

Lesson 123

The Gospel Truth

Each Gospel account shares unique aspects about Jesus.

Overview

Lesson Focus

The four Gospels were written by four men—and all show something unique about Jesus. Jesus is revealed in Matthew as the Jewish Messiah and promised King; in Mark as a suffering servant; in Luke as the Son of Man and friend of sinners; and in John as the Son of God, the Christ who alone brings eternal life.

Key Passages

Matthew 1:1, 9:27, 21:9; Mark 10:45, 6:34, 8:2; Luke 19:10, 5:32; John 20:31, 17:3

Objectives

Students will be able to:

Explain why we can trust the Gospels more because of the differences we find in them.

Describe how Jesus is portrayed in each of the Gospels.

Memory Verse

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

The Gospels, although different in many details and style, work in tandem to give the testimony of Jesus Christ and make up one account, as God ordained, to reveal who Jesus is, what he did, why he did it, how he did it, when he did it, and what he is still to do.

As an apostle, Matthew became one of Jesus' closest friends. As Matthew wrote his testimony of Jesus, he may have had his fellow Jews in mind. The writing style suggests that Matthew wanted to convince his Jewish brothers that Jesus truly was the Messiah and King promised from the throne of David (Matthew 1:1, 1:6). In fact, Matthew quotes from the Old Testament more than 60 times, revealing how Jesus was the fulfillment of these prophecies (e.g., Matthew 1:22–23, 2:5–6, 2:15).

Mark was a companion and spiritual son of Peter (1 Peter 5:13). He does not quote as often from the Old Testament, leading some to believe this Gospel was written not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. Mark focused on Jesus as a

suffering servant—revealing more of what he did and less of what he said. Mark sums up this theme when he tells us that even the Son of Man, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, did not come to be served, but to serve. And in that service, he would ultimately suffer and give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

Luke, a physician and a close companion to the Apostle Paul, wrote to the “most excellent Theophilus” (Luke 1:3). Theophilus may have been a dignitary of some sort—perhaps from Rome. Luke presents Jesus as the redeemer of humanity, often referring to him as the Son of Man, the title Jesus most frequently used for himself. Luke 19:10 sums up the essence of the Gospel of Luke: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” We witness this in the account of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:5), miraculous healings (Luke 6:8, 7:10), and the resurrection of the dead (Luke 7:13–15). Luke also portrays Jesus as one who repeatedly showed compassion to women (Luke 7:13), Samaritans (Luke 10:33), and children (Luke 18:15–16). In the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus paints a picture of the compassionate Father who is eager to welcome and forgive repentant sinners (Luke 15:11–32).

John clearly cites his reason for writing—to encourage his readers to believe in Jesus and to present Jesus as the Son of God, fully God and fully man (John 20:31). John repeatedly calls his audience to believe in Jesus (John 1:7, 3:16, 5:24, 6:29, 11:25–26). Also, John presents Jesus as the eternal God, describing him as the Word who was in the beginning, who was with God, and who was God—the very Word who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1, 1:14).

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we have the history of Jesus Christ, the God-man, presented through a tax collector (Matthew), a Jewish friend (Mark), a Gentile doctor (Luke), and a Jewish fisherman (John). Only God could have sovereignly woven these lives together with the life of Christ to bring about this amazingly accurate and life-changing account.

Historical/Apologetics Background

When you really dig into the differences of the four Gospels, God’s wisdom becomes evident. As you read above, each of the Gospels has a slightly different angle on the life of Christ. In a sense, each is written to bring the message of the gospel into a context that makes sense to different people with different backgrounds and different cultural practices—both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 26:22–23).

An example of the same gospel to different audiences is illustrated for us in the book of Acts by Peter and Paul. Both of these men boldly proclaimed the hope of reconciliation in Jesus, but in different ways. In Acts 2, we have a record of a proclamation of the gospel message given by Peter on Pentecost, a Jewish festival in Jerusalem. Although the people listening to Peter were from many different nations, they all shared the same religious heritage—belief in and knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures (Acts 2:7–11). Consequently, Peter’s message included many passages from the Old Testament writings. Peter did not need to explain ideas like sin and judgment because his audience was familiar with these ideas. When he talked of the prophet Joel and the patriarch David, he didn’t need to offer an introduction—Peter knew his audience was

familiar with these men and the Old Testament accounts he preached from (Acts 2:16–39). Peter was living in and preaching to a Jewish culture. And he presented the message of repentance and faith in Christ in light of that context.

Paul, on the other hand, in the message he preached to the Greeks at the Areopagus (Acts 17:22–24), knew his audience did not possess knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. So, Paul started this message from the beginning, explaining who God is: that there is but one God who created the world and everything in it, that this God determines the events of the world, and that he is the only God worthy of the praise and honor of all men. Paul recognized that those listening to this message had not heard of God’s judgment or the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 17:22–31). And he had to lay that foundation before calling his hearers to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

As we tell others about Jesus Christ and the Bible, it is important to know their knowledge of the Bible. What have they heard and read? What is their frame of reference when it comes to the gospel? This will help us to better understand where to begin as we proclaim the life-giving good news of Jesus Christ.

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