

Reading the Gospels (Cyprus Tr.: week 1, session 14)

This session is on reading the gospels.

That = really important, because the gospels = nrly ½ NT!

Some things are true of all Scr: e.g. God-breathed, useful...

Other things are distinctive to particular parts of Scr, e.g.

Psalms (& much of the Prophets) are poetry. etc.

What is distinctive about the gospels?

◆ about J? (all Scr is!) ◆ good news? (all Scr is, & warning...)

◆ Narrative? Along w almost ½ Scr.

❶ **direct encounter with Jesus:** He is the central character of almost ev episode (a few centre on JnB).

❷ **direct description of the great central event** of the Bible story, namely the incarnⁿ, culminating in the Easter events.

[Gospels strange cfd to most other biogs: so much = final week of J' life: ¼ Lk 25%, >1/3 Mt/Mk 36%, nrly 40% Jn! 38%]

Several other things about the gospels affect our approach:

❸ **4 accts of the same life** (there are ||els e/w in Scr: e.g. Kgs & 2Chr, but v rarely 3x even 4x). **Why multiple?** (Cert'ly multiple witnesses seems v approp. **How do they differ?**)

Mark? = gospel of action. (his fav word = "immediately" 40x!)

Lays out main **shape** of J ministry: ① JnB, ② early popularity (healing, teaching, gathering disciples, growing opposition);

③ t.pt at Caes. Philippi; ④ travel twds Jerusalem, shadow of the cross; ⑤ final week, last supper, arrest, trial, crucifixion

⑥ resurrn). [*Both Matt & Luke have the same basic shape*]

Mainly short episodes (some extended teaching, chs.4+13),

then from last supper (14v12ff) continuous narrative to end. Clearly 2 parts: The King (Who J is); & The Cross (his & ours)

Matt? = same storyline as Mk (s.t. v closely), but w addnl material at the start (J genealogy & birth), & end [lost from Mk?], & addnl large **teaching** blocks taking total to 5. J the teacher; fulfilmt of OT.

Luke? diff again: same storyline as Mk, but w addnl material at the start & end (diff to Matt); alt tchg material & a large section after Caesarea Philippi (Perea, W of Jordan).

Has his own distinctives (above all, as part 1 of 2-part wk): follow themes thro into Acts (Lk/Ac = 27% of NT; Paul 25%) Mt = a v *Jewish* gospel, Lk hooks into wider *Gk-Roman* world (1v5; 2v1f; 3v1f); universal concern, & for the underpriv'd: women, children, the poor, outsiders; focus on pr & rejoicing.

It's as if Mt & Lk both start w Mk, but develop the story in diff, complementary ways (also Mt/Mk ¼ in common but not from Mk. Great puzzle: who borrowed who, or shared source 'Q'?)

Mt/Mk/Lk = synoptics "*same pt of view*". **John** completely diff!

- **How?** *Style*: Jn has fewer episodes, but recounted in more detail, & w much more dialogue, & narr comment (s.t. not sure where J words stop & Jn's begin, e.g. Jn.3v16) rare in

Synoptics, e.g. Lk.14v7; Mk.7v19

- *content*: in mt/Mk/Lk, all the action is outside of Jerusalem until passion week, but Jn *centres* on J' *earlier* visits to Jerusalem (feasts). [hardly any overlap prior to Passion week, only JnB & feeding of 5000].

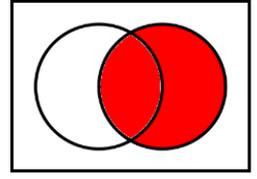
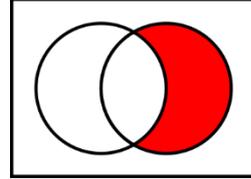
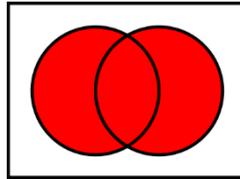
- John = more self-consciously *theological* (cf. e.g. Feeding of 5,000: Jn's major focus is on the dialogue the next day). Easiest Gk (first bk to study) but most profound
- Jn explicitly *evangelistic* in intent, 20v31 (cf. Lk.1v4)

⇒ implns of parallel accts for study?

Wrong approaches:

(i) wk from a harmony ✘, or

(ii) only from distinctives ✘



Rather, *what this gospel says* (both in common & uniquely) ✓

But: (a) aware of distinctives, e.g. Matt's interest in OT

fulfilmt, & Luke's in J' Pr life. & (b) not drawing conclusions that contradict ||el accts (isoln in Mk.5? Yes, but 2 in Mt.8!)

Can use PC to map ||els: **h/o** (*Transfigurn & Qn re Elijah*)

Another distinctive which is easily overlooked =

④ The gospels have “**One foot in each testament**”

Explicitly grounded in OT. How does each gospel do that?

◆ **Mk**: JnB prophecies, 1v2f

◆ **Mt**: 1v1 ‘bk of the genealogy’ (cf. Gen.5 etc.); also Abr, David, Exile; women in genealogy, fulfilmt motif...

◆ **Luke**: Eliz~Hannah etc. ◆ **John**: Gen.1v1; Jn.1v17 etc.

Look out for OT qtns/allusions

Need to remember that they're pre-Pentecost. In what ways?

◆ HS (Jn.7v39) ◆ Gentiles (Mt.10v6 & 15v24) ◆ Trinity (Jn.1v49)

◆ Church (only 2refs; tho' cf Acts! => historically rspnsble)

◆ Atonemt (Not til Mk.10v45; then LS & clues: but main focus = the *event*. Later NT brings out *signif*).

◆ Grace/wks not always distinct: key thing = person of Xt (much unpacked in Epistles). More re practical discipleship. Don't feel the need to force 'the gospel' into the gospel, but rather focus on what is there, supplemented by later NT.

Having said that the gospels are 'pre-Pentecost', we also need to see that, in some ways, they foreshadow the End. Thus when we read of J' miracles*, they do not necessarily 'set the bar' for the church, but are rather a trailer of the Age to come (e.g. Mk.4f: the end of Chaos in nature, Evil, Disease & Death) => J is fully able to deal w these things.

*NB also have spiritual counterparts (sight, resurrn, feeding)

⑤ Use all tools/insights discussed in the notes on **Narrative**.

- Narrator's comment: Mk.7v19

- Repetition: "Blessed are..."; "But I tell you..."; *themes*: threats in Mk.4f; Qns in Mk.2v1 – 3v6

- Climax, punch-line: Luke 19v10 (brilliant!)

- Contrasts: Zaccheus & Bartimaeus, etc.

- Speech often carries the main pts of the episode (Mk.3v1-6: hard hearts rather than withered hand)

Three great themes to look out for: **Who J is** (& what he is like); **Why he came**; & **What it means to follow him**.

Gospels call for a rsp: Jn.20v31; Choose sides: for/against!

Relationships between the Synoptic Gospels

