

Week 2: Introduction to the Gospels

Readings:

- Mark 1:1
- Luke 1:1-4

Resources:

- Dr Jeannie Constantinou
 - ACTS Intro to the NT (<http://actslibrary.org>)
 - <https://castbox.fm/vb/186406802>
 - <https://castbox.fm/vb/184608001>
- St Irenaeus
 - Against Heresies:
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/phai08dc2342e1a/Against%20Heresies%20-%20Irenaeus.pdf?dl=0>
- Literary Structure of Gospel of Matthew: <https://chiasmusresources.org/literary-art-gospel-matthew>

Powerpoint:

- <https://www.dropbox.com/s/oln5l8of3puauhb/2021-09-08%20-%20Introduction%20to%20the%20Gospels.pptx?dl=0>

Quiz:

- <https://forms.gle/GEepS9XUS28xpmE46>

Introduction to the Gospels

What is the Gospel?

- What does the word "Gospel" mean? "Good news"
 - : "Good News"
 - : "Good"
 - Eulogy = Good word
 - Euphoria = Good feeling
 - : "Message"
 - is just the Greek word for "messenger"
 - God's messengers were spirits, so now the word for them is Angels
 - Related words
 - Evangelist - writer of a gospel
 - Evangelize - to preach a gospel
 - The Gospel was a **message** before it was a book or a genre
 - First one to use the word was St Mark in Mark 1:1
 - "The beginning of the **gospel** of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"
- Importance of the Gospel to the Orthodox Church
 - We put it on the altar, read it in every liturgy, adorn it in gold, kiss it, etc.

The Four Gospel Accounts

- How many gospels are there?
 - We say four gospels, but it is really one Gospel recorded by four people separately. It's the same "good news" that they are all sharing.
 - This is why we say "The Gospel **according to...**" in the Liturgy
 - St Irenaeus makes the argument that the Gospels must be exactly four in *Against Heresies Book 3 Ch 11 Sec 8*

"It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is scattered throughout all the world, and the "pillar and ground" of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh. From which fact, it is evident that the Word, the Artificer of all, He that sits upon the cherubim, and contains all things, He who was manifested to men, has given us the Gospel under four aspects, but bound together by one Spirit."

- Are four gospels really needed? Why not one gospel?
 - Irenaeus continues his remarks in the same passage

"As also David says, when entreating His manifestation, 'You who sits between the cherubim, shine forth.' For the cherubim, too, were four-faced, and their faces were images of the dispensation of the Son of God. For, as the Scripture says, 'the first living creature was like a lion,' symbolizing His effectual working, His leadership, and royal power; 'the second was like a calf,' signifying His sacrificial and sacerdotal order; but 'the third had, as it were, the face of a man,' - an evident description of His advent as a human being; 'the fourth was like a flying eagle,' pointing out the gift of the Spirit hovering with His wings over the Church."

"And therefore the Gospels are in accord with these things, among which Christ Jesus is seated.

For that according to John relates His original, effectual, and glorious generation from the Father, thus declaring, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' Also, 'all things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made.' For this reason, too, is that Gospel full of all confidence, for such is His person."

"But that according to Luke, taking up His priestly character, commenced with Zacharias the priest offering sacrifice to God. For now was made ready the fatted calf, about to be immolated for the finding again of the younger son."

"Matthew, again, relates His generation as a man, saying "the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham;" and also, "the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise." This, then, is the Gospel of His humanity; for which reason it is, too, that the character of a humble and meek man is kept up through the whole Gospel."

"Mark, on the other hand, commences with a reference to the prophetic spirit coming down from on high to men, saying, 'the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is written in Isaiah the Prophet,' pointing to the winged aspect of the Gospel; and on this account he made a compendious and cursory narrative, for such is the prophetic character."

- The gospels themselves are represented by the Four Incorporeal Creatures
 - Matthew - Face Like a Man - He started his gospel with the Genealogy of Christ
 - Mark - Face of a Lion - Starts his gospel with "a voice crying out in the wilderness" and focuses on Christ's might
 - Luke - Face of an Ox - Starts his gospel with the priesthood of Zechariah, talks about Christ who offered Himself for the salvation of the whole world by the blood of His sacrifice
 - John - Face of an Eagle - Starts his gospel with the heavenly "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and Word was God" - and proves Christ is Son of God in his gospel
- The Redeeming work of Christ is also Christ is also represented by the four creatures
 - Man - Incarnation of Christ
 - Calf - His Sacrifice on the Cross for our Forgiveness
 - Lion - Power of His Resurrection
 - Eagle - His Ascension
- The gospels work together to give us the full picture of Christ from several different angles:
 - Matthew: Jesus is the Messiah
 - Mark: Jesus is the Son of God
 - Luke: Jesus is the Savior of the World
 - John: Jesus is the Logos
- When were they written?

- All of the Gospels were written in the 1st Century. Starting with Matthew, then Mark, then Luke, then John. That's why we have that order. The Early Church Tradition is that Matthew wrote his gospel first, then Mark and Luke, then John was last.
- What languages were they written?
 - Matthew's Gospel was most likely originally written in Hebrew and then translated by him into Greek. We don't have any Hebrew fragments or manuscripts of it, but we think this for some reasons:
 - It was directed to the Jews... so it makes sense it was in Hebrew
 - He, himself, was formerly a Jew and a tax collector so he would be most fluent in Hebrew
 - The Early Church Fathers seem to know for certain that he wrote it in Hebrew
 - Jerome (On Illustrious Men Ch 3)
 - Irenaeus (Against Heresies 3:1)
 - Origen (quoted by Eusebius Book 6 Ch 25 Sect 4)
 - Mark, Luke and John were all written in the Greek Language
- Why were they written?
 - Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew during the time Peter and Paul were out preaching - very early on.
 - When Peter and Paul were martyred, St Mark and St Luke wrote their gospels
 - St Mark was a relative of St Peter and his gospel is generally believed to be the written account of the gospel that St Peter preached (we even see in 1 Peter 5:13 that St Peter acknowledges Mark as greeting the reader). So when St Peter was martyred, it was likely then that St Mark wrote his gospel. He probably did not know that Matthew had written a gospel.
 - St Luke was a close associate and physician of St Paul. The gospel he recorded is the gospel that St Paul was preaching. St Luke was also close to St Mary (he wrote her icon) which is why he has such details like the annunciation of the birth of John and the annunciation of Christ in his gospel. So when St Paul was martyred, it was likely that then St Luke wrote his gospel. He probably did not know that Matthew and Mark had written gospels.
 - St. John wrote his gospel last. He did not write it to replace the other three gospels - in fact, the Fathers tell us that he knew that the other gospels existed and he supported them and agreed with them... but he felt they were missing some things. For example, they are missing what Christ did at the very beginning of His ministry. They are also missing some of the long theological dialogues that Christ had. They also didn't document some things simply because everyone knew them! Like the Raising of Lazarus - why would Matthew Mark and Luke leave something so important out of their gospel? Because everyone already knew about it! But by the time of St John maybe some people had forgotten, or he recognized the importance of writing it down... so he did. His Gospel also aimed to give a more theological understanding of Christ - so for example, from the beginning in Ch 1 he mentions this idea of "Lamb of God" and then during the Crucifixion makes it a point to say "during the slaughtering of the lambs for Passover" - so he is making links here for the reader to understand.

- Synoptic Gospels vs Gospel of John

The Good News

- What is the "Good News" that these Gospels are preaching?
 - The Messiah has come, was crucified and buried, and then rose from the dead and granted us eternal life by faith in Him and participation with Him in the sacraments
- How did the disciples spread this "good news" in the New Testament? How did Christianity get so big?
 - To the Jews they went to Synagogues, heard the Old Testament reading and preaching, and interpreted it according to the NT
 - To the Gentiles, they were attracted by the level of virtue, the bravery of martyrdom, etc.

Characteristics of the Four Gospels

The evangelists did not try to give a comprehensive view of the life and ministry of Christ. But they picked and chose which stories, parables, miracles, etc. to write down to **serve their purpose**. They had no obligation to document everything, they were simply spreading the "good news" - telling their audience "this is what you need to know about Jesus. This is the good news." Back then it would have been impossible to write very long volumes - everything had to be hand-copied. Writings needed to be limited in length. It is not dishonest of them to leave things out.

Gospel According to St. Matthew

- Author
 - St Matthew (Levi) one of the 12
 - Nickname: Meticulous Matthew
- Audience
 - Jewish Christians
- Structure of the Gospel
 - Narrative-Teaching Structure
 - Ch 1-2 (Bookend) Genealogy, Birth of Christ, Herod, Flight to Egypt, Return to Nazareth
 - 1 - Narrative/Teaching
 - Ch 3-4 - Baptism of Christ, Temptation, Calling Disciples
 - Ch 5-7 - Sermon on the Mount
 - 2 - Narrative/Teaching
 - Ch 8-9 - Ten Miracles
 - Ch 10 - Missionary Discourse (Instructions for the Disciples)
 - 3 - Narrative/Teaching
 - Ch 11-12 - Arrest/Beheading of John the Baptist
 - Ch 13 - Parables of the Kingdom of Heaven
 - 4 - Narrative/Teaching

- Ch 14-17 -
- Ch 18 - Discourse on the Church
- 5 - Narrative/Teaching
 - Ch 19-22 -
 - Ch 23-25 - Eschatological Discourse
- Ch 26-28 (Bookend) Arrest, Trial, Cross, Resurrection
- Balance in the Book
 - Ch 1: "He will be called Emmanuel meaning 'God with us'"
 - Ch 28: "Lo, I am with you always"
 - Ch 2: "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?"
 - Ch 27: "And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS."
- Purpose
 - Jesus is the Messiah who fulfilled the prophecies
 - Christ is the new Moses
 - Christ is the Teacher
- Common Themes
 - Fulfillment of Prophecy
 - Double the number of prophecies mentioned in this gospel than in the others
 - Fulfillment formula: "
 - Kingdom of Heaven
 - Gospels of Mark and Luke use the term "Kingdom of God" but St Matthew is writing to Jewish Christians! And the Jews were very sensitive to using the name of God... so he doesn't say "Kingdom of God" but he says "Kingdom of Heaven"
 - He emphasizes how do we obtain the Kingdom of Heaven
 - He emphasizes how do we preach the Kingdom of Heaven
 - Authority
 - "He taught them as one having **authority** and not as the scribes" (7:28)
 - The scribes would teach and say "Rabbi xxx says this and that" but Christ never did that. Never quoted human authority.
 - "All **authority** has been given to Me in heaven and on earth"
 - Christ always challenged: "By what **authority** do you do these things?"
 - Christ as the New Moses
 - At the birth of Christ, Herod kills all the babies and Christ escapes to Egypt. At the birth of Moses, Pharaoh killed all the babies and Moses escaped to Egypt.
 - As Moses gave his law from the mountain, so Christ expounds the law from the mountain (Sermon on the Mount)
 - Christ is clear in replacing Moses' law

Gospel According to St. Mark

- Author:
 - St Mark (John Mark, mentioned in the Book of Acts, one of the 70)
 - Nickname: The Storyteller

- Audience:
 - Romans
 - He explains Jewish customs (since the Romans would not already know them)
 - 7:1-4 "Now when the Pharisees gathered together to him, with some of the scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze.)"
 - He focuses on the power and might of Christ - Romans respected this. Christ did great things and great miracles.
- Structure of the Gospel
 - Very rich, vivid, lengthy narrative. He's a storyteller and he's writing to the Greeks - his stories include dialogue and drama and emotions
 - The rich young ruler came and asked what should I do to inherit eternal life? And Christ told him to follow the commandments and he said "well I already do all those things from my youth" and Mark says "Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, 'One thing you lack...'"
 - He includes names that the other gospels leave out
 - Jesus talks very little but does very much - very powerful; a hero!
 - Fast-paced
 - "Immediately" - appears 41 times in the Gospel
 - Messianic Secret
 - Christ telling people "don't tell anyone" - daughter of Jairus, demons screaming, etc.
 - Why would Christ want to keep it a secret?
 - People had a different idea of who the Messiah was going to be (an earthly king, military ruler, etc). So the knowledge that the Messiah is here would have attracted the wrong crowd.
 - The first time Christ allowed them to take Him in as the Messiah is Palm Sunday... and He was dead by Friday.

Gospel According to St. Luke

- Author
- Audience
 - St Luke the Physician and Helper of St Paul
 - Author of Book of Acts
 - Nickname: Luke the Historian
- Characteristics
 - The Great Reversal
 - Jewish thinking was very Deuteronomistic - if you are rich, it's because you're good and God is rewarding you. If you are poor, sick, slave, childless, etc. it is because you did something terrible and God cursed you.

- St. Luke reverses all of this thinking in his gospel
 - Christ comes and tells the parable of the rich man that went to hell and the poor man that went to heaven
 - The last will be first, and the first will be last
 - The righteous Pharisee and the Publican
- Salvation for Everyone (even the outcasts, sinners and people who are ignored)
 - The sinful woman who anoints Christ's feet is the one that is praised, not the Pharisee who hosted Him
 - Many women mentioned (Elizabeth, Anna the Prophetess, Mary and Martha (no mention of Lazarus), Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, etc.)
 - Good Samaritan (Samaritans were hated by Jews)
 - Jesus loves the poor "Blessed are the poor"
 - Zaccheaus the short tax collector
 - etc.
- Prayer and Praise
 - Angels glorifying God at the nativity
 - Zechariah raising incense
 - Christ "went up to the Temple to pray"
 - Prayer of Simeon
 - Prayer of St Mary
 - Prayer of Zechariah
 - Prayer of the Publican
 - Many references to Christ praying
 - Mark "Jesus chose disciples"
 - Luke "Jesus prayed and chose disciples"
 - Christ praying on the Cross
 - Gospel ends with the disciples continually in the temple blessing God
- Repentance, Forgiveness, Humility
 - Prodigal Son
 - Thief on the Cross
 - Zacchaeus
 - Christ forgiving the executioners on the Cross "for they do not know what they're doing"
- Holy Spirit
 - More references to the Holy Spirit than any other
 - Zechariah, Mary, John, etc.

Gospel According to St. John

- Author
 - St John the Beloved, the Apostle, the Theologian, the Evangelist, the Virgin
- Audience
 - Everyone
- Style and Characteristics
 - "I AM" statements

- The Light of the World
- The Good Shepherd
- The Door
- The Resurrection and the Life
- The Bread of Life
- The Way, the Truth, and the Life
- The True Vine
- Omits well-known stories
 - Doesn't mention the Last Supper or institution of the Eucharist, but instead tells us the Theology of the Eucharist in Ch 6
 - Doesn't mention the birth of Christ or genealogy but tells us "In the beginning was the Logos"
- Long Theological Discourses

Activity

- Split into four groups - each group gets one gospel account (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John)
- Read some chapters/verses (you can skim) of your respective gospel and make notes of some things that are indicative of the author's style
 - For example:
 - In Matthew if you find "The Kingdom of Heaven" or if you find "The prophecy was fulfilled"
 - In Mark if you find "Immediately" or explanations of Jewish customs
 - In Luke if you find prayers, or Christ being compassionate to the poor, widow, tax-collector, sinner, etc.
 - In John if you find "I am" statements or long Theological discussions by Christ
- Document your findings and share with the class

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