

“Survey of the Scriptures”

Session #8 – THE FOUR GOSPELS

In the Old Testament Christ is seen in history, law, poetry and prophecy. Through the years the Jews looked for their promised Messiah, the world waited for the promised Redeemer. In the New Testament prophecies and promises are fulfilled and we meet Christ in person.

Who could better record the history of Christ than His early disciples, some of whom shared His ministry, listened to His teachings and were eye-witnesses to His miracles?

During the first century Christ’s disciples were scattered abroad and the gospel was spread by word of mouth. Those with firsthand knowledge of Christ’s words and deeds would not live forever, and so God entrusted to them the task of writing the gospel for all the world.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. God chose these four men to write the biography of His Son. The gospels were eagerly read by Christians and immediately recognized as inspired – the sacred Scriptures of God’s New Testament. As early as 115 A.D. these four accounts were often bound together.

“That it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet...” wrote **Matthew** in his gospel, time and time again. In the New Testament, words of promise and prophecy in the Old Testament were fulfilled. Perhaps because of its close association with the words of the prophets, the book of Matthew was given first place in the New Testament.

Matthew portrayed Christ as the Messiah, the Son of David and rightful **King of the Jews**. Christ Himself often spoke of His kingdom as “the kingdom of heaven” – a phrase which was perfectly understandable to the Jews.

“Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” asked the wise men from the east. Although Christ had been born in humble surroundings, they brought Him gifts fit for a king – gold, frankincense and myrrh.

In His teaching Christ showed that He was the final authority on the law and its interpretation. In His sermon on the mount – as recorded by Matthew – Christ taught as a king and laid down the principles of His kingdom.

In Matthew’s account of Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem he reminded the Jews of Zechariah’s prophecy: *“Behold, thy King cometh...lowly...and riding upon an ass.”* The common people acclaimed Christ that day, but the nation soon rejected Him as their King.

Because Christ claimed to be King of the Jews He was crowned with thorns and mocked. On the cross where He died His accusation was nailed above Him: “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”

As resurrected King, the Lord Jesus said to His followers: “*All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.*” His last command, to go to all nations and teach His Word, is still being obeyed by His followers today.

Mark had many sources of information for the vivid and expressive biography he wrote. He talked and worked with Peter. The first Christians met in his mother’s house in Jerusalem, and he went with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary voyage.

Mark’s inspired record revealed Jesus as the **Servant of God**. Mark wrote primarily for the practical-minded Romans, who were more interested in the deeds of Christ than in His teachings. In this active narrative the words “straightway,” “forthwith” and “immediately” appear again and again.

In a series of vivid pictures Mark portrayed Jesus ministering to the people, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, raising the dead and showing by His power that He was the Son of God.

Through Mark, God made it clear that Christ’s greatest ministry was His work of redemption. Almost a third of the book is devoted to the record of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the Gospel of **Luke**, Christ was presented as the **Perfect Man**. His humanity was emphasized and this had a special appeal to the Greeks. Apparently Luke himself was a Gentile, and if so the only Gentile writer of the Bible. He called Christ by the name of “Jesus” or referred to Him as “the Lord” but did not use the Hebrew title of “Christ” or “Messiah”.

Luke made it clear that he was drawing on other documents and references written by those who had been with Christ. A true historian, Luke gave the story of Christianity from the time of Christ to the extension of the church. He wrote his history in two parts: the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.

In the Gospel of Luke may be found the detailed story of the birth of Jesus, including the declaration of the angels to the shepherds that they would find Christ the Lord in a Bethlehem manger. Luke traced the genealogy of Jesus, the Son of Man, to Adam, the first man.

More of the Lord’s parables are found in Luke than in any other gospel, and many of them begin with the words – “a certain man.” We read of the lost sheep, the prodigal son, the Good Samaritan, the sower, the unjust judge. Through them all the love and compassion of Jesus shine out.

Mary's psalm of praise – the Magnificat, the song of Zacharias, the song of the angels, all recorded by Luke, were the first hymns of the church and are still being sung. Luke's gospel was also a book of prayer, with the humanity of Jesus reflected in His prayerful dependence upon God His Father.

“Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have,” Christ said to His disciples after His resurrection. While Luke recorded the suffering and death of the Son of Man, he gave detailed accounts of Christ's appearances to His disciples as a risen, glorified man.

God's good news – the story of Christ Jesus the Lord – was written for all the world to read, in terms understandable to the religious Jews, the cultured Greeks, the powerful Romans. Once again, as in the past, “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” to give God's message to mankind. Because of their similarity, the books of Matthew, Mark and Luke may be studied or surveyed together, and are often referred to as “the synoptics.”

John was specially chosen to bear witness that Jesus was the **Son of God**. By the time John wrote his story there was no need for a new historical record of the life of Christ. Christian communities were increasing in number but some teachers were introducing strange beliefs and dangerous new doctrines concerning the person of Christ.

“These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His name.”

John's purpose was to demonstrate beyond all doubt that Jesus was the Son of God and eternal life could be obtained by believing in Him.

In John's Gospel we read that Christ declared Himself to be the Son of God. Then there was the witness of Martha, of Nathanael, John the Baptist, Peter, Thomas, and the Apostle John himself.

Seven miracles are recorded in which Christ revealed His divine power. These miracles demonstrated to the world Christ's control over the physical universe as He changed water into wine, multiplied the loaves and fishes, walked on the water, healed the sick, lame and blind, and restored life to the dead.

In seven beautiful pictures, Christ laid claim to His divinity. He was the Light of the World, the True Vine, the Good Shepherd, the Door, the Way, the Resurrection, and the Bread of Life. When He said, “Before Abraham was, I am” the Jews took up stones to kill Him, because He was obviously declaring Himself to be God.

God loved...the world! Christ came not to judge, but to save...the world! He takes away the sin of...the world! Christ, the Saviour of...the world! John's message was for all the world.

The gospel, whether written by Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, is God's good news for all the world. Writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, all four told the same story and yet from different viewpoints as they presented Jesus Christ the Son of God to the Jew first, but also to the Greek, to the Roman, and to all men everywhere, then and now.

Through Matthew God showed the Jews that Jesus Christ was their Messiah, the long promised King of the Davidic line. The Christian today accepts Christ as his Lord and King and should seek to obey His commands and live by His principles.

Through Mark, Jesus was shown to be the obedient and perfect Servant, Who came to minister to others in obedience to His Father. Now God has highly exalted His Servant. We own Him Master and Lord, and count it a privilege to be servants of His.

Luke portrayed Jesus as the Son of Man who came to seek and to save that which was lost. The record began with the joyful praise at His birth, ended with the joy of His followers when they saw the risen Christ. Their joy is shared by all who have not seen and yet by faith believe in Christ Jesus and acknowledge Him as Saviour.

John showed Jesus to be the Son of God sent by His Father to bring salvation to the world, "*and as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.*" As we see Jesus Christ portrayed in the gospels, we would acknowledge Him as Thomas did long ago, saying "*My Lord and my God!*"

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