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The Gospels

Key verses: Matthew 1:23; 16:16-19; 28:18-20; Mark 1:14-15; 10:45; Luke 9:23-24; 19:10; John; 1:1-14; 11:25; 14:6; 20:30-31.

Key personalities: Jesus Christ, God, the Apostles, and Humanity

Timeline: About 6 B.C.-30 A.D.

The word **Gospel** comes from the Classical Greek--a 'reward' for bringing 'glad tidings' as in good news, and in the Old English, *gospel* is 'God-spell,'--who brings 'good news.' What is the Good News? It is the best news for what better news could there ever be than a caring, loving God who creates and redeems us—His children—when we rebel. This Good News is fulfilled in and by the Person and Work of Jesus Christ--Messiah, God's Son, and Our Lord and Savior, Who forgives the sins of all those who believe and trust in Him (John 20:30-31; 1 Cor. 15:1-11; Gal. 1:6-9).

Gospel also refers to the titles of the first four books of the New Testament; these first four books present the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. All convey the same theme of lifting up Christ as Lord of All. The Gospels tell of what He did, His role in our lives and death, the fulfillment of God's promises, salvation, the Kingdom of God and eternity. The Gospels tell us that Jesus is God--*the* authoritative teacher for our faith and practice, and that apart from Christ, there can be no salvation or hope to come. (Acts 4:12; 1 Cor. 15:1-11; Gal. 1:6-9).

All four Gospels give different perspectives on Christ Jesus; we can know different aspects of Christ and know Him through these Holy words with emphasis and truth. The Gospels are not—and are not meant to be--extensive biographies. What is written is what we need to know. The Gospels are comprised of God-directed selections--the teachings that are best suited for us as most important and necessary for salvation and spiritual growth. The Gospels are for us for all time—yes, today. The Good News is for us and relevant at every time, regardless of our culture and society. God's Word transcends culture, time, and thought.

The Gospel of Matthew, written probably around 50-70 A.D., highlights that Jesus is Christ the Messiah, and HE IS the fulfillment of prophecy. This book about the life and ministry of Jesus is also the most frequently-quoted book by the early church, and is perhaps the most widely read Gospel or book ever for that matter! The theme is the "Kingly Glory of Christ," organizing the Gospel topically. There are two primary intentions with the Book of Matthew. The first is to tell that Jesus Christ is the the Messiah. In doing so, Matthew shows us who Jesus is and addresses Jewish thinking through the ancient prophecies with comprehensive evidence thus proving that faith must be in Jesus as God's Anointed One, Messiah. Matthew includes biographical information of Jesus and gives us as much as is needed. Matthew dispelled the false teachings of the Romans: although the Romans put Jesus to death, He did not actually die as His disciples stole His body and He became well. We know this to be false thanks to the God-directed account of His Son through Matthew. (We know that Our Lord's heart was impaled by a spear!) The second primary goal of the Book of Matthew was to instruct the early Christians on how they should live the Christian life. With this, there five major discourses—themes--on ethics: The Kingdom of Heaven, the Church, End Times, missions, and discipleship (Matt. 1: 5-7, 22-23; 2, 10, 13, 18, 24-25).

The Gospel of Mark, written probably around 60 A.D. depicts the life of Jesus, the suffering Servant who comes to redeem the world. John-Mark, the human author and/or *secretary* for the Gospel of Mark, along with Peter and possibly Paul and the other disciples supply the account. Mark--cousin of Barnabas, the great disciple maker--gives a concise account that testifies to the wondrous power of Christ's inherent authority and whose actions significantly impacted those who observed. Mark understands the purpose of those who questioned Jesus; he knew the religious leaders and Romans who were investigating Jesus, and Mark speaks to these—and all who question. *Who is this guy, Jesus? Why is He doing this? Is He a threat and why?* However, the religious leaders and Romans were not on a quest to seek truth; rather, their intention was to feed critical and hostile mindsets with more judgmental attitudes. The result? Their quick accusations and

false assumptions led to them saying that Jesus was a fake; they they missed the point and the impact of the Gospel!

Also, Paul had a rocky relationship with Peter, Mark, and Barnabas earlier. They had gone their separate ways for several years; eventually, the rift is healed, and they are working together—powerfully—for the Lord. This rift-healing is yet another example of the power of reconciliation through the Peace of Christ when we allow Christ to work and reign—we set aside our pride for the Gospel and for unity in the Church (Mark 2:12; 5:20, 42; 6:2, 51; 7:37; 10:26; 11:18; 15:5; Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5-13; 15:37-40; Col. 4:7-18; 2 Tim. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:11; Phm. 24; Col. 1:20-22; 3:15; 1 Pet. 5:12; Philem. 24).

The Gospel of Luke, written probably around 60-70 A.D., gives an exact chronological portrait of the life of Christ. (Matthew was written in themes and not chronologically.) A highly educated historian and master of literature, Luke, writes to the Greeks. (Luke also wrote the Book of Acts.) Luke was a trusted companion with Paul and the other disciples on their missionary journeys. Luke gives a linear account and writes to an audience of educated philosophers and Gentiles, making the case that Christ brings true salvation to *all*—not just to the privileged, not just to the Jews, but to the Gentiles, also.

Luke shows us the beauty of Jesus—His great love and acceptance of all, including the meek and less powerful poor, women, children, and the Gentiles. God knows His Creation; He knows that the readers of Luke need to see this enormously great aspect of His Son.

Luke shows us who Christ is—that faith and salvation is by Christ alone. Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior, was not merely a miraculous human baby that grew up to be a great teacher, a wise and lovely man. Christ is the Hope and Light of the World. In Luke's writing, we see this. This Book is also a sort of instructional manual addressing everything from personal behavior and righteousness to how to run a church and what is expected of those in the Kingdom of God. This Book gives us our operational parameters on how, as Christians, we are to live and to treat those around us; the proclamation is clear in this great Gospel (Acts 16:10; 28; Col. 4:7-18)!

The Gospel of John was written in 85-90 A.D. prior to John being exiled to the Island of Patmos. John, *the beloved Disciple*, writes this Book after the other three Gospels, filling in the gaps; and, he endeavors to explain the mystery and Deity of the Person of Christ. John does not use a historical or chronological order; John writes in themes to give us hope in a dark world. He depicts the relationship of Christ with God, the world and time with the power and compassion of Christ to those who are faithful. This Book is about God's power, purpose, and love. John begs the world to come, see, and hear Who the Christ is and know that He is the only way to the Father. Christ is the Word, "*Logos*," the Eternal God, Creator and Redeemer who brings Light into the world of darkness. The theme is "evangelistic," that Jesus, the One to believe and trust in for life and salvation, performed unprecedented signs and wonders and rose from the dead to everlasting life to prove His status. This is an incredible Gospel and is His call for us to first learn who He is and what He has to say, then to trust and obey! This Book was written as the new Christian movement was being severely harassed, expelled from the synagogue and from familial and cultural structures (John 1.1-14; 20:30-31).

The differences between the Gospels.

These have to do with the nature of the audience. All of the Gospels begin by placing Jesus in a historical setting, i.e. the genealogy with Matthew who writes to the Jews. Mark points to John the Baptist's ministry connecting Jesus to humanity and history for the Romans. Luke points to Christ' humanity for the critical thinker. John was familiar with the other Gospels, thus he places Christ by His nature being God, connecting Jesus with His eternal Being and history of the universe. John's use of "Word" to identify Jesus also grabs philosophic-minded Romans and pious Jews and teaches about our Creator, Lord, and Savior who is the eternally existing, ever-present, ever-powerful, sole-creator God. This is Our transcendent, all-knowing, ever-existing, most Holy, most powerful, eternal God who has always existed and will always continue to exist—and He is Jesus Christ! Each point to the audience is to remove all doubt of who and what Jesus Christ is.

John is the last Gospel penned as it came several years after the other "synoptic" Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written. Like the rest of the Gospels, John covered the events of Jesus' life and death for our

atonement, His teachings, works, and the plan of redemption. The Gospel of John, by the use of the term "logos" (Word), confirm Christians in the belief that Jesus was the Christ; this Gospel also makes significant use of such words as light, water, life, love, and bread.

Matthew was written primarily to the Jews, giving evidence of why Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. Mark was primarily written to the Romans and Gentiles, giving evidence of why Jesus is the reason for faith and living.

Luke was written to Greek philosophical thinkers who wanted a more orderly account to analyze who Jesus was. Finally, John comes along nearly 20 years later. He starts off with declaring Jesus as eternal, ever-existing, born-into-the-world for the whole world to save the world. He gives thoughts and answers to arguments for both Jews and Gentiles, to the great thinker and the common person--all of whom need a Savior.

Each Gospel fits together in harmony when viewed side-by-side with their purpose and audience in mind. Each set up instructions for us to live by that are meant to help, guide, mold, shape, and protect us. The Gospels were planned to enable us to grow, mature, create community, enable fruitful living, and to signal the importance of love and effectual relationships. These are tough concepts for those who want things their way. In this attitude, people do not like authority nor do they appreciate the progress of faith that is honed by life's irritations and opportunities. However, before we can grow in faith, we must escape the darkness of what holds us back--our sins and frustrations, the barriers of our fears, and our misguided beliefs.

All four Gospels paint the same God-Man but give different "portraits" of Christ. Each is lifting up and painting the same Person at a different angle and emphasis, like looking at all the facets of a diamond, one facet at a time. The Gospels are not meant to be detailed biographies. Each tell their true story to their audience, but they do not tell us everything as they give only what we need to know. What they do is select the teachings best suited to the audience and that are most important and necessary for our salvation and spiritual growth, penned by human writers being led by the Spirit (John 20:30-31).

The literary genre style is Gospel--a cross between 'biography' and 'instruction.'

This is important to know as the Gospels are not to be extensive or all-inclusive biographies; rather, biographical information is given as needed--beginning prior to the creation of the universe, concentrating on the life and times of Jesus Christ, Son of God. Matthew and John's use of classical Jewish storytelling and symbolism that flashes forward and back though "polemic" (an apologetic argument to stem or stir up controversy made against others views and doctrine) episodes are like a modern movie, telling a story with discourses between various peoples to relate to the questions and objections of the original audience. The first half of the Gospel (John, chps. 1-11) takes place over a three-year time period, and the last half (John, chps. 12-21) takes place over a one-week period (John 2:1-11; 4:46-54; 5:1-15; 6:5-13; 6:15-21; 9:1-7; 11-44; 20:30-31).

The key that sums it all up: *His Glory*. This means the Lordship, Supremacy, Sovereign Ruler, and the Holiness of God as a reference to Who He is, requiring our utmost and highest respect and our call to give Him praise for His glory. "To God alone be the glory" was a critical and important slogan for the Reformation (and this must be upheld by any serious believer) and means that all life and all purpose is to give God glory (1 Kings 8:1-11; Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 8:38; Luke 4:42; 6:12; 11:1; John 1:1-18; 4:34; 7:39; 12:23-37; 13:31; 17:5; 19:30; Phil. 2:8-9; Rev. 21:9-27)

Key Happenings: Restoration and God's Redemption are at work! Real faith can be used to protect and to serve as well as to glorify God and grow in faith.

Do you know who Jesus is? He is the face of God, the One who eternally lives and reveals to us the Father. He is the One who gives you life and the Light of the Word for your salvation! We know God by knowing Christ. We know Him by knowing His written Word that carries to us His living Word. Are you living your life because of Who He is and what He has done for you? Are you forever devoted to Christ as LORD? Does your character reflect Who Christ is and what He is doing in you? Do you believe in the eternal Christ? Are you living up to what you believe with trust and hope? If not, why not (1 Pet. 4:19)?

Christianity is not earned or presumed; it is not learned or reasoned. It is not built or formed or inherited or purchased. It is something that no price can ever lay hold of--except the price paid on our behalf by Christ! Yet, once we have it, we can lean, learn, reason, inherit His character and eternal life, and continually build upon it. For us to have real effectual faith, we have to receive Jesus Christ as our own. We cannot receive Jesus through tradition or custom; we cannot receive Him through our parents or our church or our religion. We must each Him on our own by faith in Him that is real, relevant, and personal. Our faith and knowledge in Christ must be received initially, a move that the Spirit enables us to do.

Have you surrendered to the authority and command of Jesus (Gal. 2:20-21) as He called you to be His disciple by how He lived and what He taught? If so, then you have the precious promise of His abiding presence in your life! If not, what is in the way?

The principles of the Gospel must impact us so we are influenced and energized by it. The nature of the Christian life is the joy and excitement of being in Christ over all else, and this should be the biggest motivation so the excitement the Christian receives from growth becomes contagious to those around us. This is *influence*. Being in Christ means living our lives for Him with excitement in all times and all places. This is *influence*--to know Him and make Him known (Phil. 3:1-14).

Questions to Ponder

1. How would you describe Jesus? Do you realize Who Jesus Christ is? If so, has His transcendence transformed you?
2. Do you have a favorite 'go to' Gospel? How and why?
3. How is Jesus your life source and reason? How can He help you be a light in darkness?
4. How is Jesus personal to you? What does it mean that He is the always existing, eternal, loving, most Holy God?
5. How is Christ your *Life*? How does this affect how you live and the choices you make? How can this determine your faith and effectiveness?
6. What is your chief goal in the Christian faith? What does it need to be? How can you better commit your obedience to your faith and practice with joy and passion?
7. What do you need to do to take your life and faith more seriously?
8. What is the application of your duty in the Gospel themes?
9. How can knowing Who Christ is help you obey Him and His call and decrees better? How will you respond? What can you do to be better at giving back to God your gratitude for His creation as well as His promise of reward?
10. Why were there people who opposed Jesus' coming, both then and now?
11. How can Christ be more within you as the ultimate purpose and meaning of life and all things we are to do?
12. Jesus' earthly mission, besides redemption, was, and still is, to redirect our focus from our frustrations, disappointments, fears sufferings and experiences, which are temporary, onto what is really important--eternity (The Kingdom of God). What needs to take place to give you the mindset that looks to eternity while your feet remain on this earth? By that measure, we are to learn all you can while you are here, so nothing is wasted, while at the same time, keeping your focus and hope on Christ and what is still to come.