

First and Introductory lesson on

JESUS IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS (MATTHEW-MARK-LUKE)

What is gospel? The word gospel comes from the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον (euangélion). In Latin, it is called evangelium. In Italian it is called Vangelo and in Spanish Evangelio. In English, it is known as Good News or Gospel. The word gospel most simply means “good news.” The Term “Gospel” comes from the Old English “Godspell”.

Greek world usage of the term: In the Greek world, this term euangelion connotes: Announcing good news/ Victory in battle/ Enthronement of a ruler. Isaiah 40:9 Go up onto a high mountain, Zion, herald of good news! Cry out at the top of your voice, Jerusalem, herald of good news! Cry out, do not fear! Say to the cities of Judah: Here is your God! Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the one bringing good news, Announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation, saying to Zion, “Your God is King!”

NT usage of the term: In the case of Jesus, this term ‘good news’ changes its political tone to religious tone as Jesus is the good news and his teachings are the good news. The central truth of the gospel is that God has provided a way of salvation for the humanity through the gift of His son Jesus to the world. He was born, baptized, ministered to the people, suffered and died and rose and will come again and now offers a share in His triumph to all who will accept it. The gospel is good news, story of Jesus and it is theology. The gospel is a gift of God. The word gospel occurs 93 times in the Bible, exclusively in the New Testament.

Transmission of the gospel: This good news was preached orally by the apostles after the ascension of Jesus in the early Church when they received the Holy Spirit. And after many years, the good news (Jesus and his preachings and teachings) were written down by the apostles and their followers as many people started believing in Jesus Christ, wanting to know about the historical Jesus.

Four Portraits of One Jesus

Matthew (Tax Collector and Apostle): This is the most structured gospel. It presents Jesus as The King and the Promised Messiah.

Mark (Known as John Mark and a young man): This is the most dramatic gospel, presenting Jesus as the Suffering Servant.

Luke (Physician and Companion of St. Paul): This is the most thematic gospel, presenting the Humanity of Christ. This gospel is an inclusive gospel presenting Jesus as the Savior of all people.

John (Son of Zebedee, Apostle and beloved disciple): This is the most theological gospel, presenting the the Divinity of Christ as revealed by the Heavenly Father.

Why Four Gospels? Early Christianity did not harmonize the four Gospels into one book. This demonstrates the appreciation and reverence for each individual work. But why four Gospels? One answer to this question is that we need four Gospels in order to represent the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ adequately.

Clarification of the term Synoptic Gospels: The gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke are known as the Synoptic Gospels. Why? The Term “Synoptic” is from the term “synopsis” meaning “viewed together”. They View the life and ministry of Jesus from a similar perspective. They follow the same general outline. They record a great deal of common material. While John writes with a different style. He dwells more on the theological significance of Jesus’ words and deeds. John omits much of the material found in the synoptics and includes much unique material. He writes with a different style and dwells more on the theological significance of Jesus’ words and deeds

The difference between the synoptic gospels and the gospel of John

The synoptic gospels	John’s gospel
<p>They emphasize the Galilean setting for the first part of Jesus’ ministry/ little information given to determine the length of Jesus’ ministry.</p> <p>Jesus teaches mostly in Parables, short sayings and epigrams. Teachings focus on the Kingdom of God; healings and exorcisms demonstrate the power of the kingdom</p>	<p>John concentrates considerable movement between Galilee and Judea.</p> <p>John relates long speeches by Jesus, dialogues with His opponents and interviews with individuals. John’s teaching focuses on Jesus Himself and the Son’s revelation of the Father; no exorcisms</p>

The Gospels: To correctly study and interpret the Gospels, we must understand that the Gospels are one story with many dimensions. Each of the writers was writing to a different audience with a different perspective of the life, teaching and ministry of Jesus. Within the Gospels we can find two basic elements: the stories about Jesus (narrative) and the sayings of Jesus (direct teachings and parables.)

Symbols of the each Gospel: Since the time of the church fathers it has been common to differentiate one Gospel from another by suggesting symbolic motifs for them, such as the creatures found in Ezekiel 1:10: 9

Lion is the symbol of **Matthew's Gospel**. Matthew presents Jesus as the Messiah-King. Christ as King (Royalty)

Ox is the symbol of **Mark's Gospel**. He presents Jesus as the perfect Servant. Christ as servant (Servanthood).

Man is the symbol of the **Gospel of Luke**. He presents Jesus as a perfect man. Christ as Human (Humanity)

Eagle is the symbols of the **Gospel of John**. He presents Jesus as Son of God. Christ as God (Deity)

Chronological order of the four gospels: Mark is generally considered to be the first written and then it was 'rewritten' by Matthew and Luke to meet their audiences understanding and need of the story and teachings of Jesus. Later, John wrote an entirely different gospel to a wholly different audience under an entirely different set of circumstances. Four gospels, one central story, but written to four different audiences, with different cultural backgrounds and a different set of circumstances.

What was the historical Setting of Jesus? Jesus Historical setting was Aramaic speaking Israel. It was agricultural, small villages, and very rural. He often taught in parables, hyperbole, similes and metaphors, questions and He used poetry and proverbs often in His teaching style. The cultural setting of Jesus day helps us to immerse ourself with an understanding of His day. The Historical Setting of the Gospels differ from one to the other.

Who were the targeted audience? They each had different target groups, cultural assumptions, and purposes in writing their rendition of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. These are very important for us to understand for us to properly learn from the Gospels. We can discover the Author's audience, the purpose of writing and the nature of each Gospel from a good commentary, Bible Dictionary, or the introduction of a good study Bible to the Gospel account.

Distinctive features of each Gospel

The Gospel Of Matthew: The first Gospel forms a natural bridge with the OT, being written by a Jew primarily for Jewish Christians or to lead Jews to faith in the Messiah. It gives a sense of continuity between Judaism and Christianity. The Jewish interest is seen by its opening genealogy, references to OT prophecies and by the fact that it is built around five major discourses, the first being the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5 - 7). The Gospel may be dated AD 60- 65.

The Gospel Of Mark: All books of the NT had to have some connection with an apostle to be accepted into the canon. The apostle Peter is generally believed to be Mark's source of information for the life and ministry of Jesus. The book gives a great deal of space to the Lord's wonderful works and it is thought to have been written primarily

for Roman Christians. As a Man of action Jesus would certainly appeal to the Roman mind. The majority of scholars take Mark to be the earliest Gospel, and argue that it is used by Matthew and Luke (see Lk. 1:1-4). It was written between 55 AD to 65 AD

The Gospel Of Luke: Luke was a close companion of the apostle Paul. He wrote both Luke and the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Luke 1:1-4 indicates the purpose behind the joint work. 'Most excellent Theophilus' is generally taken to indicate a man of position (cf. Acts 24:3; 26:25). The Gospel is characterized by its parables, its universalism, its concern for the social outcast, women and children, its features of joy and prayer, the ministry of angels and the Holy Spirit. It was written about 60 AD and the book of the Acts was between 63 to 70 AD.

The Gospel Of John John: John was the beloved disciple of Jesus and he outlived the other apostles and may have been the youngest apostle called by Jesus. The purpose of the Gospel is given in Jn. 20:30, 31. The Fourth Gospel is sometimes referred to as the 'spiritual Gospel', especially as it opens with Christ as the pre-existent Word or Logos. It is usually dated as the last Gospel, c. 90 AD. A fragment of a copy of the Gospel, the Rylands papyrus, is dated c. 120 AD

What are the core messages of the gospel?

It is a joyful announcement about Christ (Lk. 2:10) that He is the Son of God (Jn. 1:1, 18; 20:28) He became a human being for us (Matt. 1:23; Lk 2:10-11; Jn. 1:14)

He died for us (Jn 19:30), was buried (Jn 19:42) and was raised (Matt. 28:1-10; Mk. 16:1-8; Lk. 24:1-12; Jn. 20:1-10)

He ascended to Heaven (Luke 24:50-51) where He is now seated at the right hand of God and been established as Lord over all things (Eph. 1:20-21; Heb. 1:3; 10:12). He presently is reigning as King and Head of His church (Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 1:18; Matt. 28:18; John 5:22-23)

He will one day come again to judge the living and the dead (John 5:22, 27; Acts 1:11; Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:5).

The above are the core messages which have been clearly laid out for us in the Gospels and in the rest of the NT books.

St. Paul in 1 Cor 15:1-8, beautifully lays out the essential content of the gospel message and summarizes the most basic ingredients of the gospel.

Now I am reminding you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you indeed received and in which you also stand. Through it you are also being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with

the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. After that he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me

Why the gospels are important? The Gospels are our most important resource to know about Christianity as Christians. We obtain most of our knowledge and understanding of Jesus from the Gospels. We regard the Gospels as the Word of God and treat them with more awe and reverence than other parts of the Bible. We stand and bow the gospel book in the holy mass.

The gospels are important because

They have been central to the church throughout its history

Paul and other NT writers presuppose and build on the story and teachings of Jesus.

They take us to the time of Jesus himself

In them, we get a more direct sense of the Bible's great story line.

They offer a concentrated exposure to the biblical emphasis on the coming kingdom of God.

There are different languages or discourses of truth. Story/narrative is a valid way of presenting and approaching truth. Geographic/historical/political maps show same land but different aspects

The gospel narratives help us to have a personal encounter with Jesus and we grow in experiential knowledge

In short, **They produce our faith.** "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." The Gospel is the ministry of the Spirit, that is the Holy Spirit works through the proclamation of the Gospel for salvation. The Gospel is "The power of God unto salvation." Secondly **They strengthen our faith.** They produce faith and through faith we are guaranteed our entire conversion to God, justification, sanctification and salvation. They remind us of our identity in Christ. Hearing the gospel each day and each week focuses us on Christ. They sustain us. Meditating on God's Word and gospel truths roots our faith, makes us fruitful, feeds us, waters us, grows us, and keeps us firm through trials (Psalm 1). They sanctify us, guard us from temptation and gratification. They motivate us to do good works and encourage others around us to pursue good deeds.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 125 *The Gospels* are the heart of all the Scriptures "because they are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Savior". 126 We can distinguish three stages in the formation of the Gospels:

(1) *The life and teaching of Jesus.* The Church holds firmly that the four Gospels, "whose historicity she unhesitatingly affirms, faithfully hand on what Jesus, the Son of God, while he lived among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation, until the day when he was taken up."

(2) *The oral tradition.* "For, after the ascension of the Lord, the apostles handed on to their hearers what he had said and done, but with that fuller understanding which they, instructed by the glorious events of Christ and enlightened by the Spirit of truth, now enjoyed."

(3) *The written Gospels.* "The sacred authors, in writing the four Gospels, selected certain of the many elements which had been handed on, either orally or already in written form; others they synthesized or explained with an eye to the situation of the churches, the while sustaining the form of preaching, but always in such a fashion that they have told us the honest truth about Jesus."

¹²⁷ The fourfold Gospel holds a unique place in the Church, as is evident both in the veneration which the liturgy accords it and in the surpassing attraction it has exercised on the saints at all times:

There is no doctrine which could be better, more precious and more splendid than the text of the Gospel. Behold and retain what our Lord and Master, Christ, has taught by his words and accomplished by his deeds (St. Caesaria the Younger to St. Richildis and St. Radegunde).

But above all it's the gospels that occupy my mind when I'm at prayer; my poor soul has so many needs, and yet this is the one thing needful. I'm always finding fresh lights there; hidden meanings which had meant nothing to me hitherto. (St. Therese of Lisieux)

"But the New Testament produced a different impression, especially the Sermon on the Mount which went straight to my heart. It delighted me beyond measure and gave me comfort and boundless joy" (Mahatma Gandhi, Sermon on the Mount Christian).

Gospels in the Holy Mass: The high point of the Liturgy of the Word is the reading of the Gospel. Because the Gospels tell of the life, ministry, and preaching of Christ, it receives several special signs of honor and reverence. The gathered assembly stands to hear the Gospel and it is introduced by an acclamation of praise.

Gospels on Sundays - Year A: *Matthew*; Year B: *Mark* mostly; Year C: *Luke*; (where's *John*? used mostly in Lent & Easter)

Gospel on the Weekdays: Gospel - same each year; semi-continuous readings from Mark (from 1st week to 9th week), Matthew (from the 10th week to 21st week) , Luke (22nd week to 34th Sunday)