

# Hermeneutics in the Gospels

## Overview

- For the most part, the Hermeneutical Principles at work in the Gospels are a combination of those at work in:
  - The Epistles
  - Historical Narratives

## Teachings & Imperatives

- If careful exegesis has been done, then Jesus' teachings & imperatives are brought to application like one would the Epistles
  - Imperative: "A direct command"
- This includes issues of cultural relativity
  - Ex.) Going the extra mile (Matt. 5:41)
    - Original context connected this to the demand of a Roman soldier for a civilian to carry their gear one mile
    - We may not have an exact modern equivalent, but this principle has various applications
- It is important to not turn Jesus' imperatives into new laws
  - Especially since most of them are the hermeneutical application of existing OT laws
  - They are *not* law because they are not prerequisites in order to become or remain a Christian
    - Rather they are descriptions of what the Christian live ought to look like *because of* God's acceptance of us
- Ex.) Matt. 5:38-42
  - A no-retaliation ethic is the ethic of the kingdom, even in this present age
  - But, it is built on God's nonretaliatory love for us, as displayed in Jesus' life and crucifixion
    - It is an example of "like Father, like child" (see Matt. 5:48)
- In Jesus' imperatives we see a desired *response* of gratitude by those who *have experienced* God's grace

## Narratives

- The narratives tend to function in several ways
- Miracles function as vital illustrations of the power of the kingdom breaking in through Jesus' own ministry
  - They are NOT recorded to offer morals or to serve as precedents
  - In a secondary way, they may demonstrate faith, fear, or failure, but this is not their primary function
- Often the Evangelists place narratives in the midst of teaching to act as an illustration of what is being taught
  - In such cases, it is the proper hermeneutical practice to use these narratives in the same way

*Example: The Wealthy Man*

- Matt. 19:16-22; cf. Mark 10:17-22; Luke 22:24-27
- The point of the narrative is not that all of Jesus' disciples are to sell all their possessions to follow Him (cf. Luke 5:27-30; 8:3; Mark 14:3-9)
- But the story illustrates how difficult it for the rich to enter the kingdom because of they have prior commitments to wealth, and are trying to secure their lives by it

*The Kingdom of God in Jesus' Ministry*

- The entire theological framework of the NT is eschatological
  - Eschatology: "Dealing with the end of this age"
- Most Jews during Jesus' time believed that they were living in the last days

The Jewish Eschatological Hope

*This Age* (Satan's time)  
Characterized by:  
Sin  
Sickness  
Demon-possession  
Evil people triumph  
The Age to Come

*God's Rule (Kingdom)*  
Characterized by:  
The presence of the Spirit  
Righteousness  
Health  
Peace  
The New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34)

- The earliest followers would have shared this view and would see Jesus' ministry through this lens
- And Jesus used this terminology
  - Thus building a fervor by his disciples and the crowds to see the Kingdom come
- But then Jesus was crucified
  - A dead Messiah can hardly bring in this new age
- Then, with His resurrection, everything changed
- Jesus' teaching, and the Evangelists' message, is that the Messianic Age has begun, but has not come in fullness
  - This is known as Inaugurated Eschatology
  - Or "Already, but Not Yet"

The New Testament Eschatological View

*Begun*  
This Age  
(passing away)  
The Cross & Resurrection  
*Already*  
Righteousness  
Peace  
Health  
The Spirit

*Consummated*  
The Age to Come  
(never ending)  
The Second Coming  
*Not Yet*  
...completed righteousness  
...full peace  
...no sickness or death  
...in complete fullness

- The Hermeneutical key to much of the New Testament, and especially to the teaching of Jesus, is this tension
- Because the kingdom has been inaugurated by Jesus' coming
  - We are called to *life* in the kingdom now
    - That is, under Christ's lordship
- Thus, the prayer, "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10; cf. Luke 11:2)
  - We are praying for both:
    - The consummation of God's kingdom when Jesus returns
    - But also, the reality of the Christ's lordship to be at work in us now
- A lot of the hermeneutical applications of the Gospels are found in this tension of already/not yet