

The Nature of the Gospels

The Uniqueness of the Gospels

- The Gospels are roughly divided into two categories:
 - Narratives
 - Sayings
- Thus, some elements from looking at other Narrative texts (OT Narratives & Acts) and the Epistles may apply
- However, much of the genre of Gospel is unique and much be approached in a unique way
- This especially true because much of the symbolism of Jesus' teaching and the Gospel authors' narrative writing is steeped in first-century Judaism

Difficulties in Interpretation

Almost all the difficulties in interpreting the Gospels come from 2 facts:

1. Jesus never wrote a gospel

- Since Jesus never authored a text*, what we have are not stories and sayings *by* Jesus
 - But rather stories and sayings *about* Jesus
 - Ex.) If we only had the book of Acts and not his Epistles, our knowledge of Paul's theology would be scant.
 - And if we only had his Epistles, we would have little information about Paul's life.
- The sayings in the Gospels are NOT in Jesus' own words
 - Unlike the writings of Paul*
 - Jesus spoke in Aramaic
 - Which appears only once* in the Gospels (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34)
 - All the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels appear in Greek
 - The same teaching may appear multiple times throughout the Gospels, but with slightly different wording
 - This is should not threaten our trust in the text
 - The Gospels are the story of Jesus given to their original audience in ways that they could understand
 - In their context
 - They are NOT dictations of events, because that is not how the original audience best evaluated truth.

- 2. The 4 gospels are all somewhat different
 - Matthew, Mark, & Luke tell the story in very similar terms
 - And thus are called 'Synoptic,' meaning 'common view'
 - But John's account is very different
 - With different language and purpose
 - Why 4?
 - Each Christian community needed a book about Jesus?
 - Mark was probably written first as a basic preaching Gospel, authorized by Peter
 - Then Mark was 'rewritten' to answer the needs of the Jews (Matthew) and the Gentiles (Luke), which were unique
 - Then John wrote his Gospel to fill in the gaps and for unique purposes than the other 3.
 - All of which was orchestrated by the Holy Spirit
 - Taken together, all 4 Gospels show Jesus at 2 levels:
 - Purely out of historical concern
 - Who Jesus was, and what he said and did
 - That *this* is the Jesus who was crucified and raised
 - Whom is now worshiped as the risen and exalted Lord
 - A practical concern to communicate the story to communities that:
 - Spoke Greek, not Aramaic
 - Who did not live in a rural, agricultural, Jewish setting
 - But rather in urban, pagan setting

The Gospels as Hermeneutics

- Because of the way the Gospels are written
 - Adapting the medium without changing the message
- They act as a model for hermeneutics for us