

Lesson Seven: The Gospels: One Story, Many Dimensions

I. Introduction:

- A. The Gospels fall into basically two types of literature:
 - 1. Sayings – the teaching of Jesus.
 - 2. Narratives – stories about Jesus.
- B. Because of this, much of the ground work to interpret the Gospel has already been laid in the principles for interpreting the epistles and historical narratives.
- C. However, the study of the Gospels must also take into consideration the unique nature of this singular story told from four different perspectives.

II. The Nature of the Gospels

- A. The unique problem with interpreting the Gospels:
 - 1. They are not written from a 1st person perspective – i.e. Jesus didn't write His own story.
 - 2. The Gospels are not only written from a 3rd person perspective, but from four different 3rd person perspectives.
 - a. For the completeness of the saying or narrative, we must harmonize the four different perspectives.
 - b. For the immediate application, we must isolate the perspective of each Gospel and determine how the saying or narrative fits the unique purpose of that writer.
 - 3. Our gospels do indeed contain collections of sayings, but these are always woven, as an integral part, into a historical narrative of Jesus' life and ministry (Fee, p. 128).
- B. The Fourfold Gospel
 - 1. Why four Gospels?
 - a. The four Gospels alike present to us the person and work of our blessed Saviour, but each one views Him in a distinct relationship, and only that which served to illustrate the separate design which each Evangelist had before him found a place in his Gospel; everything else which was not strictly germane to his immediate purpose was omitted (Pink).
 - b. The Gospel According to Matthew was written for a Jewish audience and focuses on Jesus as the Son of David, the fulfillment of the Messianic promises, and everything in Matthew's narrative focuses on that singular point.
 - c. The Gospel According to Mark was written for a Roman audience and focuses on Jesus as the Servant of God.
 - 1) Because of the audience, it is more fast paced and "action packed."
 - 2) Everything in this face paced narrative focuses on the point of Jesus as an active and effective Servant.
 - 3) There are more miracles and "deeds" of Jesus than the other Gospels.
 - d. The Gospel According to Luke was written for a Gentile audience and focuses on Jesus as the Son of Man.
 - 1) This Gospel focuses on the humanity of Jesus.
 - 2) There is much more about His prayer life.

- 3) His genealogy goes back to Adam, the first man, instead of Abraham, the father of the Hebrews.
- e. The Gospel According to John was written for “Greek thinking intellectuals” and focuses on Jesus as the Son of God.
 - 1) John focuses on the Deity of Christ.
 - 2) His miracles and deeds prove His Deity.
 - 3) His Divine titles are emphasized – “God,” “Son of God,” “only begotten of the Father,” “Lamb of God,” “Light of the world,” etc.
- f. It is a remarkable fact that this fourfold presentation of Christ in the Gospels was specifically indicated through the Old Testament seers (Pink).
 - 1) Jeremiah 23:5 – Son of David, King - Matthew.
 - 2) Zechariah 3:8 – My Servant – Mark.
 - 3) Zechariah 6:12 – The Man – Luke.
 - 4) Isaiah 6 – Jehovah God – John.
2. In a certain sense, therefore, the four gospels are already functioning as hermeneutical models for us, insisting by their very nature that we, too, retell the same story in our own twenty-first-century contexts (Fee, p. 129).

III. The Historical Context

- A. We must know the historical context of the narrative itself.
 1. This will be the basically the same for all four Gospels.
 2. All four record the same period of history – i.e the life of Christ.
- B. However, we must – as best we can - also know the historical context of the writer.

IV. The Literary Context

- A. This is where we harmonize the Gospels.
 1. We harmonize the events and saying recorded in their sectional context.
 2. We harmonize the chronology of the events recorded in all four Gospels.
- B. A good “Harmony of the Gospels” can be very valuable in study the life of Christ.