

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry 2
Week 6 – The Gospels

Editors' note:

- *Italics (lower case or ALL CAPS) show what students should write in their student outline.*
- **Bold (including bold italics and bold ALL CAPS) shows what appears in the student outline.**
- Regular text is used for lecture notes; ALL CAPS are used for emphasis.

What is a gospel?

The Gospels are a unique literary genre. They are a mixture of historical narrative about Jesus' life (especially His public ministry, death and resurrection), and Jesus' teachings (in which He employs different teaching approaches, including straightforward instruction, parable, metaphor, question, hyperbole, and different kinds of predictive prophecy).

The Gospels are also a counter-cultural announcement of “good news.”

“Gospel” is a Greek term which means “good news.” In the Roman Empire, it was used to refer to *the announcement of an objective event that had changed the course of human history, and a summons to align one's life to this event.* For example, when Caesar Augustus was born (63 BC), heralds were sent throughout the Empire to proclaim this “gospel.” During his reign (9 BC), Asia Minor heralds proclaimed the “gospel” of his peaceful reign and summoned all subjects to reckon time from a new calendar based on his birthday.¹

It is in this context that the apostles announced a greater “gospel” (see Mk. 1:1)—the coming of a much greater Ruler (Jesus) who won a much greater victory (over sin through His death on a Roman cross), and the issue of a much greater summons (to receive His forgiveness and embrace His loving rulership). This gospel was radically counter-cultural—even subversive—in its context.

Why are there four?

“This four-way composite portrait of Jesus Christ is more than four biographies. Instead, these books present carefully selected material from Jesus' life, each with a

¹ “In the Roman imperial world, the ‘gospel’ was the good news of Caesar’s having established peace and security for the world.” (Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*). For example, this announcement from a provincial assembly of Asia Minor: “Whereas the Providence which has guided our whole existence and which has shown such care and liberality, has brought our life to the peak of perfection in giving to us Augustus Caesar, whom it (Providence) filled with virtue for the welfare of mankind, and who, being sent to us and to our descendants as a savior, has put an end to war and has set all things in order; and whereas, having become visible . . . ; and whereas, finally that the birthday of the god (viz., Caesar Augustus) *has been for the whole world the beginning of the gospel (euangelion) concerning him,* (therefore, let all reckon a new era beginning from the date of his birth).” (cited in http://www.deuceofclubs.com/books/228gospel_fictions.htm.)

different theological emphasis. Taken together, the overall purpose of the Gospels is to show who Jesus Christ is – God’s Son, Israel’s Messiah, and the world’s Savior – so that people will come to Him in faith and receive eternal life.”²

One gospel couldn’t meet the needs of every Christian community. Early Christian churches were scattered around the Mediterranean basin. People in these churches spoke different languages and were from different cultures. Each community had a need for a book about Jesus, but their needs varied. The gospel writers selected and arranged their material with the needs of these different groups of Christians in mind.

Because they are written to different audiences, each of the four gospels emphasizes unique aspects of Jesus life and ministry. But read together, they provide us with a fuller picture of the life of Christ.

Are the Gospels a reliable source of history?

The answer is a resounding “yes” (see Week 2 on the historical reliability of the gospels), but with a few important qualifications.

1. *The gospels are selective.*

None of the gospel authors claim to be exhaustive in his account of Christ's life (Jn. 20:30,31; 21:24,25).

- **Matthew and Luke have birth narratives; Mark and John do not.**
- **Only Luke mentions events during Jesus’ childhood (see Luke 2).**
- **Some events/teachings that occurred during Jesus’ ministry can be found in all four gospels...**
 - **Jesus preaching in Galilee: Matt. 4:12-17; Mark 1:14,15; Luke 4:14,15; John 4:43-45**
 - **Jesus feeding the 5000: Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15**
 - **Jesus entry into Jerusalem on a donkey: Matt. 21:1-11; Mk. 11:1-11; Lk. 19:28-44; Jn. 12:12-19**
- **...but other events/teachings are only found in one gospel.**
 - **Jesus teaching on restoring the brother who sins (Matt. 18:15-20).**
 - **The parable of the seed that grows without the farmer’s help (Mark 4:26-29).**
 - **The parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).**
 - **Jesus heals a man born blind (John 9:12)**

All of the gospels spend the majority of their time on the last 3 years of Jesus’ life, and especially on the last week (1/4 to 1/3 of each gospel) to emphasize the importance of His death and resurrection.

² John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, *The Life of Christ Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1989) p. 7.

What they wrote is accurate history, but the gospel writers selected that part of Jesus' story that served the needs of the community to which they were writing.

2. The gospels are sometimes organized *thematically vs. chronologically*.

The Gospels are not intended to be read as a strict chronological presentation of the life of Jesus. The gospel writers all agree on the overall flow of events in Jesus Ministry (baptism, public ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection). But within this basic framework, they sometimes they grouped events and teachings topically. (See Matt. 4:23—Matthew devotes chapters 5-7 to an example of Jesus' teaching and preaching," and then devotes chapters 8,9 to examples of Jesus' healing miracles.) The chart below shows a sequence of events that occur in Mark and Luke. Both authors include the same events, but Mark recounts the calling of the disciples earlier than Luke does.

Mark	Luke
The Calling of the Disciples (1:16-20)	Introduction to Ministry in Capernaum (4:31-32)
Introduction to Ministry in Capernaum (1:21-22)	Casting out a Demon in the Synagogue (4:33-37)
Casting out a Demon in the Synagogue (1:23-28)	Healing Simon's Mother-in-Law (4:38-39)
Healing Simon's Mother-in-Law (1:29-31)	Healing the Multitudes (4:40-41)
Healing the Multitudes (1:32-34)	Trying to Visit Other Cities (4:42-44)
Trying to Visit Other Cities (1:35-39)	The Calling of the Disciples (5:1-11)
Cleansing the Leper (1:40-45)	Cleansing the Leper (5:12-16)

Why the variation in order? We can't be sure. Maybe Mark moved the calling of the disciples up to the beginning of his shorter gospel in order to introduce the reader to the main characters in the story (Jesus, John the Baptist, and the disciples).

Overview of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (See "Overview of the Four Gospels" CHART)

Instructors, this is FYI for students. Skim through this but slow down in Luke.

Understanding how each gospel is put together and the themes each one emphasizes will aid you in your own study and in teaching the Gospels to others. Let's take a quick tour through each one . . .

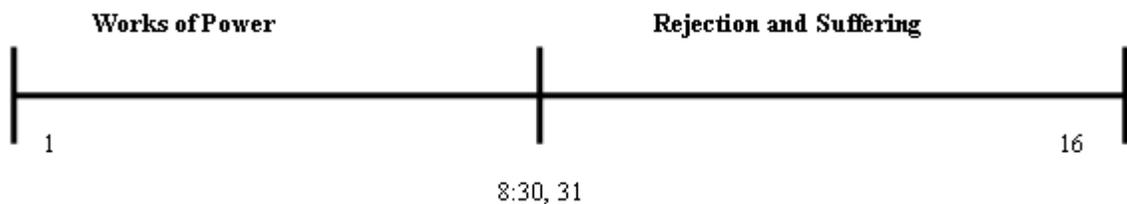
Mark's Gospel

MARK'S READERS: According to Papias, a church father writing at the beginning of the 1st century, Mark was written to persecuted Christians in Rome.

MAIN THEME(S):

Jesus as the Servant-Ruler (Mk. 10:45).

STRUCTURE:



The first 8 chapters: Mostly action-packed narratives that focus on the power of Jesus and the amazement of the crowds (“the Servant who rules”).

The last 8 chapters: A "slowing down" of the narrative focusing on Jesus' apparent weakness, rejection by the crowds, suffering and death (“the Ruler who serves”).

What was Mark trying to do by sharply contrasting Christ's "successes" and his "failures"? Why does half of his Gospel focus on his mighty deeds and half on his suffering and death? Mark emphasizes that Jesus was not killed because He was weak, but because He chose to be a Servant. His suffering was not a sign of failure, but of embracing God's redemptive will. Mark's emphasis would have reminded his readers that evil is not winning through persecution, and that they should embrace persecution as part of God's redemptive will.

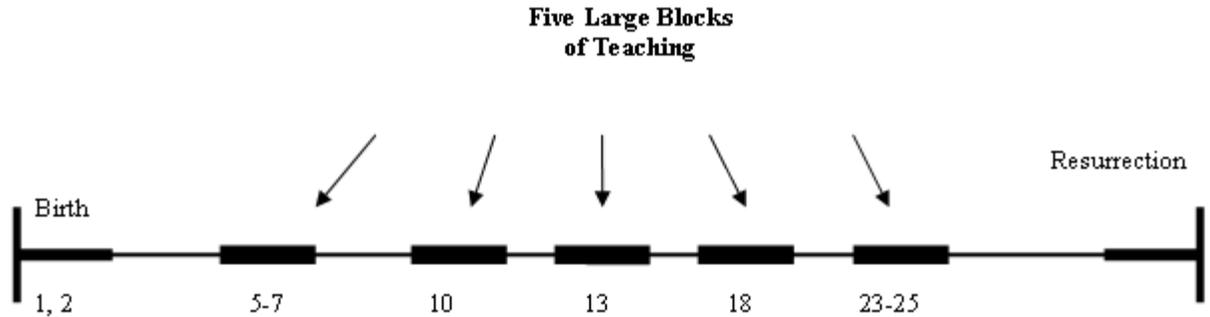
Matthew's Gospel

MATTHEW'S READERS: Jewish Christians or non-Christians

MAIN THEME(S):

Jesus as the authoritative teacher/Messiah.

STRUCTURE: Comparing Matthew with Mark, we notice that Matthew incorporates larger blocks of Jesus' teachings than Mark does. (see 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1)



Luke's Gospel

LUKE'S READERS: Specifically written by Luke, a Gentile doctor who traveled with Paul (Acts 16:10ff), for "Theophilus" (possibly Luke's literary patron or Paul's defense lawyer) and primarily intended for Gentile readers. Luke is part of a two-volume work (see Acts 1:1).

MAIN THEME(S): Jesus is the Savior of lost people.

Luke 19:10* arguably provides a one-verse summary of the entire Gospel: "For the Son of Man came to **seek and to save what was lost.**" There is abundant evidence that "Jesus is Savior of the lost" is a central theme in Luke:

- The Greek words for Savior and salvation (*soter*, *soteria*, *soterion*) occur eight times in Luke, nine times in Acts, and nowhere else in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).
- Luke also emphasizes God's desire to seek and save everyone, especially outcasts and outsiders. Jesus is the Savior of all: every race (Gentiles, Samaritans, Jews), both genders, all economic classes, and people of high and low social status.

1. Samaritans and Gentiles (10:25-37; 17:11-19; 14:15-24). Only Luke records the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25-27) and the story of the ten lepers who were cleansed, with only the Samaritan leper returning to give thanks (17:11-19).

2. Women. Luke has far more women in his account than do the other Gospels.

The birth narratives are told from the perspectives of Elizabeth and Mary (chaps. 1-2).

The prophetess Anna appears alongside her male counterpart Simeon (2:25-38).

Jesus affirms the notoriously sinful woman who anoints him with oil despite the complaints of his pharisaic host (7:36-50).

He praises Mary's (Martha's sister) devotion to his teaching, against the cultural norms of the day (10:38-42).

And only Luke describes Jesus' itinerant ministry as being funded in part by the contributions of several well-to-do women who traveled with him (8:1-3).

3. The Poor.

In Matthew, Jesus blesses "the poor in spirit," in Luke he blesses "you who are poor" (6:20).

Jesus was anointed by God "to preach good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18).

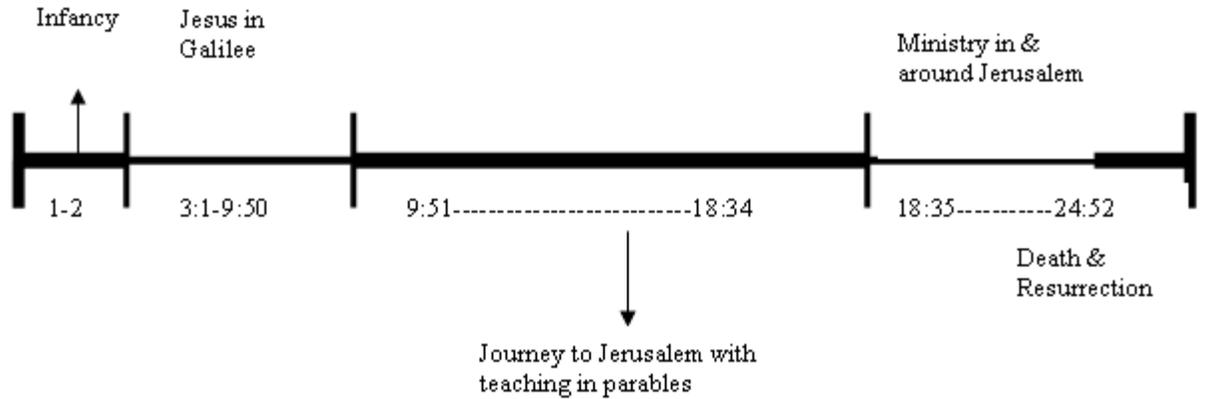
The various teachings in 14:7-24 all demonstrate God's concern for the sick and dispossessed who are unable to help themselves or return favors.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus vindicates the poor beggar at the expense of his counterpart wallowing in luxury (16:19-31).

4. Tax collectors and sinners (5:30, 7:34, and 15:1).

Not only does Luke use the phrase, "tax collectors and sinners," to characterize those who gathered around Jesus to hear him and were welcomed by him, but Luke alone tells two stories in which tax collectors were heroes - the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (18:9-14) and the conversion of Zaccheus (19:1-10).

STRUCTURE: loosely geographical



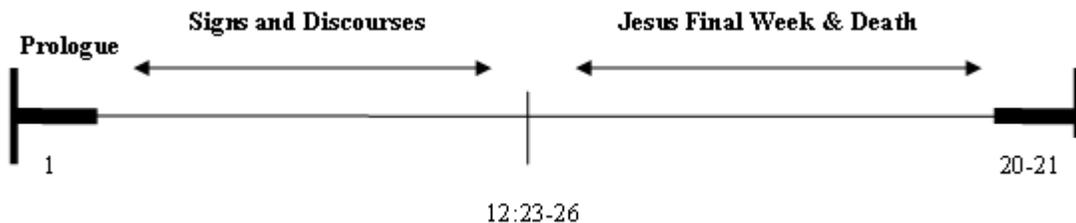
When you read Luke and Acts together, it becomes clear how carefully Luke has crafted them. Luke begins with the birth of Jesus in the context of *Roman* rule. He then follows Jesus as he travels from *Galilee* through *Samaria* to *Judea* and finally *Jerusalem*—where the decisive events of Jesus’ death and resurrection are recorded. Acts begins in *Jerusalem* with Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, and then traces the growth of the early Christian movement outward from Jerusalem through *Judea* and *Samaria*, and throughout *the Gentile world*—ending with Paul proclaiming Jesus in *Rome*.³

John's Gospel

JOHN'S READERS: John was written to seekers, some of whom were Greek (note his translation of Hebrew words), and some of whom may have been Jewish (note how he shows Jesus fulfilling many Old Testament festivals).

For John's purpose statement, see 20:31. He's writing to non-Christians to help them have faith. John is also eager to tell readers that he was an eyewitness of the events he describes (19:35 & 21:24).

STRUCTURE:



The Synoptic Gospels

³ Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), p. 143.

Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the “synoptic” (literally: “see together”) gospels because they are very similar in their basic narrative framework. On one level, they corroborate each other because of their similarity. Yet critics raise three objections:

1. “Borrowing material from other synoptic gospels or sources undercuts the claim that they are divinely inspired.”

There is clear evidence of borrowing in the synoptic gospels. Various theories have been advanced on who borrowed from whom. Most scholars hold that Matthew and Luke both borrowed from Mark’s narrative framework, and then brought in other discourses and/or events according to their purposes for their audiences. It is also likely that there was another source of Jesus’ sayings and/or teachings that the synoptic authors used (i.e., “Q” and/or the “Logia”).

RESOLUTION: There is no inherent contradiction between divine inspiration and the human authors using other sources. Luke states plainly that he used eye-witnesses’ testimony (Lk. 1:2,3). God’s inspiration does not forbid the human authors’ use of other sources; rather, it superintends the proper selection and use of these sources.

2. “Discrepancies between synoptic gospels’ accounts of the same event undercuts the claim that they are divinely inspired.”

Most of these discrepancies can be easily resolved by following these principles:

- **Ancient people were not as concerned in chronological or geographical details as we are.**

Gadarenes (Mt. 8:28) and Gerasenes (Mk. 5:1) refer to two cities in the same region.

Luke refers to the new site of Jericho (Lk. 18:35), while Matthew and Mark refer to old Jericho (Mt. 20:29; Mk. 10:46).

- **The authors sometimes arranged their material topically, not chronologically.**

See above Point 2 on “Are the Gospels a reliable source of history?”

- **Jesus was an itinerate speaker who often repeated actions and teaching in various places.**

The sermon on mount (Mt. 5-7) and the sermon on the level place (Lk. 6) are probably different discourses.

Jesus cleansed the Temple twice: once at beginning of His ministry (Jn. 2) and once at the end (Mt., Mk., Lk.).

The incident with Mary and the perfume (Jn. 12; Mt. 26; Mk. 14) is probably different from similar incident recorded in Lk. 7.

- **The authors used great selectivity in their accounts, and greatly compressed what they reported.**

There are 2 Garasene demonics (Mt. 8; Lk. 8), but Mark focuses on one of them (Mk. 5).

There are 2 blind men healed (Mt. 20; Lk. 18), but Mark focuses on one of them (Mk. 10).

- **The authors had to translate, interpret and condense Jesus' words.**

Accurate condensation of the content (versus exact quotation) was an accepted practice in ancient history.⁴

This explains slightly different versions of the same quotations (compare Mt.24:3; Mk 13:4; Lk.21:7).

This explains why we don't always know where the summary of Jesus' words ends and the author's application begins (Jn. 3:10-21).

3. "John's gospel is so different from the synoptic gospels that this undercuts the claim that it is divinely inspired."

RESOLUTION: As seen above, all of the gospels are highly selective. One of John's purposes for his (later) gospel seems to have been to record aspects of Jesus' public ministry that the (earlier) synoptic authors had omitted. There is no inherent contradiction between divine inspiration and this intent.

The challenge to us: becoming disciples of Christ⁵

"DISCIPLE" was Jesus' favorite word for those whose lives were intricately linked with his. The Greek word for disciple, *mathetes*, is used 269 times in the Gospels and Acts. It means a "taught" or "trained" one.

In the Gospels, Jesus gives us several characteristics of a true disciple.

1. A disciple is involved in *the word of God* on a continual basis.

⁴ See Darrell Bock's argument for this point in Darrell Bock, "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex", in *Jesus Under Fire*, (Zondervan), 1995.

⁵ This section is adapted from chapter 2 of Waylon Moore, *Multiplying Disciples* (Tampa, Florida: Missions Unlimited, 1981) p. 21-25.

(John 8:31,32*) "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

See also Jesus' emphasis on this in Lk. 10:42. Be a life-long learner and lover of the Word!

2. A disciple loves and lays down his life for other Christians.

(John 13:34,35) "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

You cannot be a disciple of Jesus as an individualist! Discipleship to Jesus requires real involvement in Christian community (see the "one another's" in the New Testament letters).

What kind of love?

(John 15:13) "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

A disciple loves enough to be unpopular, to be misunderstood, to stand alone, to suffer. Jesus captured the hearts of his disciples with his unconditional love and his willingness to serve at his own expense. His love always sought to do what was best for those he trained. To love our brothers, we must sacrifice for their deepest needs.

3. A disciple abides daily in a fruit-bearing union with Christ.

John 15:4,5 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing . . . 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."

The "fruit" of which Jesus speaks involves Christ-like character (Gal. 5:22,23), other people coming to Christ (Rom. 1:13), and love for other Christians (Jn. 15:12). This is God's purpose for your life, and He is at work to "prune" (15:2) other worldly purposes (EXAMPLES). Is this your purpose for your life?

But real, fruitful Christian ministry occurs *only* as we personally depend on Christ. If we aren't connecting with Him regularly in prayer and reading His Word, and acting on what we learn, our ministry will not bear fruit!

4. A disciple commits his whole life to Christ.

(Luke 14:33) "So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."

Making an irrevocable commitment to Christ as Lord is essential for biblical discipleship, and this commitment must be renewed daily.

INSTRUCTOR: Consider reading sections from Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life*, "Presenting Ourselves to God."

We're all taking this class because we want to bear fruit – we want to help people come to know Christ and begin their process of growth and change. Reevaluate your walk with Christ in the light of these scriptural definitions of discipleship, for before you can disciple others, you must first be a disciple of Christ yourself.

The world desperately needs laborers (disciples), men and women who are abiding in Christ, obeying and applying the Scriptures daily, evangelizing the lost effectively, and reaching out in Christ like love to their brothers and sisters in the church. Thus, we can help to reach the world—that great, ripe harvest field!

Memory Verses

Luke 19:10 – Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

John 8:31,32 – Disciples of Jesus abide in His words, learn the truth, and are made free by it.

Assignment

Complete inductive paragraph study of Titus 1:5-9.