

7. Good News!

(One story, many dimensions)

Introduction

The Gospels are a **unique literary genre** written for two reasons:

1) A historical record - story and teaching

Question: If Jesus had written the gospels, what might they have looked like?

Note: The teaching is not separate from the story. They are woven together: **teaching + story**

2) Meeting the needs of community

The first three are alike so we call them the **Synoptic** (common-view) **Gospels**.

1. Mark was written (widely accepted view)
2. Mark was re-written (Luke for Gentiles and Matthew for Jewish communities)
3. John was written independently.

Example: Read Luke 6:10 and Matthew 5:3. Why is the saying different?

The writers were selective, arranged their selection and also adapted it.

Exercise: Why did John write gospel? Read John 20:31. John's gospel is mostly accounts from Judea and Jerusalem whereas Matthew, Mark, Luke are mostly Galilean ministry.

2. The Context (exegesis)

Before we can apply a text (hermeneutics), we need to understand the context (exegesis).

Note: Exegesis is important to stop us putting our own spin on a text or reading into a text.

- Culture and religion of first century.
- The gospel writers reasons for writing.

Note: It is unlikely that we will become experts in either, but it's important to be aware!

a) Understanding about the Kingdom

There is a tension between the 'now and not yet', the current age and the age to come. Jesus heralds the beginning of the age to come.

b) Things we can be aware of...

Gospel text is divided into **pericopes** – stories passed orally thirty years before being written.

Jesus taught parables using:

- hyperbole (e.g. Matthew 5:29-30)
- proverbs (e.g. Matthew 6:21)
- similes, metaphors (e.g. Matthew 10:16;5:13)
- poetry (e.g. Matthew 7:6-8; Luke 6:27-28)
- questions (e.g. Matthew 17:25)
- irony (e.g. Matthew 16:2-3)

The sayings of Jesus are provided:

- with context (e.g. Mark 12:13-17)
- without context (e.g. Matthew 5:33-37)

Note: The latter are often recycled elsewhere!

Reading Tip: Who is Jesus teaching: close disciples, larger crowds or opponents?

1) Think horizontally (across gospels)

- Look for distinctiveness, DO NOT blandize!
- Look for the contexts (e.g. Jewish or Gentile).
- Remember that Matthew and Luke used Mark
- Remember the Holy Spirit inspired the writers

Example: Compare Mark 13:14, Matthew 24:15-16 and Luke 21:20-21

2) Think vertically

- read around the passage– understand context

Example: Matthew 24:1-21 – the historical context of what happened in AD66-70.

3. How can we apply it? (hermeneutics)

Exercise: Given what we know of the context of Matthew 24:1-21, how can we apply this text to us today?

- **Some of Jesus' teaching is cultural and some eternal** (e.g. divorce given that one in two new Christians will have been divorced, or soldiers asking us to carry cloaks!)
- **Jesus did not come to give us another set of laws** (they are ideals for living *because of* God's grace to us)

Remember – the Gospels are God's word to us. Ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate the text for us, but let us too, commit to learning and studying the Bible for all it's worth.

