

Gospel, Four Gospels, Paul's Gospel and the Whole Gospel

Outline

1. Meaning of the Gospel
2. Writers of the Four Gospels
3. Vital Elements of the Four Gospels
4. The Kingdom of God in the Four Gospels
5. Synoptic Gospels and Paul's Gospel
6. The Whole Gospel and the Bible Story

1. Meaning of the Gospel

The Gospel is the good news of God Himself intervening in human history to save humanity from misery and a perishing world and bring an eternal new creation. The word **Gospel** comes from the old English term “god-spell”, which means “**good news**” (Greek, evangelion). The Gospel is good news and not good advice. In the olden days, there were no newspapers, and the only way to spread the news was by shouting it aloud on the streets. Tribal wars were common. Notable runners carried the news of the war's outcome from the battlefield and proclaimed it aloud in the tribal city. When a king lost the battle, it was terrible news. His entire tribe was taken captive, and the victorious opponent often brutally treated its people. However, if a king won, it was **good news**, and his whole tribe rejoiced.

The New Testament writers used this same word (Greek euangelion) for the Gospel (good news). The good news is that the Eternal Son of God Himself entered human history as a man in Jesus Christ. Jesus came as humanity's new representative to defeat Satan and save us from human misery, sin, death and a perishing world—through His life, death and resurrection. He also came to start a new creation that would last for eternity. God has invited everyone everywhere to look at, believe in, and trust Jesus. He is the central character in the Bible and the only way we can be saved from a perishing world and be part of his eternal new creation.

2. Writers of the Four Gospels

Four people wrote the authentic biography of Jesus Christ — about His life, death and resurrection. We call them the **four gospels**, though it is just **one Gospel (one good news)** according to each of the writers — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. So, we should properly call them *the Gospel according to Matthew, Gospel according to Mark, etc.* We have four gospels because, during the early church period, four people wrote the story of Jesus, each for a different target audience and with a different emphasis and purpose.

Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience, emphasising Jesus' fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy, proving He is the long-awaited Messiah—the King of the Jews.

Mark wrote to a Gentile audience, especially a Roman one. He emphasises Jesus as the servant who came to suffer for the sins of humanity. Mark's Gospel is a fast-paced, action-packed story of Jesus' miraculous deeds. It is less on Jesus' long teachings than in the other gospels. It is the shortest Gospel.

Luke wrote to a broad, Gentile audience. Luke's Gospel is the longest of the four. It is a historical, journalistic, and thorough account of the events in Jesus' life. Luke portrays Jesus' perfect humanity and His concern for the weak, the suffering, and the outcast.

John wrote so readers may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. So they may have life in His Name (John 20:31). John emphasises Jesus' deity by carefully selecting Jesus' conversations and sayings with miraculous signs to prove it.

There probably were many who wrote about Jesus. However, the early church chose the writings by one of the 12 chosen apostles or by his follower. Jesus taught His chosen apostles personally. They had witnessed His resurrection from the dead. In selecting these four gospels as accurate, the early church wanted to be as close as possible to the eyewitness records of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. In 100 AD, there were only four such gospels that the people widely accepted as authentic.

3. Vital Elements of the Four Gospels

Five Common Vital Points in each of the Four Gospels are:

- i. Jesus is fully God (Matt 1:23, 3:13-17; Mark 1:1,9-11; Luke 1:32-35, 3:21-22; John 1:1,14,29-34)
- ii. Jesus is fully man (Matt 1:1, 12:23, 15:22, 21:9, 26:37; Mark 10:48, 12:35; Luke 2:40, 4:2, 8:23, 9:58; John 4:6, 7:42)
- iii. Jesus' miracles and teachings (Matt 4-25; Mark 1-13; Luke 4-19:27; John 2-17)
- iv. Jesus' betrayal, trial, and death (Matt 26-27; Mark 14-15; Luke 19:28-23:56; John 18-19)
- v. Jesus' resurrection (Matt 28; Mark 16-18; Luke 24 John 20-21)

The four gospels are like biographies of Jesus—His parents, brothers and sisters, His followers etc. **However, the main part is the last week of His life**, which is between **30% and 50% of the Four Gospels**. Most of the remaining portion contains His teachings and miracles during the last three years of His life.

Many people love Jesus' kingdom teachings but leave out His death on the cross, resurrection, and its meaning. Others concentrate only on His death on the cross and resurrection but leave out His kingdom teachings which we must obey. However, His death on the cross, resurrection, and kingdom teachings are essential to the Four Gospels.

4. The Kingdom of God in the Four Gospels

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels because we see similar things in them. (Syn means similar, and Optic means seeing—so synoptic means seeing similar things). We see that the Synoptic Gospels include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and with similar wording. In contrast, the Gospel of John has vastly different content. Furthermore, the Synoptic Gospels often mention the kingdom of God, whereas the Gospel of John rarely mentions it. **Why the difference?**

The Gospel of John emphasises the individual and inward spiritual aspects of being in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not an earthly political kingdom. John quotes Jesus as saying — Yes, I am King. However, *My kingdom is not of this world* (John 18:36-37). Whenever the Synoptic Gospels talk of the kingdom of God, they emphasise the social and behavioural changes that the same Gospel brings through us. We can say that John's Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels are two forms of the same Gospel.

- a. John stresses the individual aspect of our salvation
- b. the Synoptics stress the corporate aspect as a result of our salvation.

5. The Synoptic Gospels and Paul's Gospel

Reading the Synoptic Gospels led many people to say that Jesus preached the **Gospel of the Kingdom** (Matt 4:23, Mark 1:15, Luke 4:43):

*Matt 4:23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming **the good news of the kingdom**, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.*

Mark 1:15 The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Whereas, those people said, Paul preached the **Gospel of salvation**.

*Rom 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of **the Gospel** because it is the power of God **that brings salvation** to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the Gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."*

So, those people said the two gospels are different. However, such reasoning is not valid. Paul said he received his Gospel directly from the risen Lord Jesus in Arabia and Damascus (Gal 1:11-12), which he confirmed and found agreement with Peter and John (Gal 1:18-19, 2:1-2, 1 Cor 15:11). And Mark's Gospel was basically what Peter had told Mark. Concerning the gospel, Paul says he preached the same as Peter, John and James (1 Cor 15:11 *Whether it is I or they, this is what we preach and what you believed*).

Prof Simon Gathercole ¹ compares the outlines of the Synoptic Gospels with the Gospel that Paul preached. He proves them to be essentially the same.

Paul's gospel outline:

- i. Jesus was the promised Messianic King and Son of God who came to earth as a servant in human form. (Rom 1:3-4, Phil 2:5-11)
- ii. By His death and resurrection, Jesus atoned for our sins and secured our justification by grace, not by our works (1 Cor 15:3-7, Eph 2:8-9)
- iii. On the cross, Jesus broke the dominion of sin and evil over us (Col 2:13-15). At his return, Jesus will complete what He began by the total renewal of the entire material creation and the resurrection of our bodies (Rom 8:18-25).

Synoptic Gospels outline:

- i. Jesus is the Messiah; He is the divine Son of God (Mark 1:1)
- ii. Jesus died as a substitutionary ransom for many (Mark 10:45)
- iii. Jesus has conquered the present demonic age with its sin and evil (Mark 1:21-2:12) and will return to renew the material world (Matt 19:28)

6. The Whole Gospel and the Bible Story

Now, when we try reading the Bible and trying to understand its story, we may find it very complicated. However, it is a four-point story—Creation, the Fall of man, Redemption by Jesus and the Final Restoration and Renewal of creation with a new heaven and new earth (Rev 21).

When we speak of the Gospel, we often talk of the third part (Redemption) with respect to the first two parts of the Bible story (Creation and Fall). We stress the individual's salvation by grace alone, through faith

alone, in Christ alone and not by works. Though this Gospel is true, it is incomplete without the fourth part of the Bible story (Restoration and Renewal of creation). When the fourth part is missing, Christians understand that we get to heaven, but nothing else about this world matters.

However, grasping the whole Gospel should interest us in evangelistic conversions and service to our neighbours, especially the poor and oppressed. The Gospel should also make us interested in working for peace, justice, and environmental protection **as evidence** of the new creation. The new creation has already come on earth through the Gospel (2 Cor 5:17), and Jesus will complete it when He comes again, which is the fourth and final part of the Gospel (Rev 21).

So, to define the “Whole Gospel”, I quote Tim Keller,

The Whole Gospel is that the Eternal Son of God entered human history as a man in Jesus Christ, who, by His life, death and resurrection, came to save us, powerless sinners, trapped in a perishing world and to bring us into fellowship with Him and to restore the whole of creation in which we can be a part of and to enjoy eternal life with Him.