

No.6. An Overview of the Four Gospels

With respect to the layout and order of its content, the New Testament commences with the four Gospels. We noted last week that the first three Gospels should be viewed together, thus they are referred to as *The Synoptic Gospels* – “synoptic” meaning *to view together*. They are viewed together because in them there is a major focus on Christ’s humanity, while in *John* the emphasis is on His deity. In nature the four Gospels are four individual and independent records of the person and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. In stressing that they are individual and independent records it is simply meant that each Gospel presents a particular line of thought essential to the understanding of Christ’s person and work. We can represent the line of thought in each Gospel as follows:

1. **Matthew – Christ as the Sovereign on the throne.**

This Gospel puts much emphasis on Christ’s kingship. Note ch. 1: 1 where His link with the kingly or royal line is established immediately – “*Jesus Christ, the son of David.*” Then the genealogy that follows is the royal genealogy. If the throne of David had been in vogue at Christ’s birth He would have ascended it for He was in direct line to it. Note that toward the close of Matthew the authority of the King is in view, ch 28: 18.

Since He is King and Matthew focuses on this office, then we would expect to see much in Matthew about a kingdom – which is exactly what is found. The word *kingdom* is used fifty times in Matthew; and the term *the kingdom of heaven* is employed thirty two times and is found nowhere else in Scripture. The other Gospels use the phrase *the kingdom of God*, often when dealing with the same matters concerning which Matthew speaks of *the kingdom of heaven*. This interchange of the terms shows the fallacy of the Dispensationalist teaching in which it is said that the kingdom of heaven is different from the kingdom of God. The kingdom is one and the same, only with a different emphasis. When Matthew speaks of *the kingdom of heaven* he is stressing the rule of heaven over the affairs of this world, especially seen by the coming of the King Himself into this world. Note Dan 4: 26 – “*the heavens do rule.*” These words were spoken to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. But in all of his pomp and pride he needed to be taught a truth of which he was willingly ignorant – heaven rules among men.

2. **Mark – Christ as the Servant in the toil.**

Mark’s Gospel puts great emphasis on Christ’s service & earthly ministry; focusing much on His prophetic office. Again, taking the opening and the close of this Gospel this emphasis will be noted. See ch.1: 2 – “*As it is written in the prophets...*” and then follows a quotation from Isaiah 40 in relation to John the Baptist. V.4 then introduces us to John – the last of the OT prophets; and v.14 brings us at once to Christ in His prophetic ministry – “*Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.*” Note, then, the close of this Gospel, ch.16: 19 & 20 – the focus is on the preaching or prophetic ministry of the Apostles with the Lord confirming the word they delivered by the sign miracles.

Since its emphasis is on Christ as the Servant toiling in His prophetic ministry, then it will be found that Mark is the Gospel of activity. For example, there is no genealogy in Mark; there is nothing by way of any record of His birth or early life. Instead, after a brief preface, the narrative introduces us to Christ in the scene of action and labour. Again, a particular word is used in Mark denoting this feature of constant action, a word that is translated in a variety of ways – *immediately, forthwith, anon, straightway*. These all are translations of this word which is found around forty times in the Mark. This repeated use of the word is in keeping with the message of this Gospel – Christ the Servant – and it shows that His service was consistent and constant. Once more, in Mark there is repeated reference to the hands of Christ. The other Gospels refer to His hands, but Mark does so over and over again. This is proof of the theme of the book – Christ the Servant or the Worker. Consequently, in content, Mark is in a sense the fullest of the Gospels. Compared with Matthew it is only a little over half the length of the first Gospel. But if all the great discourses and sermons in Matthew were omitted and only passages that detail the activities of Christ were retained, it would be found that Mark would be longer than Matthew!

3. **Luke – Christ as the Sacrifice on the tree.**

In Luke, the emphasis is on Christ’s priestly ministry, a fact demonstrated in various ways. One of the strong emphases in the book is on the atmosphere of the Temple. Once more taking the commencement & close this feature is clearly seen. After the preface in the first four verses, Luke immediately brings us into the Temple, vs. 5-10. Note the references to the priestly office, to Aaron, the burning of incense & the offering of prayer – vs. 5, 8, 9, & 10. Then in the very last verse of Luke the Temple is mentioned, ch.24: 53. Moreover, throughout the book there are various references to the Temple and the activities carried on there. In ch.2 in relation to Christ’s birth, we enter the Temple again and note the offering of sacrifices and other ceremonial rites. Thus, this Gospel does put much emphasis on Christ as both priest and sacrifice for sin.

4. **John – Christ as the Son in His triumph.**

As noted, there is much emphasis in this Gospel on the deity of Christ. Moreover, the focus is especially on Him as the Godman. Thus, seen as the Godman in this Gospel, Christ stands in all three offices – prophet, priest and king. He could only fulfil these offices – emphasised as noted in the first three Gospels – by becoming the Godman. It is especially on that central truth of redemption that this Gospel focuses – Christ is the Godman. Note in the very opening chapter that the Spirit draws our attention to this vital doctrine concerning the person of Christ, vs. 1, 14 & 18. The title employed in this opening chapter is *The Word*. It is a title that especially pertains to Christ as the Godman in that as both God and man Christ is the culmination of divine revelation. He reveals in Himself the glory of the Father. God is never known or understood except through His own Son, thus Christ is the Word – this is the significance of this title. Again, in a real sense this Gospel closes with its own particular emphasis on this theme: Christ is the Godman who is the full revelation of God – He is the Word, see ch.21: 24 & 25. Then, all through this Gospel there is a constant focus on Christ’s teaching as the Word. The Godman is seen in His visible manifestation among men, revealing God to them and showing that He Himself is the Eternal Son of the Father manifested in the flesh.