

“THE GENIUS OF THE GOSPELS”¹

Question: *What are the Gospels?* **Answer:**

- I. **GENERAL FUNCTION:** The Gospels are an introduction to the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. God didn't want that information in only one record, but in four different ones.
- II. **AUTHORSHIP: 4 MEN.** One particularly helpful thing is that one of the authors (the apostle John) wrote some additional interpretative material which we also have (i.e. 1, 2 & 3 John)
 - A. **Two of the authors were 1st generation: Matthew & John**
 - B. **Two of the authors were 2nd generation: Mark & Luke**
- III. **CONTENT – 1 John 1:1-2.** The content of the gospels was their sensory experiences with Jesus Christ. John says we “*heard*”, “*saw*”, *scrutinized* (“*looked upon*”) and “*touched*” Him i.e. Christ. **John is explaining what the purpose was, humanly speaking, of writing the gospels. The content of the gospels is an inspired record of the sensory experiences with the living Word i.e. Jesus Christ.** Several of the writers had apostolic qualifications (Acts 1:21-26 i.e. they had heard, seen & touched Him) and they are sharing those sensory experiences with us.
- IV. **PURPOSE – 1 John 1:3-4.** John, writing after all four of the gospels had been written, tells us the purpose for the writing of those four gospels. He states that those experiences were being proclaimed:
 - A. ***So that we might have Christ in common with the disciples* i.e. *So that we will come to have fellowship with the Apostles.*** Fellowship is not just two Christians talking about fishing, or cars, or the weather. It's Christians sharing the Word of God (Jesus), and the experience of the Word (Christ) that they have in common.
 - B. ***So that the reader's joy should be made full* i.e. *to bring our joy to fulfillment.***

The Gospels were written to accomplish these two purposes. This answers the objection of skeptics who say, “*I didn't have those sensory experiences so I just can't bring myself to believe on Christ. I'd believe if I could see & hear & touch Him.*”

In addition to the four witnesses above, we have a fifth eye witness: Peter
- V. **THE SUFFICIENCY OF HIS WRITINGS FOR THESE PURPOSES – 2 Peter 1:15.** Peter wanted to leave something behind since he knew he was soon going to die. What could he leave? **Answer: His writings, his record!** He says “*we have an even more sure word of testimony*” than seeing and hearing. What could possibly be more certain than seeing and hearing? **Answer: The prophetic word!** Peter states:
 - A. **Eye witness experience (i.e. testimony) is sure – 1 Pet. 1:19**

¹ The vast majority of this material is taken nearly verbatim from a lecture by Dr. Mark Minnick, during a graduate course I took which he taught over two decades ago. –Mike Edwards Note: I have decided to forego quotation marks, since nearly everything contained here is taken directly from Dr. Minnick's remarks which were taken down by me July, 1999 and transcribed September, 2007–mve (revised 3/12 & 2/13, St. Vincent, West Indies and 2/15, 9/17, 3/20 & 1/21, Madison, Ohio)

- B. **But an inspired written record is even more sure** – 1 Pet. 1:19. The word “sure” occurs 9 times in the NT (“sure” or “certain” -an adjective). This one time only, it is a comparative adjective. More sure than something else. *How?*
- (1) **Experience can be misinterpreted**. Peter misinterpreted things on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17).
 - (2) **Experience can be forgotten**. It’s a fact that over time you forget details.
 - (3) **Experience can be duplicated deceptively**. cf. Ex. 7:11-12; II Thess. 2:9-10; Rev. 13:13-15
 - (4) **But a written record can be continually studied objectively by multiple students**.
In regard to Peter’s mistake on the Mount of Transfiguration, what was it that straightened out his misinterpretation there? It was a word from heaven! God’s word from heaven straightened out the misunderstood experience. **And so Peter says we are writing down these accounts so that you can have an understanding of Jesus Christ that is even “more sure.”**(v. 19) A.T. Robertson’s father-in-law was theologian John Broadus. Dr. Broadus would finish every semester of teaching the life of Christ by holding up his Bible and saying: ***“Gentlemen, you have just seen Jesus Christ as clearly as if He were standing here before you!”*** Through the gospels in particular, we can know Christ as well as if He was standing before us!

- VI. **THE NUMBER OF GOSPELS**. ***Why four gospels?*** Minnick said that he has no Bible verse for this per se. However the OT law required a minimum of two witnesses in judgment. But in this case we have:
- A. **Two 1st generation witnesses to the reality of the facts** i.e. Matthew & John
 - B. **Two 2nd generation witnesses to the fellowship of the facts** i.e. Mark & Luke
- VII. **THE SELECTIVE RECORD OF THE GOSPELS**. What did the writers choose, out of everything that they could have shared about their subject, Jesus Christ? **It’s obvious that they were very selective**. Only a very small percentage of the content of the gospels is actual biography of the life of Christ. Clearly the writers were selective and had a definite purpose in mind when they penned these gospels under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. A century or so ago the fad in writing books, was to write a “*Life of Christ*.” But eventually that was found to be unsatisfactory, since there is so little told to us in the gospels in regard to His life! For instance:
- A. **Only two writers record His birth**. (Matthew & Luke)
 - B. **Only one records His childhood**(Luke), and that account is incredibly brief. (Matt. 2:27 cf. Luke 2:40-52) For example, **Luke 2:40 covers Christ’s 1st twelve years. Out of 89 chapters in the gospels, that’s all we know about his first 12 years!** The record then completely jumps over the years 12-30! So there is just one story covering the first thirty years of Christ’s life (i.e. the Temple episode in Luke 2:41-51). **So...we had better pay MAJOR attention to that one incident. What was the key principle of it?** That Jesus “*had to be* (i.e. He was compelled) *about His Father’s business!*” So... the perfect childhood was **God-centeredness**. Today we would say, “*Christ-likeness*.”
 - C. **There’s nothing in the gospels about His young adulthood**.
 - D. **When the writing really begins, it covers a total of only about three years!**

The Synoptics (*Matthew, Mark & Luke*). If you were reading these books alone you would think that Christ's ministry was only 1 year long! What tips us off that it was longer than that is that are the three (possibly four) Passovers mentioned in the gospel of John (John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55 & possibly 4:1-ff).

Each gospel contains only a LIMITED AMOUNT OF CHRIST'S TEACHING.

- (a) Christ wrote *nothing*.
- (b) No gospel writer wrote down *everything* that Christ said.
- (c) No gospel writer records *all* of what Christ said *verbatim* i.e. word for word.
(We know that by comparing them with each other)
- (d) All of the gospels combined give *only about a dozen sermons* that Christ preached.
- (e) Much is left *un-interpreted*.
- (f) There are references in the gospels to *much unrecorded teaching*. So obviously the writers weren't recording everything. So they must have recorded all of His deeds, *right? Wrong!*

The gospels contain ONLY A SAMPLING OF CHRIST'S WORKS!

- (a) A total of 35 miracles combined.
- (b) No gospel contains more than 20 (Matthew).
- (c) You have one of the gospels dedicated to giving signs (John), yet it only lists seven!
- (d) Often Jesus forbade people to tell about His miracles.
- (e) There are numerous "*clusters*" of miracles (e.g. Matt. 8-9 cf. Matt. 4:23; 8:16; 9:25; 12:15; etc.)

The focus or emphasis in the gospels is on ONE MAIN SUBJECT!

- (a) **Look at the BULK OF THE CONTENT.**
 - i. **30 of the 89 chapters** (i.e. 1/3 of all the content of the gospels) **is about just ONE WEEK!** i.e. the Passion Week!
 - ii. **25 of those 30 chapters cover just the time from Jesus leaving Bethany to the time He was crucified i.e. HIS DEATH.**
- (b) **Look at the SINGLE DAY of the week that is emphasized.**
 - i. **6 chapters in the Synoptics cover it.**
 - ii. **7 chapters in the gospel of John deal with it. Consequently, for the writers to emphasize one thing so much tells you that this one thing is THE WHOLE FOCAL POINT OF THEIR WRITINGS.**
- (c) **Look at the INTERPRETATION THAT CHRIST HIMSELF gives to His life!**
The people didn't "*get it*." So Christ, after His resurrection teaches and instructs His disciples. **But what does he teach them?** The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. **In other words, the Old Testament!** He shows them that Christ "*ought to have suffered and then entered into His glory.*" So the gospels get it right! The Jews thought that Christ was a King, which was correct. **BUT THEY DIDN'T EXPECT HIM TO DIE!** **So the gospels explain that part of the story in depth.** In fact John spends 7 chapters on just one day, His last day before His crucifixion!

- (d) **Look at the *INTERPRETATION CONTAINED IN THE EPISTLES*.** For instance, note the writer of the book of Hebrews (**Heb. 10:5-7**). He quotes from Psalm 40:6-7. **The Epistles thus interpret the Gospels** regarding what that body was prepared for and what it was made to do, etc. In other words, “**HIS SACRIFICE!**”
- (e) **Look at the *COMMISSION CHRIST GAVE TO THE APOSTLES*.** - Luke 24:46-48. The Messiah was sent to **SUFFER**. **And our focus is skewed if we don't keep it there!** Spurgeon was right. He said that in all his preaching, no matter what passage he was expounding on, he always tried “*to make a beeline to the cross.*” ***Why?*** Because it's clear from the gospels that **that is THE MAIN THEME & THRUST!** Today Christian bookstores reflect *everything but* an emphasis on Christ. There are books on aerobics, eating disorders, psychology, angels, horizontal relationships, etc. But go back to the Reformation and the period of time following it, and look at those books. **The emphasis was CHRIST-CENTERED!**

One final thought: **How do we teach or preach *Christo-centrally* without being accused of, and being guilty of teaching/preaching nothing but *salvation messages*?** **Answer:** Look at and follow the pattern in the Epistles. Those books are excellent examples of Christ-centered teaching. Notice that it's doctrine—but it is **Christ-centered doctrine**. For example, Ephesians 5:22-ff (“*Husbands love your wives. [How?] As Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it!*”). So link your preaching & teaching to Christ's teaching, examples, etc.