

# The Message of the Four Gospels

Summary and Implications

# Introduction

- The fact that we have four gospel accounts—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John does not mean we have four different gospels
- In early church manuscripts, church leaders refer to the (one) “Gospel According to Matthew, et al”
- Though there is a single gospel, each account includes its core elements or emphases

# The Term “Gospel” in the Gospels

- The word “gospel” (*euangelion*) in the noun form is used only by Matthew and Mark
- Luke uses the verb form 26 times in Luke-Acts and the noun twice in the book of Acts
- In John’s gospel, there is no trace of either verb or noun form

# The Kingdom of God

- The main theme of the synoptic gospels is found in Jesus' announcement of his arrival and ministry fulfils the "kingdom of God"
- The way in which Mark uses *euangelion* is indicated in his opening words, "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk 1:1)
- <sup>14</sup> After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup> "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mk 1:14-15)
- In contrast, John's gospel focuses on the announcement of the gift of life or eternal life

# The Kingdom of God

- The dawning of the “good news of the Kingdom of God,” as Matthew calls it (4:32), focuses on Jesus’ ethical teaching or the ethics of the kingdom in Matt 5-7 (see, for example, the Beatitudes)
- The kingdom of God refers to God’s gradual reestablishment of his reign over the whole earth by redeeming humanity and creation
- That reign has not only “drawn near,” but is said to be already present: “If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Lu 11:20)

# The Fulfilment of OT Promises

- All four gospel accounts focus on the fulfilment of the OT, though the stress on fulfilment is more pronounced in Matthew and Luke than it is in Mark and John
- <sup>25</sup> “He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Lu 24:25-27)
- <sup>44</sup> “He said to them, ‘this is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Lu 24:44-45)

# Already but Not Yet

- Even though there is a strong emphasis in the Synoptic gospels on the presence of the kingdom and the fulfilment of the OT, there is a sense in which not all the promises have been fulfilled
- For now, the kingdom exists in mystery or veiled form, with visibility only to those who believe (Matt 13:11; Lu 17:21)
- The wicked have not been judged; the righteous do not yet enjoy the wholeness of salvation
- God's plan of salvation has been fulfilled but not completed
- Thus, we should continue to pray, "Your kingdom come" (Matt 6:10), expecting the return of Jesus

# Suffering Before Glory

- It is obvious that one of the key features of the gospels is the emphasis on the passion of Jesus
- Since the common expectation was that the Messiah would come as a triumphant king, a great shift in understanding was required by the idea of a Messiah who must suffer and die (cf. Isa 53)
- At the heart of the story of Jesus is neither the teaching nor the healings he performed, but the cross. Jesus came to die as a sacrifice (Mk 10:45; Matt 20:28) to fulfil the will of God (Mk 14:49; Lu 24:26)
- On the mount of Transfiguration the conversation is devoted to Jesus' departure. The term translated "departure" is the Greek term "exodus" (Lu 9:31)

# The Identity of Jesus

- It is clear that the synoptic gospels view Jesus as the Messiah, the unique agent of God (Mk 8:29; Matt 16:16; Lu 9:20; Jn 20:30-31)
- This is indicated not only by the titles assigned to him, but by the power and authority he demonstrated and witnessed by many
- He is the unique Son of God (Matt 11:25-27; Lu 10:21-22; Jn 5:16-23)
- He is also the apocalyptic Son of Man of Dan 7:13, a quasi-divine figure
- Matthew refers to Jesus as “Emmanuel,” which is “God with us” (1:23)
- John’s gospel makes clear Jesus’ pre-existence and divinity that he was from the very beginning with God and was God (Jn 1:1)

# The Mission of God

- Although Jesus came to minister to an exclusively Jewish audience, ministry was already trending toward the inclusion of the Gentiles in Matthew: magi (2:1-12), the centurion (8:5-13), and the Canaanite woman (15:21-28)
- Mark and Luke were written with Gentile readers in mind, so the proclamation of the gospel was universal in view (Mk 13:10; Lu 24:47)
- Luke's second volume is most impressive in explaining the missionary work of Paul to the Gentile nations

# The Importance of Faith

- The two terms “faith” and “believe” come from the same root in Greek
- We are called to faith: “The time has come, he said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’” (Mk 1:15)
- To those who received healing from Jesus, Jesus says that their faith has made them well (Mk 5:34; Lu 7:50; Matt 9:29)
- To be his disciple, we are called to “have faith in God” (Mk 11:22), a turning from one’s own resources to trust in the grace of God
- The emphasis on salvation by faith is best described in the parable of the prodigal son (Lu 15:11-32), and serves as a bridge to Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith (Rom 5)
- In Lu 18:14, the tax collector “went down to his house justified”, a term used by Paul in his articulation of the gospel

# Implications

- We are living in the last days, or in between worlds—the already of God’s promises fulfilled and the “not yet” of promises yet to be fulfilled
- Jesus demonstrated his power over Satan (Matt 12:28), indicating that the Kingdom of God is present, but he also instructs his disciples to pray, “Your Kingdom come” (Matt 6:10)
- Meanwhile, we are to continue the mission of God, to exercise faith and remain faithful until the day of Jesus’ 2<sup>nd</sup> coming or the “blessed hope,” when we receive our “changed” bodies