

CHAPTER 2

Portraits of Christ (The Four Gospels)

Why are there four Gospels? Why did God give us four books--each of which describes the life and ministry of Christ? Would not one book have been enough?

Suppose you have a pen pal--someone that you correspond with by mail but someone that you have never met or seen. In your next letter you write, "I want to get to know you better. Please send a picture so that I can see what you look like." Which would help you to get to know your pen pal better--if your pen pal sent you one picture or four pictures? _____
Why is this so?

God has given us four pictures or **portraits** of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the four gospel accounts called Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. God could have given us just one Gospel, but four is so much better. Does God want us to get to know His Son, even though, as 1 Peter 1:8 says, we have never seen Him with our eyes (John 17:3; Philippians 3:10)?

_____ As we come to know Him more and more, who else will we get to know (John 8:19; 14:7). As we see Christ clearer and clearer (as we look into these four portraits), Whom else will we see (John 14:9)? _____ Jesus is God's perfect photograph! If you want to know what God the Father is really like, look at the Son! Jesus Christ "is the _____ of the _____ God" (Colossians 1:15). You cannot see the invisible God, but you can see His Son as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

Think again of the four pictures of your pen pal. Would there be certain things in each of these pictures that would be similar? Would there be some things that are common to all four photos? (perhaps your pen pal is wearing the same sweater in all four shots or perhaps there is the same tree in the background in each shot). Would each photo show certain things that the other three did not show? Would each picture be different from the others, at least in some ways? Would it be possible to have three photos very similar (perhaps all taken in the same room within a few minutes of each other) and a fourth photo that was very different (perhaps taken at a later time when the person was out-of-doors with different clothes on and with different background)? Would you say, "This fourth photo is so different from the other three that it must be a different person!"?

So it is with the four Gospels. They are similar to each other and yet they are different from each other. The first three gospels are very much alike in many ways (though there are differences) and the Gospel of John is very different from the first three (with only a few similarities). Yet all four are needed to give us a correct understanding of who Jesus is and what He is like!

Here are some examples:

1. Read Matthew 24:32-36 and compare Mark 13:28-32. Are these two passages essentially the same or different?

2. Read Matthew 13:55 and compare Mark 6:3. Though these verses are very similar, what difference do you notice? Matthew speaks of Jesus as the _____'s son and Mark speaks of Jesus as the _____. Was Joseph a carpenter? _____ Was Jesus a carpenter? _____ Are both verses true? _____

3. Read Mark 6:38 and compare Matthew 15:34. What difference do you find here?

_____ Did Matthew have trouble counting or was it Mark who did not keep his numbers straight? What is the real answer to this problem (see Mark 8:19-20 and Matthew 16:9-10; see also Mark 8:5 and Matthew 14:17)?

_____ It was really no problem at all! It only *seemed* like a problem because we did not have all the facts.

4. Compare these four verses: Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19. Are all these verses similar? Are there any differences? Do all four verses give the *correct* and *true* information as to what really was written over the head of the crucified Christ? _____ Do all the verses give the *complete* information as to what was written? _____ Does John 19:20 give a possible reason for some of the differences?
5. There are certain things that are common to all four Gospels:

All four gospels speak of the ministry of John the Baptist.

All four gospels speak of the baptism of Jesus.

All four gospels speak of the feeding of the 5000.

All four gospels speak of Peter's denial of the Lord.

All four gospels speak of the arrest and trials of Jesus.

All four gospels speak of the crucifixion of Jesus.

All four gospels speak of the resurrection of Jesus.

There are also certain things that are different and unique to each of the Gospels:

Examples:

Only Matthew tells of Joseph and Mary's flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:12-23).

Only Mark tells of the healing of the blind man which was done in two stages (Mark 8:22-26).

Only Luke tells the parable of the lost son (Luke 15:11-32).

Only John tells of the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-45).

There is an expression that is sometimes used: "That's gospel truth!" (meaning, "that's something that is most certainly true and which we must accept and believe"). Consider this sentence: "His word was taken for *gospel* by the neighborhood children." This means the children believed every word that this person spoke and accepted what he said as being completely true. The very same thing must be said about the four Gospels. The Gospels contain nothing but **gospel truth!** There are people who say that the gospels contain mistakes and contradictions and errors, but we know that all four gospels contain nothing but **gospel truth!** There are no errors and no mistakes anywhere in God's Word. [See our study on The Inspiration of the Bible].

Suppose someone were to say, "The four gospels were not written until many years after Jesus died (and this is true). How then did the gospel writers remember the things Jesus did and said?" How would you answer this? **Who** helped them to have a perfect memory (see John 14:26)?

The word "gospel" means "good news" or "glad tidings." What is the good news according to 1 Corinthians 15:1-5:

HE _____ FOR OUR _____ according to the Scriptures (verse 3).
 HE WAS _____ (verse 4).
 HE _____ AGAIN according to the Scriptures (verse 4).
 HE WAS _____ (verse 5) by many different people.

Do all four Gospels present the GOOD NEWS that Christ died, was buried, rose again and was seen alive? _____

Suppose there are five blind men investigating an elephant without knowing what it was. One feels its legs and thinks it must be a large tree. Another feels its nose and concludes it must be a huge snake. Another feels its side and thinks it's a massive wall. Another feels its tail and thinks it's a rope. Another feels its tusk and thinks it's an iron bar. Are they all wrong? _____ They all have only a part and they fail to understand the whole. The trunk is only a part of the elephant. It is not the whole elephant. If we only see the part, we will miss the whole. In fact, the part alone would not give us a clear and true picture of what an elephant really is like. Each part needs the other parts to make the whole.

God gave us four Gospels so that they might lead us to Christ. There is only **one Christ**, not four! There are not four Saviours! The four Gospels all point to the same blessed Person whom God wants us to know. We need to see all four Gospels together, just as you would look at the four photos of your pen pal to better see what that one person really looks like.

Matthew

Presents Christ as KING
(The Prophesied King)

Key Verse: Matthew 2:2
"King of the Jews"

PURPLE (Exodus 26:36)--the color of
Kingship (Royalty).

LION (Ezekiel 1:10; Rev. 1:7)--the king of
beasts

Written especially for the Jews

Mark

Presents Christ as SERVANT
(The Obedient Servant)

Key Verse: Mark 10:45
"The Son of man came, not to be ministered
unto but to minister (serve) and to give His
life a ransom for many."

SCARLET (Exodus 26:36)--the color of
blood: the servant must give His life.

OX (Ezekiel 1:10)--the sacrificial animal

Written especially for the Romans

Luke

Presents Christ as Man
(The Perfect Man)

Key Verse: Luke 19:10
"Son of man"

WHITE (Exodus 26:36)--the color of purity:
He is the sinless, pure, perfect Man.

MAN (Ezekiel 1:10)--His perfect
Humanity

Written especially for the Greeks

John

Presents Christ as God
(The Divine Son)

Key Verse: John 20:31
"Son of God"

BLUE (Exodus 26:36)--the heavenly color:
He is the One who came down from heaven

EAGLE (Ezekiel 1:10)--the bird from the
heavens

Written for the whole world

**They all point to that ONE, BLESSED PERSON
the LORD JESUS CHRIST,
the SAVIOUR,
the SON OF GOD!**