



# BIBLETRACK 1

## TALK 4 THE GOSPELS (PART 1) DR JEREMY DUFF

### Talk Outline

#### What are the Gospels?

1. Historical record
2. Testimony to Jesus
3. Theology
4. Biography
5. Scripture through which God speaks
6. Means of opening up spirituality
  - Christian faith is about encountering Jesus through:
    - The Spirit
    - Worship
    - The Eucharist
    - The Gospels
  - Four Gospels are teaching but in the context of a narrative
  - Other Gospels have different format – no longer in use
  - Heart of the Gospels is Jesus' encounters with people
  - 150–200 AD Christians were using the four Gospels we have today

'(The four gospels) survived and were revered because they had been found to be a reliable foundation for Christian spirituality over the previous centuries ...' (Duff and McGrath, *Meeting Jesus*, p.4.)

- Purpose of Gospels is to nourish the church which is why these four remain in use today

*'Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly' (Luke 19:1–6).*

- The Gospels are our sycamore tree allowing encounter with Jesus

# Studying the Gospels

- Literary analysis can be carried out on Gospels in the same way as other texts
- Form criticism:

## i. Historical approaches

- Looking through the window: asking historical questions

## ii. Literary approaches

- Looking at the window: asking literary questions

## iii. Reader-response approaches

- Looking at our reflection in the window: us in the picture

APPROACH	QUESTIONS	TECHNICAL TERMS	PARTICULARLY IN VOGUE
Looking through the window: <b>Historical approaches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What actually happened?</li><li>• When / why / how were the Gospels written?</li></ul>	Historical Jesus  Source / Form / Redaction Criticism	1750–1900 and 1980 onwards  1900–1960
Looking at the window: <b>Literary approaches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does the text work?</li><li>• What is the plot, the characters the style?</li></ul>	Literary / Narrative criticism	1960 onwards
Looking at our reflection: <b>Reader-based approaches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does this make me feel when I read it?</li><li>• What effect does it have because of who I am?</li></ul>	Reader-response	1980 onwards

# Historical approaches to studying the Gospels

## i. Historical Jesus studies

- Historical Jesus studies looks at the biographical elements of Jesus' life
- Difficulty lies in knowing how much of this is speculative
- Scholars peer down the deep well of history and see their own reflection at the bottom (Albert Schweitzer)
- Problem of miracles
- Value in cutting through our cultural assumptions

## ii. Source criticism

- Connection between Matthew, Mark and Luke
- 90% of words in Mark are in Matthew
- 50% of words in Mark are in Luke

### Triple material:

MARK 1:39–44 (NRSV)	MATTHEW 8:1–4 (NRSV)	LUKE 5:12–14 (NRSV)
<p><i>And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.</i></p> <p><i>A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean."</i></p> <p><i>Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!"</i></p> <p><i>Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.</i></p> <p><i>After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, 44 saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone;</i></p> <p><i>but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."</i></p>	<p><i>When Jesus had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; and</i></p> <p><i>there was a leper who came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean."</i></p> <p><i>He stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I do choose. Be made clean!"</i></p> <p><i>Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.</i></p> <p><i>Then Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."</i></p>	<p><i>Once, when he was in one of the cities,</i></p> <p><i>there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean."</i></p> <p><i>Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do choose. Be made clean."</i></p> <p><i>Immediately the leprosy left him. And he ordered him to tell no one.</i></p> <p><i>"Go," he said, "and show yourself to the priest, and, as Moses commanded, make an offering for your cleansing, for a testimony to them."</i></p>

- Similarity in order

Cleansing of the Leper	Mark 1:40–45	Matthew 8:1–4	Luke 5:12–16
Healing of the Paralytic	Mark 2:1–12	Matthew 9:1–8	Luke 5:17–26
Call of Levi	Mark 2:13–17	Matthew 9:9–13	Luke 5:27–32
Question about Fasting	Mark 2:18–22	Matthew 9:14–17	Luke 5:33–39
Plucking Grain on the Sabbath	Mark 2:23–28	Matthew 12:1–8	Luke 6:1–5
Man with Withered Hand	Mark 3:1–16	Matthew 12:9–14	Luke 6:6–11

- Six stories all occur in same order in Matthew, Mark and Luke
- Mark was used by Matthew and Luke

## Double material:

- 25% of Matthew and Luke are the same but not in Mark

MATTHEW 3:7-10 (NRSV)	LUKE 3:7-9 (NRSV)
<i>But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.</i>	<i>John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."</i>

- No similarity in order in Matthew and Luke

Does it matter?

- Can see intentions of Gospel writers
- Not three independent witness accounts

## iii. Form criticism

- Gospels seem to have been built from small blocks of material
- Context maybe not as well preserved at content
- Continuous narrative at end of Gospels
- Papius, Bishop of Hierapolis (Western Turkey) wrote in 120 AD

'And the presbyter said this. Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him. But afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who accommodated his instructions to the necessities [of his hearers], but with no intention of giving a regular narrative of the Lord's sayings. Wherefore Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as he remembered them. For of one thing he took especial care, not to omit anything he had heard, and not to put anything fictitious into the statements.' (Papias Bishop of Hierapolis, *Eusebius History of the Church* 3.39.)

- Mark 1:45–Mark 3:6: six or seven clashes with the religious authorities

## iv. Redaction criticism

- How each Gospel writer has shaped material
- Compare with other Gospels and draw conclusions

MATTHEW 5:2–10 (NRSV)	LUKE 6:20–26 (NRSV)
<p><i>Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:</i></p> <p><i>"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</i></p> <p><i>"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.</i></p> <p><i>"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.</i></p> <p><i>"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</i></p> <p><i>"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.</i></p>	<p><i>Then he looked up at his disciples and said:</i></p> <p><i>"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.</i></p> <p><i>"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.</i></p> <p><i>"Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.</i></p> <p><i>"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.</i></p> <p><i>"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. "Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. "Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.</i></p>

## John and the Synoptic Gospels

- Matthew, Mark and Luke are the Synoptic Gospels: 'syn' (together) and 'optic' (sight)
- John is different in content:
  - In Synoptic Gospels Jesus only comes to Jerusalem in the final week, John he visits there and teaches there (2:13, 5:1, 7:10)
  - No exorcisms in John
  - No tax collectors in John
  - Themes and ideas reappearing
  - Little mention of kingdom or parables in John
  - John's favourite words 'life', 'light', 'the world', 'the Jews', 'to witness', 'sent', 'I am', 'love' – these are rare in synoptics.
- **Synoptics:** Tell you what was said / done from the point of view of the people there
- **John:** Tells you the true meaning of the story (with hindsight)
- **The Four-Fold Gospel** – Why four Gospels?

# Understanding the Pharisees

- Pharisees were trying to establish holiness of Israel by teaching the law and promoting it
- Holiness would bring about rescue by God
- Being holy meant following the law more closely
- Jesus is seen to undermine work of the Pharisees
- Jesus presented a different way of meeting with God

## The Distinctiveness of the Gospels

### i. Matthew: the way of righteousness

- Closest to Pharisees agenda

#### **Content:**

- Wise men, Sermon on the Mount, woe to the scribes and Pharisees, sheep and the goats, the Great Commission

#### **Structure:**

- Five blocks of teaching (5–7, 10, 13, 18, 24–25)
- Very structured

#### **Character:**

- Closely relating to Judaism – more Jewish and more anti-Jewish
- Fulfilment and use of the Old Testament
- Someone greater than ...
- Disciples portrayed fairly well

### ii. Mark: the way of Jesus

- Shorter than the other Gospels

#### **Content:**

- Nothing (other than 4:26–29) not in Matthew / Luke
- Fewer teaching and parables
- No infancy or resurrection narratives

#### **Structure:**

- Mid-point is the transfiguration: 1–8, 9–10, 12–16

#### **Character:**

- Very detailed

- Fast paced
- Focused on who Jesus is and the disciples response to him
- Written to provoke change

### **iii. Luke: the way for the world**

- Unique content

#### **Content:**

- Shepherds, Nazareth speech, Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son, trial before Herod, Emmaeus Road

#### **Structure:**

- Less obviously structured
- Long 'travel narrative'

#### **Character:**

- Gospels for the wider world
- Outsiders: lost, sinners, women, gentiles
- Focus on the poor
- Positive continuity with Judaism
- The Gospel for evangelists

### **iv. John: 'I am the way'**

#### **Content**

- Wedding at Cana, Nicodemus, the Samaritan Woman, Lazarus, washing the feet, the 'Farewell Discourse'

#### **Structure**

- Incident followed by dialogue / monologue
- Far more theological exposition, far fewer incidents
- Ministry across Galilee and Jerusalem

#### **Character**

- Small range of themes developed at length
- Thoroughly Jewish and also profoundly anti-Jewish
- Jesus makes 'I am' claims
- Jesus' role to bring revelation

## Acknowledgments

Jeremy Duff and Joanna Collicutt McGrath, *Meeting Jesus: Human Responses to a Yearning God* (SPCK, 2006), p.4.

Papias Bishop of Hierapolis (Western Turkey), writing about AD 120. Quoted in *Eusebius History of the Church* 3.39 (Written about 320 AD)

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