

Adult Forum

The Gospels

Leader: Jerry Nabozny

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels

Week 2: The Gospels of Matthew and Mark

Week 3: The Gospels of Matthew and Mark (Continued) and Luke

Week 4: The Gospel of John and Summary

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Week 1: Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels

1. Gospel Beginnings

- a. Early Church and Preachings**
- b. Cultural Contexts**
- c. Preaching in an Oral Culture**
- d. Writing it Down**

2. Form Criticism

- a. What it is**
- b. What it is not**
- c. Why it is important**
- d. Examples**

3. Key Take Home Messages

1. Gospel Beginnings

1a. The Early Church and it's Preachings

- Very limited knowledge of the first days of the Christian Church (up to 100 years!)
 - Jesus did not set out to organize a "church"
 - Jesus had a "relationship" with his disciples that was loosely modeled off a Rabbi and his followers
 - The obvious cornerstone to early Christianity was the crucifixion and resurrection
 - The resurrection was more than an ecstatic visionary experience
1. Jesus as "Giver of Life"
 2. Separated early Christians from Jews

- First Christians were Jewish Christians
 1. A Jewish sect
 2. Their experience met the expectation of Jewish Scriptures
 3. Rooted in Jewish tradition

- The need to spread the message
 1. Continue to spread the message that disciples heard Jesus preach
 2. Incorporate Jesus stories

- Since people of Jewish origins were preaching to Jews, a common religious heritage was shared
 1. Used terms that everyone knew (e.g. Messiah)

- Effective ways to spread the word that the Messiah had arrived was to tell "Jesus Stories"
- Jesus Stories were stories of life
 1. Dramatic
 2. Lively
 3. Vivid clarification

- Jesus Stories were *selective* to get a point across!
 1. Some stories were told often
 2. Some stories were told seldom
 3. Some stories were forgotten

- Early church was not interested in informing their listeners about what Jesus had done
 1. Church was interested in what Jesus was doing right
 2. First century society was not interested in biography for biography's sake!

- Early church needed to educate it's new converts

1. Utilized stories with a lesson

Mark 12:28-34 (instructional)

Matthew 6:9-15 (worship)

Mark 14:17-25 (worship)

Mark 4:1-20 (comfort)

Stories about Jesus helped the Church address concrete issues and problems of the time

1b. Cultural Contexts

- Estimated that at least 35 years elapsed between the Church's beginnings and the composition of the first Gospel
- Major changes in composition of the growing Church
 1. Jew to Gentile
 2. Aramaic to Greek
 3. Near Eastern to Greco-Roman
- First Christians spoke Aramaic
 1. Very acquainted with Jewish religious traditions
- Christianity rapidly moves outside of Palestine
 1. "Hellenistic Jews" Jews in Greek-speaking areas of Roman Empire
- Preachers needed to be aware that Hellenistic Jews were influenced by Greek and Roman traditions
 1. Needed to adjust their style
 2. Teaching and preaching now done in Greek
 3. Translation was difficult
- Christianity begins to preach to population centers in Greco-Roman world
 1. Missions of Paul
 2. Gap between Christianity and Judaism widens

3. Need to address the mixing of pagan belief with Christianity
4. Need to “shape” Jesus’ message

1c. Preaching in an Oral Culture

- Approximately 20% of the people could read!
- Oral tradition dominated
- People lived for stories!
- Rabbis trained students to commit to memory large portions of scriptures
- Early Christians were rooted in Jewish tradition
 1. Committing to memory the teachings and stories of Jesus was the obvious thing to do
- Oral cultures develop patterns or forms
 1. The occasion or purpose for which the communication is intended shapes the account we write

1d. Writing it Down

- Believed that Mark was the first Gospel (~65 C.E.)
- What caused the delay?
 1. Except for Athens and Rome, most early Christians lived in the non-literary world
 2. Cost of committing something to writing
 3. Christians expected the second coming to be imminent. So, why write it down?
- What led to the production of the Gospels?
 1. The form of the Christian service demanded the need for Christian literature
 2. Missionary “propaganda”
 3. First accounts of Jesus were used for teaching purposes
 4. Matters of life and discipline required an example of Jesus
(*What would Jesus do?*)
 5. Threats of heresies required an agreed version of the teachings of Jesus
 6. The written Gospel was a necessary substitute for the living voice of the apostles

2. Form Criticism

2a. What it is

- An attempt to classify all the stories of Jesus in the first 3 Gospels according to categories of their forms or patterns
- Helps to understand the traditions of the Gospels

2b. What it is not

- Not a judgement of the Gospels
- Not a fault finding exercise

2c. Why it is important

- Biggest contribution is that this form of study was able to identify and classify the forms and place structure to the “when, where and possibly why” the first three Gospels were written
- Smallest contribution has been the determination of the “historical context” of the Jesus tradition.

Caveat: Great latitude used by Form Critics to attribute Jesus Stories as authentic!

2d. Examples and Classification of Forms

Pronouncement Stories

- Always contains a significant sayings of Jesus
- Very “Stand Alone” in nature

Miracle Stories

1. Description of need
2. Miraculous act
3. Results

“Not what Jesus said but what he did”

“Early Christians had a tendency to embellish Jesus Stories”

Stories about Christ

- Emphasize the identity of Jesus as the Christ
 1. Twelve year old Jesus in the Temple
 2. Baptism by John the Baptist
 3. Entry into Jerusalem

Sayings of the Lord

- Independent sayings of Jesus that has no framework

3. Key Take Home Messages

- Early Christians lived in oral culture
- Shape of Christian Church changed from Jews to Hellenistic Jews to Gentiles
- Traditions of the audience shaped the way the stories were told
- The early preachers needed “Jesus Stories” to get the message of Christianity across
- The early Christian Church was not interested in the biography of Jesus. They told stories about Jesus to get a point across
- It was very expensive to commit something to writing
- Early Christians thought that the second coming was imminent so there was no need to write anything down
- The early Christian service demanded a written form
- The challenge of heresies and pagan influences in the newly Gentile Christian areas forced a written form
- The apostles were dying so there was a need to preserve the “first person” accounts of the sayings and stories of Jesus
- Form criticism is a method to study the first 3 Gospels to put the writings into context and establish structure
- The first three Gospels utilized the same source of information and thus are classified as Synoptic (Viewed Together)