

FOUR GOSPELS ONE JESUS

Bonus Mini-Sermon: Challenging Comfort Zones in the Gospel of Luke

Ron Giese

Illustration: Let's say an accident happens at the intersection of San Mateo and Montgomery, involving several vehicles. Four pedestrians happen to be standing at each of the four corners (NW, NE, SW, and SE) and see the accident. When the police officer questions each one, we can see two things happening.

First, any one witness will not see anywhere near the totality of what really happened. Probably only God Himself will know this. The parallel here to the four gospel writers is that none of them are relating 100% of what Jesus said and did. In fact if you think about it, each one probably records far less than 1% of all that Jesus said. However, we know that God has given us, in each gospel account, exactly what He wants us to receive. He has selected those sayings, sermons, and acts of Jesus that He wishes us to read and study for our growth and sanctification.

Second, in the illustration of four human witnesses, we can envision two results of their testimony. The four testimonies could be contradictory or complementary. For instance, they could be contradictory. A person at the NE corner could say, "I know what caused the accident, it was the blue car," and the person at the SW corner could say, "I know who is at fault, it's the guy driving the truck who was talking on his cell phone." But, another result is that all four testimonies are complementary, that is, each one perfectly complements the other three. Each one is 100% accurate—not 100% *complete*, because they can't see and know everything, but in what they relate they are 100% *accurate*. And of course this second option is what we have in the gospels. The four human witnesses will have a lot of overlap (maybe they all saw one car hit the brakes), and yet each one will have something unique to contribute as well.

Here is one way of looking at how the four gospels present Jesus:

MATTHEW:	RABBI
MARK:	REBEL
LUKE:	REDEEMER
JOHN:	REALITY

MATTHEW JESUS AS RABBI

- “Rabbi” is the Aramaic word for “teacher,” and was used of a Jewish person who had disciples or held some kind of school. Matthew presents Jesus as the Jewish Messiah.
- FIRST VERSE: “The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”
- AUDIENCE: Jewish

The beginning and end of a book often tell us a lot about the book.

Note the key nouns here: “record, “genealogy,” “Messiah,” “David,” and “Abraham.”

The audience of Mt is clearly Jewish. And there is a clear focus on chronology and development, that is, Jesus as the culmination of God’s plan for human history.

- BOOKENDING:

LOOK AT 1:23: Immanuel means “God with us.”

The very last sentence is, “And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age,” likewise focusing on the timeline of human history. Thus God “with us” is both in chapter 1 and in the last chapter of the book.

- This first verse (Mt 1:1) has “biblos” + “genesis.” the Greek “biblos” is the work for “book,” and the word we get “Bible” from. The word “genesis” is, of course, where we get the title of the first book of the bible from (Genesis) and means “beginning” or “birth.” In fact all four gospels have the word “beginning” in their first few verses (though not always the same Greek word for “beginning”). In Matthew, the “beginning” is the linear, chronological background of Messiah, that is, his Old Testament “roots.”
- Key topics: Similar to Luke, one of Matthew’s key topics is that of kingdom (55x in Matthew, but only 5x in John)
- One author said that Matthew is the bridge that leads us out of the OT into the NT.

A few of Matthew’s key terms: “kingdom of heaven,” “righteousness,” and “holy city.”

Matthew has an interest in law, Sabbath, Messiah, prophecy, and defilement, clearly indicating both his background and the audience to whom he writes.

Matthew refers to the OT almost 150 times, more than any of the other three gospels.

Matthew also focuses on Jesus's teachings more than any other gospel (though John is perhaps an equal here—both gospel have more sermons and extended teachings than Mark and Luke). These include the three main teachings: the Sermon on the Mount (chs 5-7), what is sometimes called the manual for the church (ch 18), and the Olivet Discourse (chs 24-25).

The transitional nature of this gospel is that it mentions the church specifically (the others do not): see Mt 16:18 and 18:17. Matthew is the only gospel writer to use the term *matheteuo*, “to disciple” (13:52; 27:57; 28:19).

MARK JESUS AS REBEL

- One of the ways that Mark present Jesus is as a rebel. A rebel is known for his actions, and his passion, as well as his beliefs and sayings. A rebel calls on people to follow him, and a rebel is often persecuted for what he believes or does. A rebel counts the cost but is willing to make the sacrifice.
- FIRST VERSE: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Here we have the “beginning” of the gospel. So not the beginning of the ancestry and Jewish background of Jesus (as in Matthew), but the beginning as more the source of the good news that saves us, which more specifically is Jesus coming into the world for ministry, death, and resurrection. (this is a different Greek word for “beginning”).
- More on Jesus as REBEL: More of a humble rebel, a servant rebel but a servant with confidence and authority. Mark wants his readers to *follow* Jesus.

Compared to Matthew, Mark has a lesser portion of words or speeches of Jesus, and a greater portion of actions. Only in chapters 4 and 13 will you find extended “red letter” parts (speeches).

Mark records much about Jesus's *sufferings*. According to one scholar about one third of the gospel deals with this topic. Being a faithful disciple of Jesus may very well involve suffering, persecution, and even death.

- Sample Story: Mark 5:1-13: healing of Demonic of Geresenes. Typical “roman” story. The man possessed by demons is bound, very strong, and the demons are called “legion” (a classic Roman word).
- Sample Story: Mark 6:19, extended version of John the Baptist's accusation against Herod (for having another man's wife). Shows vanity and sinfulness of Roman system.

- Sample Story: Mark 3:1-6 (healing the man with a withered hand)

“After looking at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, Stretch out your hand.”

This is the only time in gospels we are told that Jesus gets angry with people. (Note: you might think, “what about Jesus cleansing the temple?” This indeed seems to be a righteous anger, but the point is that we are not *told* he was angry as we are here in Mark.)

- AUDIENCE: written in Rome to Romans. For instance, Mark explains Jewish customs (as in 7:2-4, the washing and cleansing rituals of Pharisees).
- Standing up for what is right: 8:34-38 (take up your cross) and 13:9-13 (you will be persecuted, but stand before governors and kings).
- Mark uses a “forceful, fresh, and vigorous” style of writing. Often uses “immediately” (40x, most in NT, Mt 15x, Luke 8x, John only has 4x). (Note: your translation may have something different here, such as “straightway” or “right away.”)
- To “give orders” or “charge” people occurs 4x in Mark, only once in all other 3 gospels combined.

LUKE JESUS AS REDEEMER

- Luke presents Jesus as a redeemer. We don’t use the word “redeem” that much, so a synonym would be “restore.” Think of restoring a house that is in bad shape, or restoring an antique piece of furniture so that it is once again usable and beautiful. What Jesus comes to redeem in Luke, of course, is *people*.
- FIRST VERSE: Read 1:1-3. Note that Luke is saying he has investigated and organized material so that we will know what is true (Luke wrote Acts as well). This is therefore perhaps more a book for teachers and “bookworms”!
- SAMPLE VERSE: Luke 14:21, “Go at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor, and crippled and blind and lame.”
- There are a number of passages in Luke about restoration. For instance, there are the three stories of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and lost son in Luke 15. Being “good” (like the Pharisee in Lk 18) or being an “older brother” (Lk 15) can be deceptive. You may never realize your true need, you may never realize God’s goodness, and thus you may never be grateful. Jesus is out to redeem the least, the lost, and the little (or insignificant, or people that do not think they

amount to much in God's eyes—note that great attitude of the tax collector in Luke 18, “God have mercy on me, *the sinner*”).

- AUDIENCE: Jewish and Gentile “God-fearers”

This makes Luke unique in that its audience is not as narrow as other gospels (as in Jews and not Gentiles, or Romans and not Jews) or as broad as John.

The Gospel of Luke sets us up for Acts (which in large measure is about Gentiles: do they really belong?)

- Ministry to “outsiders”. Luke mentions Samaritans several times, for instance. “Samaritans” are only mentioned in Matthew once, and there as a prohibition (don’t go to the cities of the Samaritans). The Samaritans are not mentioned all in Mark, and only once in John (Jn 4, the story of the woman at the well). But Samaritans appear in three key stories in Luke. Also remember that the Samaritan mission was beginning of the Gentile mission. Note Acts 1:8, also written by Luke: after Jerusalem and Judea comes Samaria as recipient of gospel, and then the ends of the earth. As another example of ministry to outsiders (see also verse 14:21 mentioned above), the word “sinners” occurs 17x in Lk (5x in Mat, 5x in Mk, 4x in Jn).
- Key topics: Along with Matthew, “kingdom” is a key word and concept in Luke (46x in Luke, only 5x in John)
- Jewish parts: The inclusion of Zechariah (ch 1) is unique, as are psalms of Mary and Zechariah. In the first 3 chapters, specific words about Israel (“David,” “Abraham,” “Israel,” “fathers,” “Law,” “temple”) are mentioned 21 times. Five different quotes or allusions to Isaiah appear in chs 1-3, with a sixth quote added in ch 4 where we find a major quote from Isaiah in Lk 4:18-19.

Similarly in the last chapter (ch 24) specific words related to Israel (such as “Israel,” “prophets,” “Moses”) mentioned 9 times, with last verse mentioning the Temple.

- Gentile parts: Luke frequently mentions Gentile people groups, as well as economic groups such as the poor or sick (as noted above). Note the centurion (ch 7), men of Nineveh (ch 11), and the Samaritan leper (ch 17). Again recall the invitation to the “poor, crippled, lame, and blind” in ch 14.
- Gospel of Response: Perhaps more than any other gospel Luke gives us a theology as well as practical implications of responding to the gospel, terms we often call repentance, discipleship, or worship. This involves challenging comfort zones (a theme often found in Luke), forms of worship, and the cost of discipleship/repentance. Some unique parts of Luke (not found in the other gospels) along the lines of response are: the Mary and Martha story (Lk 10), the parable of good Samaritan (Lk 10), the Lord’s Prayer (some call it the Disciple’s Prayer, Lk 11 – here in Luke not part of Sermon on the Mount but in response to disciples asking how to pray).

JOHN JESUS AS REALITY

- John presents Jesus as reality. John is a cosmic, universal book. Jesus is really God and the true Messiah. And he is this for all times, all geographic areas, all economic classes, and all people groups.
- FIRST VERSE: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
- Chapter 1 teaches two things: Jesus is the true God, and He is the true Messiah.
- KEY TOPICS: “life” (36x, only 16x in other 3 gospels combined), the verb “believe” (86x in John, only 9x in Mt, 14x in Mk, and 9x in Lk), the deity of Jesus.
- John is more for teaching on truth than on showing Jesus in action (you’ll recall Mark is more for showing Jesus in action). For instance, there are no instances of casting out demons in John, no healing of lepers, no temptation, nor the transfiguration or Lord’s Supper. There are more extended speeches or dialogues in John than the parable or proverbial sayings found in the other gospels. For instance, John 14-17, the “Farewell Speech,” is four chapters long.
- There are seven sign acts (miracles), which are miracles that *taught* something (the Greek *semeion* means “sign”). We noted an example in John chapter 2, the miracle of changing water to wine. Joel 3:18 (among other OT passages) tells us that when Messiah comes, there will be an abundance of wine. The wine Jesus created in John chapter 2, at Cana, would have been about 120 gallons, or 60 cases of wine. More than just wine to drink at this wedding, this ended up being an asset worth money as a gift to the wedding couple. The Jewish people attending the wedding would have known about Joel 3, and would have asked the question, “Is this the Messiah?”
- There are seven “I am” statements in the gospel of John, like “I am the bread of life” (Jn 6:35) or “I am the good shepherd” (10:11).
- The relation of the Son to the Father (“father” is found 115x in Jn, about the same amount as all three other gospels combined).

MINI-SERMON

Challenging Comfort Zones in the Gospel of Luke

In this time I want to share with you my favorite part of my favorite gospel (Luke). What Jesus does in the second half of the Gospel of Luke is, to me, very convicting, and a great catalyst for growth, discipleship, and worship.

Here's what Jesus is doing (at least one main thing he's doing) in the second half of the Gospel of Luke:

Jesus discerned the comfort zone of individuals or groups of people around Him,

... to *challenge* that comfort zone.

Instead of talking about this as a topic let me try to prove this to you by simply reading through a number of passages.

Luke 11:37-38

In this passage Jesus can tell that a Pharisee didn't approve that he (Jesus) didn't wash his hands. The comfort zone, the security, the trust, of the Pharisee was in an area that it should not have been. Thus Jesus, in the teaching that follows, challenges that comfort zone.

Luke 14:7

Jesus notices how people pick out the places of honor at a table, so He challenges this comfort zone.

Luke 15:2

The Pharisees and scribes are grumbling here and complaining about Jesus spending time with sinners. Thus in the third parable especially (the Prodigal Son) Jesus challenges this, since the third parable is as much about the older brother (who complains and is angry) as it is the younger son.

Luke 16:14

Jesus can tell that the Pharisees were lovers of money. Thus He will challenge this comfort zone – note how the parable in v. 19 starts (“Now there was a rich man ...”).

Luke 18:9

This shows us people who trust in themselves, thus Jesus immediately follows by challenging this comfort zone, in the story that begins in v. 10.

Luke 19:11

This shows people that are too comfortable in what they think is the very near ushering in of the Messianic kingdom, so Jesus challenges this kind of attitude. Jesus does not want people just to sit back and wait for Him to bring worldwide, and personal, deliverance from sorrows and frustrations.

Luke 21:1

Jesus again sees the rich, and thus challenges their comfort zone.

Luke 21:5

Jesus sees those whose security is in the Temple, and thus challenges this.

SUMMARY: I don't think the idea is so much that, in this sense, we are to strive to be "just like Jesus." In other words, we don't have near the level of discernment that Jesus does so that we can determine, in a matter of seconds, if someone is trusting in an idol rather than Christ.

Although, as an aside, we should have people in our lives, even if just a few, who will do just this kind of thing. That is, as they observe our lives over time, they discern "comfort zones" or idols, and then they lovingly challenge us.

Rather, the application that I think Luke intends is that we engage in some heavy self-examination. We should be asking questions like, "Is this (people group) similar to me?" or "If Jesus were to observe me for a day, what would He challenge me on?"

Be wary of the temptation as you read these passages to "point the finger," so to speak, at these groups of people. The temptation being, "I'm sure glad I'm not like them." Rather it might be better to try to see ourselves in each of these groups of people, to rightly test, through prayer and meditation on the Scriptures, to what extent we trust in position, our own opinions and abilities, money, religious acts, etc. May God help us to see, believe in, and live out, the all-sufficiency of Christ.



THE FOUR GOSPELS

- Matthew: RABBI
Jesus is the fulfillment of the OT.
- Mark: REBEL
Jesus's actions teach who He is, and he suffers for them.
- Luke: REDEEMER
Jesus restores: Israel, lost sons, sinners (the "lost, least, and little").
- John: REALITY
Jesus is truly God, the only and true Messiah, and the only way.

MATTHEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jewish audience. "kingdom," "righteousness," "holy city." Sabbath, Messiah, prophecy, defilement, OT references (150x).
MARK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written from Rome to Romans. concise but vigorous style ("immediately" 40x). more actions (less words), and also emotions at times, much recorded about his sufferings, emphasis on following Jesus.
LUKE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written for Jewish and (Gentile) "God-fearers" audience. Jewish parts include Zechariah (ch 1), psalms of Zechariah and Mary, six different quotes or allusions to Isaiah in chs 1-4. Gentile people groups mentioned often, as well as poor or sick. Ministry to "outsiders" (Samaritans, also "sinners" occurs 17x). The gospel of "response" (theology as well as practical implications of responding to the gospel, such as repentance, discipleship, and worship).
JOHN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universal audience Real or true God and true Messiah (chs 1-2). Verb "to believe" (86x) and "life" occur often. Deity of Jesus (one example is that the "son" is just like the "father"—"father" occurs 115x). 7 "sign" acts (miracles) and 7 "I am" statements.