

Jesus Prepares for His Kingdom Mission

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

All great stories have a climatic episode, where the driving tension gets resolved and the implications of the resolution are played out in the lives of the characters and God's Drama of Redemption is no different. Martin Luther used to quote a famous Latin poet who spoke of the rule of drama being: "*a god is not to be introduced into the action of a play unless the plot has gotten into such a tangle that only a god could unravel it. Thus, Christianity is Christ.*" Christ is God's resolution to the tangle in man's heart that man's sin has caused.

The Gospel's Foundations

Why They are Called "The Gospels"

The word "*Gospel*" means news. Though the term "*Gospel*" is now primarily associated with religion, originally, the term was a common word that was typically used in political contexts to mark historical events that would mark significant change in the life of a people. Thus, an example would be when a herald was sent out to declare the news of a great victory in war or the news of a new king; these were tidings that were identified as "*the gospel*" or "*the news*". Christians chose to use this word over other words at the time because it best expressed the essence of the Christian faith being "*Good News*". The good news of what God had done for man through His Son Jesus and not news about what man had to do for God. Hence, the Gospel According to Mark begins this way: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The first 4 books of the New Testament are called the Gospel (news) accounts because they tell the Good News about Jesus and that is their primary purpose.

Why There are Four of Them

They were written for the same primary purpose, but they were also written from different viewpoints and for different audiences. These are four different people, with different personalities, different perspectives, who are all talking to different people.

Matthew wrote to Jewish Christians, highlighting the origins of Jesus back to Abraham. Mark wrote to Gentile Christians experiencing persecution in Rome. Luke wrote to Gentile Christians, highlighting the origins of Jesus back to Adam which emphasizes His salvation applying to all humanity. John has a universal creation focus, highlighting Christ's origins before creation's very existence. Though all the gospels are independently written, Matthew, Mark and Luke are literarily interdependent or known as *synoptic* which means they parallel one another in content, language and narrative structure. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of Mark's words are found in Matthew and eighty-eight percent (88%) of Mark's words can be found in Luke. Thus, if you have read Matthew or Luke, you have functionally also read Mark. They have different perspectives, different emphasis, different authors, but the content is uniform. Luke was a Gentile physician, and is the only Gentile author in the Bible. Given Mark as a type of foundation, consider the following:

Mark 5:25 "And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind Him in the crowd and touched His cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch His clothes, I will be healed."

versus,

Luke 8:42 “As Jesus was on His way, the crowds almost crushed Him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind Him and touched the edge of His cloak.”

Mark said “She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors.” Luke’s rendition doesn’t emphasize the doctors’ inability to treat her condition in quite the same way that Mark’s does. This is one example of the different personalities of the Gospel writers coming out in how they tell the gospel story. Together, these four (4) unique Holy Spirit inspired, God breathed accounts give a more complete account of Jesus life and ministry.

Redemption all Hinges on Jesus

The Good News is good news about Jesus. It is God bringing to a climax His work of redemption through this man Jesus.

“Here the door is thrown open wide for the understanding of Holy Scripture, that is, that everything must be understood in relation to Christ.” – Martin Luther

“The whole gospel is contained in Christ...To move even a step from Christ means to withdraw oneself from the gospel” – John Calvin

The origin of the gospel is God the Father and its substance Jesus Christ his Son. Its attestation is Old Testament Scripture and its scope all the nations. Our immediate purpose in proclaiming it is to bring people to the obedience of faith, but our ultimate goal is the greater glory of the name of Jesus Christ. The good news is the gospel of God, about Christ, according to Scripture, for the nations, unto the obedience of faith, and for the sake of the Name”.- John Stott

To understand the Christian faith you have to understand who this man Jesus is; and in order to dismiss the Christian faith you will have to dismiss this man Jesus. He is its substance for there is no Christianity apart from Jesus.

Jesus’ Birth Was Nothing Short of Miraculous

Luke 1:26-37 “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.”

The Birth of Jesus was a miraculous act of humble obedience for the sake of the world. In the Saviors supernatural birth, the human egg of Mary was divinely fertilized and formed a zygote. This zygote grew as a fetus in Mary’s womb until Jesus, like every other child before Him and every child after Him, entered

into the world the way God designed it. This supernatural birth lays the foundation for all that Jesus would perform and accomplish He did not “dress up like a man.” He was fully God and fully man.

His story, His birth, is miraculous and neither made up nor manipulated and is according to the scriptures. In the Old Testament, there are nearly 300 references to this coming Messiah. Matthew, writing to a Jewish audience, connects back to several of those throughout his account.

- Matthew 1:22-23 and Isaiah 7:14 refer to the virgin birth.
- Matthew 2:5 and Micah 5:2 refer to being born in Bethlehem
- Matthew 2:15 and Hosea 11:1 refer to Jesus’ family going to Egypt after His birth
- Matthew 2:17-18 and Jeremiah 31:15 refer to “Rachel weeping for her children” and the murder of boys under the age of two (2) by Herod

The Birth of Jesus was Humble

Matthew 2:1-7 “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.”

The distance between Nazareth and Bethlehem was about 85-90 miles on foot so they would have averaged about 15-18 miles a day. Their trek to Bethlehem would have taken a period of around 5-6 days. It isn’t clear how quickly after their arrival she gave birth as it only notes “And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.” Consider what a humble beginning it was for Him, when He was finally delivered, to be placed in a manger which is a feeding trough for animals. This was the Messiah, the King, and at His start He resided in a feeding trough in a stall behind an inn. How great the cries of injustices would be if this were the child of Prince William and Kate, yet, no equivalent cries of injustices would be made for the heavenly King of all creation.

The humble beginnings don’t end with His human emergence to the world but continue, with significant irony, with His first introductions to men. In Luke 2:8-20, the first people to hear the Good News of and see the newborn King are not people of power and prestige but rather shepherds. Unlike the current romanticized perception of shepherds as faithful overseers of flocks, shepherds were considered dishonest and unclean according to Mosaic law. They were veritable outcasts counted socially among the un-esteemed likes of tax collectors. But God chooses these men to reveal the birth of His son to first; they were the first eyes to behold the King of Kings; not in palace, but in a stall; not in a royal bassinet, but in a feeding trough.

Application

Luke wants us to understand something from his description of Christ’s beginnings. This King is not just a king for the capable and the powerful.

This King is a King for the poor, for the outcast, for the unclean and for sinners like you and me. The values and thinking of the world are being turned on their heads by this baby. 1 Corinthians 1:20 “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”

Now, it’s normal for us to include the wise men in this story as if they were with the shepherds. However, the wise men weren’t with the shepherds and didn’t see or hear of the news of Jesus at the first, as the shepherds did. Matthew 2:11 “And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him” Which makes clear that when the wise men found Jesus, they found Him in a house and not a manger. The point is that Matthew joins Luke in illuminating that from the beginning, the nature of the Good News was Universal. Shepherds and Wise Men, Gentiles and Jews, men and woman of any nationality and station, you and me, can worship the King.

Jesus' Life Fulfilled the Law of God Perfectly

The entirety of Jesus' life was a miraculous humble act of obedience. Luke 2:21 "And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised," is included to make very clear that, from His earliest days, Jesus obeyed all of the Law of Moses and this point is vital. Israel would not have accepted someone who was blatantly disobedient to the Law, in this regard, to teach them truth from the Law. More importantly, Jesus is better than Moses who wrote the Law since we know that Moses broke this very law with his own son from Exodus 4:24-26.

Luke 2:22-24 "And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." Here Luke again draws attention to His perfect obedience to the law from His very start. From childhood, Christ obeyed the whole of the Mosaic code which not only enabled Him to speak with authority to Israel as the teacher of the law, but is also part of His active obedience for man's salvation. The implications of His perfect keeping of the law are staggering and often ignored; there is no Gospel without this obedience. From infancy, He was perfectly observant of the Law of God and fulfilled its every demand; no other human being who ever lived, not Paul, not Moses, not Isaiah, not Jeremiah, no one can say that but Jesus. This complete obedience to the Law was absolutely necessary to secure the salvation of every man, woman, boy and girl from every tribe, tongue, people and nation who believes and trusts in His name alone for salvation as offered in the gospel.

Application

It is clear from Scriptures that in order for you and me to have fellowship with the only True Holy God of the Universe, we must be sinless and obey the Law perfectly. The problem is that not one of us is perfect nor is anyone of us righteous. The only solution to this problem was Jesus. He was the one perfect Man, the Son of God, who was perfect for you. Your sin is imputed to Him and His righteousness is imputed to you so that you are accepted by God as perfect, as you believe in Him. His supernatural, humble act of obedience was for you and me.

Jesus Came to Save His People From Their Sins

Matthew 1:21 "you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Luke 1:31 "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."

Luke 2:21 "And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb."

The name Jesus means "Yahweh is salvation". This is what is proclaimed by Simeon and his wife Anna at the Temple. Luke 2:30-32 "for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." Simeon identifies Jesus as the Messiah and says that He is the one Savior appointed by God for both Jew and Gentile: for all people. Effectively, Simeon is saying, *'Lord, I've prayed all my life that I would not die before I saw the Messiah. I've seen Him! I'm holding Him. I'm holding the One for whom we have been waiting since Adam. I'm holding Him in my hands! I'm looking at Him with my eyes...this is the One that the prophets prophesied of! This is the one that Abraham looked forward to. This is the Messiah spoken of by Isaiah and Jeremiah and Daniel. This is the One! I've seen Him!'* Hence, Luke is emphasizing that Simeon knew from the beginning that Jesus was going to be the Savior of the world, "a light of revelation

to the Gentiles” and the only way of salvation. John 14:6 “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Application

Luke 2:34-35 “This child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed.”

What is meant in this verse is that how every man, woman, boy, and girl responds to the person of Jesus will determine their fate, both now and forevermore. If you reject this Jesus then He is appointed for your fall; but if you embrace this Jesus, if you trust this Jesus, if you treasure this Jesus, then you will rise with Him like the dawn. Your eternal destiny depends upon this God-man Jesus. Accept Him and find eternal life; reject Him, and live in death forever. There is no option to ignore or dismiss Him for everything hinges on Christ.

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