

Journeying Through the New Testament: Gospels

Difficulties in reading the Gospels...

■ Unexplained differences:

"But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.' 'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus replied. 'But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.'" (Matthew 26:63-64, NIV)

"But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?' 'I am,' said Jesus. 'And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.'" (Mark 14:61-62, NIV)

"'If you are the Christ,' they said, 'tell us.' Jesus answered, 'If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.' They all asked, 'Are you then the Son of God?' He replied, 'You are right in saying I am.'" (Luke 22:67-70, NIV)

■ Apparent discrepancies:

"The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' And his disciples heard him say it.... In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!' 'Have faith in God,' Jesus answered. 'I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.'" (Mark 11:12-14, 20-25, NIV)

"Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, 'May you never bear fruit again!' Immediately the tree withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. 'How did the fig tree wither so quickly?' they asked. Jesus replied, 'I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, "Go, throw yourself into the sea," and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.'" (Matthew 21:18-22, NIV)

General guidelines for reading the Gospels...

- The Gospels are written about the **same** person.
 - ▶ Two components at work in the Gospels:
 - The **teachings** of Jesus.
 - The stories about Jesus.
- The Gospels are written by **different** authors.
 - ▶ Two **settings** at work in the Gospels:
 - The historical setting of Jesus.
 - The historical setting of the authors.
- The Gospels are written for different audiences.
 - ▶ Three principles at work in the Gospels:
 - Selectivity.
 - **Arrangement.**
 - Adaptation.

A practical process for reading the Gospels...

- **Observe their home:** What do I see?
 - ▶ Think in terms of stories and discourses.
 - Individual stories and discourses: Look for answers to the standard questions...
 - Collective stories and discourses: Look for **connections**...
 - ▶ Look for special literary forms in the Gospels.
 - Exaggeration.

"If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell." (Matthew 5:29-30, NIV)

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26, NIV)

"The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, 'Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'" (Mark 10:24-25, NIV)

- Irony.

"And he told them this parable: 'The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops." Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Pen who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.'" (Luke 12:16-21, NIV)

- **Rhetorical** Questions
 - Questions designed to make a point rather than to retrieve an answer.

"If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?" (Matthew 5:46, NIV)

"Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (Matthew 6:27, NIV)

"He said to his disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?'" (Mark 4:40, NIV)

"Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division." (Luke 12:51, NIV)

- Parallelism.
 - When certain lines are structured to be read together.
 - Synonymous: The lines say basically the same thing in a similar way.

*"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."
(Matthew 7:7, NIV)*

"For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open." (Mark 4:22, NIV)

- Contrastive.
 - The second line contrasts with the first line

"Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." (Mark 4:25, NIV)

"The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him." (Matthew 12:35, NIV)

- Developmental.
 - The second line repeats part of the first line, then advances the thought of the first line to a **climax**.

"He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me." (Matthew 10:40, NIV)

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." (John 6:37, NIV)

■ **Understand their home:** What does it mean?

- ▶ Two challenges for interpretation:
 - Think vertically.
 - How the Gospels represent Jesus.
 - Think **horizontally**.
 - How the Gospels relate to one another.
- ▶ For each story/discourse and series of stories/discourses, write down in one or two sentences the answer to the overall question: What's the point?

■ **Bring it back home:** How does it relate?

- ▶ Look for the biblical and compatible...
 - See how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament **law** (Matthew 5-7; 22:37-40; Luke 24:13-35).
- ▶ Look for the eternal and cross-cultural...
 - See how Jesus teaches and demonstrates the **Kingdom** _____ of God (see Old Testament and New Testament Secret Church notes on the Kingdom).
- ▶ Look for the applicable...
 - See the larger **context** of the individual stories in order to identify the timeless truths.
- ▶ Write out the timeless truth (or truths) using present-tense verbs.

■ **Apply it in your home:** What do I do?

- ▶ Meditate on the timeless truth.
- ▶ Relate the timeless truth to today.
- ▶ Practice the timeless truth.
 - Who should I be?
 - How should I think?
 - What should I do?
 - Where should I go?
 - Who will I teach?

An example of reading the Gospels...

- Mark 4:35-41