

Message for 2-13-22

Shared by Rev. Ken Heintzelman

Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases, and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Blessings and Woes

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

'Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

'Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

'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 on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

'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.

The Word About Life is one of those passages from the wisdom of our tradition that invites scrutiny and scholarship. I know that most people who go to church want a word of encouragement that they can take home with them and it is something that can sustain them for the week. Church attendance is expected to be like going to the grocery store. You go, you pay your money, you receive the desired product, and then you go home and you're done for the week. The interest is not studying or resolving contradictions. Sometimes we might relish in the contradictions because it allows us to dismiss the wisdom and it reinforces a

notion that we are smarter than the people who dedicate themselves to the Christian Faith.

I respond by saying there is scholarship, study, prayer, and earlier manuscripts being discovered that provide answers and resolution to the surface contradictions. The scholarship points to not a compiling of a single gospel narrative but multiple gospel narratives with unique voices written for specific communities and reflective of different theological agendas. Studies that nurture this awareness enrich our faith. Today's Word About Life is like that today.

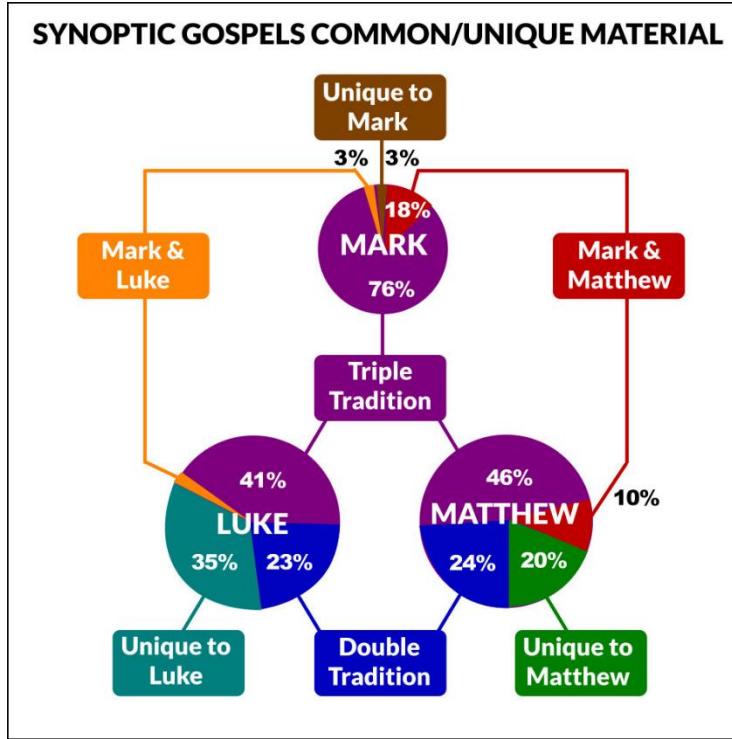
<https://bibleoutsidethebox.blog/2017/07/24/when-were-the-gospels-written-and-how-can-we-know/>

Luke tells the story of Jesus giving a sermon on a plain (not a plane). Luke tells the story of Jesus giving a sermon on a flat piece of land which is in contrast to Matthew's better-known Sermon on the Mount. Are they two different sermons at two different times for two different audiences? If this was the case we would ask why did Matthew tell one story and leave out the sermon on the plane, and why did Luke tell one story but leave out the Sermon on the Mount? Maybe they didn't know about the other stories. Maybe they had theological agendas about who Jesus is and what his life, ministry, death, and resurrection meant, and this is the real treasure hunt of faith, hope, and love. I think this is the case.

So, let me share an idea with you.

People who have dedicated their lives to the study of the New Testament have pieced together the following theory about the four Gospels.

Mark is the first Gospel written about 60 years after Jesus died. Matthew and Luke came later about 80-90 years after Jesus died and these writers used Mark as a template and expanded on the story of Mark. There are huge chunks of Mark in both Matthew and Luke. The similarities and differences between the gospels cannot be ignored or dismissed. They can be denied and explained away, or they can be embraced and let the scholarship lead us to an explanation. I invite us to embrace each gospel not as inaccurate historical records but as testimonies of faith that will nurture our spiritual maturity. (Below is a graphic outlining the bare bones of the Synoptic Gospel theory.)



If there is intentionality, and not just a hodge-podge hit or miss compilation, then we should ask what are the theological agendas of each Gospel writer? The answer is yes there is intention and yes we can know the theological agendas?

The theological agendas shine through. Mark writes in a simplistic style and keeps presenting an urgency to Jesus' ministry. His agenda is to present Jesus as the servant of God and we should be eager to shout it from the mountaintops.

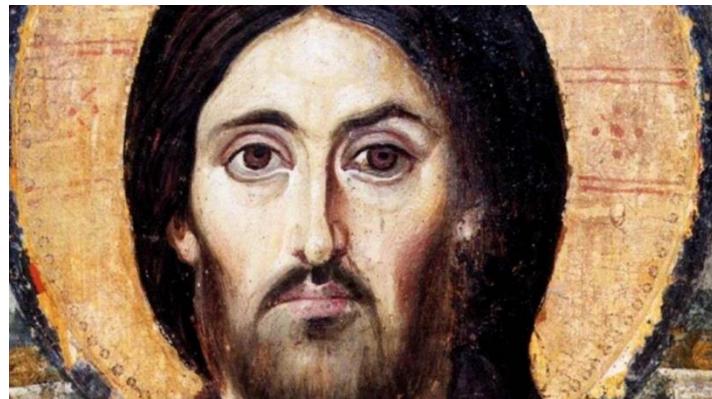
Matthew is telling the story to mostly Jewish believers and he presents Jesus as King and the new Moses. As the new Moses, Jesus gives new instructions for our lives from the top of a mountain, thus the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew also gives the genealogy of Jesus back to Abraham who is the father of the Jewish people. In a different theological agenda, Luke gives the genealogy of Jesus back to Adam who is the father of humankind. Luke's agenda is to present the humanity of Jesus. As a side note, the Gospel of John was developed separately and was the latest Gospel written. The writers of John emphasized the divinity of Jesus. Back to Luke. Luke has more unique material than any of the other Gospels. Luke has 16-17 parables (depending on how you count them) that no other Gospels have. All of this is to say that the Gospels are separate and unique

testimonies of faith about God's newest thrust in the midst of history through the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This is very important. As Shadow Rockers with our commitment to align ourselves to God's newest thrust in the midst of history, I think we can learn from the testimonies of the Gospel writers what to do and how to do it.

This was a long way to go to get to the beginning. In an age of cynicism in a congregation of skeptics, I feel the need sometimes to justify what I am going to say before I can say it. This speaks to my respect for your intellect as well as a lack of proper biblical teaching. What I have just shared is the basic ABCs of bible study and yet many of you have never heard it or understood its implications even though you have been in church your whole life. This is an indictment of the shepherds and not the sheep.

To make a point I borrow an idea from Brian Zahnd who is the lead pastor at Word of Life Church in Missouri. It is based on his spiritual retreat after the 25th anniversary of the founding of Word of Life Church. He used a picture of Christ to make a point.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words and you may think that is where I should have begun. Nevertheless, I share this picture with you.



This is a picture of a painting that is in St. Catherine's Orthodox Cathedral at the foot of Mt. Sinai in Egypt. It is the oldest Christian icon in the world. It dates back to the 500s. I quote from the Encyclopedia Britannica,

"The painting is deliberately asymmetrical to symbolize Christ's dual nature (Weitzmann, 15). Christ's left side is symbolic of his human nature with his features depicted as much softer and light (Weitzmann, 15). Whereas

Christ's right side is symbolic of his divinity with his stern look and intense features (Weitzmann, 15). The eyes themselves are different in shape and size as well as the hair on his left side is swept behind his shoulder (Tour Egypt)."

Think about this. An artist over 1500 years ago wanted to convey the complexity and depth of mystery in the person and story of Jesus. This artist was not threatened by the complexity and different nuances and agendas. He was inspired by them.

This is the place to start when reading things like the Sermon on the Plain. The sayings of blessings and woes, like the dual nature of Jesus, speak to the complexity, mystery, and depth of life. Shadow Rock spirituality invites people into a spiritual maturity that equips us to experience all the good and bad of life, all the blessings, and woes, and still celebrate life's deep goodness and giftedness.

Is life full of blessings and woes? Yes, it is, and thank you Pastor Obvious. As our new ambition statement implies, we are in the work of turning the barriers of woes into the bridges of blessings. I am not suggesting we fall into a simple dualistic way of thinking and branding of people. I am encouraging a growing spiritual maturity that embraces a comprehensive view of life that is neither all sunshine and rainbows nor rainclouds and cold wind. It is both and it is good. The standard for what is a blessing and what is woeful is not arbitrary, random, or completely subjective, but it may not be what you think it is. That's next week.