

Lecture 3 – Traits of Matthew among the Gospels

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:31 (NIV)

Key Terms

Euangelion, the five great discourses of Matthew

Objectives

- *To grasp the basics of the Gospel genre
- *To learn the main distinctives of Matthew's Gospel

Lead Question

How do the distinctives of the different Gospels help us to think about the varying ways we can share the Good News?

Traits of Matthew among the Gospels

I. The Nature or Genre of All Four Gospels

- A. This class basically follows Matthew.
- B. But all four Gospels are historical testimonies to Jesus. Written to persuade, to instill faith.
 1. Analogy: sincere testimonial commercial by celebrity.
 2. Critics say: If Gospels are tendentious testimonies, why believe them?
 3. Gospels claim historicity: Luke 1:1-4, 2:1ff., 3:1ff.; John 20:30-31, 21:25; 1 John 1:1-4
 4. Strong historical evidence for their reliability. Example: σκιμπευς (*skimpeus*, “little bed”) and κρᾶβαττος (*krabattos*, “stretcher, cot”)
- C. A new genre, blending OT history, Greco-Roman biography

II. The Purpose of the Gospels

- A. All four Gospels state their purpose at beginning or the end
 1. Mark 1:1 Note: εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*, “good news/Gospel”) and the emperor cult.
 2. Luke 1:1-4
 3. John 21:25 and 20:31
 4. Matt 13:51, 28:18-20
- B. Composition analysis seeks unified narrative, shaped by theological convictions. What is the specific goal of Matthew?
 1. Note: The four Gospels present same basic story, so attempts to delineate the traits of any Gospel must attempt to ignore the parallels in order to select what is distinctive.
 2. Matthew never states his theme or audience; reconstructions are only probable.

III. Matthew as the Jewish Gospel

- A. Jewish readers would find it easiest to understand Matthew.
 1. Matthew cites Jewish customs without explaining them, unlike other Gospels.
 - a. Sabbath regulations, and debates over them, are much more extensive in Matthew.
 - b. Jews wash hands, dishes 15:1f., 23:5 f. Mark explains in 7:3-4; Matthew does not.
 - c. Expectation of fasting for Jesus' disciples 6:16ff., “when you fast...” No parallel.
 - d. Temple tax (17:24-27), phylacteries (23:5), straining gnats (23:24), whitewashed tombs (23:27), untranslated Hebrew expressions (5:22, 27:6).
 2. Matthew frames theological discussions in the terms of rabbinic debate.
 3. Matthew quotes and uses OT more than other Gospels. Examples:
 - a. When Jesus dines with sinners, only Matthew justifies him by citing OT prophecy (9:13)

b. Matthew records more of Jesus' interaction with OT. The six instances in Matt (5:21-48).

4. Matthew refers to OT characters more than other Gospels: David, Jonah, Isaiah, Jeremiah.
5. Matthew mentions cities, geographical regions found in OT but without interest to Gentiles
6. Matthew phrases Jesus' language for Jewish readers. Example "kingdom of heaven."

B. Jewish appeal. Matthew also addresses distinctively Jewish concerns.

1. Matthew reinforces the claim that Jesus is the Messiah. See genealogy, magi.
2. Matthew shows Jesus' reverence for law and righteousness (5:6, 10, 21; 6:1, 33).
3. Does Matthew limit Jesus to Israel? (10:5,6; 15:24. Matthew and evangelizing Jews.)

IV. Matthew's Interest in Gentiles

A. Universal interests in Matthew

1. The genealogy (1:1-17) lists Gentiles such as Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba.
2. In birth narrative (2:1-15) only Gentiles worship Jesus.
3. Jesus' ministry begins (4:17-25) in "Galilee of the Gentiles."
4. Jesus performed several of His early miracles for Gentiles (8-9).
5. He suggests Christianity has superseded Judaism (cf. 7:29, 9:35, 10:17, 23:34). Jesus often describes rejection of the Jews: "The sons of the kingdom will be cast into outer darkness" (8:12). Because they failed to bear fruit for God, "The kingdom will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (21:43). They even curse themselves at the crucifixion, "Let his blood be on us and on our children" (27:25).
6. Jesus commands his disciples to "Make disciples of the nations" that is, the Gentiles.
7. Texts that apparently limit Jesus' ministry to the Jews, do the opposite. See 10:5-20

B. A crux passage: encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman

1. An annoying beggar woman put in her place.
2. A clever retort; Jesus acquiesces, and grants her request.
3. The point of the shocking turn of events.
4. Matthew the Gospel of the Jews? Yes, but...

V. Matthew and the Making of Disciples

A. The extensive record of Jesus' teaching. "Make disciples teaching them all I have commanded."

B. The sympathetic picture of disciples.

1. He encourages His audience to identify with the twelve. They are *ολιγοπιστοι* (*oligopistoi*, "of little faith"), people of little faith (Matthean usage). They grow fitfully until finally ready for Great Commission.
2. Disciples' weak faith looks better by comparison to Jewish leaders, who constantly oppose Jesus (9, 11, 12, 23, 27), and crowds, who understand almost nothing.
3. Matthew's narrative perspective is close to that of a disciple at the scene.
4. Matthew is the ideal reader of his own text. He heard Jesus. Once a "man of little faith," he treasured Jesus' instruction, until he could heed Jesus by writing his disciple-making Gospel.

C. The goal: His Gospel should do for Jew and Gentile what Jesus did for him: both evangelize, make disciples (13:51-52, 28:18-20).

D. The structure

1. Matthew's historical structure resembles the other Gospels.
2. To this Matthew adds a second structure of five great discourses. Each begins with description of an audience and ends with phrase "when Jesus had finished saying these things..."
 - a. Sermon on the Mount: Jesus speaks on the mind and values of a disciple (5:1-7:27).
 - b. Charge to the Twelve: Jesus speaks on the conduct and outlook of Christian missions (10:1-42).

- c. Parables of the kingdom: Jesus speaks on the Word and the kingdom (13:1-52).
- d. Community life: Jesus speaks on relations between disciples (18:1-35).
- e. On the Mount of Olives: Jesus speaks on the future of Israel and mankind (24:1-25:46).

What role are you or your church taking in discipleship? Is this something that needs greater emphasis in evangelical Christianity? How could it be improved?