



Connect to the Bible

Leader's Guide

Week 4

Topic week 4: The Synoptic Gospels

PREWORK: Before class read the full leader's guide and watch the videos on the website.

Note the time of the videos so you can plan well.

Study these teaching points covered in the video (See participants guide week 4):

- 1) The meaning of "gospel," how the Synoptic gospels are related, Marcan Priority, addressing differences.
- 2) Mark
 - Theme
 - Audience
 - Overview
- 3) Matthew
 - Theme
 - Audience
 - Overview (Sermon on the Mount, Great Commission)
- 4) Luke
 - Theme
 - Audience
 - Overview (Birth Narrative, Unique teachings and stories)

Speaker: Pastor Shawn Allen

Transcript****

Welcome back. First, I want to congratulate you! You have completed the entire old Testament in three weeks, which is some sort of a record, and now we're going to move into the New Testament. Today we will start by talking about the gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The first four books of the New Testament. Let's talk about what they mean. What does the word gospel mean? It means good news. The Greek word for that is *evangelio*. Which means I am telling the good news. When you hear the word evangelize, something that we know today, what we're saying is we are telling the good news of God and His son, Jesus Christ. But this wasn't a term that they came up with at the time, the term gospel was something that was known in the society. It was used for big events. It was used for military victories. It was used for the birth of Augustus. They would say that this was good news. And so, when the gospel

writers take this, what they're sort of saying is we're taking something, you know, but what we're telling you is it doesn't apply to them. It applies to this. This is the real good news for you.

The gospels are narratives. This is a story that's written for a purpose. The writers wanted to tell you something. This is an explanation of why this happened, which means that everything that the writer included was something that they deemed important for the story that they wanted to tell. And so we have to give credit to everything they wrote. Everyone tells their own story, don't assume that you already know this story because you read it from another gospel. You need to let each author tell the story that they want to tell. Now, obviously this is a part of the whole story, the whole Bible, but each one does have something unique.

When you are reading the Gospels, it's a good idea to use resources. I've said several times to use a study Bible, learn the culture, and review the cross-references. An example of this is in Mark 5:25, the story of the woman who was hemorrhaging. Jesus heals her and you think "that's great, I'm sure this was a really terrible thing to deal with, right?" But when you look at the notes and then it directs you back to Leviticus and it teaches you back to the law regarding blood and learn that this was viewed as unclean. She wasn't just sick, she was also an outcast. Christ, wasn't just healing a physical ailment, he was healing, a social and a societal rift. He was bringing her back to a part of society. And that is a much broader salvation than just fixing an ailment. And if you don't realize this – maybe you haven't read the Old Testament yet or haven't made the connection – you miss out on the depth of what's really happening there. So, as you're looking through and see a reference to another part of the Bible, flip over and read it and see what they're talking about. You'll really get the bigger picture of it.

Why are they ordered Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? Well, there's a lot of different theories. One theory is that this was originally thought to be written in this order. Now, most people think that Mark was written first followed by Matthew, Luke, and then John. Everyone agrees that John was the last. So, why are the first three so similar? I have a little cartoon here to show you. "Matthew, Mark, and Luke. See me after class. Your book reports are surprisingly similar!" If you read Matthew, Mark, and Luke, you will see that. We see a lot of the same stories and they sound a lot alike. Why is that? They're known as the Synoptic Gospels, which means common view. Most people now, believe that Mark was written first and then Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source for their writings. This is known as "Marcan priority". And many people think there is another document, which we don't have a, that Matthew and Luke used because they have some commonalities. The reason they believe this is that there are very few verses that are unique to Mark. And when they look at them, the Greek writing is the same. And I'm going to go off on a little bit of a tangent here to explain why that's important. If I were to hit a ball and you were to hit a ball, and we said, explain what we did. I would say, "I hit the ball." And you would say, "I hit the ball." And 90% of us would write it the same way. In Greek,

they don't have to follow the subject, verb, direct object the same way that we talk. They can write it any way they want, because it indicates by the ending of a word, what its role is. A word that ends a certain way, then you know it's a direct object, no matter where it is in the sentence, or, you know, it's the subject. Many times the verbs come first in Greek. They might write, "hit the ball I did." And you're thinking they talked like Yoda. No, they didn't. They wrote for emphasis. And they wrote in different ways. The point being when they see the same structure of a sentence repeatedly in different books, it indicates that somebody probably relied on the other one because there's too much commonality, too much coincidence. I tell you this because I want you to understand that sometimes you're going to hear "there's a difference in this book or that, or one belief to another." There is an incredible amount of study and research that's gone into what we understand about the Bible and the authenticity and the accuracy of it. I believe it's important for you to know and to accept, because if you question what you're reading, first of all, you may not read it. Second of all, you're going to be less likely to follow it. And so, understand that when you hear these things that phenomenal scholars have studied and have brought us to where we know what we know about the Bible right now. That's just the little bit of history of how those three books came about.

Let's start with Mark, even though it's not the first in order. It is the oldest, and he was actually known as John Mark. He was a chronicler and associate of Peter (we see that in Acts). We actually see that Peter goes to Mark's mom's house. Mark may have been the streaker in 14:51 that says he ran off from the garden without any clothes on. He was thought to have been written this around 55 to 70 CE. Another thing to remember is that we assume these were written first and then Paul's letters were written because that's the order of the new Testament. But Paul's letters were already circulating at this time. Many of them predate the gospels. The audience that they believe it was written for is the Gentiles. And the reason they say that is because he explains Jewish culture. Well, why would you have to explain Jewish culture to a Jew? That said, there's nothing in here that would make it any less applicable to the Jews at that time. Cultural issues are important and the teaching about the difficulty with unclean foods, that's something that Jews would have understood. The feelings toward the tax and the toll collectors, they were outcasts. People would have understood that, and that's something that's very important. And you'll see in all the gospels, there was a culture of honor and shame back then that we don't have in America right now. And one of the ways you discredited someone was you brought shame on them. An example I'll use is what is called challenge/riposte. This is where somebody tries to ask another person a question that they can't answer and will shame them by their inability to answer. So, this is what the Pharisees kept trying to do with Jesus. And they never quite got the memo that they weren't going to outwit Jesus, but they do it throughout. For example, if you look at Mark 12, this was the story of paying taxes. They said, "Teacher, we know that you were sincere and show deference to no one for you. Do not regard people with partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the Emperor or not? Should we pay them or should we

not? But knowing their hypocrisy, Jesus said to him, why are you putting me to the test, bring me a denarius and let me see. And they brought him one and he said to them, whose head is this? And whose title? They answered the Emperor's. Jesus said to him, give to the Emperor, the things that are the Emperors and to God, the things that are God's, and they were utterly amazed at him." So, what they were trying to do is they wanted to discredit him by giving him this question with no right answer. Jesus of course had the right answer and kind of threw it back to them and you'll see that throughout the Gospels. They're trying to shame him.

Mark is important because it's the first it sets the gospel narrative. As I said, this was a big thing to take the term good news and apply it to Jesus. He also starts off boldly at the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God, and then begins to quote Isaiah. He immediately jumps in, which would have been a little different for that time period. With Mark, you see the gospels are about Jesus, but they're about God first. Mark is telling God's intervention in history. And he's talking about Jesus's role as proclaiming the good news of God. So, you see them both, there's two parts. You see him as the powerful teacher, and then you see him as a suffering servant. And quickly, by the third chapter, the Pharisees are already plotting to kill Jesus. The sacrifice and the suffering and the taking up of the cross would have really resonated. If you remember, this was written in the 50 to 70 time frame and in 64 Rome burned. And it was blamed on the Christians and the persecution really was beginning. There were a lot of martyrs. There were a lot of people dying for their faith at that time. When Jesus says to take up my cross, this would have resonated with what it really meant to do that. Where does Mark end? In most of your Bibles, it'll have Mark through 16:8. Sometimes it'll have a shorter version, or it'll have a longer version. It's not really clear, these are supposed to be attached. So, if you're unsure if you need to handle snakes, you're safe from that because the longer version probably doesn't really belong there anyway.

Let's talk about the book of Matthew. Matthew was a toll collector. He was one of the disciples. He was called Levi in Mark. We believe Matthew to be written a little bit later, 70 maybe even closer to 80 CE. It's a great transition. And maybe one of the reasons on why it's placed first is it's a great transition because it draws heavily on the Hebrew scriptures more so than any other book. It emphasizes the fulfilling of the prophecies about Jesus, and it was relied on by the early church. It includes the birth narrative and the Resurrection. It presents a more complete story. Also, Matthew has the highest percentage of writing devoted to the teachings of Jesus. This is really the teaching book. It also is the only book focused on the church. It's the only book that uses the word *ecclesia*, which meant church so that might be why it was one of the most used by the early church. The purpose of Matthew is to show the ongoing redemptive presence of God. Matthew has what is called an *inclusio* meaning – it starts and ends with the exact same message. So, as you see in verse 1:22 & 23, he's quoting and he says, "all of this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us." And then if

you go to the Great Commission, which is at the end, that we're called to make disciples, baptize them. And he says, "behold, I am with you always to the end of the age." So, it starts off saying his name is going to be Emmanuel, which means "God with us". And it ends by Jesus promising that he will be with us always.

The other purpose of Matthew is to show the teachings of Christ. There are five sections dealing with teaching. A few specific teachings are unique to Matthew – the birth narrative alone is not unique, but it does contain the story of Jesus going to Egypt, that's unique. The sermon on the Mount specifically as it's given is unique to Matthew. The verse 11:28-30 comes to me, "all who labor and are heavy laden". Many people know that verse – that's a teaching in Matthew. Some of the parables, just to mention a few – of the pearl of great price., the treasure in the field are unique. The primacy of Peter, the parable of the sheep and the goats and the dividing at judgment, and then specifically the Great Commission in the form that it is, these are all things that are unique to Matthew. Once again, I'm making the point, hopefully that reading one of the three gospels may tell you the story of Jesus, but it doesn't tell you the whole story or the story that that writer wanted.

Regarding Luke and Acts, we're only going to talk about Luke right now. I'm going to put them together because it's the same author but we'll discuss Acts next week. Luke is likely a physician and he's mentioned in a couple of the letters. He was a companion of Paul. In Acts, we see the same language when he's writing and there's no real debate that he wrote these books. Luke is the most prolific writer of the new Testament. The longest book of the New Testament is actually Luke. The second longest is Acts. And so as you see all the books written by Paul when you add them together, it's not even close. Luke wrote over a third of the entire New Testament in just those two books. Historically, most people think he was a Gentile. There's no real evidence to it, and it really doesn't matter one way or the other, but that's maybe what you've been taught. I think Luke is overlooked and I'm biased because Luke happens to be my favorite book. And if we were teaching the long version of this class, you'd hear way too much about Luke. I think it gets overlooked because Matthew was first, Mark was historically first, and then you have Luke. And by the time you get to Luke, you've sort of covered everything. But I think that is wrong. Luke is very unique. It has a lot of the stories, and I call them the greatest hits, that we know – the story of the good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the rich man and Lazarus, the road to Emmaus – these are all teachings that are unique to Luke. And there's a reason for that. Luke has a clearly articulated narrative of what he wants to teach and the story he wants to tell. So quickly, it's divided into four parts. The first four chapters are the birth narrative. Then chapters four through most of nine are his ministry in Galilee. Then you see a turn as he heads to Jerusalem. And then the final part is him in Jerusalem with the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. We are, unfortunately not going to go into all of this. We're only able to talk about the first one today and the birth narrative. Why is that so important?

First of all, this is where we get Christmas, so that's important. This is also where we get Peanuts Christmas – if you've watched the Peanuts Christmas special and Linus says, “Charlie Brown, I know what the meaning of Christmas is.” And he proceeds to read, or actually he proceeds to say it from memory, that's from Luke. A little aside here, when he's talking about “not to be afraid, I bring you Good News”, Linus drops his blanket. Linus who always had to have that security of his blanket, when he's talking about the Good News of Christ, he drops his blanket. It's a little subtlety that I think is very important. During this birth narrative in Luke, we also have the birth narrative of John the Baptist. We see the parallels between the two at that time. And you see the parallels between Zechariah who is John's dad and Mary the mother of Christ. There are many references in that section back to scripture and it shows all the way back to the nation of Israel where he lays out his themes. When you read Luke, really pay attention to this and then think about it as you read the book. There are three songs in this section – there's Mary's song, also known as the *Magnificat*, there is Zechariah's song which is known as the *Benedictus*, and there's Simeon's song (which is really short and doesn't have a name). The main three messages you're going to see throughout Luke are: God is Savior, God's the ultimate source of salvation, and Jesus is the instrument of this. Jesus is the savior. We hear this everywhere. Except what's interesting is the word which means salvation is used 10 times in Luke and Acts, and it's not used in any of the other Gospels. Mark and Matthew didn't talk about this the way that Luke did. Mary talks about God as savior and Zechariah does too.

Regarding other stories in Luke that I mentioned – the good Samaritan and the story of Lazarus the rich man – these show the lifting up of the lowly and the bringing down of the powerful – a two-part message. Mary's song lays that out. She talks about what the Savior will do, how He will bring down the powerful and lift up those who are lost. Sometimes we think of the lowly as the poor, and that's not what this means. It's the outcasts, it's the vocation, it's the tax collectors who were set aside. Everybody hates them because of their job. It's those whose family may cause them to be outcasts, as those who may have a medical issue. Elizabeth, who is John's mother is talking about feeling like an outcast because she's older and hadn't had a child, and that was considered to make you an outcast back then. Luke's story recognizes anybody that was an outcast and lifts them up. You see in verse 19:10 it says “for the son of man came to seek and save the lost” and that brings the whole thing together.

But the interesting thing is it also talks about bringing down the powerful in the story of Lazarus. And the rich man is a great one also. But one example I want to use in showing this is the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5. Many people know that this is where to find the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger for they shall be filled.” Luke has a Sermon on the Plain. And I don't want you to think, one's on a mountain and one's on a plain, who got it wrong? We don't know that this was given at the same time. There's nothing in here that says Jesus gave this great teaching only once. I think we can assume that probably some of these teachings happened multiple times. We have

the Beatitudes: all the blessed in Matthew and we get to Luke 6 and this is the Sermon on the Plain. We have the “blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God”. Luke makes it personal. He's doesn't just say “blessed are the meek.” He's speaking to the people, but then he goes on and he has the woes: “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”. Once again, it's not just the lifting up. It's the bringing down of those that have been oppressors. And you will see that all the way through Luke. That Jesus would be a light to the Gentiles and that comes directly from Simeon's song. And so if you look at those three things they are the reasons I focus a little more on Luke. I think he lays it out so beautifully for the audience. That is a quick overview of the synoptic gospels. Once again, that's Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and next week we will jump into, uh, the gospel of John and the history with Acts.

*End Script*****

Tough questions prep:

What about where there are differences? Remember that these are written from different points of view, and different things may seem important. As an example, if you and your spouse were both to describe your wedding day, the recollections may focus on different things; but the fundamental truth, you were married, does not change.

Key Scriptures to review prior:

Matthew 11:28-30

Acts 16:10-17, 20:5-15

Mark 1:14

Class Timeline:

	Estimated time
1. Introductions	10 min
2. Teaching Video	Pastor Shawn Allen, 24 min
3. Discussion Questions	20 min
4. Takeaways	5 min
5. Prayer	1 min
6. Invitation for next week	1 min

1.Introduce the content and video for this class (in your own words):

The first four books of the New Testament, the Gospels, tell the story of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. While there are common stories and themes, there are also unique aspects based on what each author wanted to convey. The first three gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are known as the Synoptic (“common view”) Gospels. It is through these three books that we are introduced to Jesus in the New Testament.

2.Play the teaching video.

3.Discussion questions (*please see pages 44 &45 of the participants guide*)

1. If 4 people told the story of an event they witness would they all be exactly alike? Why or why not?
2. What did you hear that is new and why did it stick out to you?
3. Do you have a favorite bible story or parable? Please share.
4. How do the themes of the Old Testament contrast with the themes of the New Testament?

For Example: OT – the reason we need a redeemer
NT – Jesus is the redeemer

4.Closing / takeaways in your own words:

Understanding the life and teachings of Jesus is imperative to our Christian walk. Jesus is not a character from a book; but is the Messiah, fully human and fully divine, come to earth to redeem us from our sins. While certain verses and stories reflect his character, you must read about his life and his teachings to fully understand who he is and what he has done for us. Knowing the Gospels is integral to our life as Christians.

5.Close in prayer Use the PRAY model as we teach them to pray:

P = praise – praise God for who He is and what he has done. Use attributes to describe Him.

R = Repent – helps us confess any sins and change the way we think or feel

A = Ask – petition your request for this group to our Father in Heaven including their understanding of the Bible

Y = Yield – Submit to God’s will and let go of our will.

PRAISE	Matthew 6:9	"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.'"
REPENT	Matthew 6:12	"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."
ASK	Matthew 6:11&13	"Give us this day our daily bread." "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]"
YIELD	Matthew 6:10	"Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven."

6. Invite them back next week to learn about

The books of John and Acts!