

# The Pastoral Significance of “the Synoptic Problem”

---

A Literary Analysis of the Four Gospels

August 2001

Mako A. Nagasawa



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

# The Postmodern Intellectual Climate

- People dislike overt claims to possess truth
  - Truth is seen as oppressive
  - Truth is seen as culturally conditioned
    - e.g. IQ tests were culturally biased
  - Truth is seen as inherently politically biased
    - e.g. the winners write history
- It is believed that everyone's story has some validity
  - Especially the stories of marginalized people

# The Importance of Stories

- People are not looking for rules to obey, but we are still looking for meaningful stories to tell us who we are
- People are bombarded by an endless amount of stories (e.g. in movies, on TV, etc.)
- People are skeptical of stories to a certain degree; we expect Hollywood to try to manipulate us

# The Christian “Story” Gets Very Mixed Reviews



- Christianity is often seen as the oppressor, the worst possible construct
- Today’s interest in Christianity has focused on stories and only certain motifs
  - using the language of freedom and liberation
  - not redemption, forgiveness
- Paul is frequently unpopular
  - didactic, propositional writing was popular during the Enlightenment (systematic theology), but not today
  - Paul’s subjection passages (1 Corinthians 11, Ephesians 5, Colossians 3-4, 1 Timothy 2,6) are often rejected because they are hard to reconcile with the motif of freedom and liberation

# Postmodern Identity Crisis

- People are searching for an identity
- Cultural Identity
  - People take race, class, cultural background as determinative; identity is a cultural construct; that's it
- Multiple Identities
  - People are not necessarily concerned about self-consistency, so we have multiple identities and are not troubled by it
  - Fluidity is seen as a positive trait in an emotionally complicated world (see R.J. Lifton's *The Protean Self*)
- Existentialist Non-Identity
  - We simply do things; we have no core identity therefore self-reflection is not important

# We Can Emphasize the Gospels

- Encountering a story seems more disarming
- Encountering Jesus directly is appealing
  - More people have not experienced him before
  - Fewer people “grew up in church”
- Encounters with Jesus lead to healing, which our generation can admit to needing
- The Gospels allow for a certain amount of diversity

# But Are We Really Prepared?

- The Media Revolution...
  - Most stories today are told visually using fast action special effects
  - Fewer stories are told through literature
  - Even fewer stories are told orally and personally
- Poses a challenge to Christian ministry
  - People have shorter attention spans and remember less
  - People want exciting stories but are also suspicious of exciting stories

# But Are We Really Prepared?

- We have to reconcile the Gospels
  - Ethical commands
    - e.g. Divorce in Mt.5:31-32, 19:1-9, Mk.10:1-12, Lk.16:18
  - Historical facts
    - Birth narratives in Mt.1-2 and Lk.1-2
    - Miracles in Matthew vs. Mark and Luke
  - Ministry emphases
    - What does discipleship look and feel like?
    - Do we need to understand the Holy Spirit?
    - How should Christians communicate and teach?
    - How do we reconcile the Gospels with the Epistles, especially Paul?

**Our BIGGEST concern**



# Will the Real Disciples Please Stand Up?



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

## The Gospel of Mark

- Their Starting Knowledge of Jesus (Mk.1-3): Disciples seem to not understand or value Jesus' teaching, since Mark leaves it unmentioned. We don't understand their motivation for following Jesus. We get the impression that providing information about Jesus or his teaching is unnecessary.
- Their Faith (Mk.4-5): Jesus asks them, "Do you not understand this parable?" suggesting that the disciples are on the 'outside' of the kingdom. We get the impression that disciples need to continually 'keep up' with Jesus. The disciples have 'no faith' on the stormy sea (Mk.4:41) and begin to be afraid of Jesus.
- Their Ministry (Mk.6): While in Luke and Matthew, the disciples are given much responsibility, and succeed for a good portion of it, in Mark, their success in ministry to Israel is minimized to a reference.
- Their Hearts (Mk.6-8): Disciples' hearts are said to be hardened after the feeding of the five thousand. Their hearts seem to be hardened also after the feeding of the four thousand.

# Will the Real Disciples Please Stand Up?



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

## The Gospel of Mark

- Their Understanding (Mk.8-12): Simon Peter perceives and proclaims Jesus' identity in the middle of the narrative, but his understanding is incomplete. The disciples struggle with and misunderstand Jesus' upcoming death. They fight amongst themselves.
- Their Failure (Mk.14-15): In Luke, only Simon Peter promises to follow Jesus unto death and then fails, but in Mark (and Mt.), ALL the disciples promise, and ALL desert him and flee. There is an emphasis on all their failures.
- Their Flight (Mk.16:1-8): The women flee from the empty tomb in fear

# Will the Real Disciples Please Stand Up?



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

## The Gospel of John

- Their Starting Knowledge of Jesus: Many titles (Word, Lamb of God, Son of God, King of Israel, Messiah), considerations (fulfillment of Moses and prophets, Nazareth), and images (Jacob's ladder) are referenced, emphasizing understanding and clarity; Nathanael correctly perceives Jesus' identity from the start of the narrative
- Their Faith: John's disciples believe after the first miracle (2:11), other people believe after other events (4:41, 4:53, 6:69, 7:31, 8:30, 9:38, 11:27, 12:42, 16:30)
- Their Confession: Simon Peter gives a better confession than in Mt, Mk, Lk. He knows Jesus has 'the words of life' in Jn.6:68. Jesus does not reprimand Simon Peter after it, but warns of Judas Iscariot's betrayal.
- Their Devotion: No mention of Gethsemane, no desertion of the disciples, John stays at the cross
- Their Faith: John believes at the empty tomb
- Their Doubts Overcome: Thomas' doubting faith is completely overturned by meeting the resurrected Jesus.
- The whole Gospel is meant to stimulate clarity and belief

# Will the Real Disciples Please Stand Up?



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

## The Gospel of Matthew

- **Their Starting Knowledge of Jesus:** The disciples begin following Jesus in a situation explicitly loaded with Jewish Messianic expectation, evidenced by the quotations from the OT, appearance of the magi, Herod's paranoia, John the Baptist's teaching about the kingdom, and the enthusiastic response from the Jews to John the Baptist.
- **Their Position Affirmed:** Jesus affirms the disciples in his first major teaching, the Sermon on the Mount, when he says, "Blessed are you" (Mt.5:11).
- **Their Faith:** On the stormy sea, Jesus says, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" (Mt.8:26) as contrasted with Mark's "Why do you have no faith?" (Mk.4:41) and Luke's "Where is your faith?" (Lk.8:25). In Matthew's second "faith on the sea" episode (Mt.14:22-33), Peter walks on water and the disciples worship Jesus, correctly proclaiming him the Son of God.
- **Their Understanding:** They understand Jesus' parables (Mt.13:51) "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." Contrast this with Mark's more exasperated "Do you not understand this parable?" and the stormy sea episode with Jesus' tacit rebuke that they had "no faith."

# Will the Real Disciples Please Stand Up?



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

## The Gospel of Matthew

- **Their Understanding:** They understand that Jesus was not talking about bread, but the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt.16:12). Mark leaves out this note on the disciples, giving the appearance that they didn't understand.
- **Their Understanding:** The Transfiguration is an occasion for understanding more spiritual truth (Mt.17:13), not just confusion. Again Mark omits this.
- **Their Position Affirmed:** Jesus tells them they will be seated on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt.19:28). Mark and Luke omit.
- **Their Misunderstanding Evident:** The disciples squabble over position and status on the road to Jerusalem.
- **Their Failure:** Like Mark, "all" the disciples swear to Jesus, but desert him and flee (Mt.26:35,56)
- **Their Triumph:** Jesus' resurrection is the occasion of joy and fear mixed together (Mt.28:8), not just fear. They are reinstated in the Great Commission.

# Will the Real Disciples Please Stand Up?



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

## The Gospel of Luke

- **Their Starting Knowledge of Jesus:** Jesus emerges into a situation explicitly loaded with Jewish Messianic expectation; Jesus' mission is apparently made known from Nazareth onward. Mark says that the first four disciples sought Jesus and followed the crowds. Luke attributes that not to the disciples, but to 'the multitude.' Simon Peter starts following Jesus when he confesses his sinfulness. Thus, we get the impression that the disciples are more spiritually sensitive than 'the multitude.' We start to notice that Jesus speaks differently to the disciples, protecting them and speaking more kindly to them than to 'the crowd.'
- **Their Ministry (Lk.9:1-9; 10:1-24):** The disciples are given much responsibility, and succeed for a good portion of it.
- **Their Good Intentions (Lk.9:10-17):** At the feeding of the five thousand, Luke implies that the disciples were helpful, proactive, and not sarcastic.



# Will the Real Disciples Please Stand Up?



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

## The Gospel of Luke

- Their Responsibility to Understand (Lk.9:45; 18:34; 24:16): Whereas Mark leaves us blaming the disciples for their failure to understand Jesus' prediction of his death and resurrection, Luke completely removes that responsibility and gives it to God. It was hidden from them until the Resurrection.
- Their Identity Apart from Ministry (Lk.10:20): Jesus tells them that they should not rejoice in their ministry success, but that their names are written in the book of life.
- Their Dependence on the Spirit (Lk.11:1-13): Jesus tells them that God will gladly and eagerly give them the Spirit in response to prayer.
- Their Dependence on the Spirit (Lk.24): The disciples understand the Scriptures and wait for the Holy Spirit.

# Will the Real Disciples Please Stand Up?



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

## Who Then Are We?

- Why are the presentations of the disciples different across all four Gospels?
- How important is teaching? Different understandings of how discipleship should feel will lead to significantly different ministries
  - Ministry based on Mark
    - Will encourage lots of activity, have more programs, more action-oriented culture, require more commitment
    - Will tend to see Christians' struggle with fear and doubt as their fault or lack of faith.
  - Ministry based on John
    - Will encourage lots of speaking, verbal evangelism, understanding, reflection, inward teaching
    - Will tend to see Christians' struggle with fear and doubt as lack of understanding or the result of bad teaching
- Should we just struggle onward without clear understanding?
- Will our doubts ever really be dealt with?
- If we are discipling others, how should we do it?



# Do We Need to Understand the Holy Spirit?

## The Gospel of Mark



- The Holy Spirit appears once, at Jesus' baptism
- Two unexplained mentions of the Spirit in the narrative
  - Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Mk.3:29)
  - The Holy Spirit will speak through persecuted disciples (Mk.13:11)
- No teaching on the Spirit throughout the narrative
- The Holy Spirit does not come upon the disciples after the Resurrection

# Do We Need to Understand the Holy Spirit?



## The Gospel of Matthew

- The most challenging part of Jesus' teaching, the Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5 - 7), does not explicitly mention the Holy Spirit
  - Luke's "Ask, seek, knock...and the Father will give you *the Holy Spirit*" is Matthew's vague, "Ask, seek, knock, and the Father will give you *what is good*."
  - Leo Tolstoy was frustrated and constantly felt disempowered as he tried to live out this section. Are we destined to feel the same way?
- There is some mention of the Holy Spirit throughout the narrative
  - The Spirit will speak through persecuted disciples (Mt.10:20)
  - The Spirit has anointed Jesus for ministry (Mt.12:18)
- But the Holy Spirit does not come upon the disciples after the Resurrection
- Baptism is to be done in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but it is unclear from Matthew alone what this means

# Do We Need to Understand the Holy Spirit?



## The Gospel of Luke

- The Holy Spirit empowers people to prophesy: Elizabeth (1:41-42), Zacharias (1:67), Simeon (2:25ff.)
- The Holy Spirit conceives Jesus and clearly empowers his ministry: baptism (3:21), wilderness trials (4:1), Nazareth pronouncement (4:14, 17)
- We have brief insights into Jesus' relation with the Holy Spirit
  - Jesus rejoices in the Holy Spirit (Lk.10:21)
- Jesus promises the Spirit to believers via our prayers (11:13)
- Jesus breathes out his Spirit on the cross (23:46)
- Jesus promises the Spirit and at the end of the Gospel (24:29)
- The disciples receive the Spirit for mission at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13) and empowers people, especially to speak (4:8, 4:31, 6:10, 7:55-56)
- Luke's Holy Spirit seems to serve a sporadic, functional role: to empower and guide disciples in mission

# Do We Need to Understand the Holy Spirit?

## The Gospel of John



- Jesus offers the Holy Spirit in John 3, 4, 6, and 7 as something that will satisfy our thirst, hunger, and brokenness
- Jesus teaches a great deal about the Spirit indwelling us in John 14 - 16
- The theme of union and relational oneness dominates that teaching. The Spirit enfolds us into the oneness between the Father and the Son. Themes of empowerment are also present, but secondary.
- Jesus breathes the Spirit into the disciples in John 20 much like God breathed life into Adam
- John's Holy Spirit primarily serves a permanent, relational role - to fill and heal our broken humanity - and secondarily serves a functional role - to empower and comfort us in ministry

# Do We Need to Understand the Holy Spirit?

## So What About Us?



- Why are the presentations of the Spirit different across all four Gospels?
- Is understanding Jesus enough?
- Do we really need to understand the Spirit? Why? Why not?
- What are the implications if we don't?
- Should we think about the Spirit primarily as a functional or relational agent?
- Should we think about the Spirit primarily as permanently or sporadically present?
- What should we expect God to do for us via the Spirit?

# How Should Christians Communicate and Teach?

- To some extent, Jesus is our model for how to communicate and teach, but *how did he really teach?*
  - About the heart first (anger, lust, etc.); then used parables to veil his teaching to outsiders and explained his teaching and his parables clearly for his disciples (Matthew)
  - Nothing definite at the start; he used parables with virtually everyone, even his disciples, and even they didn't get it (Mark)
  - About radical financial sacrifice, multi-ethnicity and anti-racism first; used parables, not to veil truth, but more like modern political satire or cartoons, with clear, direct connections and implications (Luke)
  - Jesus didn't use parables per se but strove for clarity using illuminating analogies (John)
- What are the implications for adopting one strategy at the expense of the others?

# How Should Christians Communicate and Teach?

Taking the Gospels alone, this is what we would tend to conclude:

	<b>Low Teaching</b>	<b>High Teaching</b>
<b>Low Action</b>		John
<b>High Action</b>	Mark	Matthew, Luke

\* Teaching is defined as the number of subjects that can be taught: Teaching on Jesus' identity, the relation between Jesus and the Old Testament, the 'cost of discipleship,' responsibilities of believers, the role of the Holy Spirit, the believer's identity, etc.

\* Action is defined as the number of activities in which we engage: Taking on new responsibilities, sacrificing, evangelizing, getting involved in new activities and roles, etc.

# Can the Gospels Be Reconciled with the Epistles, Especially Paul?



- Paul's spiritual emphasis is understanding and living out of our new identity "in Christ"
  - Romans 6:1-23, 7:14-25, 8:1-17
  - 2 Corinthians 1-5, especially 4:6-10, 5:17
  - Ephesians 1:1-2:22, 3:14-21, 4:17-24
  - Colossians 2:8-3:4
  - Galatians 2:20, 4:1-8
- Paul and John agree on the "in Christ" language
- Paul alone discusses the internal struggle with "the flesh," the residual old nature that competes with our new identity
- A flat sequential treatment of Matthew, Mark, and Luke may not comprehend this theme
- Which comes first: identity or behavior? Should we teach on identity or is behavior enough? How closely are they linked?



# Can the Gospels Be Reconciled with the Epistles, Especially Paul?



## Is There Even Hope for Christian Unity Based on the Bible?

- Roman Catholics                      Matthew, Pastoral Epistles
  - Orthodox                                John
  - Pentecostals                            Luke, Acts
  - Protestants                              Paul (Romans, Galatians)
  - InterVarsity                            Mark
- 
- question posed and analysis offered by James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*

# Some Major Questions Confronting Us

- Do we *really* know how to read and apply the Gospels?
- Is there a way to make Bible study, especially study of the Gospels, more attractive?
- How much should Christians accommodate for “postmodern” attitudes?
- Is there a way to consistently address the question of identity using the Gospels?

# What I Hope You'll Get Out of This

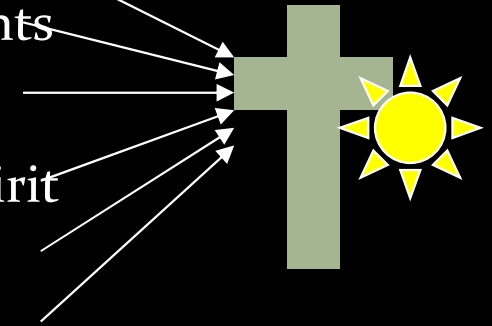
- Hope, not despair, in tackling these questions
- A more thorough understanding of the Gospels
- A new appreciation for the artistry of the Gospels
- New techniques for illustration: comparison to movies, theatre, art

# Literary-Thematic Analysis Applied to the Gospels



# Major Themes of the Gospel of John

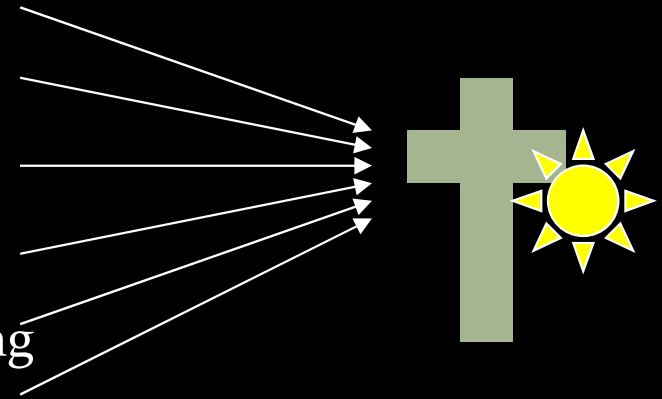
- Creation motifs (In the beginning, Word, water and spirit)
- Seven miracles, seven discourses, seven 'I am' statements
- The Oneness of Jesus and the Father
- Becoming Children of God by Being in Jesus by the Spirit
- Knowing God through the Spirit of Christ
- The Unity of the Church in Jesus



- The Cross as the Exaltation of Jesus as the True Human
- The Resurrection as the Beginning of God's New Creation

# Major Themes of the Gospel of Mark

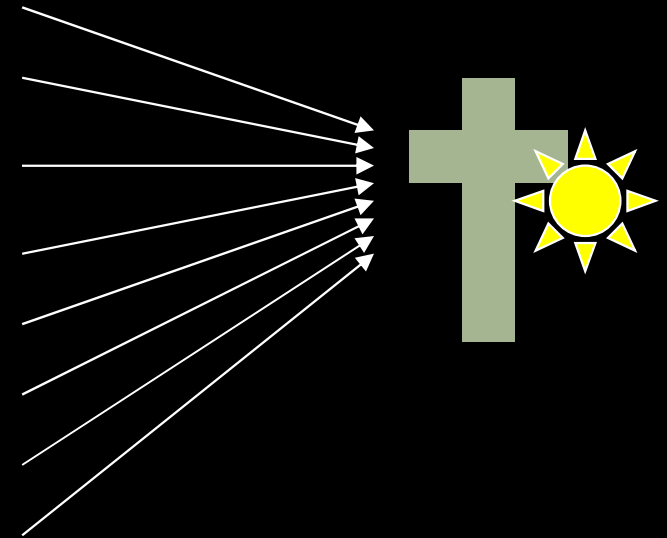
- The Disciples' Failure
- Being an Outsider vs. Being an Insider
- The Veil Between Outsiders and Insiders
- Parables as a Veiled Way of Communicating
- Servanthood and Jesus the Davidic Servant King
- Hardness and Uncleanness of Heart



- The Cross as a “Day of Atonement” Tearing of the Veil
- The Resurrection as an Opened Way to God through Jesus

# Major Themes of the Gospel of Luke

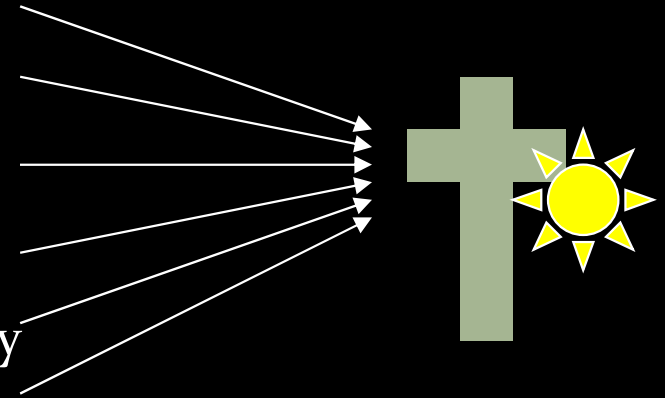
- Jews and Gentiles, Women, All Humanity
- Human Sight Restored, Blindness Lifted
- Ethnocentrism Challenged
- Wealth and Materialism Challenged
- Table Fellowship with Jesus, Eating with God
- Israel's Scriptures Fulfilled
- From Jerusalem Outward
- The Holy Spirit and Human Speech



- The Cross as the Suffering of the Isaianic Servant
- The Resurrection as the Restoration from Exile to Paradise

# Major Themes of the Gospel of Matthew

- The New Covenant
- The Power of Jesus' Word
- The Presence of God through Jesus
- The Kingdom in Parables
- Forgiveness in Discipleship and Multi-Ethnicity
- Jesus the Fulfillment of Israel's Hopes



- The Cross as the Messiah Entering into Israel's Sin
- The Resurrection as the Beginning of the Messiah's Reign over the World



# Issue 1: Discipleship

- It is erroneous to say that any one Gospel presents “the” method Jesus used in discipleship.
- Discipleship is not the main point of any of the Gospels, and even with Matthew (who comes closest), as with the others, the portrayal of Jesus’ relationship with his disciples always serves an illustrative, secondary role in relation to the main theme: the Cross and Resurrection.

# Issue 1: Discipleship

- Matthew highlights the disciples' learning process at strategic points (feeding of the 4,000, transfiguration, etc.) because they understand something about *Jesus' inclusion of the Gentiles*.
- Mark deliberately omits those statements because he is pointing out that they do not understand *Jesus' call to servanthood* and because *they were fundamentally hard and unclean of heart* throughout Jesus' earthly ministry.
- This gives us a fair historical perspective on the disciples - they understood one thing and not the other.
- And it gives us a fair literary perspective on the disciples. Mark plays up the failure of the disciples because he emphasizes the fact of their being outsiders before the Cross/Resurrection, while Matthew portrays them as slowly, but progressively, learning, but also not totally with Jesus until after the Cross/Resurrection.

# Issue 1: Discipleship

## The Real Issue: Knowledge of God

- All four Gospels agree that the disciples didn't completely understand Jesus during his earthly ministry.
- Even in Matthew and John, it becomes clear that the disciples don't really understand Jesus' predictions of the Cross and Resurrection.
- All four Gospels agree that comprehension of Jesus and knowledge of God increases dramatically from before to after the Resurrection. After the Resurrection:
  - Mark's Jesus becomes available to the disciples
  - Matthew's disciples have joy and assurance, and worship Jesus
  - Luke's disciples see Jesus in the bread breaking and are made to understand the Hebrew Scriptures
  - John's disciples believe at the end, and receive the Spirit, which is to help them remember and understand Jesus' teaching

# Issue 1: Discipleship

## Knowledge in John

- “No evangelist so clearly notes the difference between what the disciples understood at the time and what they came to see later through the Spirit.” (J.A.T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, p.35)
- John includes misunderstandings of a spiritual reality interpreted on an earthly level
  - destroy this temple, 2:21
  - born again, 3:5
  - living water, 4:1-42
  - springs of living water, 7:39
  - etc.
- But as the Cross-Resurrection draws near, Jesus drops the metaphors, and the disciples exclaim, “Now you are speaking plainly!” 16:25

# Issue 1: Discipleship

## Knowledge in John

- Jesus tries to convey his relation with his Father and the disciples' yet-future relation to the Holy Spirit. He does this with metaphor and clear statements. No one truly understands, however, until...
- The Resurrection, when Jesus breathes the Spirit into the disciples, and they are drawn into Jesus by the Spirit.
- This causes the disciples to have internal knowledge of God as Father through Jesus as Son.
- The difference between internal and external knowledge of God makes all the difference.

# Issue 1: Discipleship

## Knowledge in Mark

- Jesus seems parabolic and obscure.
- Knowledge seems to be always incomplete and inadequate, formed either by preconceptions about who Jesus should be, or by conclusions drawn from a limited experience with Jesus
- Mark does not give us very much information at all about the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's role in mediating knowledge to us
- But all this is appropriate, because Mark heavily emphasizes what it was like before the disciples experienced the resurrected Jesus (they were outsiders), before the Holy Spirit mediated knowledge of God to the disciples.
- Mark and John therefore agree on the difference between exterior vs. interior experience and knowledge of God

# Issue 1: Discipleship Knowledge in Luke

- There is a fight between Jesus and Israel's leadership (Nazareth synagogue, Pharisees, scribes, etc.) for the right interpretation of Israel's Scriptures.
- There is a divine block on the disciples. They cannot understand Jesus' predictions of the Resurrection.
- Both issues are resolved at the Resurrection.

# Issue 1: Discipleship

## Knowledge in Matthew

- The difference between what the disciples understood before the Cross/Resurrection and what they understood afterwards is played down.
- This is because Matthew portrays Jesus' establishment of the new covenant being continuous with Jesus' ministry with the disciples; Jesus trained them for the Great Commission.
- Nevertheless, Matthew still implies that the disciples didn't understand Jesus' prediction of the Cross and Resurrection, his corresponding call to servanthood (Mt.20:17-28), and what it meant to follow him to the Cross.
- Doubt is framed as an issue of questioning Jesus' authority, and is addressed after the Resurrection by the authority given to Jesus (28:17-20)



# Issue 1: Discipleship

## Knowledge and Discipleship

- Resurrection means a deeper personal “knowledge” of Jesus than that which was present before, because (1) an experience with the resurrected Jesus sheds more light on Jesus’ incarnate life, and (2) the Spirit given after the resurrection gives us internal knowledge of God as our Father.
- Evangelism is an invitation to know God *by being made new*.
- A newly converted Christian, being a new creation by spiritual resurrection, should receive the best, clearest explanations possible.
  - Matthew understands Jesus’ ongoing presence being known in the midst of the ministry of new covenant teaching and discipleship
  - Luke suggests that Jesus’ ongoing presence is known in the midst of the church expounding the fulfillment of the Old Testament and the ministry of the breaking of bread in table fellowship.
  - John indicates that Jesus’ ongoing presence is known via the Holy Spirit and in the unity of the church
  - Mark suggests that Jesus’ ongoing presence is known via an entering of the Cross/Resurrection mystery, a penetrating of the veil whereby our hearts are changed and we serve one another.



## Issue 2: Understanding the Holy Spirit

- It is reasonable to say that the emphases of Matthew and Mark in downplaying the role of the Holy Spirit was done for the literary and thematic purpose of focusing on the identity of Jesus (Mark) or how Jesus inaugurated the new creation/new covenant (Matthew)
- It is important to note, however, that Matthew and Mark speak about new covenant transformation, which is understood to be by the Spirit.
  - They both use the discourse on “the unclean heart” which requires the new covenant heart transformation
  - Mark alludes to Ezekiel 36 (clean spirit, clean heart) in the back-to-back cleansing of the Legion demoniac and the hemorrhaging woman (unclean spirit, unclean internals)
  - Matthew alludes to Jeremiah 31 (new covenant) through his literary structure
  - Matthew alludes to the Holy Spirit through the ‘presence of God’ theme

## Issue 2: Understanding the Holy Spirit

- Luke's portrayal of the Holy Spirit seems entirely functional; it is tied in with the theme of speech
- However, Luke's portrayal of new creation takes place through the following themes:
  - two eating in the presence of God
  - internalizing what is given by Jesus
  - sight to see Jesus
  - burning heart and understanding mind to internalize God's Word
  - all of the above are inversions of Adam and Eve's Fall
- But the Holy Spirit and the theme of new creation are united by the Old Testament prophecy of the new covenant, where the Spirit is poured out on all believers. This is stated by Joel and quoted by Peter in Acts 2, and serves as the confirmation of what was accomplished by Jesus.
- Hence it would be inappropriate to say that Luke's Holy Spirit is entirely functional. It is about *being* and serves a symbolic literary purpose. The outpouring of the Spirit constitutes the event of the new creation. Luke and John thus agree on the purpose and importance of the Holy Spirit.



## Issue 2: Understanding the Holy Spirit

- The Holy Spirit makes us a part of the ‘new creation’ and the ‘new covenant.’
- The only way this can be done is by bringing us ‘into Christ,’ who is the first of humanity to experience the ‘new creation’ personally via his resurrection
- Though John is the most explicit in this, there is ample reason to believe that the other Gospel writers recognized it as well. This can be shown in the way Matthew, Mark, and Luke discuss the ‘new creation’ and ‘new covenant’ idea.
- And, John’s writing at a later date accounts for his attempt to be more explicit - as the church became more Gentile, they were less familiar with the Old Testament and found it less personally significant.

# Issue 3: How Should Christians Communicate and Teach?

- To some extent, Jesus is our model for how to communicate and teach, but *how did he really teach?*
  - About the heart first (anger, lust, etc.); then used parables to veil his teaching to outsiders and explained his teaching and his parables clearly for his disciples (Matthew)
  - Nothing definite at the start; he used parables with virtually everyone, even his disciples, and even they didn't get it (Mark)
  - About the mission and the cost first; used parables, not to veil truth, but more like modern political satire or cartoons, with clear, direct connections and implications; exposit the OT (Luke)
  - Jesus didn't use parables per se but strove for clarity using illuminating analogies (John)

# Issue 3: How Should Christians Communicate and Teach?

- Jesus' parables have echoes in Old Testament passages about the new covenant (e.g. Isa.55 in the parable of the soils).
- Jesus is adding his 'layer' and his 'story' on top of the Hebrew Scriptures to disrupt the 'story' told by his opponents
- Parables force people to choose between two stories.
- The reason why Jesus used parables is to underscore what will happen in and after the Resurrection: Only those who believe in Jesus after the Resurrection will know and understand him from an interior perspective.
- Thus, not only do believers objectively understand parables after the Resurrection, we subjectively participate in them. (We are the good soil, etc.)
- Jesus' parables are a way to bring unbelievers to a point of decision
- Parables in general are most appropriate for unbelievers

# Issue 3: How Should Christians Communicate and Teach?

- It's important to note that everything actually points to the new creation/new covenant, encapsulated by Jesus' Resurrection!
  - Luke and Matthew say that the OT was driving towards the new creation/new covenant all along.
  - Matthew's Sermon on the Mount is the ethical standard of the new covenant
  - Miracles are also physical demonstrations of the interior transformation and healing brought about by participating in Jesus' Resurrection. In John, particularly, miracles are 'signs' symbolizing new life.
- There are a variety of ways to teach, but what's most important is the overall effect of what we teach.
  - Jesus Above
  - Jesus Below
  - Jesus Beyond
  - Jesus Within

# Issue 3: How Should Christians Communicate and Teach?

- Taking the Gospels in a non-thematic way, this is what we will tend to conclude:

	Low Teaching	High Teaching
Low Action		
High Action		All

\* Teaching is defined as the number of subjects that can be taught: Teaching on Jesus' identity, the relation between Jesus and the Old Testament, the 'cost of discipleship,' responsibilities of believers, the role of the Holy Spirit, the believer's identity, etc.

\* Action is defined as the number of activities in which we engage: Taking on new responsibilities, sacrificing, evangelizing, getting involved in new activities and roles, etc.



# Issue 3: How Should Christians Communicate and Teach?

- Taking the Gospels in a thematic way, this is what we will tend to conclude:

	<b>Low Teaching</b>	<b>High Teaching</b>
<b>Low Action</b>		
<b>High Action</b>		All

# Issue 4: Can the Gospels Be Reconciled with the Epistles, Especially Paul?



- Paul's spiritual emphasis is understanding and living out of our new identity "in Christ"
  - Romans 6:1-23, 7:14-25, 8:1-17
  - 2 Corinthians 1-5, especially 4:6-10, 5:17
  - Ephesians 1:1-2:22, 3:14-21, 4:17-24
  - Colossians 2:8-3:4
  - Galatians 2:20, 4:1-8
- Paul and John explicitly agree on the "in Christ" language and the basic two-fold role of the Spirit in bringing Christ into us, and us into Christ.

# Issue 4: Can the Gospels Be Reconciled with the Epistles, Especially Paul?



- In Matthew, the new covenant means:
  - The surpassing of the Law of Moses to a higher covenant
  - The transition from just Israel to the whole world
  - Jesus' authority vs. that of Satan
  - Jesus' ongoing presence bound up with his disciples
- This transition happens when Jesus takes on Israel's sin and curse at the Cross, and emerges victorious in the Resurrection, ushering Israel formally into the new covenant phase of her history.
- Matthew and Paul explicitly agree on the new covenant language (2 Cor.3, Gal.3-4), the ongoing presence of Jesus with his disciples (Col.1:27), the transition to include the Gentiles (Rom.1-4, Eph.2:11-22), Jesus taking on Israel's curse (Gal.3:13), and on identification with Jesus as the means for any given person to participate in the new covenant (Gal.2:20, Ph.3:7-11)

# Issue 4: Can the Gospels Be Reconciled with the Epistles, Especially Paul?



- In Mark, the new covenant means:
  - A transformative experience with the resurrected Jesus
  - A clean heart and clean spirit
  - Life out of death
  - Forgiveness of sin via Jesus' atonement for sin
  - The veil between humanity and God being torn by Jesus' atonement for sin
- This transition happens when Jesus tears the veil separating humanity and God at the Cross, and emerges in the Resurrection available to the disciples.
- Mark and Paul agree that the veil is removed for those in Christ (2 Cor.3), believers are moved from life out of death (Eph.1:15-2:10, Col.1:13-14), forgiveness of sin occurs for those in Jesus (Eph.1:7-8, Col.1:14, Rom.3:21-26, Gal.3), and the need to experience the resurrected Jesus (2 Cor.4, Rom.6, Ph.3:7-11)

# Issue 4: Can the Gospels Be Reconciled with the Epistles, Especially Paul?



- In Luke, the new covenant means:
  - The restoration of both Jew and Gentile, in some sense, to the paradise
  - The undoing, in some sense, of the fall
  - The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all believers
  - The Suffering Servant atoning for sin
  - The fulfillment of Israel's Scriptures
- This transition happens when Jesus creates a new division in humanity at the Cross, one which is greater than that of Jew, Gentile, and rebel. He then emerges in the Resurrection as the one who undoes the fall, in a sense.
- Luke and Paul agree on the restoration of both Jew and Gentile (Rom.1:16-17, Eph.2:11-22), the outpouring of the Spirit (Rom.8, 2 Cor.3, 1 Cor.12), the undoing of the fall (Rom.5:12-21, 1 Cor.15), Jesus atoning for sin (Rom.3:21-26), and the fulfillment of Israel's Scriptures (1 Cor.10, 2 Tim.3:16)

# Issue 4: Can the Gospels Be Reconciled with the Epistles, Especially Paul?



## Is There Even Hope for Christian Unity Based on the Bible?

- Roman Catholics                      Matthew, Pastoral Epistles
  - Orthodox                                      John
  - Pentecostals                                  Luke, Acts
  - Protestants                                      Paul (Romans, Galatians)
  - InterVarsity                                      Mark
- 
- Yes, there is hope!!! But it requires a consistent methodology with which to analyze the Bible.

# What Literary-Thematic Analysis Tells Us About the Gospels



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

- Hebrew narrative, and in particular, each Gospel, deals with a few major themes
- Those literary themes originate from and interact with a wider body of foundational literature, the Hebrew Scriptures.
- In the Gospels, these major themes are developed, brought to a climax, and interact with each other at the Cross and the Resurrection
- Each Gospel spends a large proportion of its narrative on the Cross and Resurrection
- Hence each Gospel is primarily about developing the meaning of the Cross and the Resurrection; they are not simply about “discipleship” or something else.
- Each Gospel ends with a “Great Commission” passage about Christian mission to the world; hence the thematic development of each Gospel results in *mission*.

# What Literary-Thematic Analysis Tells Us About Jesus



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

- Jesus was a tremendous Jewish theologian who spoke and acted in a very symbolic and systematic way.
- Jesus drew his life's symbolism from Israel's Scriptures.
- Jesus acted in such a rich symbolic manner that it was a fairly straightforward task for his disciples to identify major themes running consistently through Jesus' life and teachings.
- Jesus saw the climax of his life as his Cross and Resurrection, where he drew together all of the themes of his life.
- Jesus' intention for his disciples was to train them for God's mission to the world.
  - The Gospels are missionary documents. We cannot neglect Jesus' intention, and each Gospel writer's intention, that we undertake Christian mission to the world.