

## HOW TO READ THE GOSPELS

Practical suggestions

Banska Bystrica, 19th October 2014

LITERATURE: WILKINSON & BOA: *Talk Thru the Bible*; MEARS, H. *What the Bible is All About*; HILL, H. *A Journey through the Bible*; PAWSON, D. *Unlocking the Bible*.

### 0. INTRODUCTION: THE NEW TESTAMENT

#### 0.1. THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

- (1) the gospels, (2) Acts - history, (3) the letters of Paul, (4) catholic/general letters (5) the Revelation

#### 0.2. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- NT – the key to the whole Bible; it's *new* not because of age, but because the Old testament (Moses' law – not all of the 39 books of the book of Old Testament as a whole) has been updated, replaced, fulfilled by Jesus
- the “why” of the Gospels: *Who is Jesus?* (1) Life-perfect, (2) Deeds-power, (3) Words-authority, (4) Death & Resurrection – love and invitation – the *central* importance is No (4) – everything else leads to the death&resurrection story/doctrine
- expected response: my *faith* in the Saviour sent from God

### 1. THE “GOSPEL GENRE”

#### 1.1. THE WORD “GOSPEL”

- “good news” – military term
- why “good news”? – OT expectations of the Messiah **John 1:41** "We have **found** the **Messiah**"

#### 1.2. THE GOSPELS AND HISTORY

- The problem of the “historical Jesus” (Albert SCHWEIZER)
- What is “history”?
- Time-sequence and historical truth
- Witness' testimony and truth of “what really happened”

### 2. THE CONTENT OF THE GOSPELS

#### 2.1. THE SYNOPTIC “PROBLEM”

- Which gospel was the first? – Who copied from whom? – Who is closer to the “real events”?...
- The problem of different readings – are they *contradictions*? – depends on what are we looking for. The gospels are telling us that we have a problem with our hearts, not with the contradictions or historicity. This doesn't mean we shouldn't be asking hard questions. But we do need to be open to change our focus.

#### 2.2. THE CRUCIFIXION AND THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

- Frank MORRISON *Who Moved the Stone?* – the process and the crucifixion
- N.T. WRIGHT *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. – the Resurrection
  - the discrepancies prove the testimonies have not been doctored to fit each other

#### 2.3. THE INDIVIDUAL GOSPELS

- Matthew: for Jews – Jesus as the coming King of Israel – prophecies quoted; collected speeches

- Mark: for the Romans – Jesus as the powerful Servant of God – fast moving (εὐθύς);
- Luke: for the Greeks – Jesus as the perfect Adam – compassionate, working in the power of the Holy Spirit
- John: for the questioning/doubting – Jesus as the Son of God – the signs proving his divinity

### 3. THE THEOLOGY OF THE GOSPELS

#### 3.1. MESSIANIC EXPECTATION

- prophecies in the Torah; the Psalms; the prophets – enhanced by the Roman oppression

#### 3.2. JESUS' LIFE AND TEACHING

- under Moses → obedience (life)
- above Moses → changes (Parables; Commandments;)

#### 3.3. CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

- faith → love → following

### 4. QUESTIONS IN APPROACHING THE GOSPELS

- not philosophers; not important political figures
- daily relationships issues (not astronomy; ontology; great logical paradoxes...)
- not *THEORY* – but *SELF-KNOWLEDGE* and *PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT*...

#### 4.1. REDEFINING OUR PROBLEMS

- What is your *key* problem in life?
- What is/are your *deepest* love(s)?
- What is your fondest hope?

#### 4.2. IN THE GOSPELS TIME MEETS ETERNITY

- What are my day-to-day relationships and what are their eternal repercussions?

### 5. PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR READING

- Pray and listen! Bring your doubts before the throne of God and ask Jesus to help you.
- Beware of unbelief – *Tolstoyism*; *Dispensationalism*; *Criticism*;
- Beware of the “I know it already” attitude

“In the only sense that matters the surprise works as well the twentieth time as the first. It is the quality of unexpectedness, not the fact that delights us. It is even better the second time. Knowing that the 'surprise' is coming we can now fully relish the fact that this path through the shrubbery doesn't look as if it were suddenly going to bring us out on the edge of the cliff. So in literature. We do not enjoy a story fully at the first reading. Not till the curiosity, the sheer narrative lust, has been given its sop and laid asleep, are we at leisure to savour the real beauties. Till then, it is like wasting great wine on a ravenous natural thirst which merely wants cold wetness. The children understand this well when they ask for the same story over and over again, and in the same words. They want to have again the 'surprise' of discovering that what seemed Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother is really the wolf. It is better when you know it is coming: free from the shock of actual surprise you can attend better to the intrinsic surprisingness of the peripeteia.”

— C.S. Lewis, *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature*

- Announcing the *news* releases the power of the Spirit over the spiritual world.

### 6. CONCLUSIONS

- Read the Gospels to know, to meet and to believe in Jesus.
- Read the Gospels in the light of the apostles' letters.
- Read the Gospels to understand Jesus' principles of building the Kingdom of God.