

Worship: The beauty of Christ (Psalm 27:4)

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Witness: An inability to keep silent (Acts 4:20)

“Did not our hearts burn within us?” (Luke 24:32-34)

Defense: Explaining Jesus’s innocence

Quantity: Jesus’s deeds and teachings were extensive

“Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25).

1	10-Sep-23	NT Introduction
2	17-Sep-23	Matthew
3	24-Sep-23	Mark
4	1-Oct-23	Luke
5	8-Oct-23	John
6	15-Oct-23	Why four Gospels?
7	22-Oct-23	Acts as history
8	29-Oct-23	Acts
9	5-Nov-23	Introduction to Paul
10	12-Nov-23	Romans
11	19-Nov-23	1 Corinthians
12	26-Nov-23	2 Corinthians

New Testament Survey

Class 6: Why are there four Gospels?

The importance of the Gospels

The Gospels make up about 45% of the NT!

The four Gospels tell the story of the one gospel

The earliest Christians preferred to speak of the “gospel” (singular). It is not until c.155 AD (in Justin Martyr’s *Apology*) that the word “gospels” (plural) is used in any extant Christian writing. Even after this, Christian writers tend to emphasize the unity of the gospel. For instance, around 400 AD Augustine wrote, “In the four Gospels, or better, in the four books of the one Gospel...” (*On John*, 36.1).

Why not just one Gospel?

Tatian (c.170 AD): Composed a harmony of all four Gospels, creating one extended narrative, known as the *Diatessaron* (lit. “out of four”)

Marcion (2nd c.): accepted only the Gospel of Luke, which he shortened significantly, removing Jewish elements

The practice of the earliest church

Receive all writings that came from the apostles, and verify their authenticity

Early acceptance of the four Gospels

The four canonical Gospels were established as the only Gospels before the end of the 2nd c. Around 180 AD, Irenaeus explained the church's acceptance of only four Gospels, "So firm is the ground upon which these Gospels rest, that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them, and, starting from these [documents], each one of them endeavors to establish his own peculiar doctrine... The Ebionites use Matthew, Marcion uses Luke, others use Mark, Valentianians use John" (*Against Heresies*, 3.11.7). Irenaeus's book was widely used by other early Christian writers, which implies that it defended a generally accepted belief that was still being assaulted.

The weight of multiple witnesses

When investigators study a crime scene to reconstruct what happened, they often rely on multiple eyewitnesses. Although witnesses often recount different details, their unique perspectives add to an overall picture that is more complete. Something similar happens with the four Gospels.

Unique contributions of each gospel

The "Great Commission" is only found in Matthew's Gospel. Mark adds background information the other writers took for granted (e.g., the washing of hands, Mark 7:3-4, certain Aramaic words: "Talitha cum," 5:41; "Abba," 14:36; "Ephaphtha," 7:32). Only Luke records the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Only John tells of the raising of Lazarus (John 11). But these are more than just details, each of these aspects add to a portrait of Jesus. Each Gospel writer was telling their own story about Jesus.

The purpose statements of the Gospels

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1).

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet..." (Mark 1:1-2).

"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:1-4).

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so 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 20:30-31).