

# The Harmony Of The Gospels?

Wayde Miller

We are starting into the New Testament section of our Big Picture of the Bible studies this morning and the first section is called “The Gospels.” One of the most surprising things readers of the New Testament (especially first-time readers) is that the story of Jesus is told not once, but four times. We have the gospels according to Matthew...Mark...Luke...and John. So why are there four gospels in the New Testament? Why not just tell the whole story once? Apparently, many have wondered the same thing over the centuries as there have been many attempts to “harmonize” the gospels into a single story.

One of the earliest of these was done by the early church father Tatian in the second century AD. His work was called the Diatessaron, meaning “through the four” and it sought to weave the four gospels into one narrative. Many have worked since to put out what is commonly called “The harmony of the Gospels.”

So, should we have just one gospel? For those who believe the Bible is God’s inspired word, the answer should be a resounding NO. The Holy Spirit gave us four gospel accounts of the life of Jesus, each being divinely inspired by God. Think about that. If we cut and paste the four gospels into one single account, have we not turned four Spirit-filled masterpieces into one uninspired human work? Conservative Christians often chastise other groups for their cutting and pasting together doctrines like Premillennialism or faith only but are they any better when they paste the gospels together as they do to teach something about Jesus the Holy Spirit never intended?

The gospels are often taught as a harmonized “life of Christ” rather than listening to each gospel writer tell his story on his terms. To try and harmonize the gospels is noble as they seek to teach Jesus but the results end up being flawed. This is because each gospel represents a unique portrait of Jesus. Each is writing to a different audience and has certain points to make about Jesus. Matthew shows the Jews that Jesus is their King. Mark, on the other hand, shows Jesus as a suffering servant to the Romans, a people who were about being served themselves. Luke shows Jesus to the Greeks as the perfect human being and in whom there was growing belief along with growing opposition. A perfect message for their quests for moral and philosophical perfection. John selects only a few miracles of Jesus to establish Him as the Son of God worthy of being believed in. The fact is that each gospel writer has to be allowed by Bible students to tell his story. And the study of each book should be interpreted in light of the context each writer is presenting.

You may notice that the title of this article has a question mark. And by now we should know why. Merging the gospels into a single story runs the great risk of missing each gospel’s unique perspective. Yes, the gospels contain so many differences in what someone said, where they said it, and when they said it. But all of that goes to each writer telling his story. It is not necessary to try and put all the accounts together when studying any one of the gospels. Nor is it necessary to even bring in the other accounts when reading one of those gospels. Just let each writer say what he intended to say. Let us not run the risk of missing the Holy Spirit’s message to us through the text.