

# The Four Gospels

by William MacDonald

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*The four Gospels provide different perspectives on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, each highlighting a unique aspect of His character and mission.*

**Duration:** 30:06

**Scripture:** Isaiah 40:9, Isaiah 42:1, Zechariah 3:8, Zechariah 6:12, Zechariah 9:9

**Topics:** "Gospels"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the purpose of the four Gospels in the Bible. He explains that the Holy Spirit selects incidents from the life of Jesus to weave a pattern and tell a story. Some incidents are found in all four Gospels, while others are only in one or a few. The speaker emphasizes that what may seem like contradictions in the Bible are actually complementary and not contradictory. He encourages the audience to read the Gospels with a fresh perspective and highlights the use of the word 'behold' in Zechariah and Isaiah, which perfectly match the presentation of Jesus in the four Gospels.

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## Transcript

I think we should tell these two brothers that there's a vitamin that's very good for failing memory. It somehow stimulates the blood corpuscles in your brain. I just can't remember the name of it.

I want to speak to you today about the Gospels and the Gospel. If you were writing the Bible, would you have included four Gospels? There aren't four versions of the book of Acts. There aren't four versions of the book of Revelation.

But there are four Gospels. Why? Very few people understand the purpose of the Gospels, what they're really designed to do. And I hope that as a result of our little study, that we'll all be stimulated to go back and read the Gospels.

It would be wonderful if we could read them for the first time, wouldn't it? And get the thrill all over again. Most people think that the Gospels are a life of Christ. They're really not at all.

In the Gospels, the Holy Spirit has selected incidents from the life of Christ, and woven a pattern together. And the weaving in each Gospel is different, as we're going to see today. It certainly isn't a life of Christ.

Less than five chapters in all the Gospels are devoted to the first 30 years of his life. Just think of that. Less than five chapters in all the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are devoted to the first 30

years of his life.

Actually, those are devoted to his babyhood. And just a passing reference to the time when he was 12, there's nothing in the Gospels from the time that the Lord Jesus was 12 to the time he was 30. So it really isn't a life of Christ, is it? Why is that? Well, if that's surprising to you, let me say that 28 chapters in all the Gospels, 28 chapters, are devoted to the first 30 years of his life.

To 10 days in the life of the Lord Jesus. That's astonishing, isn't it? Those are the days from his last coming to Bethany to his resurrection. And that tells us something about the purpose of the Gospel.

28 chapters devoted to 10 days in the life of our Lord, from his coming to Bethany, that is his last coming to Bethany, before his crucifixion, to the time of his resurrection. Certainly not complete biography. Even the Gospels don't give a full account of the last three years of his life.

That's what they devote it to. They devote it to the last three years of the Savior's life, but they don't give a full account of that. John, chapter 21, verse 25.

Let's look at that. John, chapter 21, verse 25. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written.

Now, maybe you think that's figurative language. Maybe you think that's hyperbole, an intended exaggeration. I think it's absolutely true.

I think of all the things that the Lord Jesus did, even in those three years of his public ministry, were written in books. The world itself would not be able to contain the books. Think of that day when there was a man born blind, brought to him, and the Lord Jesus gave him sight.

Actually, it was an act of creation. Because if you're born blind, you need two new optic nerves. Nothing else will ever do.

And the Creator was there that day, and he provided two new optic nerves. It would take a few books to write out the process of creating optic nerves, wouldn't it? Think of all the miracles the Lord Jesus did. All the time he was doing that, he was sustaining the universe by the word of his power.

It would take a few books, wouldn't it? Even the planets in their orbit. And all the time he was doing that, he was keeping watch above his own people. It means guiding every germ, protecting his people from them.

In warfare, guiding all the implements of war, so his people would be protected. If you start to think of the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the world would certainly not contain the books that would be written to describe it. So, what the Spirit of God does in the Gospel, he selects incidents from the life of the Lord to, as I say, to weave a pattern, to tell a story.

Some incidents are in all four Gospels, like the feeding of the 5,000. He finds them in all four Gospels. Some incidents are only in one Gospel.

Some in two, some in three. But I want to give you a little key. The Holy Spirit tells them, repeats himself.

And if there are incidents found in four Gospels, there's a different story in connection with each one. Maybe next week we'll go into that more. The differences in the Gospels and how significant they are.

Sometimes when you read the Gospels, the order of events is chronological. This took place, this took place right in the proper sequence. That's the way we think in the Western world.

We think in terms of chronology. We want to tell a story the way it happened. As far as the Bible is concerned, that's the weakest order.

Sometimes a different order is used. Sometimes there's a dispensational order used in the Bible. And let me explain that to you.

And to a person in Bible land, this is really beautiful. When you can rearrange events to tell a story by the arrangement. You say, how do you know? How do you know that they're not always in chronological order? Because the order doesn't agree in certain of the Gospels.

One order will be given in Matthew and a completely different order in Mark. Now, here's a dispensational order of events. Matthew chapter 8 verses 1 through 17.

Four healings are recorded here. First of all, you have the healing of a leper. Behold, there came to him, verse 2, a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

Jesus put forth his hand and touched him, saying, I will be made clean. Immediately his leprosy was cleansed, and Jesus said unto him, See, thou tell no man, but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded for testimony unto them. What race did the man belong to? Anybody? Anybody.

What race? Jewish. How do you know he was Jewish? He said, go show yourself to the priest. Okay, here Jesus heals a leper.

The leper was Jewish, and Jesus was bodily present when he healed him. Verse 5. When Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick in the palsy, grievously tormented. Jesus said unto him, I will come and heal him.

The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come unto my roof, but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. I say to this man, go, and he goeth, and to another, come, and he cometh to my service.

Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marveled and said to them that followed verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. I say unto you, and so forth.

Verse 13. Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way, thou hast believed, so be it. Done unto thee.

The servant was healed in the selfsame hour. Here's another healing. The centurion was a member of what race? Roman.

Yeah, Roman. Gentile. Right? Gentile.

And, let's say, his servant was, too, although it doesn't say that. Here, his servant was. Was Jesus bodily present or absent when he healed him? Absent? He wasn't even on the scene when he healed him.

Third miracle. Verse 14. When Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid and sick of a fever.

And he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she arose and ministered unto them. Third miracle. Jesus healed Peter's wife's mother.

Jewish. Jesus was bodily present when he healed her. Are you with me? Fourth.

When he even was come, verse 16, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils, and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses. Here, the multitude is healed, and Jesus is bodily present when he does it. Let's put them together.

The first miracle. Jesus' first advent. He came to the leprous house of Israel, and healed those who came to him for healing.

Dispensation. But Jesus today is bodily absent. And yet all over the world today, Gentiles are exercising their faith in him, and he bodily absent is healing them, and granting them salvation.

But he's coming back again. He's coming back again to the house of Israel, Peter's wife's mother. He'll be bodily present.

They shall look upon him whom they pierced, and mourn for him as one mourns for an only son. They'll see him bodily, and he'll heal the repentance house of Israel. It says in Romans chapter 11, and so all Israel shall be saved.

The liver will come out of Zion. And then in the fourth case of healing, you have another dispensation. You have the millennium.

You have the thousand-year reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, when the multitudes will be healed, and the leaves of the tree will be for the healing of the nations. Now, to the people of the Bible, and that's much more beautiful than just telling a thing in its chronological order. It's telling events.

It's linking events with a story. Change of dispensation. Jesus healing bodily presence.

Absence, presence, presence. Israel. The Gentiles.

Israel again, and the multitude. Well, there are other orders in the scripture, I believe. I suggest this.

I don't say it dogmatically, but if you'll turn over to Matthew chapter 9, you have three miracles here, and I think they tell a different story. A different story. Matthew chapter 9, verse 18.

"...when he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead, but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And Jesus arose and followed him, and so did his disciples." Okay, you have a case of a person dead receiving life. Verse 27, "...now when Jesus departed, then two blind men followed him, crying out, saying, Thou son of David, have mercy on us.

When he was coming to the house, a blind man came to him. Jesus said unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your

face, be it unto you.

Their eyes were opened. Jesus straightly charged them, saying, See that no man knoweth. They, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country." First of all, the dead is raised.

Second, blind eyes made to see. Verse 32, "...as they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a demon. When the devil was cast out, the dumb man spake, and a multitude marveled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel." In other words, it doesn't necessarily mean that the events took place in this order.

It doesn't necessarily mean that. But it might be telling us this. In the salvation of a soul, first of all, the man is dead, and he needs life.

And we are. We're dead in trespasses and in sin. And we need the life-giving touch of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But even after you're saved, you're still somewhat blind, aren't you? You don't see everything clearly at once. And so the Lord heals our blinded eyes. And then, after he heals our blinded eyes, he opens our mouths in testimony for him, that if thou shalt contest with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

So, you have a chronological order in Scripture. The chronological order would be very clear at the events connected with the crucifixion. You have the dispensational order in Scripture, Matthew chapter 8. You have what we might call a moral or a spiritual order in Scripture, Matthew chapter 9. Then, in John's Gospel, especially, you have a different order.

You have events taking place. The Spirit of God will take an event here, and then he'll lead up to a discourse of the Lord Jesus on the basis of that event. John's Gospel consists very largely of discourses of our Lord.

For instance, the Lord feeds the 5,000. Events take place pretty soon. He's giving the discourse on the bread of life.

One day, some Greeks come and say, we would see Jesus. And it leads to a discourse of the Lord on the grain of wheat. Except the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die.

It abides us alone. I think those Greeks, they came and they liked philosophers, you know. They liked men of wisdom.

I think they were rather struck with the Lord Jesus. And I think they would like to have taken him back to Athens and set him up as their favorite philosopher. And Jesus said, it's not the way.

Except the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die. It abides us alone. Live it, die.

Bring it forth. Much fruit. In other words, he couldn't go to Athens and become a popular philosopher.

He had to go to the cross and die for the sins of the world. So, that's the order that's predominant, I think, in John's gospel. Not necessarily chronological, but just isolated incidents that led up to these marvelous discourses of the Lord Jesus.

Now, I think that most of you know that each of the gospels is designed to present the Lord Jesus in a different aspect. Matthew presents him as king of the Jews. Mark presents him as the perfect servant.

Luke presents him as the son of man. And John presents him as the son of God. God manifests in the flesh.

And all of the incidents in the various gospels are designed to produce that effect. Matthew opens, for instance, with a genealogy showing Jesus' legal right to the throne of David. Mark doesn't open with any genealogy, because you don't care.

When you hire a servant, you don't ask him for his family tree. Luke has a genealogy in chapter 3, and it shows that the Lord Jesus is true man. It traces him back to Mary.

John has no genealogy. In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God.

The Word was God. But what is fascinating, and that is fascinating, but what is still more fascinating to me is that all through the Scriptures you have these intimations of the four gospels in other ways. For instance, in the colors of the tabernacle, in the colors that were used in the tabernacle, you have colors that answer to these four aspects of Christ.

King, servant, man, and God. You have purple, the color of royalty. That was in the tabernacle, in the veil of the tabernacle.

It says in Judges 8.26, the kings of Midian were clothed in purple. In other words, purple is connected with royalty in the Scriptures. Mark, scarlet.

I confess that that's the least clear, but I understand that the scarlet dye of Bible times came from a worm, a worm called the cochineal worm. Dry it out and open it up, and this scarlet powder comes out, and that's what they used in making the dye. Jesus said of himself in Psalm 22.6, I am a worm, and no man, but reproach of men, and despise of the people.

Luke, white, Revelation chapter 19, verse 8, speaks of the white garment, the righteousnesses of the saints. That's the way the Lord Jesus is presented in Luke, the perfect, sinless son of man. And then John, the blue of the tabernacle veil.

Sapphire is connected with the body of heaven, the blue of the heavens, and John presents him as the heavenly one. Then in the Bible there are four animals that match the four Gospels. You have that in Ezekiel, and you have it in Revelation as well.

You have the lion, Matthew, the lion of the tribe of Judah. You have the ox. If we had time we could turn to these.

I'll give you the references so you can turn to them. Ezekiel 1.10, and Revelation 4.7. The ox are the calf beats a burden. Matches Mark.

Man, you have that in Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4. Corresponds to Luke. John, the eagle, the heavenly bird as it were. The bird that flies in the heaven.

Lion, ox, man, eagle. These were written by men that never met. They lived hundreds of years apart, and yet the weaving is there.

Then there are four uses of the word branch, and I'd like you to turn with me to these four uses of the word branch in the Old Testament that correspond to Christ as presented in the Gospels. Jeremiah, chapter 23, verses 5 and 6. Jeremiah 23, verses 5 and 6. It says, Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a king shall reign and prosper. You get it? A branch, a king, shall reign and prosper.

That's Matthew, isn't it? Matthew presents the Lord Jesus as a descendant of David to reign as king. I think that's beautiful. Zechariah, chapter 3. I'm glad the children sang the books of the Bible this morning, because it will help us all find these.

Zechariah, chapter 3, verse 8. Hear now, O Joshua, the high priest, thou and thy fellows that sit before thee, for they are men wondered at, for behold, I will bring forth my servant the branch. What is that? Mark's Gospel, isn't it? The Lord Jesus as presented in Mark's Gospel. My servant, the branch.

While you're still in Zechariah, Zechariah, chapter 6, verse 12. Just turn over the page. 6, verse 12.

Speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is the branch. Luke presents the Lord Jesus as a man, doesn't he? The perfect man. Here you have it, in connection with the term, the branch.

Behold the man whose name is the branch, and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. And finally, Isaiah, chapter 4, and verse 2. Isaiah, chapter 4, and verse 2. This has to be John's Gospel, if it's going to fit the pattern. Isaiah 4, 2. In that day shall the branch of the Lord, the branch of Jehovah.

It's exactly the way the Lord Jesus is presented in John's Gospel. The branch, or son, of Jehovah. The offspring of Jehovah.

How isn't that marvelous? Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Isaiah, they're predicting, way back there in the Old Testament, Isaiah 700 years before Christ was born, they never got together and collaborated on it. And yet they use the expression, the branch, four times, and it corresponds to Christ, presented in the four Gospels. If you're still not convinced, I have four more for you.

Go to Zechariah, chapter 9, again, and watch out for the word, behold. There are four uses of the word, behold, and they perfectly match Christ, as he's presented in the four Gospels. Zechariah, chapter 9, verse 9. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, thy King cometh unto thee.

He is just, and having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ant, and upon a colt, the foal of an ant. Behold thy King. Tuck that away, Matthew's Gospel, presenting Jesus as King.

Isaiah, chapter 42, verse 1. Isaiah, chapter 42, verse 1. Behold my servant, whom I uphold, mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth. I have put my spirit upon him. He shall bring forth judgment of the Gentiles.

Behold my servant, Mark's Gospel. Zechariah, again. I hope you kept your finger in the place.

Zechariah, chapter 6, verse 12. Well, we've already read it, haven't we? But here it is again. Speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man.

Luke's Gospel. Behold the man. Well, if it's going to fit, we've got to find a verse that says Behold your God.

Is there such a verse in the Bible? Yes. Isaiah, chapter 40, and verse 9. Chapter 40 of Isaiah, verse 9. O Zion, that bringest good tidings, or O thou that bringest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain. O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength.

Lift it up. Be not afraid. Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God.

John's Gospel. There you have it. Behold thy king.

Zechariah 9, 9. Behold my servant. Isaiah 42, 1. Behold the man. Zechariah 6, 12.

Behold your God. Isaiah 40, verse 9. I didn't realize the time would go so quickly. Just let me say this in closing.

Sometimes what seems to be contradictions in the Bible are not contradictions at all. They're supplementary. I'll just say this quickly and then close.

For instance, at the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus you had the superscription that was written over his head on the cross. Matthew 27 says this is Jesus the King of the Jews. Mark says the King of the Jews.

Luke says this is the King of the Jews. And John 19 Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. They don't agree.

They don't agree. They're complementary. They're not contradictory.

They're complementary. What did it say in the superscription over the cross? It said this is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews. In other words, you put them all together and you get the exact wording.

But I'd like to say that always the reasons for the differences in the Gospel are significant. They always have a meaning. And that's what I'd like to speak about next week, Lord willing.

I'd like to take up some of the differences in the Gospel and I hope it'll open a whole new world for you to see that when the Spirit of God says something and it even uses what seems to be the same thing in another passage, it isn't the same thing. It's different. And there's a different spiritual meaning connected with it.

Shall we just look to the Lord in closing prayer? Father, we thank you for the wonderful story of love told out in the Gospels of our blessed Redeemer coming down to this world, suffering bleeding and dying for a race of fallen mankind. Thank you for the wonderful offer of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus. Going out to those who are completely unworthy, who have nothing in themselves to commend themselves, but who can come and receive salvation as a free gift of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you He died as our substitute. We thank you He died as our representative. We thank you for all in the meeting today who have identified themselves with Him by faith by a definite act of faith chosen Him as Lord and Savior.

We pray should there be some in our midst today who are not decided Christians that, convicted by the Holy Spirit of God, they may come and as it were place their hand on His head and say I believe you died

for me, for my sins that I here and now accept you as my Savior. We pray in His worthy name and for His sake. Amen.

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