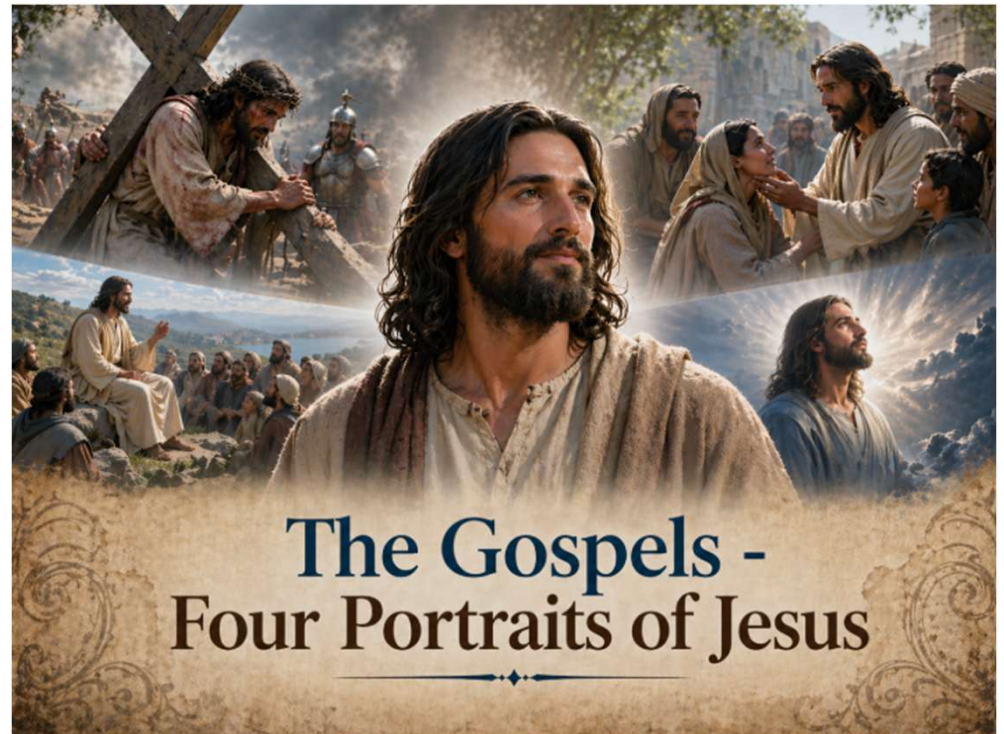
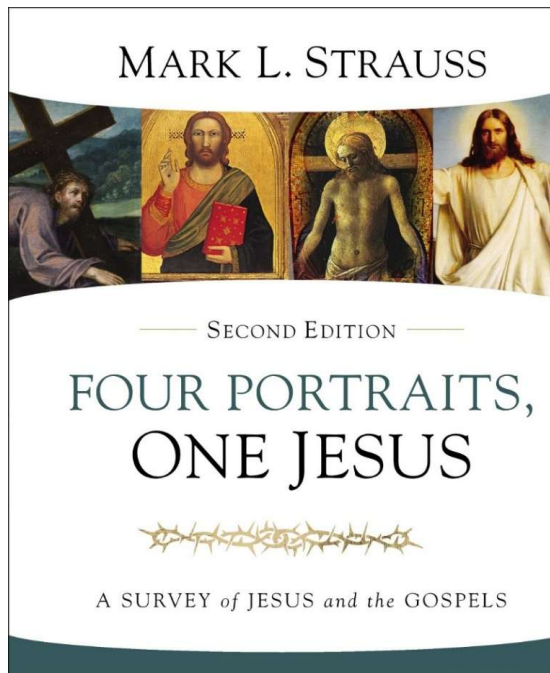


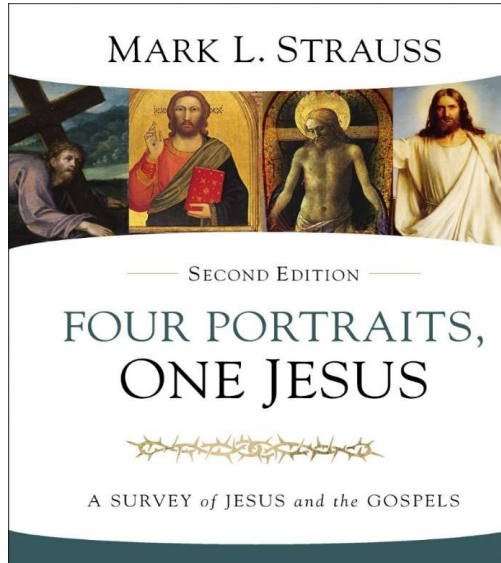
The Gospels are four complementary portraits of the same Jesus

Phillip Cornwell

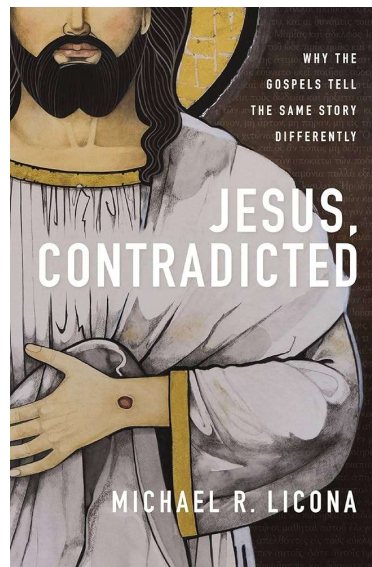
Eastside Church of Christ



This evening, I will wrap up our class on the Gospels



Four portraits of Jesus



**“Contradictions”
in the Canonical
Gospels**



**Knowing Jesus personally
and deeply**

These are the four portraits of Jesus that we discussed

Based on the series so far, what portrait of Jesus is each Gospel writer presenting?

Mark	Matthew	Luke	John
The Gospel of the suffering servant and Son of God	The Gospel of the Messiah and King	The Gospel of the Savior of all people	The Gospel of the eternal Son who reveals the Father
Most urgent	Most structured	Most inclusive	Most theological

Here is a comparison of the Gospels in terms of miracles

Category	Matthew (1,071 verses)	Mark (678 verses)	Luke (1,151 verses)	John (879 verses)
% of Mark	~90% of Mark's verses	— (baseline)	~55-60% of Mark's verses	NA
Healings	~10	~11-13	~13-15	~3
Nature Miracles	~6 (e.g., calming storm, feeding)	~4-6	~4-5	~3-4
Exorcisms	~3	~4-7	~4-7	0

Here is a comparison of the Gospels

Category	Matthew (1,071 verses)	Mark (678 verses)	Luke (1,151 verses)	John (879 verses)
Parables	~23 total (11 unique)	~8 total (2 unique)	~24 total (18 unique)	none
Long Discourses	5 major (Sermon on the Mount, Mission Discourse, Parables, Church Life, Olivet Discourse)	Very few; mostly short teachings	Several extended sections (Sermon on the Plain, Travel Narrative, Olivet Discourse)	Several major discourses (e.g., Bread of Life, Good Shepherd, Light of the World, Upper Room Discourse).
Unique Material	Birth narrative, Sermon on the Mount, Great Commission	Two-stage healing of blind man, healing of deaf-mute, young man fleeing naked	Infancy narrative, Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son, Rich Man & Lazarus, Emmaus Road	Lots! Water to wine, Nicodemus, Samaritan woman, raising of Lazarus, washing disciples' feet, many 'I am' sayings, etc.

Differences between the Gospels

Category	Mark	Matthew	Luke	John
Length	Shortest (16 ch.)	28 ch.	24 ch. (most verses)	21 ch.
Beginning	Baptism of Jesus	Genealogy & birth	Infancy narratives	Eternal Word
Style	Fast-paced, urgent	Structured, teaching	Historical, orderly	Theological, signs, “I am” sayings
Teaching	Few parables, short	Long discourses	Many parables	Long dialogues and discourses
Disciples	Often fail & misunderstand	More positive	Mixed portrayal	Small circle, intimate scenes
Messianic Secret	Strong emphasis	Less prominent	Less prominent	Absent
Jesus’ Portrait	Powerful yet human	New Moses, fulfillment	Universal Savior	Eternal Word/Son, reveals the Father
Passion	Proportionally longest	Strong focus	Strong focus	Strong focus
Resurrection	Abrupt (16:8)	Great Commission	Emmaus & Ascension	Multiple appearances

Let's compare how the Gospels portray Jesus

Mark - Suffering servant & Son of God	Matthew - New Moses & fulfillment of the Law	Luke - Universal Savior & friend of the outcast	John – Eternal Word and revealer of the Father
• Rooted in Isaiah's Servant Songs (Isa 42; 53) • Key verse: Mark 10:45 ("to serve... give his life as a ransom") • Passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34) • Identity revealed at the cross (15:39) • Discipleship = taking up the cross (8:34)	• Emphasis on fulfillment: "This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet" (over a dozen times) • Five major teaching discourses (paralleling the Torah) • Sermon on the Mount: Jesus as authoritative Law-giver • Strong Jewish flavor: genealogy through Abraham & David	• Unique parables of compassion: Good Samaritan (10:25–37), Prodigal Son (15:11–32) • Focus on the poor, women, Gentiles, sinners • Emphasis on the Holy Spirit and prayer • Jesus as Savior for all nations (2:30–32)	• High Christology: "in the beginning was the Word..." • Key verse: John 20:31 ("so that you may believe and have life") • Extended dialogues and discourses • Seven "signs" Seven "I am" sayings • Emphasis on love and unity (13–17)

Let's look at commonly cited “contradictions”



Classic examples

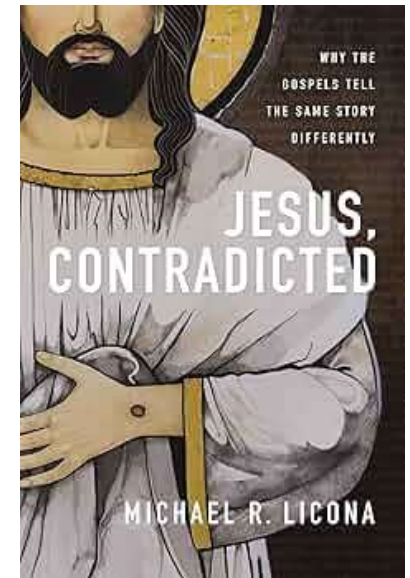
Matthew	Luke	
Abraham	Jesus	Joseph
Isaac	Heli	Matthat
Jacob	Levi	Melchi
Judah	Jannai	Joseph
Perez	Mattathias	Amos
Hezron	Nahum	Esli
Ram	Naggai	Maath
Amminadab	Mattathias	Semein
Nahshon	Josech	Joda
Salmon	Joanan	Rhesa
Boaz	Zerubbabel	Shealtiel
Obed	Neri	Melchii
Jesse	Addi	Cosam
David	Elmadam	Er
Solomon	Joshua	Eliczer
Rehoboam	Jorim	Matthat
Abijah	Levi	Simeon
Asa	Judah	Joseph
Jehoshaphat	Jonam	Eliakim
Joram	Melea	Menna
Uzziah	Mattatha	Nathan
Jotham	David	Jesse
Ahaz	Obed	Boaz
Hezekiah	Salmon	Nahshon
Manasseh	Amminadab	Admin
Amon	Arni	Hezron
Josiah	Perez	Judah
Jecooniah	Jacob	Isaac
Shealtiel	Abraham	Terah
Zerubbabel	Nahor	Serug
Abud	Reu	Peleg
Eliakim	Eber	Shelah
Azor	Cainan	Arphaxad
Zadok	Shem	Noah
Akim	Lamech	Methuselah
Eliud	Enoch	Jared
Eleazar	Mahalaheel	Cainan
Matthan	Enosh	Seth
Jacob	Adam	God
Joseph		
Jesus		

The genealogies in
Matthew and Luke

Let's look at apparent contradictions

The author conveys a debate with Bart Ehrman. He asks a series of questions:

1. Was Jesus crucified before or after the Passover meal?
2. Did Simon of Cyrene carry Jesus's cross or did Jesus carry it all the way?
3. Did both thieves curse Jesus or did one repent?
4. On Sunday morning, how many women were at the tomb?
5. When they went there, how many angels did they see?
6. Did Jesus first appear to his disciples in Jerusalem or in Galilee?
7. Did the apostles receive the Holy Spirit before or after Jesus ascended into heaven?



The author discusses how people were taught to write

Educated children would be taught how to write various forms of literature

Compositional textbooks containing writing exercises (progymnasmata) have been discovered

These exercises include **paraphrasing** – changing the form of expression while keeping the thoughts

- variation in syntax
- addition
- subtraction
- substitution

We have examples from ancient historians, such as Plutarch

- **Do they sometimes invent speeches? Yes**
- **Do they sometimes paraphrase and elaborate in order to improve the quality of a speech or even a narrative? Yes**
- **Do they sometimes change a question to a statement? Yes**
- **Do they sometimes change a statement to a question? Yes**
- **Do we see them doing this with the writing of others? Yes**
- **Do we see them doing this with their own writing? Yes**
 - Plutarch tells the same story in different biographies (“Lives”) differently.
 - He never “cut and pasted” from one biography to another (Caesar vs Brutus vs Antony)

Here are some conclusions from the book

- God could have given us the Gospels without their authors using sources, but He did not choose to go this route.
- Most, if not all, of the Evangelists probably used secretaries (amanuenses) to compose their Gospels. We know that Peter and Paul did.
- The authors of the Gospels often quote from the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew text.
- Whatever we say about the nature of the divine inspiration of the Bible, we should acknowledge that the end product possesses distinct human elements that are imperfect, such as awkward grammar.
- Compositional textbooks prescribed that authors should alter what their sources report to make points clearer.
- Many stories of Jesus came from oral tradition or collections of sayings with no chronological clues, so the authors put them where they fit in their Gospels.

When you see differences, don't try to harmonize them, but ask yourself

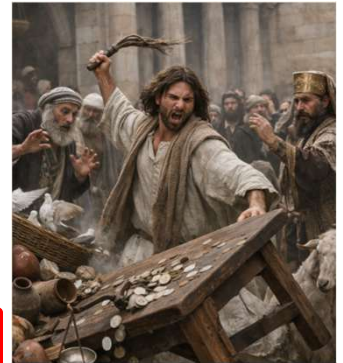
- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| Is this selection? |  | one includes, another omits
Good Samaritan (Luke only) |
| Is this compression? |  | short vs detailed
Jairus' daughter (dead vs dying) |
| Is this arrangement? |  | thematic vs chronological
Temple cleansing (John early / Synoptics late) |
| Is this a paraphrase? |  | same meaning, different wording
Cross inscription (wording varies) |
| Is this a difference in emphasis? |  | same event, different theological focus
Passion narratives (John highlights Jesus as the Passover lamb) |

Let's look at the cleansing of the temple

Synoptics: Near the end of Jesus' ministry (Passion week)

John: Early (John 2)

How would you explain this difference to a seeker?



Possible explanations

- **Two cleansings:** One early, one late (possible, though debated).
- **One cleansing arranged for literary/theological reasons:** John places it early to introduce the theme of Jesus replacing the temple; the Synoptics place it later to highlight its role in the final conflict.
- **Different emphases:** Ancient writers sometimes arranged material for theological reasons, not strictly chronologically.

Let's look at when the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles

John 20:22 — On the **evening of the resurrection**, Jesus breathes on the disciples and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 2:1–4 — **At Pentecost**, the Holy Spirit comes with a sound like wind and what seemed to be tongues of fire after Jesus ascends.

Explanation?

Possible explanations

- **Different emphases:** John focuses on the intimate gift of life from Jesus; Acts focuses on the visible coming of the Spirit for mission.
- **Two stages:** John 20 may be a private giving of the Spirit; Acts 2 the public outpouring for witness.

Let's look at the healing of Jairus's daughter

In Matthew 9:18, Jairus says, “My daughter has **just died**” (no mention of messengers)

In Mark 5:23 and Luke 8:42, Jairus says his daughter **is dying/at the point of death**

Then later in Mark 5:35 and Luke 8:49, after the healing of the bleeding woman, messengers arrive and say she has died

Explanation?

Possible explanations

- **Compression:** Matthew shortens the story and states the situation in its final form.
- **Expanded narration:** Mark and Luke give the fuller sequence: dying first, then death announced.
- **Same basic event:** All three agree that Jairus seeks Jesus in desperation and that Jesus raises his daughter.

Let's look at when and how Judas died

Matthew 27:5: And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and **hanged himself**.

Acts 1:18: (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and **falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out**).

Explanation?

Possible explanations

- **Complementary details:** Judas hangs himself; later the body falls (rope/branch breaks or body later discovered), producing the gruesome description in Acts.
- **Different focus:** Matthew highlights remorse; Acts highlights judgment.

Let's look at the women at the tomb and the resurrection appearances

A. Which women went to the tomb?

- **Matthew:** Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary”
- **Mark:** Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome
- **Luke:** Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others
- **John:** Focuses only on Mary Magdalene (at least initially)

**Different names
and numbers**

B. What did they see at the tomb?

- **Matthew:** One angel outside
- **Mark:** One young man inside
- **Luke:** Two men in dazzling apparel inside
- **John:** Two angels inside (seen later by Mary)

**One or two angels?
Inside or outside?**

Let's look at the women at the tomb and the resurrection appearances

C. How did the women react?

- **Mark:** They fled and said nothing (initially)
- **Matthew:** They ran with fear and joy to tell the disciples
- **Luke:** They reported to the apostles
- **John:** Mary runs to Peter immediately

Do they speak or stay silent?

D. Where and to whom did Jesus first appear?

- **Matthew:** To the women; later in Galilee
- **Luke:** To disciples near Jerusalem (Emmaus, then others)
- **John:** To Mary Magdalene, then to disciples in Jerusalem
- **Mark (longer ending):** To Mary Magdalene first

Location and sequence

We could go through each one of these, but let's focus on the big picture

The resurrection accounts differ in details, emphasis, and sequence

Complementary perspectives rather than contradictions

The Gospels reflect:

- **Selective reporting (not every detail included)**
- **Different emphases (audience and purpose)**
- **Compressed timelines of a complex series of events**

Key Takeaway: Jesus was crucified, buried, and rose from the dead!

The “contradictions” are largely:

- **Differences in focus, not facts**
- **Differences in selection, not substance**
- **Differences in ordering, not events themselves**

They read like independent eyewitness traditions—which, for many scholars, actually strengthens their credibility

Let's look at the different genealogies in Matthew and Luke

Matthew implies that his list includes all the generations between Abraham and Jesus:

¹⁷ Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

Luke has 57 names between Abraham and Jesus

Matthew uses the name Jechoniah twice (final name in the 2nd set and the 1st name in the third set)

Matthew seems especially interested in shaping the genealogy around the number 14, likely for theological emphasis.

Some scholars propose he is using a rhetorical device known as “gematria”

Here is a high-level comparison of the genealogies in Matthew and Luke

Feature	Matthew 1:1–17 (41 names)	Luke 3:23–38 (~77 names)
Direction	Past → Present (Abraham → Jesus)	Present → Past (Jesus → Adam)
Starting Point	Abraham	Jesus
Ending Point	Jesus	Adam (“son of God”)
Focus	Jewish Messiah	Universal Savior
Key Emphasis	Davidic kingship	Jesus for all humanity
Structure	3 groups of 14	No obvious grouping
Line through David	Solomon (royal line)	Nathan (non-royal line)
Joseph’s Father	Jacob	Heli
Women included?	Yes (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, Mary)	No
Style	Highly structured, theological	More linear, historical tone

Other observations

The genealogies are identical from Abraham to David with some textual variants

- Matthew: ... Hezron, Ram, Amminadab ...
- Luke (ESV): ... Hezron, **Arni**, **Admin**, Amminadab ...
- Luke (NIV): ... Hezron, Ram, Amminadab ...

The genealogies diverge after David

Matthew	Luke
Jesse David Solomon Rehoboam ...	Jesse David Nathan Mattatha ...

Matthew traces Jesus' lineage differently than Luke (different names, different order, different endpoint emphasis)

Possible explanations

- **Different purposes:**
 - Matthew emphasizes royal/Abraham–David messianic credentials
 - Luke emphasizes universal scope (back to Adam)
- **Different lines:**
 - One may follow Joseph's legal line
 - The other Mary's family line (common Christian explanation; not provable, but plausible). Luke does emphasize Mary in his narrative.
- **Levirate/legal relationships:** Ancient genealogies can follow legal lineage, not only biological descent. This explanation assumes Joseph had two fathers:
 - a biological father (his actual parent)
 - a legal father (through levirate marriage or similar inheritance customs)

How do we transition from knowing about Jesus to knowing Jesus?

Why is it important to know about a person before you can know them deeply?

How do you usually come to know about a person?

What moves a relationship from knowing about someone to really knowing them?

What do the Gospels want us to know about Jesus?

How do we move from knowing about him to knowing him?

Would anyone be willing to share how Jesus became personally real in your life?



Knowing Jesus personally
and deeply

Here are some of my main takeaways from this Gospel series

I ended Mark with Jesus touching the untouchable

Questions?

I ended Matthew with Jesus calling us to come to him

I ended Luke with the image of God (Jesus) running towards the lost to welcome us home

I ended John with Thomas's confession of faith, "My Lord and my God!"

Today we talked about apparent contradictions and about how we not only need to know about Jesus, but we also need to know him.

The Gospels were written, not only to inform our minds, but also to bring us into faith, love, obedience, and communion with the living Christ.