

## **The Resurrection of Christ and the History of Redemption**

In our last lesson we talked about the intention of Jesus. We came up with four major elements to the intention of Jesus. First, He intended to be called and considered the Messiah. Second, He intended to teach people as well as perform His ministry, including miracles. He intended to be crucified. And He intended to be resurrected. All those things were very much in the intention of Jesus. When we talked about teaching, I highlighted one specific aspect of Jesus' teaching in the parables of Jesus. We looked at Luke chapter 15 together and some of the parables there.

There are two main things I want you to remember about parables. The first is that they generally make one, maybe two or three points, and that is it. Generally, if there is a main character, that corresponds to the point being made. If there are two main characters, then you might have two main points being made. If there are three main characters, you might have three main points being made. But generally, the details in the parable, although they contribute to the meaning of the parable, should not be understood as if you needed to apply each of the details. There are major points that are made in the parables. If you stay with the main points, you are doing much better than if you get lost in the details.

The second point I think I made was that the parables should be interpreted in their context in the Gospels. For example, in Luke chapter 15 with the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son, it is especially important with the prodigal son to remember that at the beginning of the chapter there are many Pharisees running around. The Pharisees are disappointed with Jesus because He sits, eats, and has ministry among tax gatherers and sinners. Thus the elder brother in the prodigal son parable refers, probably, to the Pharisees and to those who, like the Pharisees, would be inclined to say, "I wonder why they are in the kingdom?" That comes from understanding the parable in its context.

I want to further that by doing a brief homily on Luke chapter 16 as we begin our lesson. I want to sustain those points again. There is effectively one main point being made by a parable, and you need to read parables in context. Let us read first the parable of the unrighteous steward, at the beginning of Luke chapter 16. I will start in 16:1:

Now He was also saying to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and this manager was reported to him as squandering his possessions.

And he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.'

The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg.

I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes.'

And he summoned each one of his master's debtors, and he began saying to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'

Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'

And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light.

That is the end of the parable. Now Jesus will explain it:

And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings.

He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.

Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?

And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?

No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

This is a parable. The parable itself is one of the most difficult, I guess we could say, of all of Jesus' parables. There is this man who is charged with squandering his master's possessions. We do not really know at the beginning of the parable whether that charge is true or not, but we know the master is punishing him for it; he will toss him out of his stewardship. So the man makes these backhanded deals with his master's debtors, and his master praises him for it because he is shrewd. What is going on? And then Jesus has this lengthy explanation that seems to make several points. It ends up with something we can all affirm since it is in the Sermon on the Mount: "You cannot serve God and wealth [or, Mammon]." Where did that come from, in relationship to the parable? I want to suggest to you that this parable is very important for transitioning us from the material in Luke chapter 15 into the point that Jesus makes at the end of chapter 16. We could get lost in all the details of the parable. For example, is there significance to the fact that the steward forgives the debt of oil at 50% and the debt of wheat at 80%? And, what is it that caused the master to praise this man? And especially, is what the steward does here—cutting the debts of his master's debtors—legitimate or not? In what sense would it be legitimate, if it is?

There have been a variety of responses to the question of the legitimacy of what the steward does here. One possibility is that he is simply lying. He has a few more days in the role of steward, even though he is being ushered out the door. So he quickly makes some backhanded deals, and in doing so he acts as the agent of the master. Then the master no longer has the legal right to go back to those debtors and say, "I know my steward said you could pay 50%, but I want the full 100%." Thus there is the possibility that the master legally cannot reverse this. Or, there is another possibility that since the steward made these backhanded deals the master would then look bad if he came back to these debtors and said, "I know part of your debt was relinquished and you have the legal right to just pay me 50%, but I want the full 100%." That might look bad. That is another possibility.

There is another possibility that has been suggested. This one appeals to people, especially commentators, because it sounds like the steward is not as bad as we think he is. The suggestion is that it was illegal in Judaism to charge interest. So I could not make you a loan of 100 shekels and charge you 20%, expecting you to pay me back 120 shekels. This is still illegal, in some respects, in Islamic law. The way people get around that is to make a deal this way: if you need 100 shekels, you come to me, and I will give you 100 shekels. As I hand you the money, I look you in the eye and say, "I just gave you 120 shekels, did I not?" And you say, "Yes." Then I say, "When you come to repay me, you will pay me 120, right?" "Yes." In making that deal I have not charged you interest *per se*; I have simply said that I was loaning you 120 shekels, but I only gave you 100. Everyone understands how that works. It is a way of circumventing the interest laws. That is a practice that continues to happen in the Middle East. It is difficult, however, to evidence whether that practice went on in first-century Judaism. Thus I am not confident that is what is happening. But if that is what is happening, then the idea would be that the

steward is coming back to the debtors to say, "I know we said 120, but you and I both know it was only 100, so just pay back the 100." Thus he would be going back to what the law of the Old Testament actually permits. That is a possibility.

I would submit to you that there is a sense in which the question of legitimacy does not really matter. In the responses to this question, we are trying to determine whether the steward is a righteous steward or not, whether or not he is doing rightly. But the text actually tells us that he is an unrighteous steward. It says so in verse 8: "And his master praised the unrighteous steward..." Now, your translations may have rendered that slightly differently, but the Greek specifically says, "...unrighteous steward [or manager]." The text tells us he is unrighteous. Then it goes on to tell us he acted shrewdly. This is interesting, because that makes it difficult for translators to come up with captions for this. It may be that in your Bibles there is a caption at the beginning of this parable. My caption says, "The unrighteous steward." Does anyone have a different caption? "The shrewd manager" is the other option. The question is, is he unrighteous or is he shrewd? The answer from the text is that he is both. The text in verse 8 says, "And his master praised the unrighteous steward because he acted shrewdly." He is acting wisely. The point that comes out of this parable follows in verse 9: "The sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light." There is a sense in which this man acted so wisely that we can learn from the wisdom that he evidences, even if he is unrighteous at the same time.

The question then becomes this: what can we learn from him? What did he do that was right? Let me retell the story just slightly. The steward will be tossed out into the darkness, effectively, outside the house of his master. This means he will no longer have a place to live. This is because, as a steward, he probably lived on his master's property. He probably also got all his food and money from this job. His whole life will disappear. Thus he needs to find another house where he can go. Now, that probably means more than simply a place to lay his head. He may actually be looking for another place to work. So he goes to the debtors, and they become, in a sense, indebted to him. Thus they will welcome him into their house. The whole parable has to do with being welcomed into a house.

In light of that, let us read Jesus' explanation and see if we can figure out what is going on: "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings." Apart from the question of what is the mammon of unrighteousness?, let us remember that He has tied his point very well back to the parable. The man uses mammon, or money, in the parable to gain for himself a house once he gets thrown out of his current house. Jesus is saying, "Use money in such a way that you will have an eternal house when you are all done with this life." That is the point. Then he goes on to say, "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much." Thus this ultimately has to do with faithfulness and unrighteousness.

The question is what are we being called to be faithful in or not to be unrighteous in? Jesus goes on, "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth [or money], who will entrust the true riches to you? And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?" Then to drive home the point, Jesus concludes by saying, "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." What is going on? It seems to have to do with money and being faithful in our use of money as opposed to being unrighteous in our use of money. If we faithfully use the money that has been entrusted to us, which is not really ours but belongs to someone else (namely, God), then we earn for ourselves eternal dwellings as we have shown our faithfulness.

Now, I said that this whole parable needs to be tied to what came before in chapter 15 and that it provides a transition for us to the end of chapter 16. What do I mean by that? What comes next, right after verse 13? Verse 14 begins, “Now the Pharisees...” Where did we last meet the Pharisees? In chapter 15, where they were listening to Jesus. They were tied into the last parable in chapter 15 as the older brother. In its entirety, 16:14 says, “Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.” They were scoffing at Him because they loved money and they did not hear this right teaching about how money should be used. Just to show you that the Pharisees are in place, Jesus then says to the Pharisees in verse 15, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.” “That which is highly esteemed among men” seems to refer to money. It is detestable in the sight of God, perhaps even to the point of being “unrighteous mammon” (or wealth) as it is referred to in the prior passage. Money can even be viewed from one angle as if it in itself is in one sense evil, because it is so prone to being misused. Then Jesus continues in verses 16 and 17, “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.”

Then Jesus makes this strange aside in verse 18, in the midst of all this: “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.” It seems that Jesus is off on a different topic there. Then the next parable seems to be wholly separate. But I would suggest to you that He is still on the topic of dealing with Pharisees. Remember that many lessons ago we talked about Pharisees and their views of divorce and how easy it could be to get a divorce in Pharisaic law. Thus He is after them not just about their view of money, but also their view of divorce. In other words, He is continuing to address the Pharisees.

Then Jesus tells us another parable. This parable comes back to the issue of money. This is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. I hope you are familiar with this parable; I will not go back now and tell it to you. Basically, there is a rich man and Lazarus. The rich man refuses to give money to Lazarus. Again, one of the most important things in Judaism was almsgiving. This was a show of your righteousness. It was what you should do with your money. Lazarus is lying outside the gates of the city, dying. The rich man—who is rich, he has money—refuses to give from any of his riches to Lazarus. Lazarus dies and gets to be in the bosom of the father Abraham. The rich man dies, and he goes to a very different place. The rich man begs that he would be able to go back and talk to his family, his brothers, to warn them about this place of torment. But Abraham says in verse 29, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” Now, who had Moses and the Prophets? All Israel, certainly, but so did the Pharisees. Then the rich man says in verse 30, “But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’” Who is Jesus talking about there? He is talking about Himself, His resurrection. The point is that the Pharisees are still very much in Jesus’ mind all the way through chapter 16. He is telling them, “Even if I rise from the dead, you will not believe.” Their hearts were hard. However, let us not also lose the other major theme of chapter 16. What was it that the rich man did wrong? He did not give money to Lazarus. He did not use his unrighteous mammon to provide for himself an eternal dwelling where people will welcome him when he goes there. The result is that the rich man goes some place very different, and Lazarus, who could have been the one to welcome him into an eternal dwelling, does not do so.

Going back, then, to the initial parable of the unrighteous steward, how should we use our money? That is the question that comes out of this. The answer is that we should use our money faithfully, not allowing it to inhibit our worship of God (for man cannot serve both God and money). And especially,

we should use it for the benefit of others so that when we go to our eternal home there will be people who will welcome us there because we were faithful to give to them and provide for them in their hour of need. I would submit to you that the Western church in particular needs to hear this today. I had a very interesting lunch a couple weeks ago with a friend of mine who is from South Africa and teaches there. We were talking about the church, and I asked him to contrast his African perspective on the Western church. The first thing he said was that he thinks the Western church is highly materialistic. And I have to say that he is right. We have so much money that we hardly know what to do with it. I think the question God would ask us right now is are we being faithful with what He has given us? Are we making eternal dwellings and securing people who will welcome us into those by our use of the money we have stewardship over for a very brief time? The money is not even ours. That is, by the way, a major theme in the Gospel of Luke and Acts. We have begun to scratch the surface of a theological theme, a theological emphasis, in Luke and Acts. I personally find this to be a very convicting set of parables.

I understand the overall pattern of Jesus' dealings with the Pharisees in chapters 15 to 16 to be like this: In chapter 15 He is on them about how they do not welcome the tax gatherers and sinners, even though they should rejoice as their Father in heaven rejoices when one who was lost comes into the fold. Then at the beginning of chapter 16 He is on them about money. Then they finally wake up and start scoffing at Him about "What does this man know about the use of money?" After all, He was an itinerant preacher who did not have much money. Thus it would seem hardly fair for Him to be talking to them about money. Jesus comes back to them directly and hammers them on one area where they are particularly weak, namely divorce. Then He goes back and fills out His teaching about money and wealth in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. That is how I see the whole thing flowing. The mention of adultery is also another indictment of the Pharisees because Jesus is saying that they promote adultery.

I would say that the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is about heaven and hell. When I say that the rich man went to a very different place, I mean that he went to hell. That is assumed in this parable. Now, I grant that this is not theologically teaching us a doctrine of heaven and hell. But it is presuming the existence of heaven and hell, and thus it becomes an argument for the existence of hell and its horrors. Maybe I was soft-pedaling this too much. Do you realize how scary this is? Jesus is saying, "Your eternal home rests on your faithfulness in the use of unrighteous mammon." Now, certainly there is forgiveness in the Gospel and all that. I do not want to say that salvation is predicated on our almsgiving. I do not think Jesus is going that far. Rather, He is talking to people who are of the nation of Israel. To some of them He is basically saying, "You are out of the kingdom." To others He is saying, "You are in the kingdom." And He is instructing both. He shows that for those who are out of the kingdom one of the great sins that shows they should be out of the kingdom is that they do not use their money rightly. But He is also teaching those who are in the kingdom how they should use their money rightly. Thus I do not think it is almsgiving that puts them in or out of the kingdom. But the almsgiving becomes indicative of what is in their hearts, which has been produced by grace. This is very serious material. This indictment of the materialism of the Western church is perhaps much more serious than we realize. We think it is a matter of "We did not give quite enough." But Jesus points to an attitude of the heart that is literally a difference between heaven and hell.

Let us pray for a moment, and then we will move into our topic for the day.

*Father, as we approach these parables, we recognize indeed the great sinfulness of our hearts that would hold onto the possessions we have. Where we may feel ourselves free from the love of money, we are constantly amazed at how much our belongings can indeed have a hold over us. Father, we ask that*

*You would enable us as Your people to relinquish that hold, that we might use our money to great avail for the spreading of Your kingdom. Beyond that, Lord, we ask that we would not have the attitude of the Pharisees who would so love money and who would so despise those who come into their gathering that, when they are so different from us, we cannot appreciate Your work in the hearts of repentant sinners. Father, instead use us to Your glory. And as we ourselves come to You repentant and recognizing the deep sinfulness of our hearts, we are thankful that Jesus stands, having paid for our sins and having offered us new life in Him. In His name we pray. Amen.*

Again, with these homilies I am also trying to make methodological points. I do this so that you will get a sense not only of what this one text means, but also of how you should go about reading Scripture. One of my points in this lesson is how to read parables. Do not stop and start with the verses that contain the parable. Look at the context and see how the parable is functioning in the whole story of the narrative of the Gospel writer. The Gospel writer very often will give you keys as to how you should rightly understand the parable by putting it into a particular context. So be careful to look at the context.

Let me do one more thing before we get into our topic for this lesson. I want to speak briefly about the resurrection of Christ and the history of redemption. This is mostly for your background information. How many times have you heard a sermon on the resurrection in October? How many times does the resurrection come up in your proclamation of the Gospel in August? That is the real indicator of the degree to which you are stamped by the understanding that our Jesus is not just crucified for our sins, but is raised that we might have new life—and the combination of that is what constitutes the Gospel. We should speak of the resurrection 365 days of the year. That is the major point I want to make about this. The resurrection of Jesus came in an historical context of resurrections in the Old Testament and as a glimpse of a doctrine of resurrection from the Old Testament.

There was a diversity of views in second-temple Judaism with regard to resurrection. The Sadducees did not believe resurrection for any of us. On the other side of the debate, the Pharisees taught a doctrine of the resurrection. There is some clear evidence of that in second-temple Judaism. Jesus intended to be resurrected. I made that point last time, but it is worth reiterating. Part of Jesus' ministry was the empty tomb and His ascension. His ministry was not accomplished until the ascension happened because He intended all of that to be part of His ministry and work. There are different emphases in the different Gospel accounts of the resurrection. It is very common in evangelical circles in the United States for the Easter sermon to include an apologetic for the resurrection, that Jesus actually, physically rose from the dead and that we can historically trust that. I would affirm that this is something we all as Christians should be prepared to defend, especially in a culture that is increasingly skeptical about that claim. You should be able to prepare to defend the resurrection. One of the books I can suggest to you is *Risen Indeed*, by Stephen Davis. There are many short apologetic books on the resurrection, such as the one by Josh McDowell. But *Risen Indeed* in particular is a very laymen-friendly and also philosophically astute defense of the resurrection. If you are interested in pursuing this further, I would encourage you to try to get that book.

The main point I would make, because it is often lost in the typical resurrection apologetics and because it is often doubted in our world today, is that first-century Christians were not stupid. People will rarely say, "Matthew was stupid." But they will effectively imply it when they say something like this: "We view history very differently than they did in the first century. In the first century they were inclined to believe that miracles happened all the time. Of course we, in our scientific world, realize that is not the case. And when they wrote history, they were happy to include miraculous events whether they happened or not, simply because if they heard something happened they figure it must have happened. Thus they included the resurrection."

You will hear that repeatedly in the United States, in *Time*, *News Week*, on the airwaves of our national television stations, etc. You should be prepared to say to people, “You know, they were not stupid in the first century.” I have a variety of evidences about that. In particular, in 1 Corinthians 15 in his discussion of the resurrection, Paul understands what is at stake. If the resurrection did not historically happen, the faith is useless. He is willing to take a stand on the historical reliability of the resurrection, presenting evidence in the form of witnesses to say, “This happened,” because he understands that if it did not historically happen, the whole thing is useless. There were people who doubted. Remember Matthew 28? When people see the resurrected Lord they fall on their knees and worship—but, Matthew tells us, some doubted. Matthew understands that there were alternate theories circulating in his day that had a certain amount of explanatory force. Namely, the disciples stole the body. That has quite a lot of explanatory force—except if you realize some of the other issues, that the body was guarded and such. But the point is that there were other alternative explanations circulating in Matthew’s day. This means that he did not just buy into the idea of the resurrection. There were other ways to think about it, and he knew there were other ways to think about it. My point is that they were not stupid.

I have a few other points to make on this topic. It is very important that you develop a healthy respect for the quality of history we have in the Gospels and the book of Acts. It is a history written with different protocols than we use today. They did not footnote their sources, for example. But that does not mean they did not understand the importance of sources and the importance of sourcing out the historical claim. It is very much the opposite. We will see that especially as we study the prologue to the Gospel of Luke in the next couple of lessons. These people were much wiser than we tend to think.

Finally, I am interested that you understand there are a variety of theological implications for the resurrection. There is not just one reason for the resurrection. There is a whole host of reasons that are actually used in Scripture for the resurrection. My daughter has a coloring book put out by a well-known Christian publisher. It was given her by my parents. It is essentially a Gospel presentation in the form a coloring book. It is cute and well done. It affirms that we are sinful; it affirms our need for Christ and salvation, the need to repent and follow Jesus. But nowhere in the 15 pages does it mention that Jesus was raised from the dead.

I would submit to you that this is actually very common in most Protestant, evangelical presentations of the Gospel. Often the pastor at the very end of the sermon will say, “Remember your sinfulness, remember that it was paid on the cross; you need to come to Christ today,” and they are done. That is not the full Gospel. There are many places in the New Testament where the Gospel is summarized not with the death of Jesus but the resurrection of Jesus. That is what constitutes the Gospel. Be careful of that. Please understand that I do not want to impeach the motives of those who summarize the Gospel the way I have described. I have heard some of my favorite pastors give short Gospel presentations that just focus on the death of Jesus. They are really earnest about convincing people that they need to come to Christ. But if you do it too often, it is dangerous because you forget that there is a whole other aspect to the Gospel as well. I myself have done this.

Now we come to our topic for this lesson. The question is why do we have four Gospels? First of all, let us theoretically say there did not have to be four. In point of fact, some Syriac-speaking churches in the second century chose to use a summary of the four Gospels rather than the four Gospels themselves. This summary was produced by a man named Tatian. He wrote a work called *The Diatessaron*. In Greek *tessera* is “four,” *dia* is “through.” Thus the title of Tatian’s summary of the Gospels means “through four.” What he did was he wove together the four canonical Gospels into one harmonized, continuous narrative. If you ever see something called a harmony of the Gospels, that is an interweaving of the four

Gospels into one narrative. People produce those to this day. I reviewed one a few years ago. Tatian produced his *Diatessaron* around 150 AD. It was done in Greek and also translated into Syriac. Some of the Syriac churches so liked having one book instead of four that they simply used it instead of the Gospels. But the vast majority of the church has always said, “We have four canonical Gospels. Even though we can harmonize them, we do not treat the harmony as if it were canonical. We treat the Gospels as canonical.” That is the approach the church has taken. But in theory at least, one could bring the Gospels together. People have long realized that Matthew, Mark, and Luke share a substantial amount of the same material. And actually, the percentage of the material that is in Mark that is also in Matthew and Luke is close to 90% of the book. So why not just have one Gospel? Maybe we see a need for Matthew and Luke, but why not have Matthew, Luke, and John, and not Mark? The question is why do we have four rather than one or two or three? One could also ask why we do not have more. But that is a question I tried to answer more firmly in our discussion of the canon many lessons ago. Thus, there is a limitation on the Gospels, but why do we have four instead of one? That is the fundamental question I am asking now.

Fundamentally, there are four Gospels because the early church recognized the canonical voice of each of the four. That is the fundamental reason. They saw the apostolic stamp on each of the four Gospels. They could also tell that they each complement the picture of one another, and this is crucial. I know I have used this illustration before, but it bears repeating because it is very important in understanding the role the Gospels play. That is, the metaphor of a diamond. If you look at a diamond, a large piece of rock that has been beautifully cut, if you look at it from one end, the light hits and refracts through it so that you see these beautiful colors. But when you start to turn it, you see even more aspects of the diamond as you view it from different perspectives. Effectively, the Gospels allow us to view the Gospel of Jesus from different perspectives. They all refer to the diamond—the life and times of Jesus. They each look at that diamond from a particular viewpoint, from their own perspective. The result is that they each have their own emphasis, but they are looking at the same material. From this we get a fuller picture than we would if we only had one person’s take on the diamond. That is the effective reason for having the four Gospels. We have them because they are in the canon. They are in the canon because they each bear the apostolic stamp. By that I mean Matthew and John were apostles and John and Luke have the apostolic stamp of having worked with Paul and Peter. Through all of this, we have an apostolically sanctioned canonical set of four Gospels that each complement one another. Thus, although the church recognized very early on that there was significant overlap in terms of the narrative, they still chose to have four different narratives of the life of Jesus. That is fundamentally why we have four Gospels.

Nevertheless, moving into the so-called “synoptic problem,” there are three Gospels that are very much alike. In this lesson we will focus on these three Gospels. The synoptic Gospels are Matthew, Mark and Luke. They are known as the synoptic Gospels because if you put them alongside one another in what is called a synopsis, you will see that they overlap substantially in their content. A “harmony” takes the four Gospels and blends them into one continuous narrative. A “synopsis” puts the Gospels in parallel columns to allow you to compare and contrast what is being emphasized in each of the Gospels. The three Gospels that can most easily be put in a synopsis are Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

There are both similarities and differences between the synoptic Gospels. There is a similarity in wording, a similarity in order, and a similarity in parenthetical material. There are also similarities in New Testament quotations from the Old Testament. Basically, the narrative structure of Mark is paralleled in Matthew and Luke. However, they have material that is not in Mark, and that additional material is structured differently in Matthew and Luke. Matthew has five great discourses—such as the Sermon on the Mount, which is the first—where he brings all of the material of Jesus’ teaching on a few topics

together into one continuous teaching time. Matthew does this at five different times in his Gospel. Again, the structure of the action in Matthew follows Mark, but Matthew then interposes teachings of Jesus in between the action that is described in Mark. Luke also follows the basic action structure from Mark and also includes much of the teaching material that is in Matthew (and some that is distinct to Luke). But he puts much of Jesus' teaching together in chapters 9 to 19, roughly the time when Jesus comes to Jerusalem. In those chapters, as Jesus is walking to Jerusalem with his disciples, he teaches them on various topics. Thus there are similarities in order, but there are also some distinctives. Matthew and Luke are, obviously, much longer than Mark, but they contain much of the material that is in Mark.

I also said there is a similarity in parenthetical material. In other words, at times in Jesus' teaching there are brief asides, and there are similarities in that material. It is not as if there was some sort of abstract teaching source as the main source for all the Gospels, because beyond the teaching, the action and parenthetical material in the teaching are paralleled in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Finally, I mentioned similarities in New Testament quotations from the Old Testament. These quotations are similar even when they differ from a natural rendering of the Hebrew.

All of the similarities between the synoptic Gospels are very striking, especially when you stop to consider the percentages. I do not have the numbers in front of me, so the percentages I am about to give you are based on my recollection and may not be entirely accurate. Roughly 90% of Mark is found in Matthew or Luke, and often in both. If you break that down further, Matthew and Luke each incorporate about 70% of what is found in Mark. They do not both use 90% of Mark—they each use about 70%. But together they use 90% of Mark. You will find, then, times when Matthew follows Mark or has the same material as Mark but Luke does not—and *vice versa*. The vast majority of Mark, then, is found in the other synoptics. That is one striking similarity. These similarities have led people to say there must be literary dependence between the three Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In other words, at least one of the Gospels came first and the others used it as a source. At this stage I would say that is possible. We will talk more about source theories later.

Now I want to give you some qualifications on the similarities as it pertains to the “synoptic Problem.” These similarities are not found consistently throughout the three synoptic Gospels. In other words, you cannot predict based on those statistics alone that a passage in Mark will definitely make its way into Matthew or Luke. Moreover, even where those passages are parallel in Matthew and Mark, or Luke and Mark, or Matthew and Luke, etc., although there are often striking similarities in wording, there are also often striking divergences. These divergences are not usually such that they would change the meaning of a passage, but they are more commonly things like using a synonym. For example, one Gospel may say that “Jesus ran,” while another Gospel may say that “Jesus went.” Thus there are similarities in wording but there are also differences in wording.

The question is how do we account for the differences as well as the similarities? One example of this is the passion accounts in the synoptics. If you put the passages from Matthew, Mark, and Luke beside each other in parallel columns (as in a synopsis), you will see that there are times when Luke has material the others do not. There are times when Matthew and Mark agree on a citation but Luke does not have it or has it much later. And if you look at the individual words in each of these accounts, you will see what I mean about the striking similarities as well as, at times, remarkable divergences between the actual words. You can do the same sort of synopsis analysis with the accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper. Here you will see some ordering differences, some material in Luke that is not in Matthew and Mark and *vice versa*, as well as similarities and differences in the specific words. This gives you an example of how you yourself could do some of this work between the three synoptic Gospels.

The “synoptic Problem,” then, is why is there so much similarity and yet divergence? How can we best figure this out? There are some proposed solutions to the problem. The initial set of solutions in the history of New Testament scholarship typically revolved around literary sources. They assumed that, for instance, the Gospel writers used one another as literary sources, and they may have used other literary sources alongside of that. In the history of the church, the first major solution to the “synoptic Problem” (though it certainly was not framed in those terms) was that Matthew’s Gospel came first, and other Gospel writers used Matthew as a source and chose to supplement him or emphasize aspects that were in Matthew in different ways. This is especially found in the early church writers Irenaeus and Eusebius. We talked about Eusebius with regard to the canon. A more studied approach to this can be found in the teachings of Augustine. This came up very early in the church—this idea that Matthew came first and that Mark and Luke used him as a source. There are variations on this in contemporary teachings. Augustine’s view was that Matthew came first, Mark used Matthew, and then Luke used Mark. You can see why he might come to this conclusion. The striking similarities in Luke and Matthew typically revolve around the action that you find in Mark. That provides the narrative framework in which the teachings of Jesus come. Therefore, if Matthew came first—as Irenaeus and Eusebius had testified, because he was Jewish and wrote initially in Aramaic and later was translated into Greek—and if Mark made a sort of summary statement of Matthew, then Luke would use Mark. That would account for why Matthew and Luke are similar to Mark in the structure of the narrative. It would also explain why Luke and Matthew diverge from one another on where they place the teachings of Jesus. That is Augustine’s form.

There is another form that is technically known as the Griesbach hypothesis. That form is basically this: Matthew came first, Luke used Matthew, and then Mark used Luke and Matthew. With this form, Griesbach is trying to note that apart from the overall structure of the narrative, there are times when Matthew and Luke contain material that is not found in Mark, but Matthew and Luke’s wording is strikingly similar. Therefore, Luke must have had some access to Matthew or *vice versa*. Thus this is what Griesbach suggests. He says that Mark produced a quick summary statement of both Matthew and Luke, focusing on the action of the narrative. That takes us through the Matthean priority. The reason it is called Matthean priority is because Matthew is postulated to have come first.

Next time we will talk about Markan priority. At this stage, I want you to leave thinking about whether it is possible that there is literary dependence between the synoptic Gospels. I am not yet definitively saying that there is or that we have come across the right solution. I am just saying that it is worth considering.