

**Gospels, Continued**

Before we move into our subject for today, I will pray for us. Let us go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, as we reflect on our Lord Jesus, we are thankful that You chose in Your great providence to bring Him at a time when people would observe and record faithfully, from a variety of perspectives on who Jesus was and what He did. As we desire to worship the risen, crucified Lord, the one who is the incarnate Son of God, the one who is worthy of all worship, this is extremely helpful to us. Thus Lord, we thank You for Your divine plan, evidenced in the four Gospels we have. Father, I would ask that today as we seek to better understand who Jesus is that You would also give us insight into how we can best approach the Gospels. Father, I know that this is a conversation the church has had for centuries. So we pray that You would illuminate all of us, including me, as we seek to understand the Gospels and better glorify You. Use this class to that end. In Your wonderful name, Amen.*

Last time we started to talk about the similarities and dissimilarities between the Gospel narratives. I had mentioned that, especially with Matthew, Mark, and Luke, you can look at passages that are parallel to each other. These parallel passages will have many similarities in wording. Occasionally there are divergences in wording as well. I want to give you an example of that. Often these parallel passages are quite complex. I am using what is called synopsis that has Matthew, Mark, and Luke in parallel columns. This is meant to help us do a comparison.

As an example, let us discuss the story of the healing of the leper as it appears in Matthew 8:1-4, Mark 1:40-45, and Luke 5:12-16. For my study I have underlined in different colors to help compare these three accounts of the same story. I used different colors to show where there is distinct material and where there is material that overlaps, specifically in terms of wording. The word “*lepros*” appears in all three traditions. The word “*legon*” also appears in all three. The phrase “*me katharizo*,” which means “if you are willing to cleanse me,” shows up verbatim in all three traditions. If you go through these three passages, what you have is a narrative that is very similar in all three—on the surface. They all talk about the cleansing of the leper. But only at a few, key junctures is the wording identical between all three traditions. But, then, it is very striking that the wording can be identical between all three traditions, especially since there are different ways to say these things in Greek. They instead use the exact same verbal forms and such. In terms of percentages, there is a high percentage of material that is the same. When you look at individual words, the picture becomes much more complex in terms of the relationships between the different Gospels. The same story is in all three Gospels, and at times the exact same wording is used in all three Gospels, but there are many aspects of each telling of the story that put it in its own words. Now, that does not mean that when you read these passages in your translation of the Bible you will get three very different impressions of what is going on. The differences are effectively slight. And yet, the authors are most often using different words to communicate the same thing.

That is some of the complexity you get when looking at parallel passages in the synoptic Gospels. The point I am trying to make is that there are similarities and differences. This issue is much more complex than people sometimes suggest by saying things like, “90% of Mark is in Matthew and Luke.” Then you have to ask, 90% of what? Is it that 90% of the storyline of Mark is in Matthew, but it becomes much more hazy when you come to the individual words? This all has to do with determining the likeliness of literary dependence between the Gospels. Therefore we will talk more about that in a moment.

Let us move on to our discussion. Where I left our discussion last time was when I brought up the idea of the synoptic problem. That problem is, effectively, why is it that Matthew, Mark, and Luke share such

similarities and yet at times are so different from one another? That is the synoptic problem. I started last time to give you some proposed solutions, especially literary solutions. One idea is that Matthew came first and was copied by Mark and Luke. There is also the Augustinian formulation of it: Matthew came first, Mark drew on Matthew, and then Luke drew on Mark. Or there is the Griesbach hypothesis: Matthew came first, then Luke, and then Mark drew on each of those. All these different ways of viewing the synoptic Gospels assumes that Matthew came first. One of the reasons the idea that Matthew came first is so appealing to people is because a number of early church fathers maintained that Matthew wrote the first Gospel, and he wrote it in Aramaic, which was then the common language in Palestine. The fathers who supported this tradition included Irenaeus in the second century (within 100 years of the time of the Gospels), Eusebius at the end of the third century, and later Augustine. Thus we have some fairly early church tradition that says Matthew came first. Many people are attracted to that idea based on the strength of the historical remembrances of the church alone. It should be said that 100 years passed between the time Matthew would have been writing and the time when Irenaeus was writing, which is a long time. Now, whether Irenaeus had reliable evidence of Matthew being the first Gospel is a different issue, and one that has had some complexity in its discussion.

The view that is most popular today among modern scholarship is Markan priority, the view that Mark came first. Usually the view is like this: Mark came first, Matthew used Mark, and Luke used Mark. The main problem with that view is that there are a number of instances, especially from the teachings of Jesus and also some miracles, that show up in both Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark. So how is it that both Matthew and Luke have the same material, at times with very similar if not identical wording, if all they had in common between them is Mark? The most common formulation of this is called the Two-Source hypothesis. This postulates another literary source that we do not have anymore. Some of you may speak or have studied German, and you will know that the German word for "source" is *quelle*, which begins with the letter "q." Therefore people have identified this postulated source as "Q," short for the German, *quelle*. The idea of this view is that Matthew and Mark both drew, independently of each other, on Mark and Q. That is the Two-Source hypothesis.

If Matthew came first, then the amount of material in Mark that overlaps with Matthew is explained by saying that he excerpted it from Matthew. Also, the further agreement between Matthew and Luke, especially on some of the sayings of Jesus, could also have come from Luke reading Matthew. Thus, in a sense, each of these views that understand Matthew as coming first works fairly well, although the Augustinian proposal is the most problematic. This is because if Luke is only using Mark, then how did he end up with some of the same sayings and other materials as are in Matthew? But the other views that have Matthew coming first have much explanatory force on their own. However, the views that put Mark first have to postulate an additional literary source that Matthew and Luke share. That, again, is the Two-Source hypothesis.

Now, a further variation on this is related to the Two-Source hypothesis. It is a proposal that tries to explain why there is material that only shows up in Matthew and other material that only shows up in Luke. Where did that material come from? If you are working in a paradigm that assumes Matthew and Luke were just assimilating the material they had in front of them and weaving those materials together, and they were dealing entirely or almost entirely with literary sources, then you will come up with a literary solution to this problem. Therefore proposals from people working from this paradigm postulate that Matthew had an additional literary source, M, and Luke had an additional hypothetical literary source, L. These hypothetical sources are one way of explaining the material that is unique to Matthew and to Luke. M and L stand for Matthew and Luke, but they are understood to be sort of proto-Matthew and proto-Luke. This proposal is called the Four-Source hypothesis. This is because it postulates four sources, Mark, Q, M, and L, as being necessary to construct Matthew and Luke.

These are the various literary proposals. Let me stress one more time that these proposals assume, especially with regard to Matthew and Luke, that they used literary sources almost exclusively. That is largely because source criticism often assumes that the final form of Matthew and Luke came in the second century. Thus source critics are most often not thinking of Matthew and Luke as being written, in their final form, by Matthew an apostle and Luke the follower of Paul. Luke is sometimes thought of as being written by Luke the follower of Paul, but Matthew is thought of as being written by the Matthewian community. Many of these literary source proposals are assuming that we are not dealing with eye-witnesses, at least when it comes to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Therefore at this stage we are not talking about any kind of oral tradition; we are only talking about literary sources. Let me also say that I plan on evaluating all of this later in this lesson. But at this point I just want you to know what people are saying.

One of the issues that arises out of all of this is when would you date the Gospels? If you date the Gospels early then the question arises of why we need the hypothetical sources of M and L. Another question we could ask is why do we have to work with entirely literary sources? If these people were eye-witnesses, then why did they need written sources? The church has historically said Luke was a follower of Paul, and also in contact with Peter, and Mark was initially a follower of Paul (John-Mark) and became more closely associated with Barnabas and especially Peter later in his ministry. With Luke sitting at the feet of Paul and Mark sitting at the feet of Peter, they were receiving very good oral tradition about what went on in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Notice that I just switched it. We are no longer talking about literary sources; we are talking about oral traditions, the telling of the story orally. Part of the switch of moving from literary sources came at the beginning of the twentieth century. Within a couple of decades many scholars had moved to considering more oral traditions in the church. This switch came about because of the way modern thought moved from considering everything as literary to recognizing oral tradition more. Entering into the twentieth century, what was the paradigm of learning? It was to write a really good book. You knew you were smart if you had written a really good book with many footnotes. When scholars whose whole lives revolved around literature looked at people telling stories to one another, especially backwoods, folklore sorts of stories, they thought, "Well, that is not very scholarly or historical." They were thinking in terms of written sources.

Toward the beginning of the twentieth century, scholarship moved to studying folklore. An interest in oral traditions and how they are passed down in oral societies began to develop. Effectively, there was a greater appreciation for folklore and oral cultures. There was a kind of switch in terms of scholarly interest. That opened up the possibility for biblical scholars to approach the Bible from an oral perspective and to say, "Even if we grant that Matthew and Luke were drawing on Mark and possibly another literary source (such as Q), still much of what they wrote could have come from oral tellings and re-tellings of stories in the early Christian community." Because of the changing trend in scholarship, this was not considered an inherently flawed proposal. Thus there was a shift to thinking about oral traditions in the Gospels. However, in studying folklore people also noted that as folklore progresses from generation to generation, emphasis and stories might change. So there were people interested in writing down stories from oral tradition, such as the Grimm fairy tales, but there was also a recognition that these stories change over time. If that is the case, what causes the change? Some people would say that the community itself shapes the way a story is told. The community may be struggling with particular issues. The community may be seeing its own demise as modern cultures are coming in and increasingly taking over rural territory. Or there may be crises because of the use of certain weaponry as opposed to other weaponry. Or there may be crisis because of the breakdown of marriage. These sorts of issues influence the way communities construct oral stories. Though the community might continue to

tell the same story, such as Hansel and Gretel, the story takes on a different life as it goes down through different generations. This is how scholars are thinking in terms of oral tradition.

In my mind, the shift of attention from literary tradition to oral tradition is actually very helpful. One of the major analogous situations in first-century Judaism in terms of the passing down of teachings is from rabbinic tradition, the tradition of the rabbis. The Mishna, written in 200 AD, says again and again, "Rabbi Achivah said this..." or "The school of Hallel said this," as opposed to the school of Shammai. These people who are cited lived 100 or 200 years before the Mishna was written. In 200 AD the Jews were still telling stories of what these teachers did and of what they specifically taught. If you go in that context you realize that the rabbinic teaching was almost entirely oral through the first century and into the second century AD. This was because part of a young rabbi student's job was to not only learn the written law (especially the Torah or Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible), but also to learn the oral law. The rabbis would pass on their oral traditions to the rabbi students, and it was the students' job to remember what the rabbis said. They would associate the teachings they learned with the names of the rabbis they learned them from, and then when the students became rabbis they would pass those teachings on to their students or disciples. Thus the teachings would pass down to several generations until the Mishna was written. The great Rabbi Judah sat down and wrote the whole Mishna from these oral recollections of what had come before.

In short, in the first century there was a very oral environment for teaching in Judaism. That was the rabbinic paradigm. And Jesus Himself was seen as a rabbi, not writing but passing down oral sayings that would then be remembered by His students. Thus it seems to me that thinking of the Bible in oral terms is helpful here. That does not mean there could not be written sources. But it does mean those written sources came down parallel to oral sources.

Now I want to evaluate some of these issues with regard to source theories. But in doing so I would like it if you would turn with me to Luke chapter 1:1-4. Let us look at the famous prologue there: "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught."

Let me make some notes about that passage. First of all, he is writing to Theophilus. There is much discussion as to who Theophilus is here. Theophilus is a Greek word that comes from two smaller Greek words: *theos*, meaning "God," and *philia*, meaning "friend" or "lover." Thus Theophilus means "friend" or "lover of God," though "friend of God" seems to be the intention in this context. So the word itself has a meaning, "friend of God." At the same time, it was fairly common practice among Jews of antiquity, which continued among the early Christians, to have names like this that meant something. A child might be named Theoditus, for example, meaning "gift of God." Thus Theophilus here could very well be a person's name. Or it could be a kind of designation for the kind of attitude Luke's audience should have as they approach his Gospel. Of those two options, I think it more likely that Luke is writing to a particular individual, with the idea that he is writing a Gospel that will be read by many people. But he is writing it to and dedicating it to this individual named Theophilus. Very possibly then, Theophilus may have paid for the writing process; he may have been the sponsor of this Gospel. Writing implements were expensive, papyrus was expensive, etc. Theophilus may possibly have also paid for the distribution of the Gospel, for making copies of it, which would have also been very expensive. All of that is fairly hypothetical, but I do think Luke was writing to a particular individual. Also, the prologue

to Acts also mentions this man Theophilus. This demonstrates a certain amount of unity between the Gospel of Luke and Acts. They have the same author and probably the same audience.

The second thing I want to draw out of this passage is that Luke is intelligent and intends to write good, sound history. He is interested in truth, and not only truth but “exact truth about the things you have been taught.” He is interested in creating a Gospel that gives us the reader an accurate sense of what went on in the life of Jesus. Also, he is striving to do so through very careful research and investigation, as he says in verse three: “it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully.” We are not dealing here with someone who sat down and said, “I want to write something about Jesus and make Him into who I want Him to be.” He carefully investigated everything.

I also want you to get from this prologue a sense of the respect we should have for this author, as an historian as well as a theologian. The last thing I want to say about this is that he was aware of the people who came before him in the process. There are basically two groups in verses 1 and 2. Verse 1 says, “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us...” This does not overtly say, “written account.” It could be referring to an oral account or oral tradition. But it seems to me more likely that it is referring to a written account. Thus he is saying, “There are written accounts that came before me.” Verse 2 says, “...just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word...” The word that is translated here as “handed down” is much closer to oral tradition. But this is not just oral tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation and is very removed from the people who actually saw who Jesus was. Rather the author here is aware of the need to look to eye-witnesses. It is eye-witness oral tradition that takes precedence over other things.

What I draw from this passage, then, is that Luke was overtly aware of other sources. It does not explicitly say that he used them here, but he is aware of them. He is also aware of an oral tradition that is associated with eye-witnesses and the very people who are classified as servants of the Word. And he was using all of this responsibly. Therefore, I am not inherently or *a priori* opposed to literary source discussion. Luke himself seems to allow that there were other literary writings before him, such of which he may have carefully investigated and drawn upon for his narrative. On the other hand, I think it unwise of us to assume that all of this was happening purely on a literary level by the time it got to Matthew and Luke. Luke himself is very aware of oral tradition, and especially of that which goes back to eye-witnesses and is worthy of respect. If you were to push me to a conclusion on this issue right now, I would head toward something closer to the Two-Source hypothesis, Markan priority solution with substantial oral tradition in the mix. I think there was so much oral tradition involved that even when Luke, for instance, was using a written source, oral tradition may have caused him to use words that were at variance with his source in Mark, if he was using Mark. That comes back to the beginning of this lesson when I was talking about the synopsis of the Gospels and why it is that you have basically the same thrust of the story (the leper being cleansed or whatever it is) and at times verbatim wording between the three Gospels, but more often than not the specific wording varies between the Gospels. Of course, most often when the wording varies it is because the different authors selected different synonyms that mean basically the same thing. But still, the different Gospels do often use different words. It seems to me that, if there were a mix of written and oral sources, that could help account for what we see going on in a synopsis in the Greek of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

I do not think that is something to be scared of, but it is something to recognize. These early Gospel writers were aware of and careful in their approach of their sources. In answer to a student question, Q could be the oral traditions. And it is possible that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were drawing on an earlier literary source. This is completely hypothetical, and there is no church tradition to support this at all. But

it is possible that, for example, Peter may have written something down. I think our proposals need to be held somewhat loosely; we need to be somewhat tenuous in any of these proposals. But again, it is possible that Q represents oral traditions. By the way, similar wording among the Gospels can also be accounted for in oral tradition. There has been some wonderful research done on oral traditions among the rabbis that shows that they were very careful to maintain particular wording. They were interested in accurately passing down traditions that came before. It is also important to recognize that we live in the twenty-first century, and we do not live in an oral context anymore, especially in the United States. We do not even have much respect for oral tradition. I, for example, often cannot accurately recount what someone said to me five minutes beforehand. This is because I am so used to having a written account in front of me when I am interested in exact wording. I pull out the book and point to the page. But in first-century Palestine, the rabbinical students strived to have a honed memory skill so that when a rabbi said something it would stick and they would be able to repeat it verbatim in 5 minutes, 20 years, and for the rest of their lives. Then they would train others to be able to do the same. We need to recognize that is the kind of environment Jesus was working in. When we recognize that, we have a higher respect for the oral traditions.

Another question often asked is if we found this hypothetical Q, would it be included in the canon of Scripture? The problem with questions about Q is that they are so hypothetical. If we found Q, how would we even know that was what it was? Also, I would not reopen the canon. We know Paul wrote letters that are not included in Scripture. If one of those letters was found that we thought was written by Paul, would we add that to the canon? Well, if that ever happened there would probably be significant discussion, and I am not sure how it would end up. But first, anything that was discovered so late I would be highly skeptical of. And second, reopening the canon seems foolhardy. The early church may have known what they were doing in not including something in the canon as well as when they included what they did. Therefore I would be very hesitant to change the canon. By the way, here is some scholarship I am very skeptical of. There are some very responsible, intelligent people doing this, but there are many people out there who are very interested in the theology of Q. There is book after book being written on the theology of Q. Now, I think that is strange. Q is a hypothetical source, and the only way we could even postulate its existence is based on the material we have in Matthew and Luke that is unique to each of those Gospels. Therefore, even if there is a Q, we do not know the whole of Q; we only know the part of the Q that is in Matthew and Luke. There could be material in Luke that goes back to Matthew that is also in Q, and we would not even know it. Reconstructing Q is an example of chasing after the wind. People have taken Matthew and Luke, put it together, and said, "This is Q. Now let us study the theology of this." This is such an odd, strange endeavor. There are many scholars who are devoting 20 or 30 years of their lives to this study. Do what you want to do, but that does not seem to a very fruitful endeavor to me.

Let us move into source, form, and redaction criticism. What is source criticism? In a sense, source criticism is what we have just done. There are several viable proposals still on the table, especially the Griesbach hypothesis, the Two-Source hypothesis, and the Four-Source hypothesis. These proposals are still being discussed by scholars. Part of the aim of source criticism is to delineate the sources used by, for example, Luke. Source criticism, again, focuses on literary source—not oral sources, but literary sources. In a sense, formulating these diagrams (for example, Matthew → Luke → Mark) is doing source criticism. But another aspect of source criticism is, once you have your diagram, coming to Luke (for example) and parceling out the material in Luke according to whether it belongs to Matthew or Mark or Q or L. That means taking individual stories and saying, "Verse 1 and 2 come from Q. Verses 3 to 5 appear in Mark and thus they must be from Mark. Verses 6 and 7 are distinctively Lukan, and thus they must come from L." That is source criticism practiced in all its glory. There are a number of commentaries, for instance, that do this. Joseph Fitzmyer, a very fine scholar, has a two-volume work on

Luke. I will quote him speaking on the infancy narrative. Listen for his assumptions. What are his assumptions when he approaches the text? I want you to be able to look at a commentary and understand what the commentator's assumptions are. Here is an assumption of someone who is interested in sources: "Whether Luke composed the infancy narrative all in one draft or wrote a first form of it and later made some additions may remain moot. Brown opts for the latter. The absence of a tight connection between the Magnificat in its context and the Benedictus in its context might suggest that at least three passages were added at a later date than the rest."

You see in the whole way he is discussing this that Fitzmyer is not interested in the text of Luke as we have it. He is interested in the order that the material came to Luke. That is how he frames his questions. In another section of his commentary he is speaking of Luke chapter 4, the Nazareth visit.

The Lukan form of the story of the Nazareth visit owes its inspiration to Mark 6:1-6a. And in verses 16, 22, and 24 the wording probably comes from Mark. As for the rest, verses 17-21, 23, and 25-30, one may debate whether they are derived from Luke's private source (L) or are to be ascribed to Lukan composition [meaning he made it up himself]. The various suggestions have been made because the story in its present form is obviously conflated. The sequence of sentences is not smooth. The Markan form of the story was classified form-critically by Bultmann [this gets into form criticism, so we will not finish that section]... In the expanded Lukan form the episode might still seem to belong to that category, having, however, multiple pronouncements...

As Fitzmyer looks at the text of Luke, he has the synopsis of the Gospels in front of him. He compares Luke to Mark. Where Luke's material does not coincide with Mark, he assumes it must be coming from a different source—in this way he tries to trace out the sources. That is source criticism.

What do we do? I think we first of all have to acknowledge that this is based on a fairly hypothetical construct. And even where Luke may "vary" from Mark, he might have some very good oral tradition. Indeed, Luke's entire Gospel might come from oral tradition. He may not even be looking at Mark. To approach the text from the stance of source criticism is a bit of scholarly navel gazing. You will read page after page of this, and it gets frustrating because they are not seriously considering the text as we have it. The basis of source criticism is very hypothetical. Source is also somewhat dismissive. You heard that comment in the quote from Fitzmyer about if Luke's material did not come from Mark it must be from another source, or perhaps it is Luke's own composition—as if Luke's composition is not as reliable. There are some source-critical scholars with more evangelical tendencies. Fitzmyer is actually more conservative than many. Part of Fitzmyer's goal through all this is to vouchsafe the accuracy of the Gospels, at times. He is saying, "Luke got this from Mark, so it must be good." Or, "This does not seem to be just Luke's own composition because it seems to come from L—thus it has a long legacy and therefore we can trust the historicity of this account." He is using some assumptions I would not agree with to try to defend something I would very much agree with, namely the historicity of the narrative. That is source criticism. You should be aware that this is going on. Source criticism can be found in many commentaries.

Let us move on to form criticism. Form criticism is largely on the thought and assumptions of source criticism, but it shifted it to the oral level. Even in Fitzmyer's take on Luke, he sees that he is willing to talk about Mark and about L, but he is interested in also classifying certain narrative stories in terms of their folkloric category. There is that brief comment in one of Fitzmyer's passages quoted above where he said, "The Markan form of this story is classified by Bultmann as..." and then I stopped because I did not want to take us into form criticism at that point. The idea of form criticism is, in addition to these

literary sources, there were also many oral sources. But, form criticism still maintains that much time passed between when Jesus lived and when everything was written down. During that time, these oral stories went into different communities and contexts, each with their own issues and problems. As this happened, the stories and the retellings of the stories became shaped to the needs of the different communities. That is one of the assumptions behind form criticism.

Another assumption is that you can tell the kinds of things the communities were interested in because a certain community with a certain set of needs was attracted to stories about Jesus that took on a particular form. For instance, stories about Jesus that all had miracles associated with them would be attractive to certain communities dealing with certain issues. Those would be “miracle stories,” and they would have a different form than, for example, a short, quick saying of Jesus. Those are both different forms from a parable of Jesus, which is different from a long teaching of Jesus that did not use parables. Form criticism assumes that each of these forms is distinct from one another, and each form arose from different communities attracted to them because of their different circumstances. That is the idea of form criticism. In particular, a community that was undergoing suffering and persecution would have been attracted to stories that spoke to their suffering and persecution. This community’s retellings of the story would heighten the elements of persecution in the stories. It is not just that the person writing about the tradition was shaping the tradition, but the communities also shaped them through their retellings of the stories up through the time when they were written down.

There is some technical terminology associated with form criticism that you should know. Form criticism seeks to separate the material in the Gospels into these different literary forms: miracle stories, short sayings of Jesus, longer sayings of Jesus, parables, etc. Form criticism mostly has to do with the teachings of Jesus. The forms form critics are most interested in is what Jesus actually said. Another term associated with form criticism is tradition criticism. Tradition criticism tries to take Jesus’ sayings and say, “This saying went through community X, it went through community Y, it went through community Z, and then the author wrote it down.” Tradition criticism is interested in taking these literary forms and saying, “The short forms all go back to community X, or maybe to Jesus Himself. The longer sayings go back to community X. The miracle stories are from community Y. And the final form is from community Z.” Tradition criticism is trying to retell the history of the early church based on what these hypothetical communities looked like. The last term you should know is very important. It is a German phrase, *sitz im lieben*. Some of you who speak or have studied German will know that this phrase means something like “situation in life.” This phrase is used in form criticism to refer to situations that were going on in a community. For instance, if a community was being persecuted that was their *sitz im lieben*, their situation in life. When people speak of *sitz im lieben* they are basically saying that this situation in life influenced the way the stories are being told. Thus *sitz im lieben* describes the situation of the community at the time when the stories were being passed through the community.

That is form criticism. What do you think of form criticism? This presumes that the communities in the early church were quite different from one another instead of saying there was much unity between the different communities of the early church. It also assumes radical change in oral tradition rather than assuming what tried to show early, that rabbis were very careful to pass on fairly exactly that which they heard. Form criticism assumes that much is changed in the passing down of oral tradition. Form criticism is trying to get behind the canon. It is almost saying the canon is irrelevant. What they are really interested in is the early history of the church, and the final form is almost seen as being in the way of that. Thus the final form (the canon) has to be taken apart so that everything can be put into its right time. The result is a very low view of the canon in many respects. Form criticism does, in many ways, presume that we can figure out where the sources came from. Form criticism at its beginning was

based on source criticism and remains that way today. Perhaps the most significant critique of form criticism is that it assumes a long passage of time between when Jesus lived and when the final forms of the Gospels were written down. This is so significant because oral traditions do change over time. When a story is passed down from one generation to the next, over long expanses of time, change does happen. What form criticism assumes in many ways is that those who passed down the oral tradition did not really care about Jesus and what Jesus actually said; they more cared about their communities. Therefore they shaped the ideas and traditions about Jesus for their communities. But is it not possible that everyone along the way actually wanted to be very accurate about what Jesus said because they thought He was the Son of God? Is it not possible that they had such a respect for who Jesus is that they were careful to record accurately what He said? I think that is a much more viable way of thinking about these things.

My last critique gets into redaction criticism. In tradition history they are interested in the communities that passed down the stories, but not so much in the final form of the stories. Some scholars have woken up to that and said, "You know, Matthew matters too. We are interested in what Matthew was thinking as well." Redaction criticism assumes source and form criticism. But instead of trying to trace out the tradition history, redaction criticism is interested in what Matthew was all about. Redaction critics try to find this by taking Matthew and the way he treated his sources and trying to see what is distinctively Matthew, what Matthew is bringing to bear and therefore what Matthew's theology is. This brings us closer to some of what we are trying to do in this course. At the beginning of our next lesson, I want to flesh out more of what redaction criticism is and then critique it as well. There are some benefits to redaction criticism, but I think there are some major drawbacks as well.