**FAVORITE HYMNS**

***Tell Me The Story Of Jesus***

Do you know what a “harmony” of the gospels is? Most of us who grew up with godly parents learned our books of the Bible as they were placed in the canon (you might think of that as the Table of Contents in the front of your Bible). In the Old Testament you would first read Genesis, then Exodus, then Leviticus, and so on until you had read all 39 books. Then, to read the 27 books of the New Testament you would read Matthew, then Mark, then Luke, then John, and so on and so forth all the way to the book of Revelation. That is a good way to learn the 66 books of the Bible, but not the best way to read them without becoming confused.

The reason for your confusion would be that they are not placed in the Bible in chronological order, meaning from year 1 B.C. – **B**efore **C**hrist (creation) to year 400 B.C. (approximate last book of the Old Testament); then from year 1 A.D. – **A**nno **D**omini – Latin for “in the year of the Lord” (Jesus’ birth) to year 100 A.D. (approximate last book of the New Testament). They are placed in the Bible according to topics, or authorship, such as:

*Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Moses’ history & Law to Israel)

*Joshua through 2 Chronicles* (various authors who wrote about Israel’s history)

*Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (Israel’s captivity and return to Jerusalem)

*Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* (book of poetry and wisdom)

*Isaiah through Malachi* (prophets sent over centuries to warn and foretell the future)

*Matthew, Mark, Luke, John* (write the story of Christ’s life, death and resurrection)

*Acts* (the history of the early church from about 30 to 62 A.D.)

*Romans through Philemon* (Paul’s epistles to churches and individuals)

*Hebrews through Jude* (letters written to Christians scattered around the world)

*Revelation* (a highly symbolic description of God’s protection of His people)

This brings me to how I love to sometimes study the four gospel stories found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Yes, sometimes I like to read each gospel straight through to get one perspective that writer emphasized concerning Christ’s life. Matthew wrote to convince Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. Mark wrote primarily to convert Romans and Gentiles that Christ was a powerful, miracle-working King. Luke (the only Gentile author) wrote to reveal Jesus as the Son of Man to the Gentile world. John’s was a universal gospel focused on the last week of Christ’s life to emphasize Him as the exalted Son of God (i.e. deity).

But it is sometimes a great exercise to study the full life of Christ in chronological order, trying to piece together all the events in sequence. This is called a *Harmony* of the gospels. I first learned of this method when I was in high school. My dad had a book in his library titled *The Fourfold Gospel – A Harmony Of The Four Gospels*. It was written by two preachers from the 19th century named J. W. McGarvey and Philip Pendleton. I started reading it and became hooked. They had combined all four stories into one and that fascinated me. It helped me see the full picture of a miracle, or parable, or the trial of Christ in ways I had never thought about before. I liken it to a police officer at the scene of a traffic accident taking the eyewitness testimony of four individuals who saw it from different viewpoints. They all told the truth, but from different angles. Taking all four stories together the policeman is able to give a complete description of what happened. So it is with the various stories of Christ’s life as told by four men.

Of course, one thing must be remembered, while Matthew and John could speak of many of the events from an actual eyewitness advantage, Mark and Luke wrote from what others told them who were eyewitnesses. But back of it all was the oversight of the Holy Spirit who ensured that every last detail was accurate. There were no mistakes or contradictions in their stories. Unlike the childhood game of “Telephone” in which the story is passed down from one to another until it is finally revealed as different than the original, the authors of the four gospels were inspired (spoken by God) to protect it from error of any kind (read John 24:26; 15:26; 16:13; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).

The gospel’s “harmony” – like that of an orchestra playing a symphony in which all instruments come together to produce a beautiful work of art – brings every necessary detail of Christ’s life together to make the sweetest story ever told. It starts with Luke 1:1-4, transitions to John 1:1-18, then focuses on Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-28 to give the background to Christ’s eternal nature and genealogy. But then it goes to His forerunner John the Baptist in Luke 1, followed by Christ’s birth in Matthew 1 and Luke 2. Seeing every necessary detail from all four perspectives opens my mind and my heart to wanting to know everything I can about my Lord’s life.

As I study the harmony of Christ’s life I gain an appetite of wanting to learn more and more of Who He is. I begin to feel like Paul when he said, *“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord … that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead”* (Phil. 3:7-11).

It also gives new meaning to an old hymn I love so much:

Tell me the story of Jesus, write on my heart every word.

Tell me the story most precious, sweetest that ever was heard.

Tell how the angels in chorus, sang as they welcomed His birth.

‘Glory to God in the highest, peace and good tiding on earth.

Fasting alone in the desert, tell of the days that are past.

How for our sins He was tempted, yet was triumphant at last.

Tell of the years of His labor, tell of the sorrow He bore.

He was despised and afflicted, homeless, rejected and poor.

Tell of the cross where they nailed Him, writhing in anguish and pain.

Tell of the grave where they laid Him, tell how he liveth again.

Love in that story so tender, clearer than ever I see.

Stay let me weep while you whisper, ‘Love paid the ransom for me.’

Chorus: Tell me the story of Jesus, write on my heart every word.

Tell me the story most precious, sweetest that ever was heard.”

If you have found your faith growing weak then do something about it. Stir it up to a blazing bonfire by studying the life of Jesus with a new twist, looking at it from a harmony of the gospels.

It got my juices flowing, maybe it will yours too. – Rick