

CHAPTER ONE

JESUS' MODEL OF MINISTRY



Matthew's Repetition

IN HIS GOSPEL ACCOUNT of Jesus' ministry, Matthew gave us a summary of Jesus' three main activities as he carried out his ministry. What is even more interesting is that Matthew gave us this summary twice.

“And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.” —Matthew 4:23

“And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.” —Matthew 9:35

No other gospel writer repeated a sentence in this way, and no other gospel writer bundled these three activities together. Obviously, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, Matthew was trying to make a point. He'd had years to think about this triad before sitting down to write his account about who Jesus was and what he did, so the repetition was deliberate. Matthew mentions three activities.

Jesus' Three Activities

Teaching

Matthew uses the Greek word *didasko* here from which we get our English word didactic. This word “teaching” carries with it the idea of giving moral instruction, like Jesus did with the crowds in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7).

It presents us with an interesting concept that we might be unfamiliar with—giving moral instruction to unbelievers. Christian families teach their children moral lessons about what pleases or displeases God, and church leaders do the same for their youth and their congregations. But in Jesus' ministry, he taught the curious

crowds that were following him moral truths. They were disciples only in the broadest sense of the term.

*“Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth ...
You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the
world ... You have heard that it was said to those of old
... but I say to you ...”*

Our brilliant and blessed Jesus made so many artful statements that stuck like barbs in the souls of his listeners. His words would highlight the distance between their condition and God’s ideals and bring conviction.

Preaching

Matthew writes that Jesus also proclaimed the gospel. He used the Greek word *kerysso*, which means to proclaim as a herald or public crier, or to preach. We must be careful because the word “preach” for most believers creates a mental image of a preacher, a pastor wearing a suit and thundering in the pulpit to gathered believers on a Sunday morning.

But in the New Testament, and in Jesus’ ministry, preaching is primarily proclamational evangelism (see Luke 9:6, 1 Corinthians 9:18, Galatians 1:9). It is authoritatively sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with those who don’t know him correctly. The good news Jesus

proclaimed was that God's Anointed One and his messianic kingdom had come to earth, to Israel, and that they must repent and believe.

As a brief side note, most pastors function as teachers and exhorters to God's people on Sunday mornings. But years ago in the revival eras, the Spirit of God was moving with such conviction that unbelievers were coming to church in significant numbers, and so pastors began to make it their habit to include the gospel message in every sermon they did. Many pastors even today, as a matter of habit, include the gospel at the end of every sermon. For this reason, communities began to refer to pastors as "preachers."

But please remember that the authoritative proclamation of the gospel requires no Bible degree, ordination, suit, or pulpit. Ladies, you can have coffee with a friend at a café and transition the conversation from the mundane to the meaningful to spiritual to biblical and move in on the gospel message in a normal conversational voice. That is preaching the gospel. In Mark's version of the Great Commission, every believer was instructed to "preach the gospel." This is not for a select few; this is for every believer.

Compassion

Matthew writes that Jesus was also "healing every disease and every affliction." Most of us would agree that we would love for Jesus to have passed this ability on to all his disciples down through the ages. There is so much suffering out there.

Jesus didn't just do miracles. He did miracles that were helpful to people. For instance, Jesus could have made water flow uphill or make sand tornados dance in the desert or cause the clouds to form the words "Jesus saves." But he didn't do that. Jesus helped people.

It is certainly true that his miracles were Messianic signs, riveting the people to the fact that he was from God and that they should listen to what he had to say. But, in his compassion, Jesus helped in very practical ways those who were suffering. So, while we can't heal people instantaneously and completely with a touch today, we can show compassion and temporarily relieve the suffering of people. Compassion turns up the volume on the gospel.

Compassion is not a fluffy word. It is a deep-seated inner response that so pulls you into identification with a sufferer who is unable to remedy their condition that you feel compelled to take action on their behalf as if you were struggling to free yourself. In the original Hebrew and Greek languages of the Bible, the words for compassion mean to respond with pain in your guts. Unlike our English word, compassion in the biblical languages is not a feeling; it is an action verb. No one ever felt compassion and then walked away.

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Jesus showed compassion to the sick, lame, and blind, and he showed compassion when the crowd was hungry (Mark 8:2). But when he saw so many people who were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd, he felt compassion and urged his disciples to pray to the Lord of Harvest for more helpers (Matthew 9:36). Jesus did not come merely to meet needs. He came to do His Father's will. But, no doubt and like so many in the field, he felt overwhelmed by the needs around him.

The Threefold Cord

Moral teaching, gospel preaching, and compassion ministry were Jesus' three categories of ministry with the lost around him. Lovely, but why do I call them a "threefold cord," shamelessly borrowing the imagery from Ecclesiastes 4:12? The answer is that Jesus left us no mechanical routine to follow. When he entered a town like Capernaum or Sidon, you never knew which activity he would do first or second. And you never knew how many activities Jesus would do during his visit to that town. Sometimes he began with compassion work and then taught the people. Other times he taught and then preached. The record in the four Gospels does not give us a repeating pattern.

Have you ever held a threefold cord in your hand, like rope from the hardware store? Have you ever tried to follow one of the three strands through the length of the rope? It's not easy. And so, I chose that as my metaphor because in Jesus' ministry, God wove together moral

teaching, the gospel message, and compassion ministry in the Gospel narratives in an artistic way known only to Him.

For this reason, I call gospel ministry a threefold cord. I will depict it here simply as three circles. Notice that I did not call the gospel message a threefold cord. The gospel message is one of the cords. But “gospel ministry,” in the holistic way that Jesus practiced it, involved three kinds of good news.



The Gospel Message

This message is about the good news that our sins have been paid for by the blood of Christ, and that through repentance and faith we can be forgiven, justified, spiritually reborn, and indwelt by God’s Holy

Spirit. For those of you who are believers in Christ, this is the part of your salvation that is in the past. Jesus is our Savior. We were saved from judgment. In the diagram, I put it at the top because it is the most significant, revolutionary, life-transforming, destiny-changing message known to mankind. (You can find a brief summary of the gospel message in the Appendix).

Moral Teaching

This teaching is the good news about a believer's continuing transformation to become like Christ by having the moral Law of Christ placed in our hearts by His Spirit. That moral law is spelled out in the commands and ethical teachings of Christ in the four Gospels, and in the second half of most of Paul's and Peter's epistles. We have our part to play every day in repentance, personal discipline, yieldedness, and devotion, but we are God's workmanship, and He will complete His work in us. For those of you who are believers in Christ, this is the part of your salvation that is in the present. Since we were declared righteous, we began that long journey towards righteous behavior. Jesus is our Comforter-Coach. We are continually being saved from our sinful selves.

It is interesting to note that Jesus gave his moral teaching to the crowds, which contained nonbelievers who had varying levels of interest in hearing what he had to say. Most Christians are used to hearing moral teaching in a church setting, but there is a great benefit to giving moral teaching to nonbelievers as well. Paul wrote in 1

Timothy 1:9, "understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane ..." You see, God and his moral law are perfect, and he requires mankind, made in his image, to also be perfect. Many nonbelievers feel pretty good about themselves until you remind them of God's moral standards. As they mull over these teachings under the conviction of God's Spirit, they often feel badly and see their need for forgiveness. Moral teaching pushes them toward the gospel.

Compassion Ministry

This ministry is the good news you give to others that they can experience some relief from physical and emotional suffering now. But more significantly, this tangible, physical help is a foretaste of the coming final salvation from physical suffering, when this mortality will put on immortality, when we will receive glorified bodies like Jesus' body. For those of you who are believers in Christ, this is the part of your salvation that is in the future. Jesus is our Recreator. We will be saved from this fallen and broken physical existence.

In summation, gospel ministry includes the gospel message, moral teaching, and compassion ministry. In Jesus' ministry, according to Matthew's Gospel, the three were woven together without any kind of mechanical formula to follow, and each element impacted the recipients in a different aspect of their lives.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Jesus' approach to teaching biblical moral truths to unbelievers challenge modern perceptions of teaching within religious contexts? Can you give examples where moral instruction might be relevant or beneficial outside a traditional religious setting?

2. In what ways can the concept of "preaching," as described in most New Testament passages, be integrated into everyday life beyond church settings? How can individuals incorporate proclaiming the gospel into their daily interactions?

3. How does Jesus' example of compassion challenge us to respond to human suffering? Discuss the significance of compassion as an action rather than just a feeling, and share ways you can practice compassionate actions in your community.

4. The metaphor of the threefold cord suggests strength and unity. How do you interpret this symbolism in the context of gospel ministry, and how might this perspective alter your view of how ministries should be done?

5. List a few situations where teaching, preaching, and compassion ministry can be effectively combined. How might

these activities complement each other to create a holistic approach to ministry or social engagement?

6. What do you think of the concept of compassion ministry providing a foretaste of a future salvation from physical suffering? How does this perspective offer hope and motivation for engaging in compassion ministry now?