

Sunday 26th October 2025 - How To Read The Bible: The Four Gospels

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Date: 26 October 2025

Preacher: Kim Thomas

[0 : 00] We are, as Laura said, we are going to carry on with our series about reading the Bible. Now, you may not be surprised to know that when I was a kid, when I was a baby, the first thing I did.

I could talk before I could walk, and then I could walk, and then I could read, and I've been an avid reader ever since. And one of the things that I used to do, which I don't do anymore, was I used to read, because my dad did, it was a family thing, I used to read the newspaper.

How many of you read the newspaper? How many read a paper copy of the newspaper? How many? Yeah, there's only a few of you. Not many, thank you.

I mean, the paper copy of the newspaper, it still gets distributed. So, read all about it. There are 6,260,814 newspapers read each day.

Paper copies. Would you read? Six million is still read. If you look at the number of people who read a paper copy of the newspaper every day, it's very few here. I read mine online. I still read it online.

[1 : 19] So, which is, do you think, out of all the newspapers, which is the one that is the most read? Which has got the biggest circulation? Anybody want to shout out any guesses?

The Sun? Yeah, that's all right. Daily Mail? Yeah. Right, well, this is the one that's read the most. The Metro. Yeah? The Metro is a free paper.

I think that's one of the things that it's read the most. But if you've ever been on London Transport, especially in the morning, the whole place is littered, isn't it? Because people have picked one up, sat on the tube and reading the Metro.

And that's the one that's read the most. Would you believe 952,438 paper copies are printed of the Metro every day?

And they've circulated. But it's no surprise, is it, that newspaper sales have fallen by nearly 25% between 2020 and 2025.

[2 : 22] I think the pandemic probably had a lot to do with some of that. But, yeah, so the circulation has gone down.

But these are the best selling. These are the top 11, strangely. I don't know why it's the 11, but these are the top 11 ones, not including the Sunday papers. So the Daily Mail.

The Daily Mail is the biggest selling paper copy newspaper in Britain today. Then there's the Sun. So that's a red top, what they call a red top newspaper. The Mirror.

The Daily Telegraph, which is what I read. The Times. The Daily Express. The iPaper. Does anybody read the iPaper? Never heard of it. Oh, yeah, there you go.

Well done, Ian. Ian reads it. I never heard of the iPaper. Presumably it's online, is it? Independent. Oh, independent. Right, okay.

[3 : 17] Okay. The Daily Star, the Financial Times, the Observer and the Guardian. So all familiar names. All familiar names. And it isn't any surprise, really, that the newspapers have a political bias.

This is all what I learned as I was doing research for it. So they've all got a political leaning. They target audiences. And they've got allegiances to political parties.

Or certainly a political slant towards those parties. Like for left-wing papers, you would think of the Daily Mirror. Liberal, open-minded.

These are often Labour supporters. Like the Guardian, the Independent, as it says there, the Daily Mirror. And then for the more conservative, the more right-wing papers, we've got the Daily Mail, Daily Express, The Sun, Telegraph, Times.

Often, but not always, conservative voters. But there's a political bias towards the right-wing. Just as every newspaper has got political targets, or not political, but just as every newspaper has got target audiences and a message to convey, it will be no surprise for you to know, and this is what I'm focusing on today, so do the Gospels.

[4 : 39] So when you read the Bible, it's quite useful to know that who are these being written for? Because although we can read different newspapers, I mean, you could be a Daily Mail reader and a staunch Labour voter, you know.

But it's useful to know with the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, it's useful to know who they were written for.

These are some, I love these Celtic drawings of the Gospels, of the Fourth Gospels. Because each Gospel writer had a bias. He was writing to a group of people, an audience, and wanted to convey the message to that audience.

They wanted their audience to know, without a shadow of a doubt, who Jesus was, and what his mission was, and why he came. And we know that many of the accounts in the Synoptic, which is like seen together, that's what synoptic means, or I like to think of it as side by side.

They've got very similar stories, very similar accounts. But they are emphasising slightly different things in each of the Gospels.

[6 : 03] And the author of these Gospels thought it was important to get this message about Jesus across, but in a certain way, so that people would receive it better. You know, a bit like the newspapers.

So, a couple of weeks ago, Matt spoke about how we look at the Bible through different lenses. I found that absolutely fascinating. And I was sitting there going, yes, yes, this is what I've been thinking all this time.

Yes, yes. So, it was lovely to have it confirmed about the different lenses and the different perspectives we look at the Bible through. And I thought today we'd think about the target audience that the Gospel writers had when they were writing their accounts of Jesus' life.

Because, let's face it, one of the things that we want to do, well, I did, certainly. When I became a Christian as an adult, one of the things I wanted to do, I wanted to find out what God was like.

So, I opened the Bible up, as many people do, and started at Genesis and thought, yep, okay, yeah, I remember that from school. And I read it and read it. And then I got through Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus was a bit hard going.

[7 : 09] And then I got to Numbers and thought, oh, close the book, put it down, don't know what that's about. I'm numerically dyslexic, I have dyscalculus, so Numbers was clunk, clunk, there you go, didn't speak to me at all.

But, of course, I was reading it just as a book. I wasn't reading it to find out or to understand what the writers were trying to convey.

But, obviously, as I've got older and older in my Christian faith, then I understand a little bit more about what they were trying to convey, what they were trying to get to.

And all of the Bible, you know, the bottom line of the Bible is, God wants us to know what he's like. And people want us to know what God's like.

And for me, that starts with Jesus. If I want to know what God's like, I look at Jesus. I look at Jesus. And the Gospel writers wanted to show us what Jesus was like, who Jesus was, what God was like, is like.

[8 : 16] Because that's what the Gospels are about. Jesus, his mission, who he is, what he's like. And this is what God's like, you know, full of grace, full of love, full of truth.

And this is what the Gospel writers wanted us to see, whichever Gospel you read, or all of them together. So, let's have a look at these Gospels, shall we?

Let's have a look at what the Gospels are and who they were focused towards and what we can get from it. Because that's the important thing, isn't it? It's what can we get from it?

How can we understand God? How can we know what God is like when we read these accounts of Jesus' life? So, what's the first Gospel?

Shout it out. Matthew. Yes, it was. It was Mark. Yeah. Mark is the first Gospel. It might be.

[9 : 12] Matthew might be the first one written down in the Bible. Mark was the first one that was written. It's the shortest Gospel. Now, I always think that this Gospel is like, get the information out.

Get it to the people. Get them to know. And quick, quick, quick, quick. You know, just give me the facts, man. Just give me the facts. It's that kind of delivery in Mark's Gospel.

It was thought to be written by John Mark, who was a cousin of Barnabas. And he was a companion of Paul and Barnabas. And Mark's Gospel begins with a great statement about who Jesus is.

The beginning of the good news about Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. There's no doubt about who Mark thinks that Jesus is. And all the way through his Gospel, like I say, it's very punchy, very headline-driven.

You know, very, dare I say, Son-driven. You know, if you read the Son, you see all the headlines to grab the people and get you interested.

[10:17] Well, the difference between the Son and Mark writing this Gospel is that this is the truth. I'm going to get sued for this, aren't I? This is the truth.

You know, he's saying, this is who Jesus is. This is who Jesus is. He doesn't start off like some of the other Gospels, two of the other Gospels do, with Jesus' birth narrative.

He doesn't start off with, okay, well, Mary was there and she was a nice lady and then an angel came to her. Now, Mark doesn't start with that. He goes straight into Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan.

And to what God says, you are my Son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased. What a great opening sentence, you know, to start.

What a great thing to start with. Because it'll grab the reader. They'll go, oh, this Jesus guy is the Messiah from this bit. But this Jesus guy, you know, God spoke about him and said, this is my Son.

[11:26] This is my Son, in whom I'm well pleased. And then, again, Mark writes, everything's got to be done straight away, quick, quick, quick. Because after Jesus was baptized, he was sent by the Spirit into the desert at once.

You know, he didn't hang about for weeks on end at once. The Spirit sent him into the wilderness like the Flash. Does anybody know the Flash? I love this character, the Flash.

He goes everywhere at nine million miles an hour. And he's brilliant. Like I say, he's a favorite character of mine. He's always in a hurry. But what Mark was saying, it was, you know, this is important.

It's got to get out there quick. People have got to know. People have got to know about Jesus. It's good news. Everything about Jesus is good news. And it needs spreading like the Flash.

So Mark shows Jesus he's the miracle maker. He's the miracle maker. He's the divine healer. He's the one with the power and the authority to heal and to teach.

[12:32] And, of course, he's got that authority. And you know he's got that authority because it says so in Mark's Gospel. It says about, you know, he was baptized. And this is what God said. There he was.

So embodied in Jesus. So if you look at Jesus, there is the fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah. And he's the one that has come to save everyone.

That was what Mark was saying. That was what Mark wants his audience to read and to know who Jesus is. And then he highlights the completion of Jesus' mission in Jesus' suffering.

But as importantly, you know, Jesus' suffering and his death, but the resurrection. And after the resurrection, it's calling people to follow Jesus immediately.

Because that's Mark. Wholeheartedly. Without turning back. Remember that old hymn? You know, I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back.

[13:37] No turning back. That's what it's about. So that's Mark. So if you think about Mark Flash in a hurry, you know, got to get the information out.

But it's really good information. So you're going to be nervous about who comes next now, haven't you? Okay, who wrote the next one? You're not saying.

Go on, give it a stab. Who wrote the next one? Anybody have a guess? Matthew. Matthew. Matthew. Also called Levi.

A former tax collector. One of Jesus' 12 disciples. So this is an eyewitness account. This is from somebody who was there. And it was written for Jewish readers. Matthew.

The Gospel of Matthew was written for Jewish readers. And this is the one. Matthew's the one that starts with the nice. There's a lovely lady called Mary. And an angel came and told her she was going to have a baby.

[14:31] And he was going to be the son of the Most High. And this one, Matthew, is really strongly pointing to Jesus as Messiah.

This is the one who's come to save the people. And the Jewish people would have read that. And they would have thought about the Old Testament and the prophets. And Jesus as king. Because that's all part of their education. That's all part of their life. They're growing up. And so Matthew wants to hook into that.

He wants to hook into what they will understand. What they will know. But just because he was writing to a Jewish congregation. A Jewish audience. Jewish readership.

Doesn't mean to say we can't get something from it. You know. It speaks to us. It certainly speaks to me. You know. About the Old Testament prophets. And how Jesus came to make that.

[15:31] You know. Right. This is what the Old Testament's prophet said. And here I am. Not me. Jesus. Here Jesus is. He's the one who the Old Testament prophets were talking about. So when we read the Old Testament.

We go. Yeah. That's Jesus. Yeah. That's Jesus. This is the fulfillment of the prophecies. And it highlights his. Collect. Jesus' connection to Jewish law and lineage.

I mean Jesus. There's. You know. There's that whole family line. In Matthew. Of Jesus. But also. The fact that he went to the temple. The fact that he followed life as a Jewish person.

Was important. And Matthew. Put it in there. But he also put. That Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. Now that would have upset a few. Jewish people.

But. As we know. From reading the Gospels. When they met him. A lot of people rejected him. But a lot of people received him. Because they recognized. This is who it was.

[16:29] And Matthew. Wanted to. Center on that. But he also wanted to center on the fact that. Jesus was here. For all humanity. Not just.

For the Jewish people. But. For the Jewish people as well. So that was Matthew's focus. Matthew speaks about the kingdom of heaven.

And it's a spiritual kingdom. That changes hearts and lives. And by knowing Jesus. Our hearts and our lives can be changed. By that.

So as this. Now when Jesus saw the crowds. He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him.

And he began to teach them. He said. Blessed are the poor in spirit. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[17:26] Blessed are those who mourn. For they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek. For they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. For they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful. For they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart. For they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers. For they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. So there's Jesus.

In the Matthew 5. The Beatitudes. There's Jesus standing on a mountainside. And he's teaching people. An upside down world.

[18:27] About. These are the people who are blessed. And people would look and go. Well the poor aren't that blessed are they. Because they're begging for scraps. But. Jesus is teaching.

He's opening people's minds. To a new. An alternative. A different way of life. A life that's filled. With love. And care. And compassion.

And that's what Jesus showed. And to me. Whenever I think about the Beatitudes. Whenever I think about Jesus. Standing on that hill. Teaching people. I think that's what God is like.

That's who God is. And God's bottom line is. Love him. And love everyone else. And if you do that. This world will be an amazing place.

Because the poor will be fed. Those who mourn. Will be comforted. You know. It's just. Jesus is saying. This is how it is. This is God's kingdom.

[19:25] And Matthew focused. On that. That this was God's kingdom. It talks about living a way. Of holiness.

I mean. This is what happens. On the mountain. Jesus is talking about. Living a way of holiness. From the inside out. The way that we are to live too.

Living from the inside out. Helping people. Looking after people. But it starts with the inside. It starts with love. And it proclaims that Jesus' death.

And resurrection. Secure salvation for all who believe. That's what Matthew's gospel. Focuses on. So. We've had Mark.

Matthew. Who's next? Luke. Yeah. We're on pretty safe ground with Luke. Aren't we? Yes. Luke. A doctor and a companion to Paul. Author of the book of Acts as well.

[20 : 23] I'm probably not telling you anything. That you don't already know. But it just gives you a whole view of things. And this gospel is often called the gospel of mercy. The cow on the.

Or the ox. I think is the picture of Luke. But he didn't look very merciful. He just looks fed up to me. But. But you know. It looks good. Doesn't it? So.

This is the gospel of mercy. Because this focus on Jesus. Is about his love and his care. For the people who are outside society. Now we all know this. Don't we? This is for me probably one of the hardest things ever.

Is we know that we should be helping the poor. We know we should be helping the oppressed. We know we should be standing up for all these people. Who are.

Who our society see on the outskirts. But it's really hard to do it. But when we do it. Then we see. What God wants us to do.

[21 : 18] And it's only when we do it. That we start doing it. We think. Yeah. This is what God wants me to do. When our last curate left.

I was asked if I would be the. Chaplain. At the women's refuge. And I said. Yes. Yes. I'll do that.

And then. When I started doing it. I started thinking. I don't know whether I want to do this.

I don't know. It's really hard. This is really really hard. Because you hear some really. Harrowing stories. And you know. You're talking to people. And sometimes they think. You've got the answers. And I go.

Well. I haven't really got the answers. But. I will listen. Because I want to say. Actually the answer is Jesus. But I know that they won't. They won't listen to that. At that time.

But it's about. Being there. Being present. And pouring out God's love. Into wherever we are. For all of us. It's about pouring out that love.

[22 : 15] To those who need us. Or who need God. They need Jesus. And it's about us being there. Pouring out love. Just like Jesus told us.

And that's what Luke was talking about. In his gospel. It was about that outpouring of love. That Jesus showed. To those. Who were having a pretty miserable life. They were having a pretty awful life.

And I have to say. I'm in my second year nearly. Of being in the women's refuge. Going every week. And it's one of the most rewarding things I've ever done.

It's incredible. And you meet some fabulous people. But I didn't want to do it. I said I'd do it. But I didn't really want to do it. But it's when you take that step out there.

And you do it. Then that's when God's love. Mercy. Grace. Power. And understanding. Comes to play. You know. It's not by my spirit.

[23 : 12] That I go. To the women's refuge. It's by God's spirit. He's the one that gives me. The get up and go. To get up and go. And that's what Luke was talking about really.

He was showing. That Jesus is the saviour to everyone. And he reaches out. To like the poor. And the sick. And divorced women. And neglected.

And the passed over. The ones who. You just don't see. You know. And Luke has got a lot of detail. In his gospel.

In fact there are 14 parables in Luke's gospel. That are not anywhere else. But I think the thing I really love about Luke. Not only is it. Is it sort of chronologically.

And historically detailed. I think the thing is. That he mentions women. He mentions Jesus. And his relationship.

[24 : 07] With the women. In a society. That you know. Women weren't written down about much really. Like. Jesus raising the widow's son.

The woman. The woman who came and anointed Jesus feet. With a jar of perfume. And with her tears. The woman who had been. Suffering from the issue of blood. For 12 years. And touching his cloak.

And be healed. He brings back to life. A dead girl. He calms the storm. He feeds people miraculously. So Luke's gospel. Is absolutely packed full. Of parables. And stories. And miracles. And healings. And teaching. And warnings. As well. So this is what. Someone wrote.

Wrote about Luke's gospel. And it really touched me. It made me reflect. On this. The book of Luke. Beautifully portrays Jesus. As the compassionate.

[25 : 01] Saviour sent for all people. With detailed storytelling. Personal encounters. And rich teaching. Luke reminds us. That God's heart. Is for the outsider. For the humble.

And the repentant. This gospel. Invites every reader. To experience. The joy of salvation. And join the mission. Of spreading the good news.

To the ends. Of the earth. Excuse me. Finally. Right. Final gospel. After three. One. Two. Three. John. Yes. The one that's left. John. The one. Who Jesus loved. That's. Very much quoted. Throughout the book.

And it's a very personal. Personal account. It's a. Deeply. Theological. And personal. Reflection. Or a gospel. That invites us.

[25 : 54] To see Jesus. Not just as a miracle worker. But as God. In the flesh. So it's a gospel. Of intimacy. And truth. And transformation.

And John. Even explained. Why the book was written. These are written. And that you may believe. In Jesus Christ. The son of God. And that by believing. You may have life. In his name.

So. This is how it starts. In the beginning. Was the word.

And the word. Was with God. And the word. Was God. He was with God.

In the beginning. Through him. All things were made. Without him.

[26 : 54] Nothing was made. That has been made. In him. Was life. And that life.

Was the light. Of all mankind. The light shines. In the darkness. And the darkness. Has not overcome it. There was a man.

Sent from God. Whose name was John. He came as a witness. To testify. Concerning that light. So that through him. All might believe. He himself.

Was not the light. He came only. As a witness. To the light. The true light. That gives light. To everyone. Was coming. Into the world.

He was in the world. And though the world. Was made through him. The world. Did not recognize him. He came to that. Which was his own. But his own.

[28 : 09] Did not receive him. Yet to all. Who did receive him. To those. Who believed. In his name. He gave the right. To become children. Of God. Children.

Born not of natural descent. Nor of human decision. Nor a husband's will. But born of God. The word became flesh.

And made his dwelling. Among us. We have seen his glory. The glory of the one. One and only son. Who came from the father. Full of grace. And truth.

Can you imagine the news headlines? He. Is. Here. And. The gospel of John. Is dramatic. But. Loving. Caring. Reaching out to people. Saying. This is who Jesus is. And this is what Jesus did. But this is what God's like.

[29 : 12] And all the gospels put together. Say that. Don't they? They say. This is what God's like. Because. He came to earth in human form. He came to. The woman at the well.

He came and talked to a woman. That nobody wanted to talk to. He bought healing. And love. And life. And that's what it is for us too.

Those gospels. Those four gospels. Talk about. God. God incarnate. God on earth. God in human form.

And they're powerful. Powerful. Witnesses. Powerful documents. But of course. They talk about. Why Jesus came.

They talk about. Jesus's death. And his wonderful resurrection. That brings. New life. To those who believe.

[30 : 08] To you. And to me. And when I was a new Christian. As an adult. I just thought. This is incredible stuff.

Do you know? They're all different. But they're all the same. Because they all talk about. The one person. And they all explain. About. What God is like.

If you want to know God. Read the gospels. If you want to know. What God is like. And it's. The bottom line. Through all the gospels. Is love. Is love.

Jesus's death. Showed that. It also. Like I said before. It also comes with warnings. About. You know. You. You'll have opposition. You'll have opposition.

Jesus had opposition. But look what God did with that. And I just think. This is more than just. Nice stories. This is more than just. About this man. Jesus.

[31 : 04] This is life. In all its fullness. That Jesus. The light of the world. Said. I have come. To bring light. Life. In all. Its fullness.

So I wonder. Which of these gospels. Is your favorite. Which do you like the best. Do you like. You know. The one with all the information in it. And I can.

Looking around. I can just see. A few people who I know. That. That. They would like all of that. These are the others. That would like the. Fast and the punchy. And the. You know. Get to the point.

Are there others. Those that will focus. On love. On Jesus's love. It doesn't really matter. You know. They're all good. They're all good stuff.

They're all good. And as I've said. If you want to know God. Look at the person of Jesus. Read the gospels. Go back.

[32 : 02] Go home. And read the gospels again. Read them again. And think about. Who was. Who were the gospel writers. Writing this for. But also. What's in it for me.

Because there is. In the bible. There is always. A what's in it for me. Because there's always something. For all of us. In there. We're all. Important. To God. God sees all of us.

In African cultures. They will. When they greet somebody. They will say. I see you Phil. I see you. And that means.

You're important to me. You're important to me. I've seen you. I know you. You know. I'm offering God's love to you. You're important. And African people. Say that.

When I went to. To the children's home in Kenya. Different one to the one. That Hazel goes to. And it was. Auntie Kim. I see you. And it's. And it's about. You know.

[32 : 56] You're important to this place. And it's wonderful. And that's what God says. To all of us. I see you. I know you. I know your heart. I know who you are. I know what you are.

And I know what you struggle with. But I'm here. And you are important to me. You're important. You're important.

You're beloved. Nobody. Is a favorite child. Well. Except for me. I am. You know. I'm God's favorite child. I have to tell you that. News. But. But none of us.

Are God's favorite child. We're all his favorite. Every. Single. One of us. Is God's favorite. Now. If you're the favorite.

Of the one. Who created everything. Who was there. At the beginning. As John's gospel said. If you're. His favorite. What can hold you back?

[33 : 53] Nothing. Nothing can hold you back. Nothing. We're all. Important to God. We're all. His favorite child. We're. All. Have value. We all.

Have worth. In God's eyes. And I want you. To remember that. Because that's what Jesus taught. Through all of the gospels. We all. Have worth.

To God. We all. Have. And I'm going to finish. With Picasso. Not a painting. By Picasso. So. I don't know.

I did that one. There is only one way. To see things. Until someone shows us. How to look at them. With different eyes. That's what Picasso said.

And that's what I want you. To remember. There's only one way. To see things. Until someone shows us. How to look at them. With different eyes. Let's pray.

[34 : 47] Gracious Lord. You who are Father. Son. And Holy Spirit. Thank you. That you love us.

That we are. All your favorites. Thank you. That you know us. Intimately. And love us. Just as we are.

Help us Lord. To look at the person of Jesus. To see what. The message that he brought. To see him.

And know ourselves. Not only loved by him. But as disciples. Of him. Help us to express your love. In the world.

And Lord. We can never do that. In our own strength. Or just about reading. About Jesus. Lord come.

[35 : 46] And pour your Holy Spirit. Into our hearts. And our minds. That as we open our eyes. We will see others.

As you see them. Come Holy Spirit. Come. Come and speak to us. Help us to know. We are worthy. For you.

Are God. And there is no other. Lord Jesus. We ask all of this. In your name. Amen.