

Fourth New Testament Summary on Matthew and Galatians

An ancient way of depicting the 4 Gospels was: 1) Matthew as an angelic man or divine man; 2) Mark as a Lion; 3) Luke as an Ox; and 4) John as an eagle (I'll get into the symbolism for the last three later). For now, we are focusing on Matthew (an angelic man or divine man). His message was to help the Jews (for which and through which the Lord came) cross the recognition threshold so as to realize that the Lord Jesus Christ was/is the promised Messiah predicted (in about 300 Messianic prophecies) in the Old Testament. One of the inherent challenges was that many Jews preferred to grasp that set of prophecies that described the Messiah as a conquering King. The Jews throughout their history you see had been extremely persecuted. They had been persecuted by the Egyptians of course; they suffered by the hands of the Assyrians, then the Babylonians (were in captivity in Babylon), then back to Judah (but this time under the power of the Persians); then under Roman rule. Enough was enough already! They had been under the thumb of other kingdoms long enough! They wanted their Messiah to come and defeat their Roman oppressors; they wanted to be free. Who could blame them? By focusing on this image of Messiah, however, as a great political King they had greater difficulty in recognizing Jesus. But we mustn't be too hard on them, because (in fact) all people need the Holy Spirit in order to properly recognize the Lord Jesus Christ! Still, we need to understand the Jewish background: though the messianic prophecies included two distinct sets of prophecies (namely KINGLY Prophecies that described the power, majesty, might, and rule of the Coming Messiah; they ALSO contained SUFFERING SERVANT Prophecies that described the humility, suffering, weakness, and passion of the Coming Messiah). It seems very challenging to combine the two; indeed, they are paradoxical. So it is understandable why the Jews would struggle so much to recognize Christ as the King when He was also the Suffering Servant. However, it is precisely in His coming to suffer for us to take on Himself our sins that He affirmed His kingship. He defeated sin, the world and the evil one through His glorious passion in our stead. In His death He destroyed the power of eternal death; through His resurrection, He assured us of the victory He won for us to have eternal life. It was Matthew's goal to show His fellow Jews that Jesus was and is the true Messiah/Christ (King/Anointed One, the Savior and Lord). Matthew does this by quoting the Old Testament more than any other Gospel, showing that Jesus is the true God/man (thus the symbolism of the divine

man). Consider for example Matthew's genealogy: It is a royal line (as it mentions some of the Kings of Israel, esp. David), but it is also a line showing humility. Note the women that are mentioned. They were known as public sinners or outcasts/Gentiles (like the men!). The REASON for their inclusion was to show that the Messiah came through sinners to SAVE sinners. Already BOTH His great majesty and humility is shown in His genealogy...He is not ashamed to be associated with sinners, for they are His ancestors and children that He came to save! Note also the temptation in the wilderness. While the first Adam was overcome by the evil one in our stead, Christ (the second Adam, the second man to represent all men, male and female) was victorious and overcame the temptations of the evil one (for us all). There is almost always in Matthew this connection to the Old Testament and the proclamation of our salvation in Him. This is what St. Matthew is all about! As for James: early on in his career, Martin Luther struggled with James and labeled the letter as "an epistle of straw" (a position, thank God, he did not maintain). The reason for this is its apparent contradictory nature in respect to what is taught by St. Paul (i.e. that we are saved by grace through faith alone, Ephesians 2:8-9 and esp. emphasized by St. Paul in the book of Romans, chapters 3-5). The references in James that caused the confusion were/are especially James 2:17 and 26. James 2:17 says, "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." James 2:26 says, "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead." So which is it? Faith or works (to attain salvation)?! This, however, is a false dilemma. It is essential to understand that we are indeed saved by faith alone, but (and as Luther in later life would explain), this faith is "never alone." That is to say the teaching of St. Paul applies esp. to conversion (our initially coming to God), while St. James describes what happens *after* conversion/*after* faith in us is created by God. Just as the created sun has no choice but to radiate heat and light; the born-again Christian (John 3) has no choice but to generate good works. In fact, if you read also verse 10 of Ephesians 2, you see that Paul and James are not at all contradictory, but complementary. In this respect, the Lutheran Confessions state that while works are not necessary for salvation (because it is only by grace through faith that we are saved), that nevertheless the Confessions state that good works "are necessary." In other words, we do not do good works in order to be saved, but they occur in our lives AS A RESULT of our being in Christ/being saved. As an apple tree produces apples (in this sense "it must" do

so); Christians with true faith "must" produce good works. Just be clear: we are NOT saying that good works are necessary in order to be saved, but that when a person IS saved, then good works will always ensure, they are proof that faith is living. Bottom line: we do not do good works in order to be saved, but we do good works because we are saved! Now let's switch gears to Galatians. Galatians presents a powerful teaching on Christian freedom. But what kind of "freedom" does it refer to? Is it political freedom? No. It is the freedom of a good conscience: knowing that we are right with God; free from sin, death and the power of the evil one. We are free from the bonds of sin, so that we may serve the living God. Paul warns that we not use our "freedom" to indulge the sinful nature, but to use our freedom to serve the Living God, to glorify His Holy Name (not because we "have to," but because we "get to"). Our freedom is the freedom to serve God because we are His children now, empowered by the Holy Spirit. This we do, because we are no longer under law, but under grace. Have fun with this discussion. Don't hesitate to ask questions along the way. In Christ, Dr. Espinosa