

The Stories in the Gospels: Why You Need Them, and How to Read Them

Steve Burchett

Ever seen a book about some event in history and thought to yourself, “That looks like a must read!”? And then, several dollars later, the book is yours. Was it a must read? Probably not. However, there are true stories about real people and events in the Gospels that are *all* “must reads.” Sure, the whole Bible is essential reading, but I want to focus on one particular portion of the New Testament—narratives in the Gospels—and give you several reasons why you should study them carefully.



First, narratives in the Gospels are God’s revelation to us. They are not just nice stories to tell kids in Sunday school, although every child should have that blessing in his life! These narratives are God’s words for us to hear and read and understand—they’re in the Bible—and so we ought to listen carefully because of their ultimate Source. The Lord didn’t include anything in the Scriptures that is unimportant or just “filler.”

Second, narratives in the Gospels proclaim truths that make believers increasingly holy. These stories often testify to Christ’s greatness, and his humility. They recount Christ’s mission and magnify his worth. They highlight this world’s fallenness, and they lift up Jesus Christ and God’s kingdom that he ushers in as the answer for a broken world. They show both right and wrong ways to respond to Jesus. The believer who slows down, meditates on these stories, and discovers (or rediscovers) these magnificent truths will see his affections for Christ increase and his growth in Christlikeness advanced.

Third, narratives in the Gospels are both gripping and Christ-exalting—a powerful combination when evangelizing the lost. Stories are often compelling to unbelievers, perhaps even more so than other genres. And God, in his providence, has given us many colorful narratives with surprising twists and potent messages. Those of us who grew up around the Bible, hearing these same stories over and over, have perhaps forgotten just how fascinating they really are. But Bible stories aren’t as well-known as they once were in our society. This illustrates a biblical illiteracy that should sadden us, but we can take advantage of this in evangelism.

Think about those who have never heard the story of the raising of Jairus’ daughter, or the report of Jesus walking on the water, or even the telling of the crucifixion and

resurrection of the Son of Man. Those are amazing accounts of events that actually happened in history! A believer should take advantage of the general interest in stories by learning, understanding, and then sharing these enthralling, gospel-focused narratives.

Fourth, narratives in the Gospels are often retold by those who hear them. Good stories get repeated. When the story is from the Gospels, and its content and the good news it points to changes a person’s heart, that new believer won’t be able to stay silent—not only about the story, but the theology it teaches. The young Christian becomes the story-teller and the gospel proclaimer, reaching people the original sharer may never know.

Getting Started

The best way to grow in your appreciation for gospel narratives is to start reading and meditating on them. Here are a few items to think about for each episode:

- The setting (including geography) and characters. Pay special attention to what Jesus does, and responses to him.
- Literary devices such as repetition, dialogue, foreshadowing, questions, comparisons, contrasts, surprise, and interpretive statements. You might find a story’s point through devices like these.
- The scenes, structure, and development of the story (dilemma, climax, resolution, results), all of which can reveal the idea the writer of the gospel account is communicating.
- The story’s various “contexts”: What comes before and after this story? How does this story, and the larger section it fits into, contribute to the purpose of the whole gospel in which it is written? And how does the story of redemptive history, and specifically the death and resurrection which are so prominent in each of the gospels, help to understand this individual story?

You’ll ultimately want to discern what the gospel writer’s purpose was in telling the story, what the narrative communicates about Jesus, and what *you* should do in response.

So give it a try! Pick a narrative in the Gospels, ask the Lord to help you understand, and start reading. A Bible-loving, spiritually maturing, evangelistically strategic believer won’t want to ignore these stories.