

Discovering the Real Jesus

(part 1 of 6): Mark vs. Matthew and Luke



Many scholars and students of the Bible have observed how similar the gospels are to each other in the episodes they narrate and in the sayings of Jesus they report. These scholars and students have also noticed how the very same passages are also starkly different from each other in various details.

Over the last three hundred years, the world of Biblical scholarship has exercised its collective mind in solving the riddle of why the gospels are so similar and yet so different. The result of this laborious scholarly enquiry has resulted in the discovery that Matthew and Luke were dependent upon Mark and an additional source, termed “Q”, as the basis for their own gospels.

The two source hypothesis is generally accepted as the fundamental solution to the synoptic problem. It remains the majority position within contemporary New Testament scholarship.

The late protestant evangelical scholar F. F. Bruce writes:

“The conclusion usually and I think rightly drawn from their comparative study is that the Gospel of Mark or something very similar like it, served as a source for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke...”^[1]

Mark’s gospel has been dated between 65-70 C.E. There is a general consensus on this dating, agreed upon by conservatives as well as skeptics, and found in most introductions to the New Testament.

F. F. Bruce corroborating this dating writes:

“Mark probably wrote his gospel in the first instance, for the Christians of Rome, in the aftermath of the persecution which overtook them without warning under Nero, as a sequel to the great fire in July, AD 64”.^[2]

When studying these gospels, it is quite apparent that Mark is more primitive in style, theology and diction. More importantly, in Mark's gospel the human Jesus stands out more visibly than the later gospels. Scholars argue that the depiction of Jesus in Mark represents a far more historical and real Jesus.

In Mark's gospel, there are a plethora of passages which describe Jesus as a mere human being. Such passages would later on become stumbling blocks in the way of weak believers, traditions which “ran against the grain”, and were therefore omitted from the later gospels.

When one scrutinizes the same narratives of Jesus reported in Mark and Matthew, one quickly realizes that the latter has altered Mark's gospel due to an increasing feeling of reverence for the person of Christ. Passages which show the inability, weakness and humanness of Jesus were omitted by Matthew and replaced with a much better Christology.

Of course, not all of the changes were Christological in nature. Factual inaccuracies, grammatical mistakes and other minor errors were also omitted by Matthew and Luke. Matthew's redaction of Mark often appears at first to involve incidental details, but a closer study reveals that it is part of a consistent and thoroughgoing redevelopment of Mark.

Through the passing of time, there was a clear change in Christology from the earlier gospel to the later ones. The development was from lesser to greater. There was an enhancing of feelings of reverence and an increase in the position and status of Jesus.

Bruce Metzger, the premier New Testament textual critic, writes:

“Matthew and Luke suppress or weaken references in Mark to such human emotions of Jesus as grief and anger and amazement as well as Jesus' unrequited love; they also omit Mark's statement that Jesus' friends thought he was beside himself”.

He explains further, that:

“The later gospels omit what might imply that Jesus was unable to accomplish what he willed...and also omit questions asked by Jesus which might be taken to imply his ignorance.”^[3]

Metzger continues further by enumerating instances where Matthew and Luke soften Mark's statements which might minimize the majesty of Jesus and replaced it with illustrations of a more alluring and authoritative Jesus.

In the story of the fig tree as found in Mark, the disciples did not notice the withering of the tree until next morning. For Matthew, this seemed less

dramatic and unimpressive, and hence in his narrative the tree withered at once, leaving the disciples in shock and amazement.

Matthew and Luke were adamant in changing the words of Jesus. They wanted to make Jesus say what they wanted people to believe, “reflecting a later stage of theological understanding than that in Mark.” (Metzger, pg 83)

It seems quite clear that during both the pre and post gospel stages of the gospel traditions transmission, the available material was molded, filtered and changed in direct correlation to the Christological convictions of those who handled the traditions.

It is important to stress that this is not a case of the evangelists’ mere differing in emphasis; rather there are numerous occasions when the later gospel writers go out of their way to modify and alter the earlier version.

Therefore, if we wish to come close to the historical Jesus in the gospels, it is a good starting point to compare the stories in the various gospels, to discern where the story has altered.

Footnotes:

[1] The Real Jesus, pg 25

[2] Ibid

[3] The New Testament: its background, growth and content, pg 81-83

(part 2 of 6): The Gospel of John

In the beginning, each gospel was circulated independently in the community it had been written. Mark was probably composed in Rome, Matthew in Antioch, Luke in Ceaserea and John in Ephesus. None of the gospel writers were eyewitnesses to life of Jesus, and very little if anything is known about them.

Now that the gospels are gathered together in the Bible, they can all be studied together. Yet most readers today often forget or ignore what is in Mark and concentrate only on the “improved” version in Matthew, Luke and more specifically John.

When we turn our attention to John, the last gospel to be written, it is not surprising to note that Jesus is magnified and transformed into someone very different to the person found in Mark. John’s Jesus is a powerful being, occupying a position somewhere between God and Man. He is the *logos*, the Word of God, through whom God created everything. He is no longer just a Prophet and Messenger of God, but rather God’s only begotten Son!

Although none of the gospels teach that Jesus is God, some of the statements found in the fourth gospel place Jesus so high above humanity that

many readers deem this as enough proof of the later Christian claim to Jesus' divinity.

For example, it is ONLY in the gospel of John, that we find the following statements:

- “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him, might not perish, but might have eternal life”. (John 3:16)
- “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, He was in the beginning with God.” (John 1:1)
- “I and my Father are One”. (John 10:30)
- “He that has seen me has seen the Father”. (John 14: 8-9)
- “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”. (John 14:6)
- “...Before Abraham came to be, I AM”. (John 8: 58)

Another striking fact is that whilst in the earlier gospels Jesus is seen preaching about the Kingdom of God, in John, Jesus is occupied preaching about himself.

In Mark, the word “kingdom” appears on the lips of Jesus 18 times, whilst in John it is drastically reduced to five. Moreover, in Mark Jesus uses “I” in self-reference, nine times, whilst in John and whopping 118 times!

When we read the earlier gospels, the impression is that the “Kingdom of God” was Jesus' main preaching and teaching, whilst in John's gospel, Jesus is rarely heard preaching the “Kingdom of God”. His gospel is substituted with profound and staggering claims by Jesus about himself.

- “I am the bread of life”. (John 6:35)
- “I am the light of the world”. (John 8:12)
- “I am the door of the sheep”. (John 10:7)
- “I am the good shepherd”. (John 10:11)
- “I am the resurrection and the life”. (John 11:25)
- “I am the way, the truth and the life”. (John 14:6)
- “I am the true vine”. (John 15:1)

It is of no surprise that evangelists and Christian apologists, when asked for textual proof for the divinity of Jesus, quickly rush to John's gospel, since none of the above powerful self-testimonies are to be found in any of the other gospels. Surely, if these words were part and parcel of the original words of Jesus, every gospel writer would have mentioned them. It is implausible to

believe that the writers neglected all of these core and fundamental teachings and busied themselves with lesser details in Jesus' life.

Moreover, why was it that the term "father" or "the father" referring to God is only used four times in Mark, but a mammoth 173 times in John? The most obvious deduction to be drawn from these statistics is that over the period spanned by Mark and John, there was an evolution and development of the traditions. In Mark's gospel, Jesus spoke of God as "God", whilst after 30 years when John wrote his gospel, Jesus in the very same episodes calls "God" his "Father".

In the earliest of the four gospels, Jesus appears very human and very much a prophet. In the last gospel, however, he appears much more divine, and much more like an icon.

It is for this reason that Mark's gospel was rather neglected by the early church. It was less frequently copied by scribes, preachers rarely referred to it and it was read only occasionally in church congregations and services.

As stated earlier, the author of John's gospel was not the only one guilty of changing the words of Jesus, Matthew and Luke also not satisfied with the depiction of Jesus in Mark set out to magnify the position of Jesus in a number of ways. When we line up the gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke (*synoptic gospels*) together, and compare them with one another, we will notice that the events and speeches are modified as we go from one gospel to another.

(part 3 of 6): Textual Comparisons (I)

Using Matthew as a case in point, we notice that the writers who came after Mark repeatedly changed the story line, in the following ways:

- 1) They often inserted the title "Son of God" for Jesus.
- 2) They often inserted the title "Father" for God.
- 3) They magnified the miracles of Jesus.
- 4) They covered up the limitations of Jesus.
- 5) They called Jesus "Lord".
- 6) They represented people praying to Jesus.
- 7) They portrayed Jesus with more knowledge.
- 8) They blurred the distinction between Jesus and God.

To illustrate the type of changes that occurred, I will show how individual episodes in the gospels of Matthew and Mark are similar and yet significantly different. The differences have been noted by Biblical scholars and explained as modifications introduced by Matthew.

The Greatest Commandment (Mark 12: 28-35, Matthew 22:34-40)

Mark 12: 28- 35	Matthew 22:34-40
<p>²⁸One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”</p> <p>²⁹“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.”</p> <p>³²“Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”</p> <p>³⁴When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.</p>	<p>³⁴Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:</p> <p>³⁶“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” ³⁷Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”</p>

* All quotes are from The New International Version.

In Mark’s gospel, a teacher of the law asks Jesus as to what is the greatest commandment. Jesus replied that the greatest commandment was that God is one. Hearing Jesus’ response, than man agrees with Jesus, that to believe that

God is One is the greatest commandment. Jesus realizes that the man had answered wisely and tells him that he is not far from the Kingdom of God.

In Matthew, loving God becomes the greatest commandment and no mention of God being one is made.

The Rich Young Ruler (Mark 10: 17-19, Matthew 19: 16-20)

Mark 10: 17-19	Matthew 19: 16-20
<p>¹⁷As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”</p> <p>¹⁸“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹You know the commandments: Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.”</p>	<p>¹⁶Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”</p> <p>¹⁷“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.”</p> <p>¹⁸“Which ones?” the man inquired.</p> <p>Jesus replied, “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, ¹⁹honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.”</p>

Hearing the two together, you do not detect any difference and this is what happens. By the time you finish reading Matthew, then Mark and then Luke. One does not remember what he read in which gospel. The reader thinks that all three gospels say exactly the same thing. Yet, when we study them together closely, we realize that the gospel writers were able to use the information to their advantage, to teach the precise point they wanted to preach.

In the above passage, the opening exchange between the man and Jesus has been altered by Matthew. In Mark, the man addresses Jesus as “good teacher”. Jesus replies with a mild rebuke, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.” Once again, Matthew tries to change the passage. First he alters the man’s initial question by moving the word “good” from the address and putting it as the object of the sentence.

Mark: “Good teacher, what must I do...?”

Matthew: “Teacher, what good deed must I do...?”

Finally, embarrassed by the fact that Jesus had reprimand the man for calling him good, Matthew changes Mark’s second sentence, hence leaving Jesus no chance to refuse that address and protecting him from the implicit suggestion that he was not good. Yet in doing so, Matthew has made his version lack coherency, indicating as though Jesus did not understand the question.

(part 4 of 6): Textual Comparisons (II)

The Withered Fig Tree (Mark 11: 12-25, Matthew 21: 12-22)

Mark 11: 12-25	Matthew 21: 12-22
<p>¹²The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. ¹³Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴Then he said to the tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard him say it.</p> <p>¹⁵On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ” ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”</p> <p>¹⁸The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began</p>	<p>¹²Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ¹³“It is written,” he said to them, “‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a ‘den of robbers.’”</p> <p>¹⁴The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.</p> <p>¹⁶“Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read, “‘From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise’?”</p> <p>¹⁷And he left them and went out of</p>

looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

¹⁹When evening came, they went out of the city.

The Withered Fig Tree

²⁰**In the morning**, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. ²¹Peter remembered and said to Jesus, **“Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!”**

²²“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. ²³“I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. ²⁴Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

The Fig Tree Withers

¹⁸Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. ¹⁹Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, **“May you never bear fruit again!” Immediately the tree withered.**

²⁰When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. **“How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked.**

²¹Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. ²²If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

In Mark’s version, Jesus seeing in a distance a fig tree went over to looking for fruit. Since it was still not the right season, no food was found on the tree. Jesus after making this understandable human error still curses the good tree. As for Matthew, he deletes the information about it not being the right season, since this would imply that Jesus destroyed a tree for no justifiable reason. Matthew leaves the reader to think that the tree was barren and therefore deserved to be destroyed.

Furthermore, in Mark the disciples notice that the tree has withered away the following day. Yet, in Matthew, the tree withers away immediately demonstrating the power of Jesus and the amazement of the disciples. Moreover, Matthew makes other significant changes to the passage,

so for example, where Mark mentions “a house of prayer for all nations”, Matthew omits “all nation” to satisfy his Jewish readership.

Sick Woman (Mark 5: 24-35, Matthew 9:20-23)

Mark 5: 24-35	Matthew 9:20-23
<p>A large crowd followed and pressed around him. ²⁵And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. ²⁷When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” ²⁹Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.</p> <p>³⁰At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”</p> <p>³¹“You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’ “</p> <p>³²But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. ³³Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. ³⁴He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”</p>	<p>²⁰Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. ²¹She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.”</p> <p>²²Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed from that moment.</p>

In Mark, the woman touches Jesus' cloak and is cured. Jesus felt the power going out of him and realized that someone had touched him but he did not know where the power went and who had touched him. Whilst the woman was already cured, in Mark, Jesus was still trying to figure out what had happened.

In Matthew, Jesus is far more powerful. He immediately knew who touched him and the woman was healed only after Jesus spoke, as if the healing power awaited Jesus' command.

(part 5 of 6): Textual Comparisons (III)

Peter's Confession (Mark 8: 27-30, Matthew 16: 13-17)

Mark 8: 27-30	Matthew 16: 13-17
<p>²⁷Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"</p> <p>²⁸They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."</p> <p>²⁹"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"</p> <p>Peter answered, "You are the Christ."</p> <p>³⁰Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.</p>	<p>¹³When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"</p> <p>¹⁴They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."</p> <p>¹⁵"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"</p> <p>¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."</p>

What did Peter actually say?

Mark: "You are the Christ".

Matthew: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God".

Many Bible notes and commentaries acknowledge that here Matthew has added the additional phrase into the mouth of Jesus. (New Jerusalem Bible, pg 34)

Jesus' Rejection at Nazareth (Mark 6: 1-6, Matthew 13: 53-58)

Mark 6: 1-6	Matthew 13: 53-58
<p>¹Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. ²When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.</p> <p>“Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! ³Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.</p> <p>⁴Jesus said to them, “Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.” ⁵He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶And he was amazed at their lack of faith.</p>	<p>⁵³When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there.</p> <p>⁵⁴Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. “Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?” they asked. ⁵⁵“Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” ⁵⁷And they took offense at him.</p> <p>But Jesus said to them, “Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor.”</p> <p>⁵⁸And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.</p>

As you can see, Mark's version depicts Jesus as being powerless in the face of unbelief and was unable to do any miracles. Matthew changes the Mark's version to eliminate this problem.

Mark: “He could not do any mighty work there...”

Matthew: “He did not do many miracles there...”

Scholars have also suggested that Matthew wanted to avoid the description of Jesus as a carpenter and therefore changed it, due to the general negative attitudes towards manual labor, which were characteristic among the elite of the Greco-Roman world.

Jesus Heals Many (Mark 1: 32-34, Matthew 8: 16-17)

Mark 1: 32-34	Matthew 8: 16-17
<p>³²That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.</p>	<p>¹⁶When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. ¹⁷This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.”</p>

In Mark Jesus heals many, but in Matthew he heals all!

Jesus' Mother and Brothers (Mark 3: 31-35, Matthew 12:46-50)

Mark 3: 31-35	Matthew 12:46-50
<p>³¹Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.”</p> <p>³³“Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked.</p> <p>³⁴Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.”</p>	<p>⁴⁶While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. ⁴⁷Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.”</p> <p>⁴⁸He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”</p>

Here, Matthew changes “God” to “Father” in Jesus’ speech in order to support later developing ideas about Jesus and God.

Walking on Water (Mark 6: 45-52, Matthew 14: 22-33)

Mark 6: 45-52	Matthew 14: 22-33
<p>⁴⁵Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.</p> <p>⁴⁷When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. ⁴⁸He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, ⁴⁹but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, ⁵⁰because they all saw him and were terrified.</p> <p>Immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.” ⁵¹Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, ⁵²for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.</p>	<p>Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but the boat was already a considerable distance^[a] from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.</p> <p>²⁵During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It's a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.</p> <p>²⁷But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.”</p> <p>²⁸“Lord, if it's you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”</p> <p>²⁹“Come,” he said.</p> <p>Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”</p> <p>³¹Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”</p> <p>³²And when they climbed into</p>

the boat, the wind died down. ³³**Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”**

Note the following changes and additions made by Matthew from Mark: Firstly, he omitted Bethsaida due to its geographical difficulty. Secondly, Peter in Matthew’s gospel addresses Jesus by the honorific title “Lord”. Thirdly, the disciples worship Jesus and finally they all confess that Jesus is the “Son of God”.

Through time, like a snowball, the more the message of Jesus was passed around, the more it got bigger and better. The above passage illustrates how Matthew modified the speech of individuals to produce the result, that Jesus is called “Lord”. Now it is true that Lord does not necessarily mean God. But in the later Christian thinking it will mean exactly that. Matthew was inadvertently setting the stage of Jesus’ promotion to Godhead.

(part 6 of 6): Conclusion

From the aforementioned discussion, another question arises. How can we trust Mark in everything that he presents about Jesus as historically accurate? It is common knowledge that the present day gospels were not written by Jesus nor at his dictation. The earliest gospel Mark was written around 65-70 AD. So there is a time gap between Jesus’ ascension and the first gospel, a gap of about 35-40 years.

As stated earlier, Mark was not an eyewitness to the life of Jesus, nor do we have clear records showing that the early church memorized the sayings of Jesus. Therefore this gap has to be viewed as considerable. During this time, the traditions of Jesus were being shaped and developed, with many different versions of the gospels being circulated in the different communities.

Furthermore, it is important to stress that the gospel writers were not merely recorders of tradition. Like the other gospel writers, Mark also edited his material. He also worked upon and reshaped the traditions that he used. Like the rest of the writers, he also was not attempting to produce a historically accurate biography of Jesus. Their concern was to present material which best served their church and reflected their understanding of Jesus rather than Jesus’ own self-understanding. In reconstructing the teaching and actions of Jesus, it is possible to take account of the modifications introduced by the later gospel writers. But the period between Jesus and the emergence of the written gospels is far more problematic.

Therefore, in attempting to discover the real historical Jesus, we will have to peel back the layers behind all of the stories that were later developed about Jesus. We have to find out who Jesus was, before the gospels were written about him. When we study the gospels, we see stories of Jesus evolving over time such that the personality of Jesus grows bigger and better. Jesus is shown to be more knowledgeable and more powerful over time, until finally after many councils and disputes, he is officially proclaimed as God in the council of Nicea in the year 325 C.E. Over the course of time, Jesus was transformed from a Jewish carpenter and Messenger of God to the second person in the holy trinity. From what he was to something he would never agree with.

Yet all is not at lost. Even today, if someone wanted to know the real historical Jesus, then they can do so. God in His infinite Mercy, has once more sent a Messenger with a pristine message, a message that was not contaminated nor tampered with.

In this final message, God tells us that Jesus was a man and a mighty messenger sent by Him, that Jesus performed miracles by God's leave, that he was born of a virgin birth and that he would return towards the end of time.

In the Qur'an, God instructs the Christians:

“O People of the Book! Do not exceed the limits in your religion: nor say of Allah aught but the truth. The Messiah Jesus, the son of Mary, was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah and His Word which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit created by Him; so believe in Allah and His Messengers. Say not: "Three!" Cease! it is better for you. For Allah is One God, Glory be Him (Far Exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is All-Sufficient as a Disposer of affairs.” (Quran 4:171)