WHY DIDN'T JESUS WRITE A GOSPEL?

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Category: Theology

One evening last week I was chatting with some friends at a conference centre where we were meeting. During the conversation, one fellow blogger raised the question of why Jesus didn't write a Gospel. At the time, none of us came up with an answer that really satisfied. I've thought about it over the past few days and have now come to the firm conclusion that we don't have an answer to this question! However, I do have a few thoughts...

My first thought is that one writer, even if that writer was Jesus himself, could never catch all of the nuances and depth of a three year ministry. Any book which caught everything that Jesus said would have to be inordinately long. However, by comparing the four Gospels we can get insights into Jesus ministry that simply wouldn't be there if all we had was one writer.

I also believe that it was intentional that we do not have access to the exact words of Jesus. We have the disciples writing from memory about things that they had heard years previously. Not only that, but the disciples wrote in Greek, when Jesus taught in Aramaic. So while the Gospels are an accurate account of Jesus actions and sayings, they are not a word-for-word record.

So why didn't God want the Bible to include a verbatim account of Jesus' teaching?

I think the answer lies in the fact that God does not want us to give the Bible too much prominence. The role of Scripture is to point us to Christ and to bring us into relationship with him. There are many ways in which Christ is revealed to us; through the life of the Christian community, through the example of faithful Christians (what Frost and Hirsch call Little Jesuses) and through our own prayer and devotional life. However, Scripture is the clearest and most reliable revelation of the character and words of Jesus. Because of this, we are constantly faced with the temptation of reverencing the Bible, over and above the God it reveals. Evangelicals are sometimes accused of worshipping Father, Son and Holy Scripture. As with most caricatures, there is a degree of truth in this. I think that if Jesus had actually sat down and written a record of his own teaching and actions, then the temptation to elevate the Bible to a higher place would be almost impossible to avoid. The way in which some Bibles put the words of Jesus in red, giving them a higher prominence than the rest of the revealed text is an illustration of how easy it is to fall into this trap (see discussion here).

A third reason is that writing books (even with MS Word) takes an awful long time. Jesus came to do his Father's bidding, to act and to teach, not to sit and write an autobiography. Quite simply, he had more important things to do than write a story - his disciples could do that when the time came.

No doubt, some scholar has given a far better answer to this question than me.