

Essay on My *Harmonizing the Gospels*

By Dan Jensen (2024)

(In order to fully benefit from this essay, I recommend reading through my “works for beginners” first. I also recommend first reading my *Harmonizing the Gospels*. Finally, I recommend reading the essay on my website about myself, especially the footnote where I discuss this book to some extent. All of these works can be found on my website.)

In this essay, I want to address some of the objections to my *Harmonizing the Gospels*. The first thing to address are the minor mistakes like typos and less than perfect grammar and punctuation. I only misspelled a few words, and there is nothing that is glaringly awful as far as grammar and punctuation. You can read more about this on pages 12-15 of my book response to Randal Rauser. That work can be found on my website in the section on Progressive Christianity. The section on Progressive Christianity can be found within the broader section on the religions of the world. You may wonder how spellcheck did not catch the spelling errors. The way in which I accidentally spelled these words was as other words that are legit. So, for example, at one point I used the word *toe* when I meant to use the word *tow*. I understand that most programs would pick this up today, but I wrote the book in 2011 and things were not as good back then.

You may ask how I could have missed such basic errors. Did I not proofread the works thoroughly? Yes, I certainly did. I caught a ton and made a lot of changes. But, after a while the brain just turns off when it has read the same thing so many times over a short period of time. It is a known fact that the brain often substitutes what we know should be there instead of allowing us to see what is actually there when we are reading quickly. I am genuinely not trying to make excuses, but I naturally read very fast and it is often hard for me to slow down even when I am trying hard to do so. You may ask why I didn't

have it professionally proofread. That is expensive and I did not have any extra money at the time. It is as simple as that. As I have gone back and read the work later after having taken long breaks from it, I of course noticed many of these things. Others pointed out some things to me, but I myself noticed most of the mistakes. I do not believe that any of these very minor mistakes takes away from the substance of the book.

In my strong estimation, most of my harmonizations are extremely reasonable. Most of the objections against these I find to be paltry indeed. However, there are 2 places where I can understand why people had a hard time with my harmonizations. The first is the episode with the faith of the centurion. Many, even believers, have said that it is a far smoother interpretation to say that the centurion never actually talked to Jesus and that Matthew is only trying to convey the idea that the centurion talked to Jesus through his messengers. It is often pointed out how this was seen as a normal literary device in Jesus' day. I am not entirely against this harmonization. There is nothing heretical about it. I am not a Fundamentalist. In *Harmonizing the Gospels* itself, I go to great lengths to say that we cannot interpret the Gospels the way that many die-hard literalists wish to do so today. With that said, it really does seem to me that Matthew is trying to present the fact that the centurion himself interacted with Jesus. Thus, in my opinion, if my harmonization is possible, it should be preferred even if it does feel like a slight stretch.

I would argue that such a scenario as described in my harmony of this episode is indeed not your everyday scenario. I do not at all deny that. If the Gospels constantly forced us to make harmonizations along these lines, I agree we would have a problem on our hands. But, only one instance is actually quite reasonable. Odd things happen to us in our lives all of the time. They simply don't happen every day. But, if we look back on any 3 year period of our lives, we all can find some days where things happened that were way out of the ordinary. Such events make for great stories. Most people would not believe us unless they knew us well and that we would not fabricate such things.

The second of my harmonizations where I can see why people had some trouble is over the episode with the cursing of the fig tree. The biggest problem people had with my harmonization is the fact that I have Jesus giving the same basic teaching twice to the same exact listeners within a very short period of time (just 24 hours). The problem here is that this objection is coming from a very modern mindset. We have the benefit of paper and pen all around us, computers, and now cell phones. That was not the case in the ancient world. Teachers, especially Jewish teachers, often were exceedingly repetitive with their teachings so that their disciples would remember them almost word for word. It is very hard for us today to understand the oral culture of that time and region. Thus, my proposed repetitiveness here actually makes perfect sense within that context.

If you have any other objections or questions about my *Harmonizing the Gospels*, please email them to me. My email can be found on my website.