

WHY FOUR GOSPELS? THE FOUR-FOLD PORTRAIT OF CHRIST

in
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

by

Louis T. Talbot

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

CHRIST — THE SON OF GOD

As Portrayed in
The Gospel According to John
“BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD!”
“THE LORD . . . BEAUTIFUL AND GLORIOUS”

When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming unto him and proclaimed Him as **“the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,”** he was led by the Holy Spirit to announce the beginning of the public ministry of the eternal Son of God, whom the Prophet Isaiah had described some seven-hundred years previously as **“the branch of the LORD . . . beautiful and glorious.”** (See John 1:29; Isaiah 4:2).

And thus we see beginning to unfold the last book of the four-fold Gospel portrait of Him who was to come — Israel’s Messiah and King, the faithful Servant of the Lord, the sinless Son of Man, the eternal Son of God. And again we are reminded of the four **“beasts [living ones]”** whom John saw **“in the midst of the throne”** of God — the place where Deity alone can dwell:

“The first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle” (Revelation 4:7).

In our former studies we have seen that these four creatures **“in the midst of the throne”** represent our Lord Jesus in His kingly character, in His humble service, in His perfect humanity, and in His heavenly Being. We have seen that these are the four characteristics of His Person and work emphasized by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John respectively.

And now we begin today the study of John’s portrait of the **“Lord from heaven.”** Just as the **“flying eagle”** soars into the clouds, so also our Lord is the heaven-sent One, whose deity the **“beloved disciple”** dwells upon particularly in His inspired record.

Because this fourth Gospel story emphasizes the eternal deity of Jesus, the Son of God, it is the most profound, the most exalted, the most loved by the redeemed of the Lord.

It has to do with spiritual relationships, whereas the other Gospels dwell much upon human ties. Accordingly, Matthew wrote particularly for Israel, to present her Messiah and King; Mark wrote especially for God's servants, portraying the faithful Servant of God; Luke wrote to men as men — Jew and Gentile — to portray the perfect **“Man, Christ Jesus”**; John wrote to prove that this King and Servant and God-Man was eternal in His Being, omnipotent in His works, Himself the everlasting God!

Throughout the centuries of Old Testament times the Holy Spirit had promised the coming into the world of **“Jesus, the Son of God.”** This One who is **“The LORD . . . beautiful and glorious”** was foretold by Isaiah when he prophesied that a **“Child”** was to be **“born,”** but that a **“Son”** was to be **“given.”** God could not die for sinners until He was **“born”** as the Child of the virgin; but as the **“Son”** He is eternal; as the Son He could not be **“born”**!

Moreover, Isaiah carefully guarded the deity of the promised Redeemer, saying also that He is **“The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace”** (Isaiah 9:6).

In another place the same prophet wrote, saying that this coming Messiah would be born of the virgin, and that His name should be called **“Immanuel,”** which **“being interpreted is, God with us”** (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23).

Micah also, foretelling the place of His birth, spoke of Him as the eternal One, **“whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting”** (Micah 5:2).

Repeatedly in the Psalms God, the Father, addressed God, the Son, as His equal; here are just a few of the passages which might be quoted :

- **“The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool”** (Psalm 110:1).
- **“Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee”** (Psalm 2:7).
- **“Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever . . .”** (Psalm 45:6).
- **“Thy years are throughout all generations”** (Psalm 102:24).

The foregoing are quoted in the New Testament, some of them several times, forever to prove that they were written of Christ before He came into the world, forever to establish His eternal deity. And they could be multiplied manifold!

Thus they become one of **“many infallible proofs”** that the Lord Jesus Christ is the central theme of the entire written Word of God.

May the Holy Spirit who inspired John to write this fourth Gospel prepare our hearts to worship Him of whom these pages speak — Him whose name is **“The Lamb of God . . . The LORD . . . beautiful and glorious”**!

JOHN — THE HUMAN AUTHOR — AND HIS PURPOSE

Even in our finite wisdom we can see in part why the Holy Spirit selected John to pen the lines of this fourth Gospel.

Together with James and Peter, John saw the Lord transfigured, witnessed the raising of the little daughter of Jairus from the dead, and went with the suffering Saviour to Gethsemane. Of John alone it is written that he followed Christ all the way to the cross, and received from Him the care of Mary. John is called “**the beloved disciple**”; he “**leaned on his breast at supper.**”

Surely he understood as few others did something of the deeper truths concerning the Person and work of his Lord!

He was also chosen of God to write three wonderful letters to the church; and to record the vision he saw on the Isle of Patmos concerning “**The Revelation of Jesus Christ**” in all His great power and coming glory. John must have understood the deeper things of Christ as no other human being, unless it was the Apostle Paul, who also was given special revelations from God.

“**The beloved disciple**” was an old man when he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the Gospel which bears his name; for the date of this record falls between 85 A.D. and 90 A.D., “probably the latter.”

The Synoptic Gospels, so-called because as the Greek word, “*Synoptic*,” suggests, they present “*the same general view*” of the Lord Jesus; that is, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, had been written some thirty years previously. They had been in circulation within twenty-five or thirty years after Christ’s ascension into heaven. Then a quarter of a century — more or less — had elapsed.

During those years false teachers had crept into the church, denying the eternal deity of “**Jesus, the Son of God.**” Like the Unitarians of our own day, like the false cults and religious systems which seek to rob our Lord of His rightful place as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, these false teachers claimed that He was only a good man, a way-shower, a perfect example.

Such false teachers are sometimes called “modernists” today; but they are not “modern.” All of their kind date back to the day when sin entered the world; when Satan first turned men’s hearts from the promised Saviour, seeking to rob the coming Messiah and Redeemer of the world of His eternal deity and Lordship.

To off-set this false teaching which had crept into early Christendom, John wrote his story of the life of Christ. There can be no question about his purpose; for in John 20:30, 31 he plainly expresses it in unmistakable terms:

“And many other signs (or ‘miracles’) truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

According to this stated purpose, there were really two motives in the mind of the Holy Spirit as He led John to write this Gospel, the second growing out of the first; for to believe that “**Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,**” is to be saved, to have everlasting “**life through his name.**” Thus the ultimate purpose of the book is to win never-dying souls to the only Saviour of sinners. And to be saved, one must believe that the Man of Galilee is the eternal God!

It has been pointed out that proof of the later date of this fourth Gospel is evidenced by the fact that a previous knowledge of the contents of the Synoptics is assumed, as illustrated by the references to John the Baptist in John 1:32; 3:24, as well as in other details of the narrative.

Again, that a previous knowledge of the content of the Synoptic Gospels was assumed by John, is evidenced by the fact that he omitted practically all the facts which the first three evangelists had written, until he reached the story of the Lord’s suffering and death. Only two of the seven miracles recorded by John are told by one or more of the other writers — the feeding of the five thousand and the Lord’s walking on the water. Then John presents a strikingly different record of the witness of John the Baptist from that of the other three, one which presupposes a knowledge of the events themselves.

Like them, he records the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Lord’s prophecy of the betrayal and Peter’s denial. All else in the first seventeen chapters is found in John alone. The explanation of this seems to be that the Holy Spirit purposely saved this fresh evidence of the Lord’s eternal Being and mighty work, in order to meet the need which He knew would arise, the need to prove the deity of Jesus, the Son of God.

“**Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world**” (Acts 15:18).

Yet other proofs of the later date of John’s record are seen in the frequent use of words which describe the deeper Christian experience; such as, “**believe,**” “**love,**” “**truth,**” “**eternal life,**” “**God, the Father.**”

And, as we shall see in this study, the Lord’s most profound teachings to His own concerning the Holy Spirit, prayer, His Father’s love for His own, the “**many mansions**” for the redeemed — these are some of the deeper things of Christ recorded by John, yet not found in the first three Gospels.

We mentioned a few minutes ago the fact that the Synoptic Gospels dwell much upon human relationships, whereas John dwells most upon divine relationships.

The Synoptics tell of an earthly people; John describes a heavenly people — although the deeper church truth was not revealed until God gave it to Paul. John has to do, rather, with “**the family of God.**” Paul wrote of the church, which is Christ’s bride. Matthew, Mark, and Luke wrote of the proclamation of Messiah’s kingdom before they told of the rejection of the King; John opened his Gospel with the announcement of His rejection, saying, “**He came unto his own (things), and his own (people, Israel) received him not**” (John 1:11). The fact is that John wrote his record after Titus had destroyed the temple, 70 A.D., after Israel had been scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

The Synoptic Gospels speak of the Son of David, the Servant among men, the Son of Man, linking Him with the earth; John wrote of the Son of God, linking Him with heaven itself. The first three evangelists wrote of an earthly kingdom; John, of a heavenly kingdom, and of “**other sheep,**” which are not of “**this fold,**” Israel. The “**other sheep,**” of course, are Gentiles.

The very nature of the miracles found only in John, the profound discourses of the Lord recorded here only, and the doctrines they set forth, add yet further evidence of the purpose of the Holy Spirit in writing these much loved pages. Nothing like this is found in Matthew, Mark, or Luke; for, as we have seen, they had their chief purpose also. Thus we are again impressed with the fact that these four Gospels are not mere repetitions of the same incidents; they are the work of the Master-Mind of the Holy Spirit of God, who not only inspired them, but who alone can teach us their meaning.

Someone has said that Christ speaks of God as His own “**Father**” thirty-five times in John; and that twenty-five times He says, with the voice of authority, “**Verily, verily, I say unto you . . .**”

It is John who emphasizes the truth, later enlarged upon by Paul, that it is “**Jesus, the Son of God,**” who will raise the dead — an act of Deity!

Several times in John we read of Jesus’ omniscience, for “**He knew all men . . . He knew what was in man**” (2:24, 25). Many times in this fourth Gospel the Lord said plainly that He came down from heaven, having been “**sent**” by His Father — “**sent,**” used in this connection, is one of the key words of the book. And Christ declared His omnipresence in John 3:13, saying,

“**No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.**”

Such evidence of the deity of Christ is overwhelming and irrefutable.

~ end of chapter 19 ~

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