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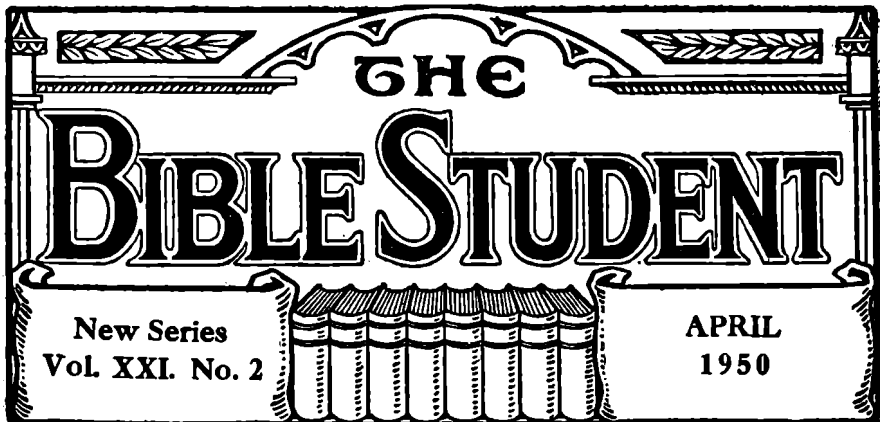
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CHRIST IN THE FOUR GOSPELS

II. The Four Gospels and their Writers (cont.)

BY A. NAISMITH, M.A.

JOHN, the writer of the fourth Gospel, was one of the three of the inner circle of disciples. His name means 'Grace of Jehovah': his writings reflect the radiance of Heaven. He is the only one of the four Evangelists into whose family and circumstances we are permitted to have a glimpse. His father was Zebedee who, with his sons, James and John, was a fisherman. Salome their mother (cp. Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40) was one of the Galilean women who ministered to the Lord Jesus. The family was evidently highly respected and of good standing, for John was personally acquainted with the members of the priestly household and gained admission to the place of trial on the night of our Lord's betrayal not only for himself, but also for Peter.

In his Gospel and in the three epistles that he wrote, John never refers to himself by his name. Whenever the name of John occurs in the Fourth Gospel, it is John the Baptist that is intended. The writer of the Gospel with becoming modesty styles himself "another disciple" or "that other disciple" or "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (See 13:23; 18:15-16; 19:26-27; 20:2-4, 8; 21:7, 20, 24). John is retiring and reticent, and a man of few words. His narrative shows a more limited vocabulary than the others: the words he uses are simple, yet profound. His sentences are short but weighty, and there is frequent reiteration. His three great themes are Life, Light and Love. The learned men of that day considered Peter and John "unlearned and ignorant men", yet they could not but perceive the power and influence of Jesus in their lives, in their words and deeds.

Mark tells us that the Lord gave Zebedee's two sons the name of Boanerges, which means 'sons of thunder'. Apart from this reference by Mark to the meaning of the name, none of the other New Testament writers except John, a 'son of thunder', makes mention of "thunder".

The title John liked best for himself was "the *disciple whom Jesus loved*" (John 21:20). It was Christ's affection that specially appealed to him, and in his Gospel and epistles he delights to dwell on the love of God in Christ, and the mutual love that should characterize all the followers of the Lamb. From Chapter

11 onward, the love of Christ is prominent. In this portion of the Gospel John refers to himself five times as the disciple whom Jesus loved (13:20; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7 and 21:20). Again and again he mentions this selective affection of the Lord Jesus for others also:

“He whom thou *lovest* is sick” (11:3):

“Jesus *loved* Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus” (11:5):

“Then said the Jews, Behold how he *loved* him” (11:36):

“Having *loved* his own which were in the world, he *loved* them unto the end (13:1):

“As I have *loved* you, that ye also *love* one another” (13:34):

“I will *love* him and will manifest myself to him” (14:21):

“As the Father hath *loved* me, so have I *loved* you; continue ye in my *love*” (15:9).

“Greater *love* hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (15:13).

John was also the disciple “who *leaned on Jesus’ bosom*”. This was a mark of the closest intimacy as well as of the deepest affection. Luke records the story of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus and tells us that the beggar after death was carried into Abraham’s bosom. But it is John alone who writes of the Lord Jesus as “the only begotten Son which is *in the bosom of the Father*” (John 1:18). In his position of nearness John had a closer view of his Lord and in his writings goes beyond all others in his appreciation of Christ’s glory. As, in his advancing years, memory travelled back to those days of sweet communion, he wrote with rapture, “we beheld His glory”. John was the first of the disciples to recognize his Lord standing in the early morning on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. In his selection of incidents, this apostle narrates several not found in any of the Synoptic Gospels, and in those he reveals his appreciation of the Lord’s dealings with individuals for their spiritual good, recording intimate conversations such as those with Nathaniel, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the impotent man healed at Bethesda, the adulteress, Martha and Mary on separate occasions, and Peter after His resurrection. John’s fuller apprehension of Jesus as the Eternal Word and the Incarnate Son was the result of the privileged intimacy he enjoyed, when his Lord communicated His instruction to him and he confided the secrets of his own heart to his gracious Master.

III. The People for whom they were primarily written

The early Christian fathers have indicated not only the various offices and relationships of our Lord emphasized by the writers of the four Gospels but also the people that each had in mind when writing. Origen says of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, that it was "written by Matthew, once a taxgatherer and afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, who published it for the benefit of the Jewish converts". Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and others clearly state that Mark had the Romans in view when he wrote his account of our Lord's life and ministry on earth. Luke, himself a Greek and a man of erudition, wrote for the Greeks who were the intellectual people of the era; while John, writing the most spiritual gospel of the four, that contains a depth of doctrine not given prominence in the Synoptic gospels, had in mind the Christian church.

The internal evidence for these distinctions is found, first in the subject-matter chosen, secondly in the style and diction of the writers and lastly, in the presentation of Christ in His greatness and perfection in a different way in each narrative.

1. The Subject-matter and Characteristic details

In the Gospel written by *Matthew*, Jesus the Messiah is seen as the Fulfiller of the Old Testament prophecies. "According to the Scriptures" and "as it is written" are characteristic of Matthew's account. His gospel is saturated with quotations from and allusions to the Jewish Scriptures. The promised Messiah comes with all the credentials of office, yet lacking in the insignia and outward display that men associate with royalty. In the first four chapters Matthew enunciates seven proofs that the Babe of Bethlehem is the long-expected King:—the genealogical, angelic, astronomical, prophetic, Divine, spiritual and miraculous evidences that He came in fulfilment of what had been recorded. Those four chapters also cite seven great prophecies fulfilled in His advent and ministry: (1:22-23; 2:6; 2:15; 2:18; 2:23; 3:3; and 4:14-16). Matthew's first concern was that his own countrymen should know that their Scriptures had their fulfilment in Jesus Christ and with this in view he wrote his gospel. Not only does Matthew quote prophecies fulfilled in the King: he also records predictions made by the King concerning His second advent. The attitude of the Lord Jesus to the Jewish law, which

He so clearly explained, is the theme of that important discourse usually known as "the sermon on the mount", recorded in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Closely connected with this exposition are our Lord's frequent references to "righteousness" and His parables of the kingdom.

The Gospel written by *Mark*, as has already been noted, is one of swift action. It contains very few Old Testament citations or allusions. There is no appeal to the Scriptures and no mention of the Jewish law. While Matthew takes for granted that his readers are familiar with Jewish customs and rites, Mark takes pains to explain them as if writing to strangers totally unacquainted with them. The Roman was a man of action, and Mark's narrative of events occurring in rapid succession would appeal to a race of that temperament, as did Caesar's accounts of his campaigns.

LUKE: In *The Bible Handbook* by Rev. G. T. Manley, he remarks that "Luke inherited the tradition of Greek historical and biographical writing". A man of learning and culture, he wrote for that philosophic, intellectual race to whom his learning would appeal. Like Mark, he explains Jewish customs and places and makes little or no reference to the fulfilment of prophecy. Our Lord's humanity, His sufferings and His sympathies are the themes Luke emphasizes.

JOHN: In the Fourth Gospel the spiritual aspects of our Lord's life and ministry are emphasized. It has been said that Peter was used by the Holy Spirit to form the Church, Paul to emancipate and John to establish it. In John's Gospel the Father's house is prominent and in his first epistle the Father's family is the predominant theme. The rejection of Christ by Israel, the division of men into two classes "because of Him", and the hatred and opposition of the world to Himself and His followers, —referred to again and again by John—are evidences that he wrote for the Church which Christ was even then setting apart for Himself and calling out from the world.

2. The Style and Diction

Similar distinguishing features are evident here. Many commentators have expressed the opinion that the Gospel of Matthew was originally written in Hebrew specially for the benefit of his own countrymen, and translated into Greek. We have no certain proof of this, but we do know that the narrative of Matthew

contains numerous Hebraisms. The references to the "holy place" (24:15) and the "city of the great king" (5:35), would have a strong appeal to Jewish readers. In Matthew's Gospel the title "Son of David" is applied ten times to Jesus, and twelve times He is called the "King".

Mark's style too is characteristic, for his narrative abounds in Latinisms. Some of the Latin words adopted into Greek that are peculiar to Mark are "speculator" (executioner) in Ch. 6:27, "quadrans" (farthing) in 12:22, and "centurio" (centurion) in 15:39. Mark alone gives us the Roman division of the watches of the night (13:35).

Luke, unlike Matthew and John, does not use the form 'Rabbi' as a title of address to the Lord Jesus but employs in its stead the word 'Master' (often '*epistatēs*', which means 'overseer' or 'superintendent'). Those whom Matthew calls 'scribes', which is characteristically Jewish, Luke often calls 'lawyers'.

John's Gospel contains more references to Christ's deity—a foundation-truth of the Christian church—than any of the other accounts. "Love" is more frequently mentioned by John than by any of the other evangelists. The vocabulary of the "disciple whom Jesus loved" is more limited than that of the Synoptists: the words he uses are simple yet profound. Indeed, there is nothing in John's style and diction that would make a strong appeal to any national culture: his is the language of heaven.

3. The Presentation of Jesus Christ

The several aspects of the uniqueness and excellencies of Jesus Christ, the central theme of all the Gospel narratives, indicate, even more than the other details already considered, the people that each had in mind when writing. It is in the presentation of the greatness of Him Whom they portray that they give the strongest indications of their purpose. In Matthew's Gospel the Lord's own statements as 'King of the Jews' bring into relief His superiority to those in whom the Jews were wont to make their boast. In Matt. 12 the Lord Jesus claims to be "greater than *the temple*" (v. 6), "greater than *Jonah*" (v. 41) and "greater than *Solomon*" (v. 42). In these words He reveals the imperfections as well as the glories of the Jewish system and of Jewish history. Jehovah had given His people a succession of priests who could not continue by reason of death and who served on behalf of the people in a glorious earthly temple that

could be destroyed. Impermanence and imperfection were stamped upon them. As the Giver greater than the gift, and as the eternal Priest not only human but also divine, the Lord Jesus Christ could truly assert His superiority to the temple. As in the priestly, so in the prophetic office, He was superior to all Israel's prophets. The Davidic dynasty, of which Solomon was taken as the most glorious representative, had come to an end long before, and no king of David's line occupied the earthly throne in Jerusalem. He Who was in incarnation "David's Son" and not only "King of the Jews" but "King of kings and Lord of lords", was surely greater than any or all of Israel's rulers.

The names honoured and revered by the Romans were those whose deeds of glory had made them great. The Romans magnified activity and achievement. Mark who writes particularly for the Latin peoples records that large crowds of people from all parts were attracted to Jesus because of "the *great things that He did*", and that those who received the blessings He bestowed published abroad "how *great things* Jesus had done" (3:8; 5:20). In spite of the conspicuous feats accomplished by the great men of the Roman Empire, every one of them had his triumphs marred by failure. Not one had an unblemished career. Of none could it be said, as it was said of the Lord Jesus Christ, "He hath done all things well" (Mark 7:37). Such an approach as Mark's was calculated to make an appeal to his Latin readers.

Luke's Gospel, written specially for the philosophic Greeks, contains a very early reference to the pre-eminence of Christ: "*He shall be great*" (Luke 1:32). The words are part of the angelic annunciation to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Before Christ was born His greatness was foretold by a messenger from Heaven. He was destined to receive a universal and an everlasting dominion. The announcement of His greatness by the angel is preceded by His human name 'Jesus' and followed by one of His divine titles, "Son of the Highest". Reading Luke's account of "those things most surely believed" among the Christians, the thoughtful Greeks would follow the history of Him of Whom such greatness was predicted, tracing it through His life—

In the temple incident when the learned Jewish Rabbis showed unfeigned astonishment at His wisdom even in boyhood days:

In His proclamation of His mission in the temple at Nazareth:

In His power to read the thoughts of His carping critics when He bestowed forgiveness of sin on the palsied man, or permitted a sinful woman to stand at His feet and rain upon them tears of penitence:

In His outline of the hard path of true discipleship:

In those wonderful parables which Luke selects from the many our Lord uttered:

In the foretelling of His second advent:

In the account of His resurrection from the dead.

In the Fourth Gospel, the greatness of the Lord Jesus is affirmed in answer to two questions, one asked by the inimical Jews—"Art thou greater than our father Abraham which is dead?" (8:53); and the other by a Samaritan woman—"Art thou greater than our father Jacob which gave us the well?" (4:12). Our Lord's answer to the Jews was, "Before Abraham was, I am!" To the Samaritaness, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst". By means of these two incidents John asserts the pre-eminence of His rank and the munificence of His gifts: And these are the two doctrines that form the basis of the Christian church. It is fundamental to the believer that Jesus Christ is the Great God and the Great Giver. Therefore "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life". This, John tells us, is the very purpose of his gospel record—"that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through His name".

HOLINESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

When we speak of holiness and righteousness, we do not use two words for one thing, but two words for two things. We shall go wrong if we think they are the same thing. They are allied but different:

1. Holiness is a temper, righteousness a tendency.
2. Holiness is an atmosphere, righteousness an attitude
3. Holiness is condition, righteousness is conduct.
4. Holiness is character, righteousness is the deed.
5. Holiness is Godward, righteousness is manward.

—W. Y. Fullerton