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What shall we then say to these things? A plan of salvation so comprehensive and far-reaching, and of such incomparable blessing for those who are its subjects, cannot but elevate the mind above the vicissitudes of life, and inspire hope and confidence in God. Paul himself is moved by its vast scope. See how he now breaks off in triumph, and, facing all possibilities, calls out in noble challenge, 'If God be for us, who can be against us?' 'Nothing . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' For these great blessings, which move from eternity into eternity, are summed up in verse 39 as the love of God in Christ. They present a panorama of grace, in which we see the Son of God coming forth to accomplish the Father's will, dying, rising again, seated at the right hand of God, and, in due season, being revealed in glory as the Firstborn of many brethren.

## AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ST JOHN'S GOSPEL\*

By F. F. BRUCE, M.A.

### Introduction

For the first thirty years or so after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the need of a written record of His ministry and saving acts was not acutely felt. So long as eyewitnesses of the great evangelic events remained alive to tell what they had seen and heard, their testimony was sufficient. But as the first Christian generation drew to its close, the number of those who had been companions of Christ in the days of His flesh grew smaller. If their personal testimony was not to be lost, or left to the uncertain chances of oral tradition, it must be preserved in some more permanent form than the spoken word. And so, round about the

\* We are greatly indebted to Mr Bruce for this new series of expository studies on the Gospel of John, of which this is the introductory one. In form they will be somewhat similar to those on the Epistle to the Hebrews by the late Mr Vine (which are now drawing to a conclusion), but the writer will have full scope to work along his own particular lines in developing his subject.

Help others to enjoy these studies by introducing them to the *B.S.*

year 60 of the Christian era, we find the beginnings of Gospel writing. In Rome, we are told by second-century Christian writers, Mark wrote down the Gospel story as he had often heard it from the lips of Peter in the days when he attended him as his interpreter. Then Luke, the companion of Paul, composed his history of Christian origins in two volumes in order that the most excellent Theophilus (and others belonging to the same class of imperial society) might have a trustworthy account of these momentous matters. And yet another volume of apostolic preaching and teaching, the Gospel according to Matthew, made its appearance in Syria or Palestine, near the original cradle of Christianity.

While these three works tell the story of Jesus from three distinct points of view, they have come to be known as the 'Synoptic Gospels' because they contain so much common material that they readily lend themselves to comparative study when their text is arranged so that all three accounts can be read together.

About the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, a number of Palestinian Christians migrated to Asia Minor, including some survivors of those who had seen Jesus. Of these last there was one, John by name, who had enjoyed unusually close fellowship with Him, and who outlived all his contemporaries. For a time this John was exiled to the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, but he was later liberated and spent his closing days in the city of Ephesus. He lived to a very advanced age, so much so that some of his friends concluded that he would survive to the Second Coming of Christ, while others went so far as to say that Christ Himself had promised that this disciple would never die. At last, however, he disappointed their expectations by dying, around the year 100, when he could not have been far short of a hundred years of age.

As we might expect, the last survivor of Jesus' closest companions and friends would be greatly venerated, especially by those who valued his reminiscences of things that Jesus did and said. And John himself would never grow tired of thinking about those early days and describing them to his younger friends. Long meditation on the words and acts of Jesus had given him an insight into their inward and abiding significance such as he and the other disciples had not appreciated at first. He experienced in a very real and special way the fulfilment of his Lord's promise that, after His departure from His disciples, He would send them

His Spirit to bring to their remembrance all that He Himself had told them, to bear witness to Him and make plain to them the meaning and purpose of His coming and His work, to guide them into all the truth and show them things to come. And as John spoke to his young friends and disciples about these things, they too grasped more of the true essence of Christianity than ever they had done before.

It would be a great calamity if John's memories and meditations were to die with him—for it was plain that he must certainly die in the near future unless something happened to arrest the normal course of nature. And John gave them no reason to expect that the normal course of nature would be arrested. It was not true, as some said, that the Lord had promised John that he would live on until the Second Advent; what the Lord really said was something quite different.

Before he died, however, John permitted his reminiscences to be recorded in writing. A document to be dated about A.D. 175, which appears as a preface to the Gospel of John in certain manuscripts, tells us that 'the Gospel of John was published and given to the churches by John while he was still in the body, being taken down accurately at his dictation'. This information is said to depend upon the testimony of Papias, who was bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor in the first half of the second century, and who was himself probably one of John's disciples; it may reasonably be regarded as trustworthy. Out of the wealth of his memories, John selected certain things for permanent record in accordance with a definite plan: 'Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name' (John 20:30 f.).

Such, then, is the account which our earliest informants give us of the origin of the fourth Gospel. That it was indeed written about the end of the first century, or the beginning of the second at the latest, has been confirmed in quite recent times by the discovery of the oldest extant fragment of any part of the N.T. a fragment of a papyrus codex of this Gospel, found in Egypt in 1917 and now housed in the Rylands Library, Manchester. This fragment is dated on palaeographical grounds not later than A.D. 140. This means, presumably, that John's Gospel was circulating

in Egypt less than fifty years after the traditional date of its first composition.

That this Gospel records the testimony of an eyewitness of the events which it relates, is its own explicit claim. The words quoted above from the end of ch. 20, setting forth the purpose of the work, are followed by an appendix which appears as ch. 21 in our common arrangement. In this appendix we meet a character alluded to as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved', who has appeared on two earlier occasions in the body of the Gospel (John 13:23; 19:26); and with reference to him we are told: 'This is the disciple which beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his witness is true' (John 21:24). If the persons who appended this guarantee ('we know') to the Gospel can no longer be identified by us, they were certainly known as men whose word carried weight among those in whose midst this Gospel first appeared; we may think of the group of John's close disciples or the elders of the church at Ephesus.

But an eyewitness claim is embedded in the main part of the Gospel itself, at the point where the narrator describes the piercing of Jesus' side on the cross and adds: 'And he that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe' (John 19:35). In fact, of the four Gospels, this is the only one that expressly claims to be the report of an eyewitness, and there is much in the internal evidence of the Gospel that supports this claim. The First Epistle of John, which is generally, though not universally, believed to come from the same author as the fourth Gospel, makes a similar claim: 'that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (. . . the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us): that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us' (1 John 1:1-3).

The traditional account is that this eyewitness, who speaks as such both in the Gospel and in the Epistle, is one of the twelve apostles, John the son of Zebedee; and on balance this traditional account appears to be less beset with difficulties than any other. It has, moreover, stronger internal evidence in its favour than is often allowed.

The Christ portrayed in this Gospel is the same Christ as He

whom the other Evangelists portray. John is at pains to emphasize His real Manhood: He grows weary on His journey through Samaria, He weeps at the grave of Lazarus, He thirsts upon the cross, His death is genuine and no illusion. Yet, real as His Manhood is, it was the eternal Word of God that 'became flesh' in Him. If the Synoptic writers tell how the centurion at the cross confessed His divinity in the hour of His death, John tells how Thomas greeted Him in resurrection as 'my Lord and my God' (John 20:28).

The relation of John's presentation of Christ to that of the other Evangelists has been aptly expressed by William Temple: 'The mind of Jesus Himself was what the Fourth Gospel disclosed, but . . . the disciples were at first unable to enter into this, partly because of its novelty, and partly because of the associations attaching to the terminology in which it was necessary that the Lord should express Himself. Let the Synoptists repeat for us as closely as they can the very words He spoke, but let St John tune our ears to hear them' (*Readings in St John's Gospel*, p. xxxii). And Dr Temple was saying in these words very much the same thing as John Calvin said four hundred years ago in his *Argument to the Gospel of John*: 'I am in the habit of saying that this Gospel is the key which opens the door to the understanding of the others.' Indeed, we may go much farther back, and hear Clement of Alexandria say towards the end of the second century: 'John last of all, perceiving that the external facts had been set forth in the (other) Gospels, urged by his friends and divinely moved by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel' (quoted by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, vi. 14. 7). That is to say, John makes plain the inward and spiritual meaning of the facts which all the Evangelists record.

Certainly few books have brought so much spiritual enlightenment to so many readers as the Gospel of John. To suppose that the writer of such a work deliberately represented as objective history something that was, in fact, the product of his own imagination, is to suppose something which is morally and psychologically incredible. If the words of Christ in this Gospel, particularly those recorded in chapters 13 to 17, reflect another mind than the mind of Christ, we might well conclude that a greater than Christ is here. But John's record bears the stamp of truth: as we read it, a spiritual conviction grows within us which finds

expression in the language of its first readers—'we know that his witness is true.'

It is sometimes maintained that what John did was to take the Gospel story out of its Jewish shell and reshape it in a form that would appeal to Greeks. There is a measure of truth in this, but it is a mistake to think that John Hellenized the Gospel, casting it in a Greek instead of a Jewish mould. What he did was to take the primitive apostolic preaching—the story of Jesus, 'beginning from the baptism of John'—and present it in such a way as to emphasize its universal and eternal validity. The relevance of the good news is not confined to the early decades of the first century or to the lands around Palestine. John does not detach the message from its original environment (indeed, he sketches that environment vividly and unforgettably); but he does show clearly that this is the one saving message for all men everywhere and at all times: 'for God sent the Son into *the world*, not to judge *the world*, but that *the world* should be saved through him' (John 3:17).

(*To be continued*)

## NEW TESTAMENT WORD STUDIES

By W. WILCOX

'To hasten; give diligence', etc. (*Spoudazō*)

The Christian faith is one which demands the putting forth of effort, *physically*, to spread abroad its message; *ethically*, to live a moral life; *spiritually*, to reach up to God, and His standards and to grow in grace and strength. For the continuance of Christian practice in these and other directions the Apostles were ever exhorting the believer to put forth effort, to give diligence, to hasten, and they use words which are intended to stimulate the believer in these ways. One of these is *spoudazō*, which Griffith Thomas defines as 'to hasten, make haste, exert one's self, endeavour, give diligence': and Soutter as, 'I hasten, am eager (zealous)'. Another writer says, 'The ideas of making haste, being eager, and giving diligence, with the added idea of effort put forth, are in the Greek usage of the word'.