

WHY FOUR GOSPELS? THE FOUR-FOLD PORTRAIT OF CHRIST

in
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

by

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CHRIST — THE SON OF MAN

As Portrayed in
The Gospel According to Luke
“BEHOLD, THE MAN!”

“Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both” (Zechariah 6:12-13).

Already in this series of studies we have quoted the prophecy from Zechariah which we have just read; we quoted it together with three related prophecies, all of which taken together present an Old Testament foreview of the Lord Jesus Christ as He is portrayed in the four Gospel records.

We have seen that, even as Matthew emphasizes the truth that our Lord came to be the King of Israel, and as Mark dwells particularly upon His faithful ministry as the Servant of the Lord, so Luke places the emphasis upon His perfect, sinless humanity as the Son of Man, and John pictures Him as the eternal Son of God.

We must never forget that all four of the evangelists tell us all this and very much more about our Lord's Person and work. We have repeatedly called attention to this vital truth, and shall do so again. Yet the fact remains that each Gospel writer, inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, portrayed the Lord Jesus in a particular phase of His Person and work.

Accordingly, the message of this third Gospel might be briefly stated in the words of the prophet which we have just read, **“Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: and he shall grow up out of his place . . . a priest upon his throne.”**

It is the “**Man Christ Jesus**” of whom Luke is writing. It is of His sinless Person, His fragrant life, His human sympathy, His loving-kindness, that “**the beloved physician**” is speaking. It was of the God-Man that Zechariah wrote hundreds of years earlier when he said, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that this coming “**Man whose name is the Branch**” should be “**a priest upon his throne.**”

Now in our studies of The Epistle to the Hebrews we have seen with crystal clearness that our Lord could not become our Priest until He offered His body upon the altar of Calvary’s Cross; and He could not die for our sins until He became a Man — the God-Man.

In view of this, the prophecy of Zechariah appears wonderful, indeed; only God Himself could have written it more than five hundred years before Christ was born in Bethlehem!

The Lord Jesus began His Great High Priestly work for sinners when He died on the accursed tree. He ever lives to continue that ministry as our never-dying, unchangeable Intercessor before the “**throne of grace**” at the “**right hand of the Majesty on high.**” And concerning this ministry the prophet wrote when he portrayed Him as “**a priest upon his throne.**”

This is the heart of the message of Luke — that the virgin-born Son of Man was without sin, “**holy, guileless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens**” (Hebrews 7:26); that He was full of compassion for lost sinners because His humanity was real; that in His humanity, as in His deity, He is “**altogether lovely.**”

It has often been pointed out that there were four representative peoples living on the earth when the four Gospels were written: Jews; Romans; Greeks; and the Christian Church, composed of individuals from all three classes. Without question Matthew wrote especially for Israel; for more than any of the other three evangelists he quoted the Hebrew Old Testament to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was Israel’s long promised Messiah and King. His key word is “**fulfilled**”; his key phrase, “**It is written.**”

In our last lesson we saw the faithful Servant of the Lord, portrayed by Mark, going “**straightway**” about His public ministry for those whose souls He came to ransom. We saw that this portrait of the Lord must have made a special appeal to the Roman type of mind, desiring as it does activity and power.

Now the Greeks were people of culture; they admired the beautiful, sought after wisdom. In their search for the human ideal — the ideal man — they found Luke’s description of the sinless Son of Man without flaw. This third record of the life of Christ has been called the Gentile Gospel because of its universal appeal, its wide scope of human interest. Of this we shall have more to say later in this lesson.

When we come to the study of John, we shall find out why Christians love it — perhaps best of all; for it exalts the Lord Jesus in all His glory and deity; it lets the born-again child of God into the very Holy of Holies, as it were, to hear the matchless words of his Great High Priest and the eternal Son of God. Therefore, key words of John are “**believe,**” “**everlasting life,**” “**love,**” “**light,**” and “**sent from heaven.**”

Now let us consider for a little while the key phrase of Luke, “**The Son of Man**”; and then look at the key verse,

“**For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost**” (Luke 19:10).

1. “*The Son of Man.*”

It is fitting that, from among all the hundreds of names and descriptive terms applied to our Lord in the Scriptures, the book of Luke should use the title, “**Son of Man,**” at least twenty-four times; for this name links the eternal God with this earth. Someone has said that it is the title by which Christ most frequently referred to Himself, and that no one else ever addressed Him by this name. The key verse of the book uses this title, as we saw a moment ago.

The frequent use of this key phrase is but one of countless illustrations of the verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures by the Spirit of God. The wonderful plan of the Book, even to the most minute detail, causes our finite minds to marvel at the infinite wisdom of our all-wise God!

We said that the term “**Son of Man**” links the Lord with this earth. As Adam is the federal head of the human race, the representative of sinful man, needing a Saviour; so the Lord Jesus Christ is the “**second Adam,**” our Representative before the Father in heaven, because, by faith, we are identified with Him in His death and resurrection.

“**And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit . . . The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven**” (I Corinthians 15:45, 47).

We are told that the name, “**Son of Man,**” occurs eighty-eight times in the New Testament, most of which are in the four Gospels. We read this title in the Old Testament for the first time in the eighth Psalm, which is a prophecy of the coming of the Lord Jesus into the world as the God-Man, even as the second chapter of Hebrews plainly states.

A comparison of this Messianic Psalm with Hebrews 2:5-9 shows that the prophecy written by David there has a double reference — first to Adam’s dominion over the earth when he was in his unfallen state; then to our Lord’s dominion over that same creation in His coming kingdom, when it shall be purified from the ravages made by sin.

The first Adam lost his full dominion over this world when he fell. Then the “**second Adam,**” the “**Lord from heaven,**” in His Incarnation, death, and resurrection, redeemed what the first Adam lost, and more!

He redeemed the sinner’s soul; and he redeemed the “**creation itself,**” which “**also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God**” when Jesus comes in glory to reign. (See Romans 8:21). That is why “**the lion shall lie down with the lamb**”; that is why “**the desert shall blossom as the rose**” when Jesus reigns in glory. He has bought back all that Adam lost through sin, with a plus!

Therefore, the title, **“Son of Man,”** first applied to our Lord in the eighth Psalm, and explained in Hebrews 2:5-9, becomes meaningful, indeed. It is the name which definitely links Him with the earth, a name which speaks to us both of His humiliation and of His coming glory. And it is the key phrase of The Gospel According to Luke.

To illustrate, let us compare the first and last times the expression occurs in Matthew. There we see the title, **“Son of Man,”** linked with Christ’s humiliation and with His glory: **“And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head”** (Matthew 8:20; cf. Luke 9:58).

“Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64).

As the suffering Saviour He came in humiliation; but as the earth’s rightful King He will reign in glory! And as both He is the **“Son of Man”**!

That the Son of Man is also the eternal Son of God is plainly taught in all Scripture, and tersely stated in John 3:13, where our Lord said to Nicodemus,

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

This statement clearly expresses the deity of Jesus, the Son of Man. It reminds us of what Paul wrote to Timothy,

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness : God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (I Timothy 3:16).

We cannot explain the Incarnation; we accept it by faith. Indeed, we dare not speculate or attempt to reason about how the eternal God could become **“Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”** We have the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts to assure us that this is true.

Again, we are told that nowhere in the epistles, except in Hebrews 2:5-9, which quotes and explains the Messianic Psalm, is the title, **“Son of Man,”** used. The reason is very plain. The epistles were written to the church; the church is a heavenly body, with a heavenly calling; and, therefore, linked with the Heavenly Bridegroom, not to the **“Son of Man”** in His earthly reign — except as the bride of Christ shall rule with Him in glory over the purified earth. Again, the marks of divine inspiration of the Word of God are wonderful!

The last time the title, **“Son of Man,”** occurs in the Bible is in Revelation 14 :14; and once more it is significantly descriptive of the glorified Lord Jesus, returning to this earth to rid it of sin and wickedness.

It is a vision of the awful day of judgment upon the rebellious nations, when “**Armageddon**” will plunge the world in unspeakable battle:

“And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.”

As the “**Man Christ Jesus,**” our Lord will use the “**sharp sickle**” to rid the earth of sin. Then He will reign in power and great glory. Thus the “**Son of Man,**” who upon earth had nowhere to lay His head, will be the “**same Jesus**” who, as the “**Son of Man,**” will return to have dominion over the works of His hands!

“We see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made (for a little time) lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour . . .”
(Hebrews 2:8, 9).

The title, “**Son of Man,**” therefore belongs primarily to the four Gospels for the significant reason that they record the story of the Incarnation of our Lord. It belongs particularly to Luke, because therein the Holy Spirit tells us that Christ’s humanity was real. He tells us that, in His earthly life, the eternal God identified Himself with us, His “**brethren,**” that He might “**lead many sons unto glory.**” This beautiful name of humiliation and power holds, in brief, the Gospel message!

Once more we would remind ourselves, however, that Luke also uses many other names for our Lord — names of deity and authority. Very often he speaks of Christ as “**The Lord,**” or “**The Lord Jesus,**” or “**The Lord’s Christ**”; and no one can call Him “**Lord**” save by the Holy Spirit! He calls Him “**The Son of the Highest,**” “**Son of God,**” “**The Holy One of God,**” “**The Son of David,**” and “**Jesus.**” These are just some of the names by which “**the beloved physician**” referred to the King of Israel, Servant of the Lord, Son of Man, and Son of God. He portrayed the Lord Jesus in all His power and majesty, but especially in His compassion and sympathy and love as the sinless “**Son of Man.**”

2. The Seeking Saviour.

The key verse, which we quoted from Luke 19:10 a few moments ago, summarizes the message of the book:

“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

We shall consider this further as we continue our study of this Gospel; but just here suffice it to say that only in Luke do we read of the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son, the Good Samaritan, the Saviour’s weeping over Jerusalem. His reassuring words to the repentant thief on the cross. A little later in this lesson we shall list the passages recorded only by Luke, many of which reveal to us the heart of compassion of the “**Man Christ Jesus,**” who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich — throughout the endless ages! (See II Corinthians 8:9).

As we “**behold the Man Christ Jesus,**” portrayed by Luke in all His perfection and beauty, we are reminded of the contrasting sin of those whom He came to redeem.

He is the holy Son of Man; those He came seeking and to save are the sons of men. And His peerless humanity stands in sharp contrast with the selfish, degraded, perverse, unrighteousness of the sinful sons of men. From the first Adam we inherited the old, sinful nature; in Christ, the “**second Adam,**” we receive the new nature, being born again by the Holy Spirit of God. And it was to “**seek and to save that which was lost**” that God came down to become the holy Son of Man, that by faith in Him we might be conformed to His image.

That is the message of the book of Luke.

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