

WHY FOUR GOSPELS? THE FOUR-FOLD PORTRAIT OF CHRIST

in
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

by

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CHAPTER TEN

IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

Matthew 16:1-20:34

With the increasing opposition to Christ as Israel's King, we find our Lord unfolding to His disciples ever more plainly the purpose for which He came into the world.

As Israel's King He offered Himself to the nation; but as Israel's Saviour, knowing the end from the beginning, He came to die. He knew that He would be rejected by His ancient people; and knowing all things, He told His disciples of His approaching death as the Saviour of both Jew and Gentile. That is why, in chapters sixteen to twenty of Matthew, we read of His first definite prophecy concerning the church, of His three-fold prophecy of His coming death and resurrection — all spoken to His disciples, not to the nation which had already rejected Him in their hearts.

At the same time, as if to reassure His disciples that His future kingdom would surely be brought into being, He was transfigured before three of them; and He told the twelve that, in His millennial kingdom they should “**sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**”

These are a few of the outline truths set forth in the five chapters immediately before us. Let us examine them for some of our Lord's clearest teaching concerning His plan — from Calvary even to His earthly kingdom, and to all eternity.

The sixteenth chapter opens with another subtle attempt of the Pharisees and the Sadducees to ensnare Christ in His teachings, as they demanded “**a sign from heaven.**” He had already given them “**the sign of the prophet Jonas**”; He had already proved by His miracles and profound teachings and sinless life that He was their righteous King. And now He warned them that, although they could “**discern the face of the sky,**” yet they could not discern “**the signs of the times.**”

It is significant that this expression, “**the signs of the times,**” occurs only in Matthew — the Gospel narrative with a special emphasis upon the dispensational character of our Lord’s teachings and actions. Here He was once more reminding the unbelieving rulers of the Jews that He came to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies; yet they would not read these “**signs of the times**” concerning Him.

Following this interview with the religious leaders of the nation, the Lord warned His disciples against the “**leaven**” or “**doctrine**” of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Christ’s First Prophecy concerning the Church
16:13-20.

Peter’s confession of Jesus as “**the Christ, the Son of the living God**” (16:16), led our Lord to utter His great prophecy concerning His church, which was to have her beginning on the Day of Pentecost. Peter’s name means “*a little rock.*” And Christ, in a play upon the words, said to Peter, “**Upon this rock** (i.e., this confession) **I will build my church.**” In the Greek He used two different words: the one meaning “**a little rock**”; the other, “**rock.**”

But the important thing to note, of a dispensational nature, is the fact that Christ said, “**I will build . . .**” He did not say, “I have built . . .,” or “I am building . . .” The birthday of the church was still in the future when He spoke this significant prophecy. Moreover, the church did not have her beginning until the Lord was crucified, risen, and ascended into heaven, and until He sent His Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost to call out, indwell, and empower believers in His finished work on Calvary. This prophecy of Christ was His first to explain to His disciples His plan for this age, during Israel’s national rejection of her King.

Christ’s Three-Fold Prophecy of His Approaching Death and Resurrection.

As if to explain further to His disciples His purpose in coming into the world, the Lord began to tell them plainly that soon afterwards He “**must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day**” (16:21). Later He told them also that He was to be “**betrayed into the hands of men**” to die and to be raised again on the third day (17:22, 23). And still later, He foretold His being delivered “**to the Gentiles**” to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and to rise again on the third day (20:17-19).

In these three statements Christ prophesied His death at the hands of the rulers of the Jews, at the hands of the nation, and at the hands of Gentiles; and each time He foretold also His resurrection on the third day after His crucifixion. He died no martyr’s death! He planned, from all eternity, to die for the sins of all the world.

A Portrait of the King in His Glory
16:28-17:13.

The disciples were sad when their Lord foretold His approaching death.

Why they were so slow to understand His plan for redeeming the world, we cannot understand — doubtless for the same reason that Christians today are slow to comprehend God’s great plan for mankind!

But as if to reassure His disciples that He would, indeed, return in power and great glory to establish His millennial kingdom upon earth, He took Peter, James, and John **“up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them.”**

Now, as we have already seen, a mountain in Scripture typifies a kingdom.

The transfigured Lord gave to the three disciples just a foregleam of His glory, which will shine forth at His coming to be recognized by all the world as King of kings and Lord of lords.

His was not an outward glory shining upon Him, but an inward glory shining out from within His very Being. **“His face did shine as the sun.”** And when Christ, the Lord, appears in glory, He will be the **“Sun of righteousness,”** arising **“with healing in his wings”** (Malachi 4:2).

In His transfiguration Moses and Elijah appeared with Him, representing the law and the prophets.

Moses also represents those who will have a part in the first resurrection, when all those who **“sleep in Jesus,”** even the dead in Christ, shall rise. God put Moses to sleep on Mount Nebo, and he aptly represents all the dead in Christ.

Elijah, who went to heaven without seeing death, represents the company who will be living when Christ calls the church home. **“The dead in Christ shall rise first”**; then the living saints shall be **“changed”** and **“caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air”** (I Thessalonians 4:16, 1”).

It was to this glorious translation of the church that Paul referred when he wrote to the Corinthian Christians, saying,

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump” (I Corinthians 15:51, 52).

Peter, James, and John, looking on in wonder at the transfiguration scene, represent the faithful Jewish remnant who will see the Lord, and will behold in wonder and awe as He returns in glory with His blood-bought church to sit upon the throne of His father, David.

Immediately after the transfiguration, at the foot of the mountain, a father brought His demon-possessed boy to the Lord.

In His compassion Christ broke Satan’s power, and set the captive free. So it will be in the millennial reign of Christ; Satan will be bound, and his captives shall know the liberty that only the Lord of glory can give.

Further Teachings for the Redeemed — Jew or Gentile
17:24-19:26; 20:20-28

Knowing the problem to be faced by His church, which was to be composed of individual Jews and a great number of individual Gentiles, the Lord taught some searching and comforting lessons for those who would heed His message. He was nearing the last days of His life on earth; the shadow of the cross was looming before Him; and He knew how much His redeemed would stand in need of these teachings in regard to godly living.

We cannot pause here to discuss these truths — important though they are; for we are not making an analytical study of the four Gospels. But let us read these chapters prayerfully, repeatedly, for their lessons in humility, faith, soul-winning, forgiveness, prayer, divorce, law and grace.

Matthew is the only evangelist to record the miracle of the tribute money (17:24-27), proving as it does Christ's Lordship over His created beings, as well as His example to His disciples in rendering **“unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's.”**

The Apostles' Place in Christ's Earthly Kingdom
19:27-30

It is fitting that Matthew should be the only one to record the highly significant words of 19:28, spoken to the twelve,

“Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration (i.e., ‘re-creation,’ or ‘making new’) when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Of course, we know that Matthias was chosen by the Lord to take the place of Judas, who was not a true disciple. (See Acts 1:15-26).

Dr. C. I. Scofield points out the following significant truth:

Referring to the twelve disciples' sitting **“upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel,”** he adds that “the kingdom will be administered over Israel through the apostles, according to the ancient theocratic judgeship.”

“When the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge” (Judges 2:18).

In that day the prophecy of Isaiah will be fulfilled, in which God said,

“And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city” (Isaiah 1:26).

God knows where every one of the twelve tribes of Israel is today, scattered throughout the world; and this is but one of many promises He has made to restore them to their own land for His covenant blessing, to be realized in the day of their acceptance of Him as their promised Messiah and glorious King.

The Sovereignty of the King
20:1-16

Matthew is the only one to record the Lord's parable of the householder, seeking laborers for his vineyard. It seems to have been spoken in answer to Peter's question concerning the disciples' reward for service (19:27), and more especially following the Lord's promised reward for all who have put Him first in their lives (19:29, 30).

Certainly it sets forth His sovereign right to bestow His rewards according to His sovereign will; and is, therefore, but another proof of Matthew's purpose in presenting Christ as the rightful King.

Although the rulers of the nation of Israel had already rejected their King in their hearts; although they were soon to reject Him publicly and officially; yet Christ still offered individual salvation to any in the nation who would accept Him, as illustrated by the healing of the two blind men (20: 29-34).

Twice it is written here that they addressed Him as "**Lord . . . son of David,**" a title appropriately used by an Israelite.

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