

THE FOUR GOSPELS.

In the attempt to unify by harmonies, much of the true scope of the Gospels is lost sight of. The evangelists differ, but do not disagree. Dean Stanley says that few persons have any idea of the distinct features of any one of these four records. The opinions of some men are that these differences are to be accounted for by the apostles' copying from one another, by each one's supplying the omission of the preceding writers, or by the fertility of their memories, or the fact that accounts were obtained at second hand. But these opinions entirely deny the divinity of the Gospels.

In the beginning we must rest on the foundation that God is their author. They stand in their right order, in the right relation to each other, beginning the canon of the New Testament. Matthew, Mark, and Luke give the outward and earthly work of Christ, and John his inward and heavenly works. The four great countries of that time, Palestine, Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor, were the places where the Gospels were written. Matthew is the Jewish Gospel, connecting the Old Testament with the New Testament, and is written to prove the Messiahship of Christ. Mark is written to the Gentiles, and its theme is Christ's ministry, his works. Luke applies universally to both Jew and Gentile, and brings out Christ's humanity; while John's is an essentially spiritual Gospel, dealing wholly with the divinity of our Lord.

The first speaks of Christ as the Son of David, hence his genealogy is complete (1:1-16); in Mark there is no genealogy, for there he is spoken of not as a son at all, but as a servant. Luke calls Christ the Son of man, and gives so comprehensive an account of his birth as to defer the genealogy to chapter 3:23-38, while John begins with it and calls Christ the Son of God. In Matthew he is said to have been born king of the Jews; in Luke the good tidings are of a birth of a Saviour, and John proclaims him pre-existent. The key to each Gospel, giving its theme, may be found in Matthew 1:1, Mark 10:44,45, Luke 19:10, Jno. 20:31.

In the first Gospel, Christ is described as a king, in the second as a worker, and in the other two as a philanthropist and as God manifested, respectively.

The central truth emphasized in Matthew is righteousness, in Mark power, in Luke sympathy, and in John divine glories. [R1047 : page 8] The great discourse of Matthew is the Sermon on the Mount, and that of Luke is the sermon on the plain, and that of John the gospel in the upper room, which extends through chapters 13-17. This very fact shows the inspiration of the Scriptures. All four evangelists heard this discourse, but it was left to John to describe it. The great subjects of the Gospels are respectively law, labor, love, and life. Matthew always introduces a quotation with "that it might be fulfilled;" Mark, with "as it is written;" and John, with "as said Esaias." Luke seldom makes any introductory references.

Matthew prefaces the parables with reference to the kingdom of heaven; Mark, to the kingdom of God; Luke makes it impersonal by beginning, "A certain man;" while John emphasizes their importance by saying, "Verily, verily, I say unto you." The parables are grouped in Matthew, and given in order in Luke. In Mark only two are recorded, and in John new parables not mentioned by the others are recorded. The character of Matthew as a writer is topical, that of Mark is chronological, of Luke biographical, and of John metaphorical. The ministries of Matthew and Mark were Galilean; that of John, Judean; and that of Luke partook of the characteristics of both. Christ is said to have come to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel in Matthew; in Luke, it is "all flesh," and in John, "whosoever will."

The most important of all is the conclusion. Here is seen the development in the Gospels as they are arranged in the New Testament. Matthew announces that Jesus is risen; Mark, that he is risen and ascended; but Luke goes further and adds the promise of the Holy Spirit; while John is beyond them all in declaring Christ's promise to come again. – *W. W. Clark.*

