

The Five Unfoldings

by H.J. Vine

The five Gospels represent different aspects of Jesus Christ, emphasizing His royalty, service, sonship, and exaltation.

Scripture: Matthew 1:1, Mark 1:1, Luke 3:38, John 1:1, Acts 1:1, Acts 2:33, Acts 4:10, Acts 7:56, Acts 28:31, Ephesians 4:8

Topics: "Jesus Christ", "Holy Spirit"

Description

H.J. Vine preaches about the complete fourfold picture of our Lord Jesus Christ presented by the Holy Spirit in the Gospels, with Luke adding a necessary complement through Acts, taking us from the living One in resurrection to the heavenly glory. Each Gospel beautifully portrays different aspects of Jesus - Matthew as the promised King, Mark as the suffering Servant, Luke as the perfect Son of Man with universal dominion, and John as the eternal Word made flesh. Acts reveals the exalted Lord Jesus carrying out His work of grace from heaven, granting power through the Holy Spirit for the salvation of sinners and the formation of the assembly.

Transcript

The Holy Spirit gives us in the Gospels a complete fourfold picture of our Lord Jesus Christ; but He adds, through Luke, a further disclosure of Him, giving us a most necessary and wonderful complement to what is termed "The former treatise" (Acts 1:1) which had been set out "with method" or "order" (Luke 1:3). This may be said of all the precious Gospels, and they show us a perfect portrayal of our gracious Saviour and Lord; only the addition of Acts carries our thoughts not simply to the living One in resurrection, but right up to the heavenly glory where Stephen saw Him, as he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). From thence the pleasure of God prospers in His hands, whether in grace now or in government soon.

Since the presentation of the Lord on earth, the Spirit of God has disclosed the glorious counsels and purpose which centre in Him; and also illuminated the promises and prophecies concerning His kingdom, service, dominion and personal glory; likewise He has made known to us His exaltation to the right hand of God, consequent upon His rejection by man. The Gospels, therefore, along with the striking addition of Acts, unfold before our delighted gaze the all-varied beauties, dignities, distinctions and honours of the One who--because of His own greatness, grace and glory--alone could be the unfailing answer to the deep designs of divine love and wisdom.

1. First of all, have not our souls marvelled at the glowing words of psalmist and prophet as they speak of a kingdom on earth, with a glorious King, or Messiah, reigning in righteousness? when, with Israel at the centre, and the ordered nations around, having the multitudes of peoples beyond, there shall flow the satisfying mercies of true equity, peace and joy for all. And have not our hearts rejoiced at the prospect? Moreover, the meditative mind might reflect, that righteous kingdom order is an absolute necessity in a sinful world like this, if the further designs of God which are according to eternal counsels are to be brought to pass, and remark, who but the one that as the divinely promised "Son of David" could establish it? It is then the first Gospel of the New Testament which gives the beautiful answer to this in its opening words: "Book of the generation of JESUS CHRIST, SON OF DAVID." No one else could recover Israel and set up the kingdom with regal right, ruling upon "the throne of His father David." He who is named Jesus, or Jehovah Saviour--who is yet to save His own people (Israel) from their sins (Mal. 1:21)--is also named Emmanuel ("which being interpreted is, GOD WITH US"), and only such an One could perfectly bring to pass this necessary rule. The works of power and mercy recorded in this Gospel concerning "great David's greater Son" show who was present in Israel at that time; and the same Gospel makes known also that as Son of Man He would build an indestructible assembly after His death, resurrection and ascension, in view of the coming kingdom. Its closing words consistently sustain the faith of those who serve the rejected King, for He has said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age. Amen." This is fully in keeping with the truth unfolded in Matthew. The expression, "The Kingdom of the heavens," so much used, is only found here, and is in complete accord with what the Spirit reveals concerning Christ through MATTHEW.

"Lord of glory, we adore Thee

Christ of God, ascended high!

Heart and soul we bow before Thee,

Glorious now beyond the sky:

Thee we worship, Thee we praise--

Excellent in all Thy ways."

2. And then, not only did we marvel at the promised splendours of the coming kingdom on earth, but have we not also often wondered as we have read of the many and great sufferings of One who is so strikingly shown in prophecy to be THE SERVANT OF JEHOVAH--the One whose work should bring pleasure and glory to God, even as Isaiah 42 to 53 foretold--"Behold My Servant" (42:1)? Yea, "Behold My Servant shall deal prudently. He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high" (52:13), and that after being "despised and rejected of men," and after being bruised for our sins and put to grief by Jehovah; for, raised and glorified, "the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand" (53:10). This is the One God's Spirit livingly pictures to us in the second Gospel. The Royal One of Matthew is seen as the Serving One of Mark! The King to reign come as the Servant to suffer! The crown and the kingdom preceded by the preaching of grace and salvation! Therefore without genealogy or special personal introduction, as in the other three, Mark's Gospel commences thus, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"; and with diligent zeal we find Him rapidly prosecuting the work He had come to do. The word "straightway" occurs again and again, and gives character to this divinely directed writing, which fittingly closes by showing how the work is still going on, now Christ has risen and ascended, after having secured eternal redemption through His shed blood; thus the disciples "went forth, and preached everywhere, THE LORD WORKING

with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen." This reveals the living Lord Himself still serving along with those who had learned of Him, and so the suitable end is reached of the servant Gospel of MARK.

"Though in the very form of God,
With heavenly glory crowned,
Jesus a servant's form assumed,
Beset with sorrow round."

3. Not only was the glorious King and the kingdom pointed on to, also the servant of God's providing, but vast and magnificent is the Son of Man's dominion of which the Spirit of God spake through holy men of old. Lit up by the citation in the New Testament, Psalm 8 shows Him set over all (after having been made a little lower than the angels) crowned with glory and splendour, with everything placed beneath His feet! Daniel 7:13-14 mentions Christ as the Son of Man for the last time in the Old Testament; and both the kingdom and the dominion are spoken of. He is seen before the ancient of days, "And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." Who is this wondrous Son of Man? Who is this promised One that is able to hold the Lordship of universal dominion? He must be Man as was foretold, yet not the created man, but the Son of Man!--not an angel, but truly man, of Adam's race! If Matthew traced the Royal One from David the king, it is LUKE whom the Spirit uses to show us this SON OF MAN--the PERFECT MAN, "of Seth, of Adam, of God" (Luke 3:38)! He is seen to be the virgin "FIRSTBORN SON" (2:7), and yet "SON OF GOD" begotten of the Holy Spirit (1:35); also the "SAVIOUR, who is CHRIST THE LORD" (2:11), and heaven opened upon Him, and a voice said, "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I have found all My delight," while as a dove the Holy Spirit descended upon Him (3:22). Truly He is the Son of David!

Truly He is the Son of Man to centre up in Himself all dominion! Truly He is also the Son of God! Yet, come down "a little lower than the angels," He Himself said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected . . . be slain, and be raised the third day . . . Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels" (9:22, 26). And having shown Him to be Man in every beautiful perfection, this third Gospel gives us to see also His priestly grace; and it closes with "GREAT JOY," and with responsive "PRAISING AND BLESSING GOD," after Jesus was seen going up into heaven, blessing them with uplifted hands. This is the last view given us by the Gospel of LUKE.

"God's counsels ere the world began
All centred in the Son of Man.
Him destined to the highest place,
Lord over all through sovereign grace."

4. The fourth Gospel is the unfolding concerning GOD Himself!--

"God manifest! God seen and heard!

The heaven's beloved One!"

Commencing by telling us of the eternal Word who "was God," in verse 14 we are told, that same One "became flesh and tabernacled among us" (N.Tr.):

"Image of the Infinite unseen

Whose being none can know."

Did MATTHEW trace his regal ancestry for the kingdom right back to David, to whom the promise was given? Did MARK show us the divine Servant in His few days of diligent toil for the pleasure of the Lord? Did LUKE trace his ancestry as Son of Man far away back to Seth and Adam, of God, in view of His taking up universal dominion? JOHN, passing outside official glories, takes us to what surpasses all else, infinitely further back still than the others--BACK INTO ETERNITY! Mark, not from Eternity! but in eternity! Not from the beginning! but "in the beginning was the Word!" He did not begin with the beginning, for the beginning began from Him--"All things received being through Him." He was therefore the eternal One in eternity when the beginning began. "The Word was with God, and the Word was God." Verse 18 tells us that He declared God who had not been seen before, for He was the Son in a unique sense, dwelling in the Father's bosom, and could consequently declare Him so perfectly. He spake the words of God (3:34). To see Him was to see the Father (14:9). He was truly MAN, unfolding the truth to men. He said so (8:40)! but note His words in verse 58, "Jesus said to them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was I AM!" Certain of His miracles or rather "signs," were selected, and were recorded as inspired in this Gospel--SIGNS to manifest who was here on earth! in order that eternal life might be ours in HIS NAME through believing (20:31). Yet, seeing it was the One who inhabits eternity that stooped to manifest Himself on this small planet, we may understand the final words of this book without difficulty: indeed, what else could be said of the works of such an One than this? "There are many other things which JESUS DID, the which if they were written one by one, I suppose that not even the world itself would contain the books written." There can be no failure in regard to the kingdom, the service, the dominion and the glory when all depends upon such an One. When Thomas saw the risen Saviour with His wounded hands and side, He exclaimed, in faith, and with sincere homage,

"MY LORD AND MY GOD" (20:28).

This is fittingly recorded alone in JOHN.

"Worthy of homage and of praise,

Worthy by all to be adored:

Exhaustless theme of heavenly lays!

Thou, Thou art worthy, Jesus, Lord."

5. The fifth--the additional unfolding of which we have spoken--gives us to behold by faith our exalted Lord glorified on high, carrying on from thence the work of grace, and granting power to this end. If John shows us God in Christ on earth amongst men, Acts shows us the Man Christ Jesus glorified at the right hand of God, GOD seen on earth in the one, and MAN seen in heaven in the other! It can be easily understood therefore why this added writing of Luke's is given by the Spirit--added to the "former treatise," not that it immediately links on with John, but rather with Luke and the previous two gospels.

Having secured eternal salvation and redemption by His sacrifice on the cross, the sight of Jesus, the Son of Man, at the right hand of God on high (7:55-56) is what gives character to Acts, and indeed to this whole present period. The Lord Jesus gave the Holy Spirit from thence. Indeed, though the fullness of the Spirit was His when on the earth, after He arrived at the glory above, He "RECEIVED" on behalf of the work below "the promise of the Holy Spirit," and "poured out" the power for that work, which was seen and heard in its immediate effects (2:33). Christ has been on high ever since, and the Holy Spirit is still here. The salvation of sinners through faith, and the forming of the assembly (as the body of Christ united livingly to Him its Head on high) are some of the results now in grace, but the pouring out of the Spirit by the Lord upon all flesh will follow later (after the assembly is translated from earth), and that will be done in view of government (vv. 17-20). When the Man Christ Jesus was exalted, He not only "received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit" for others, but "GOD MADE HIM" officially (what He was personally and in counsel before) "BOTH LORD AND CHRIST." All the Gospels show Him to be this, for He came out of heaven, but the addition was a necessary unfolding to let us see what took place in heaven after He went there as MAN. Matthew may specially make Him known as the Christ, the Messiah, or God's anointed King, and Luke as the Lord, the Son of Man; while Mark gives us to see Him as God's servant, and Acts also thus speaks of Him, for chapter 3:36 should read, "His Servant" instead of His "Son" Jesus, and so 4:30 is "His holy Servant Jesus." Even the gift of "apostles" takes a new character consequent upon His exaltation. There were apostles before, but "having ascended up on high," He has "given some apostles" (Eph. 4:8, 11). Peter was specially for the Jews, but Paul (apprehended from heaven and for heaven by the exalted Lord) was given the work among the Gentiles specially; and, in spite of his sufferings and imprisonment, this fifth unfolding ends by showing us the successful overruling of the exalted Lord of all, so that Paul is seen in the very citadel of the Roman Empire, preaching and teaching, "no man forbidding him." This unhindered freedom, maintained by the glorified Lord on behalf of men, is the triumphant note which is sounded at the close of ACTS.

"Ye servants of God, the Saviour proclaim,

And publish abroad His wonderful Name,

The Name, all victorious, of Jesus extol,

He's Lord in the glory! He'll rule over all."

PAUL said to Timothy, "The grace of our Lord surpassingly over-abounded" in calling him, a persecutor, and using him in His service. This overbearing Pharisee learned he was "the chief of sinners," and he was fitted by divine grace to carry the glad tidings of forgiveness and salvation to sinners of the Gentiles. The same grace glorified itself in MATTHEW, who was scorned as a publican (or tax-gatherer) disloyally serving a foreign king, Caesar. Grace made him loyal to the true King, Jesus, and used Him to preach His kingdom, and to write the gospel of the King. MARK was the servant who failed as such--turning back; he "went not with them (Paul, Barnabas) to the work" (Acts 15:38); but grace fitted such an one to serve the true Servant in His work, and to write His Gospel. LUKE--one of the "far off" men, called out from the despised "dogs of the Gentiles"--the only Gentile used of the Spirit to write any part of the inspired volume--clave to the apostle of the Gentiles, and wrote the Gospel of the perfect Man--the Son of Man, also ACTS, where we see the exalted Man sending His herald to Gentile men afar off in sin and degradation. Then how wonderfully divine grace is glorified in taking up JOHN to tell us of God made known in Jesus of the love of God told out in Him; to show us the Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, giving a place to a disciple in the bosom of the Son; and that disciple had been a Boanerges,

marked once by a spirit foreign to that of His Lord. Grace, however, mellowed him, and the Spirit guided him to write the Gospel of love eternal, love unchanging, of God, who is love, made known in the Son--of the eternal Word become flesh, "FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH."

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