

Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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Transcript

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It is our purpose to give (D. V.) a verse by verse exposition of the fourth Gospel in the course of this series of studies, but before turning to the opening verses of chapter I it will be necessary to consider John's Gospel as a whole, with the endeavor of discovering its scope, its central theme, and its relation to the other three Gospels. We shall not waste the reader's time by entering into a discussion as to who wrote this fourth Gospel, as to where John was when he wrote it, nor as to the probable date when it was written. These may be points of academical interest, but they provide no food for the soul, nor do they afford any help to an understanding of this section of the Bible, and these are the two chief things we desire to accomplish. Our aim is to open up the Scriptures in such a way that the reader will be able to enter into the meaning of what God has recorded for our learning in this part of His Holy Word, and to edify those who are members of the Household of Faith. The four Gospels deal with the earthly life of the Savior, but each one presents Him in an entirely different character. Matthew portrays the Lord Jesus as the Son of David, the Heir of Israel's throne, the King of the Jews; and everything in his Gospel contributes to this central theme. In Mark, Christ is seen as the Servant of Jehovah, the perfect Workman of God; and everything in this second Gospel brings out the characteristics of His service and the manner in which He served. Luke treats of the humanity of the Savior, and presents Him as the perfect Man, contrasting Him from the sinful sons of men. The fourth Gospel views Him as the Heavenly One come down to earth, the eternal Son of the Father made flesh and tabernacling among men, and from start to finish this is the one dominant truth which is steadily held in view. As we turn to the fourth Gospel we come to entirely different ground from that which is traversed in the other three. It is true, the period of time covered by it is the same as in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, some of the incidents treated of by the "Synoptics" come before us here, and He who has occupied the central position in the narratives of the first three Evangelists is the same One that is made pre-eminent by John; but otherwise, everything is entirely new. The viewpoint of this fourth Gospel is more elevated than that of the others; its contents bring into view spiritual relationships rather than human ties; and, higher glories are revealed as touching the peerless Person of the Savior. In each of the first three Gospels Christ is viewed in human relationships, but not so in John. The purpose of this fourth Gospel is to show that the One who was born in a manger and afterward died on the Cross had

higher glories than those of King, that He who humbled Himself to take the Servant place was, previously, "equal with God," that the One who became the Son of Man was none other than, and ever remains, the Only Begotten of the Father. Each book of the Bible has a prominent and dominant theme which is peculiar to itself. Just as each member in the human body has its own particular function, so every book in the Bible has its own special purpose and mission. The theme of John's Gospel is the Deity of the Savior. Here, as nowhere else in Scripture so fully, the Godhood of Christ is presented to our view. That which is outstanding in this fourth Gospel is the Divine Sonship of the Lord Jesus. In this Book we are shown that the One who was heralded by the angels to the Bethlehem shepherds, who walked this earth for thirty-three years, who was crucified at Calvary who rose in triumph from the grave, and who forty days later departed from these scenes, was none other than the Lord of Glory. The evidence for this is overwhelming, the proofs almost without number, and the effect of contemplating them must be to bow our hearts in worship before "the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Here is a theme worthy of our most prayerful attention. If the Holy Spirit took such marked care to guard the perfections of our Lord's humanity—seen for example, in the words of the angel to Mary "that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee," "made in the likeness of sin's flesh," etc.—equally so has the Inspirer of the Scriptures seen to it that there is no uncertainty touching the Divine Sonship of our Savior. Just as the Old Testament prophets made known that the Coming One should be a Man, a perfect Man, so did Messianic prediction give plain intimation that He should be more than a man. Through Isaiah God foretold, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Through Micah He declared, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel; Whose goings forth have been from the days of eternity." Through Zechariah He said, "Awake, O Sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my Fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts: smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered." Through the Psalmist He announced, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." And again, when looking forward to the second advent, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee (or, 'brought thee forth')." In these days of wide-spread departure from the faith, it cannot be insisted upon too strongly or too frequently that the Lord Jesus is none other than the Second Person of the blessed Trinity, co-eternal and co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. In keeping with the special theme of this fourth Gospel, it is here we have the full unveiling of Christ's Divine glories. It is here that we behold Him dwelling with God before time began and before ever the creature was formed (John 1:1, 2). It is here that He is denominated "The only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). It is here we read of John the Baptist bearing record "that this is the Son of God" (John 1:34). It is here that we read "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory" (John 2:11). It is here we are told that the Savior said "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). It is here we learn that "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand" (John 3:35). It is in this Gospel we hear Christ saying, "For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father" (John 5:21-23). It is here we find Him declaring, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). It is here He affirmed "I and my Father are One" (John 10:30). It is here He testifies "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Before we take up John's Gospel in detail, a few words should also be said concerning the scope of the fourth Gospel. It must be evident at once that this is quite different from the other three. There, Christ is seen in human relationships, and as connected with an earthly people; but here He is viewed in a Divine relationship, and as connected with a heavenly people. It is true the mystery

of the "Body" is not unfolded here—that is found only in what the Apostle Paul wrote as he was moved by the Holy Spirit—rather is it the Family relationship which is here in view: the Son of God together with the sons of God. It is also true that the "heavenly calling," as such, is not fully unfolded here, yet are there plain intimations of it, as a careful study of it makes apparent. In the first three Gospels Christ is seen connected with the Jews, proclaiming the Messianic kingdom, a proclamation which ceased, however, as soon as it became evident that the nation had rejected Him. But here in John's Gospel His rejection is anticipated from the beginning, for in the very first chapter we are told, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." The limitations which obtain in connection with much which is found in the first three Gospels does not, therefore, obtain in John's. Again, in John's Gospel the Savior is displayed as the Son of God, and as such He can be known only by believers. On this plane, then, the Jew has no priority. The Jew's claim upon Christ was purely a fleshly one (arising from the fact that He was "the Son of David"), whereas believers are related to the Son of God by spiritual union. As there may be some of our readers who have been influenced by ultra-dispensational teaching we deem it well to here call attention to other points which help to fix the true dispensational bearings and scope of this fourth Gospel. There are those who make no distinction between John's Gospel and the Synoptics, and who insist that this fourth Gospel is entirely Jewish, and has nothing but a remote application to believers of the present dispensation. But this, we are assured, is a serious mistake. John's Gospel, like his Epistles, concerns the family of God. In proof of this we request the reader to weigh carefully the following points: First, in John 1:11-13 we read, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." From these verses we may notice three things: first, the Jews as a nation rejected the Sent One of the Father, they "received him not;" second, a company did "receive him," even those that "believed on his name"; third, this company are here designated "the sons of God," who were "born . . . of God." There is nothing which in any wise resembles this in the other Gospels. Here only, in the four Gospels, is the truth of the new birth brought before us. And it is by new birth we enter the family of God. As, then, the family of God reaches out beyond Jewish believers, and takes in all Gentile believers too, we submit that John's Gospel cannot be restricted to the twelve-tribed people. Second, after stating that the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, "and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father (which is a glory that none but believers behold!), full of grace and truth," and after summarizing John the Baptist's witness to the Person of Christ, the Holy Spirit through the Evangelist goes on to say, "and of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. Surely this verse alone establishes the point of who it is that is here being addressed. The Jewish nation never received "of his fulness"—that can be predicated of believers only. The "all we" of verse 16 is the "as many as" received Him, to them gave He power to become "the sons of God" of verse 12. Third, in the tenth chapter of John, we read that the Savior said, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep" (verses 14, 15). Immediately following this He went on to say, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (verse 16). Who were these "other sheep?" Before we can answer this, we must ascertain who were the "sheep" referred to by Christ in the first fifteen verses of this chapter. As to who they were there can be only one answer: they were not the nation of Israel as such, for they had "received him not"; no, they were the little company who had "received him," who had "believed on his name." But Christ goes on to speak of a future company of believers, "other sheep I have (speaking as God who calleth those things which be not as though they were: Romans 4:17), them also I must bring." Clearly, the "other sheep" which had not been brought into the fold at the time the Savior then

spake, were believers from among the Gentiles, and these, together with the Jewish believers, should be "one fold" (or, better "one flock"), which is the equivalent of one family, the family of God. Fourth, in John 11:49-52 we read, "and one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation, and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." This was a remarkable prophecy, and contained far more in it than Caiaphas was aware. It made known the Divine purpose in the death of the Savior and revealed what was to be the outcome of the great Sacrifice. It looked out far beyond the bounds of Judaism, including within its range believing sinners from the Gentiles. The "children of God that were scattered abroad" were the elect found among all nations. That they were here termed "children of God" while viewed as still "scattered abroad," gives us the Divine viewpoint, being parallel with "other sheep I have." But what we desire to call special attention to is the declaration that these believers from among the Gentiles were to be "gathered together in one," not into one "body" (for as previously said, the body does not fall within the scope of John's writings), but one family, the family of God. Fifth, in John 14:2, 3 we read that Christ said to His disciples, "In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am, there ye may be also." How entirely different this is from anything that is to be found in the first three Gospels scarcely needs to be pointed out. In them, reference is invariably made to the coming of "the Son of man," but here it is the rapture of the saints to heaven, and the taking of them to be where Christ now is that is expressly mentioned. And manifestly this can in no wise be limited to Jewish believers. Sixth, without attempting to develop this point at any length it should be noticed that the relation which the Holy Spirit sustains to believers in this Gospel is entirely different from what is before us in the first three. Here only do we read of being "born of the Spirit" (John 3:5). Here only is He denominated their "Comforter" or Advocate (John 14:16); and here only do we read of Him "abiding forever" with believers (John 14:16). Seventh, the High Priestly prayer of the Savior which is recorded in John 17, and found nowhere else in the Gospels, shows plainly that more than Jewish believers are here contemplated, and evidences the wider scope of this fourth Gospel. Here we find the Savior saying, "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." The "as many as thou hast given him" takes in the whole family of God. Again, in verse 20 the Lord Jesus says, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word:" the "these" evidently refers to Jewish believers, while the "them also" looked forward to Gentile believers. Finally, His words in verse 22, "and the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one" shows, once more, that the whole family of God was here before Him. In bringing this chapter to a close we want to prepare the reader for the second of the series. In the next chapter we shall (D.V.) take up the first section of the opening chapter, and it is our earnest desire that many of our readers will make these verses the subject of prayerful study and meditation. The Bible teacher who becomes a substitute for diligent study on the part of those who hear him is a hindrance and not a help. The business of the teacher is to turn people to the searching of the Scriptures for themselves, stimulating their interest in the Sacred Word, and instructing them how to go about it. With this end in view, it will be our aim to prepare a series of questions at the close of each chapter bearing on the passage to be expounded in the succeeding one, so that the reader may study it for himself. Below are seven questions on the passage for the portion we shall take up in the next lesson, and we earnestly urge our readers to study the first thirteen verses of John 1, and to concentrate upon the

points raised by our questions. 1. What "beginning" is referred to in John 1:1? 2. How may I obtain a better, deeper, fuller knowledge of God Himself? By studying nature? By prayer? By studying Scripture? Or—how? 3. Why is the Lord Jesus here termed "The Word?" What is the exact force and significance of this title? 4. What is the meaning of John 1:4—"The Life was the Light of men?" 5. The fact that the Savior is termed "the Light" in John 1:7, teaches us what? 6. What does John 1:12 teach concerning what a sinner must do to be saved? 7. What is the exact meaning of each clause in John 1:13? Pray over and meditate much upon each of these questions, and above all "Search the Scriptures" to find God's answers. Answers to these questions will be found in the next chapter, in the course of our exposition of John 1:1-13.

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