

The Christ of Luke

In 1940 the Testimony published a series of articles by Brother F. Bilton entitled, "Christ in the Four Gospels", dealing with the different aspects of Christ presented in each gospel. Two spare pages at the end of this Special Issue enable us to published extracts from his thoughts on Luke's Gospel.

LUKE, in his prologue, says, "Having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first", which [. . .] should be rendered "from above". Not merely did Luke record those things which eyewitnesses "from the beginning" delivered unto him, but he states he had also perfect understanding "from above".

Luke here makes the tremendous claim that his "perfect understanding of all things" came "from above" (although rendered "from the very first"), that is, by Divine power and control, exactly as Jesus made the same claim respecting his mission: "He that cometh *from above* [Gr. *anōthen*] is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly . . . he that cometh from heaven is above all" (Jno. 3:31).

Christ's mission, which thus came "from above", is explained by him as being from his heavenly Father, Who gave him His Spirit without measure, that men believing on him may have everlasting life.

Jesus, refuting Pilate's statement that he had power to crucify or release him, uses the same words: "Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee *from above* [*anōthen*]: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin" (19:11).

What possible excuse have scholars for undermining the Scriptures, when fully acquainted with the Divine claims made by Luke? They know full well that James uses the same words: "Every good and perfect gift is *from above* [*anōthen*], and cometh down from the Father of lights, with Whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jas. 1:17).

Luke specifically claims it was the Father of Lights Who gave him his perfect understanding "from above".

IN this Gospel we have no reference, as we had in Matthew, to Christ being "born King of the Jews", but as the Son of *man* and the Saviour of the world. We here read that his birth was her-

alded by the angel to humble shepherds: "behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (Lk. 2:10-12).

Seeing this Gospel presents the manhood of Christ, we find, only here, the story of the infancy of the child; how the child grew, and how the grace of God was upon him; how, when he was twelve years old, he went up with his parents to Jerusalem; how the child tarried behind at Jerusalem, and his mother's question, "Son why hast thou thus dealt with us?"; and how "he went down with them . . . and was subject unto them", and "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (vv. 42-52).

These, and points similar to these, are peculiar to this Gospel, distinctly marking our Lord as the Son of *man*, personally sharing man's lot and himself fully tasting it; being joined to us in birth, in childhood, and in youth, that, as the first Adam failed, bringing sin and death, so the second Adam might bring righteousness and life; for, as Paul states in his epistle to the Corinthians, "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:47).

Just as Matthew's Gospel was directed to the recording of the labours of Christ and the twelve apostles among the lost sheep of the house of Israel, so we read in Luke's Gospel of those labours which were directed to the outer world of the Gentiles. For instance, we read in Matthew, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (10:5-7). Luke omits this as beside his purpose, simply saying, "he sent them to preach"; and "they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing every where" (9:2,6).

Though the diverse records of Christ's commission to his disciples in each Gospel have caused so much confusion and hostile criticism, we again see the answer to such criticism in this Divinely controlled portrayal of the Christ in accordance with the viewpoint of the narrator.

Luke also adds a scene not elsewhere recorded, but characteristic of his Gospel, showing the compassion of the Son of *man* for men, even while they rejected him. The disciples going to a village of the Samaritans make ready for him, "And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem" (9:52-56). At once the disciples James and John would have called for fire from heaven on the rejectors. Such is the flesh, even in true and beloved followers of the loving Christ—so unwilling to recognise labour as they are not with us; so ready to judge those who will not receive us!

But Jesus turned, and rebuked them, saying, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of *man* is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them"—words omitted entirely in the other Gospels, but perfect as revealing the Son of *man*, who, with doors shut against him, is yet content to bear this slight, if, by long-suffering, he may yet save lost sinners.

HOW very human is this narrative by Luke! His preface is characteristic, beginning with an address to his friend Theophilus. The Gospel thus displays, in the opening, that human attachment which continues throughout, and closes with that touching human incident, recorded by Luke alone, of the penitent dying thief being assured of a place in paradise.

The Gospel begins like a simple tale touching the sons of men: "There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judæa, a certain priest named Zacharias", and, seeing this Gospel was to all people, and the Christ was to be "a light to lighten the Gentiles", we are introduced to many matters outside purely Jewish interests. For instance, we read, "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed" (2:1), and then comes a fact which we look for in vain in Matthew's Gospel, that Joseph and Mary went up to be taxed among the rest who went "every one into his own city" (v. 3).

Luke tells us Tiberius Caesar is reigning and Pontius Pilate governs Judea, Herod is tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while (and this is not without purpose) two men are named as the high priests of that people which had once been God's elect. Two high priests in Israel! What a tale this tells of the fall of the elect! "In 1 strict propriety there could be but one high priest at the time who held the office for life. But after the reduction of

Judæa to the Roman yoke great changes were made, and the occupants of an office which had enjoyed almost regular authority were changed at the will of the conquerors. Hence some have supposed that the office had become annual and that Annas and Caiaphas, occupying it by turns, each or both might be said to be the High Priest" (Bloomfield's Greek Testament).

THE Spirit of God induced Luke alone to record eleven parables [see p. 308]. These parables are peculiar to Luke inasmuch as they exhibit the manhood of the Master, and illustrate the extension of the compassion and forgiveness of God, where true repentance obtains, even to the profligate and wretched prodigal. They also teach us our duty to men, even of alien race, when maimed and helpless; our forgiveness of one another as a prerequisite to our heavenly Father's forgiveness. This is illustrated in the Parable of the Two Debtors, while the importance of prayer to all followers of Christ is beautifully illustrated in the Importunate Friend. God's ears are ever open, and access to His throne available at all times; and, though our position be as utterly hopeless as the importunate widow confronted with a soulless unjust judge, yet because of her very persistence and importunity her request was granted, "lest by her continual coming she weary me". The lesson Jesus draws is, "And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily" (Lk. 18:5-8).

All these parables aim at breaking down the national prejudices of Jewry, and condemn the attitude of the Pharisees, who regarded Gentiles with supreme contempt. They show clearly that the way of salvation is open to *all men*, irrespective of race.

WE see the manhood of Christ illustrated in this Gospel very fully. Luke alone records the days of his childhood, and even at his arrest and crucifixion it is Luke only who records the remark, "Judas, betrayest thou the *Son of man* with a kiss?" (22:48). Again, Luke only records the statement of the centurion, "Certainly this was a righteous *man*" (as distinct from the statement of Matthew and Mark, where the comment is recorded, "Truly this was the Son of God"). Luke *only* records the 'bloody sweat' in the Garden of Gethsemane, and also the incident of an angel seen "strengthening him", showing how truly he was *man*.