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THE FOUR GOSPELS.

The following is condensed from Canon Farrar's introduction to the commentary on Luke in the "Cambridge Bible for Schools."

The existence of four separate, and mainly, if not absolutely, independent Gospels, is a great blessing to the church of Christ. It furnishes us with such a weight of contemporaneous testimony as is wanting to the vast majority of events in ancient history. A fourfold cord is not easily broken.

They come to us invested with the highest authority. MATTHEW and JOHN were apostles and eye-witnesses of the ministry of our Lord from the baptism of John until the ascension. The other two evangelists were, as St. Jerome says, "apostolic men." MARK may have been a partial eye-witness of some of the later scenes of the life of Christ, and it is the unanimous tradition of the early church that his Gospel reflects for us the direct testimony of Peter. LUKE expressly implies that he was not an eye-witness, but he made diligent use of all the records which he found in existence, and he derived his testimony from the most authentic sources. It may be regarded as certain that he sets before us that conception of the life and work of Christ which was the basis of the teaching of St. Paul. Thus we have the Gospel "according to" the view and teaching of the four great apostles, Matthew, Peter, Paul and John.

ST. MATTHEW's is the Gospel for the Jews. It is the Gospel of the *past*, the Gospel that sees in Christianity a fulfilment of Judaism. It opens with the words, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham":—the son of David and therefore the heir of the Jewish kingdom: the son of Abraham and therefore the heir of Jewish promise. In it appears the constantly recurrent formula "that it might be fulfilled." It is the Gospel of discourses, the didactic Gospel. It records with fulness five great discourses (chaps. 5; 7; 10; 13; 18; 23-25), all bearing upon our Lord's offices as Lawgiver, King and Judge of the new kingdom. It represents Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of prophecy.

ST. MARK's is the Gospel for the Romans. It is the Gospel of the *present*. It sets forth Jesus as the Lord of the world. The speech of St. Peter to Cornelius has been called "the Gospel of St. Mark in brief." It is the Gospel of incident, the anecdotal Gospel. It is characterized by a graphic vividness which is due to the reminiscences of an eye-witness. Its one aim is to describe our Lord as he lived and moved among men. It represents Christ as the Son of God and clothed with regal power and majesty.

ST. LUKE's is the Gospel for the Greeks. It is the Gospel of the *future*. Its literary style is the purest, its order the most artistic and historical. It is the Gospel of progressive Christianity, of the universality and gratuitousness of the Gospel. It sets forth Jesus to us neither as the Messiah of the Jews only, nor as the universal Ruler, but as *the Saviour of sinners*. It is the Gospel for the world. Hence the genealogy of Jesus is traced up to Adam and God. In it Jesus is the Great Physician and Redeemer of mankind.

ST. JOHN's is pre-eminently the Gospel for the church. It is the Gospel of *eternity*. In it Jesus is the *Incarnate Word*. It is the spiritual Gospel and reveals the inmost life of Christianity.

Note the following special characteristics of the Gospel we are studying, that by Luke. (1) It records the first inspired hymns of the Church. (2) In it thanksgivings are prominent. Mention is made no less than seven times of "glorifying God" by the utterance of gratitude and praise. (3) It gives special prominence to prayer. It not only records, with Matthew's, the Lord's Prayer, but alone preserves to us the fact that our Lord prayed on six distinct and memorable occasions. It insists on the duty of unceasing prayer, and alone records the two parables of the Friend at Midnight and the Unjust Judge. (4) It sets forth clearly the universality and gratuitousness of the Gospel. Our Lord appears in it as CHRISTUS CONSOLATOR, the good physician of bodies and souls, the Gospeller of the poor, the desire of all nations. (5) It teaches the sacredness of Infancy as it alone tells of the birth and infancy of John and Jesus, with all the attendant circumstances. (6) It is the Gospel of womanhood, prominently recording the graciousness and tenderness of Christ towards the sex. (7) It is the Gospel of the poor and the outcast. Its human sympathy throbs all through, and comes to the front in the story of Zacchaeus, and the parable of the Prodigal Son. (8) Lastly, it is the Gospel of tolerance. It records also our Saviour's rebukes when his disciples would call down fire from heaven on the churlish Samaritan village, and when they would forbid good deeds done in Christ's name by one who did not connect himself with their band. This Gospel alone gives our Lord's words to the daughters of Jerusalem on their way to Calvary; his prayer for his murderers; the story of the penitent thief; the walk to Emmaus; and the particulars of the Ascension.