

## I A LIVING PICTURE OF CHRIST

- A. The New Testament is simply a living picture of a Person. This Person is too wonderful. He is both God and man. He is the mingling of God with man, for in Him the divine nature and the human nature are mingled together. He is the King, and He is a bond slave. He is wonderful! No human being has ever spoken words like He spoke, words so profound, yet so clear. For example, Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35), and, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). Plato and Confucius were two great philosophers, and people appreciated the things they said, but neither of them could say, "I am the light of the world." No one else could say, "I am the life," or, "I am the way," or, "I am the reality" (John 14:6). These are simple words and short sentences—"I am," "I am what I am," and "I am that I am"—but they are great and profound.
- B. Jesus is all-inclusive. With Him there are many aspects. Although the New Testament is a short book, it begins with four biographies of one Person, four books telling us of the life of Christ. If you would make an accurate copy of my image, you need to take a picture of every side. This is exactly what has been done in the New Testament. Why do we have four Gospels? Because Christ has at least four main aspects. Christ is great! Because He is all-inclusive and unsearchably rich, He needs several biographies. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John present different aspects of Christ because each writer was a different kind of person. Matthew, for instance, was a tax collector. Among the Jewish people in ancient times, a tax collector was a despised person. Nevertheless, Matthew wrote the first biography of Christ. Mark was an ordinary man, and Luke was a physician and a Gentile. At first, John was a common fisherman, but eventually he became the very aged, experienced apostle. Each wrote a different biography about the same Christ. This living Person needs many biographies.

## II THE POSITION OF JOHN'S WRITINGS IN THE SCRIPTURES

- A. John's Ministry, a Mending Ministry by Life. When Peter was called by the Lord, he was fishing, but when John was called, he was mending the net (Matt. 4:21). Peter did a great deal of fishing, bringing in a multitude of people. However, John mended the spiritual net, for his ministry of mending was a mending ministry of life. Only life can mend, covering all the holes in the spiritual net. How much this is needed today! There are so many holes in the Christian net. What can mend them? Nothing but life. This is the reason that we have been burdened over and over again with this matter of life. Some people laugh at us, saying, "Don't you know anything except the one word life?" Yes, in a sense, we only know life, nothing else. We do not know anything else because we do not need anything else. Life is our only need. Other things may enlarge the holes; life will close every gap. We need John's ministry. John's ministry, the last ministry in the Bible and the ministry with which the Bible concludes, was a mending ministry of life. All of John's writings are the final words of the divine revelation in the Scriptures. The final word is always the decisive word. Although many words may be spoken, the decision depends upon the final word. John's gospel is the last of the four gospels, his epistles are among the last ones of the epistles, and his revelation is the last book of both the New Testament and of the entire Bible. Thus, his writings are the final word of the divine revelation.
- B. *John's writings are an extract of the Whole Bible.* Just as the Bible is a book of life and building, so the Gospel of John is also focused on life and building. The Gospel of John reveals that in Christ, the Word of God, is life (1:4); that He came that man may have life (10:10b); and that He Himself is life (11:25; 14:6). Furthermore, this gospel shows us that Christ is the bread of life (6:35); that He has the water of life (4:14); that He gives life to man (5:21); and that He even lives in man as life (14:19). The Gospel of John unfolds the building. In 1:14 we see that Christ in the flesh was the tabernacle for God's habitation among men on earth. "And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." Also, Christ's body was the temple before His death and after His resurrection (2:19-22). Before His death His body in the flesh was the temple, and after His resurrection His resurrected

body remained the temple of God. This is the building. Furthermore, this gospel reveals that the believers are to be built as the abode of the Triune God (14:2, 23). This is adequately and fully disclosed in John 14. According to that chapter, all the believers will be built together as God's eternal habitation with so many abodes. Thus, as the Lord's last prayer found in John 17 indicates, all His believers must be built up into one (vv. 11, 21-23).

### III HOW IS JOHN'S GOSPEL STRUCTURED

- A. *The First Section: the Lord's Coming.* The first section of the Gospel of John, composed of the first thirteen chapters, is on the coming of the Lord Jesus to bring God into man and to declare God to man. This section tells how the Lord was the Word of God, which was God Himself, coming through His incarnation to bring God into man and to declare God to man. Before the time of His incarnation, He was separate from man. God was God, and man was man. However, through His incarnation He brought God into man. God became one with a man named Jesus, a man who was both God and man. Although no one has ever seen God, through incarnation the only begotten Son of God has declared God to man in life, light, grace, and reality. We shall see more of this in the following messages. For the time being it is sufficient to remember that in the first section of John we see how God was brought into man and declared to man.
- B. *The Second Section: the Lord's Going in Death and Coming Back in Resurrection.* The second section, composed of the last eight chapters, is on the Lord's going in death and coming back in resurrection to bring man into God and to abide in and with man for God's building. In the first section He brought God into man; in the second section He passed through death and resurrection to bring man into God. Thus, He is able to enter into man and to abide in and with man for God's building.

### IV THE LANGUAGE AND FIGURES OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

- A. Although the language of the Gospel of John is simple and brief, this book is deep and profound. "In the beginning was the Word"; "I am the light"; "I am the life"—such statements are simple, but their meaning is profound. What does "the Word" mean? Try to define it. What does it mean to say that "in Him was life"? Who can say what life is? It is profound, far beyond our understanding. Hence, this gospel, in its brief and simple style, uses many allegories and figures. In John 1 we have the Word. We know that this Word was Christ. However, do not think that Christ was a word with four letters; the Word here is an allegory, a figure, depicting what Christ means for God. In 1:14 we have the tabernacle, which also was Christ. Furthermore, in 1:29 Christ is called the Lamb of God, although He was not actually a lamb with four feet. We have seen that Christ called Peter a stone (1:42), but "stone" has a spiritual significance. Therefore, we should not try to understand the Gospel of John merely according to letters; we need to allegorize it in a proper way according to the revelation of the entire Bible.
- B. Nearly every chapter of John's gospel contains some figures. **Chapter one:** the Word, the light, the tabernacle, the lamb, the stone, and the heavenly ladder; **Chapter two:** six water pots, the wine, the temple, the Father's house; **Chapter three:** serpent on a pole; **Chapter four:** Jacob's well and the living water; **Chapter six:** living bread; **Chapter seven:** rivers of living water; **Chapter nine:** spittle and the clay; **Chapter ten:** door, fold, flock, pasture, and shepherd; **Chapter twelve:** grain of wheat; **Chapter thirteen:** foot-washing; **Chapter fifteen:** vine and branches; **Chapter sixteen:** woman and child; **Chapter nineteen:** bone, blood, and water; **Chapter twenty:** breath; and **Chapter twenty-one:** sheep and lambs. We cannot understand this gospel properly without allegorizing all of its figures. Because the matters of life are abstract, deep, and profound, it is extremely difficult to describe and express them with ordinary human language. Hence, this gospel uses various figures to signify spiritual things, the exceedingly profound matters of life and building.