

Introduction to John's Gospel

John 20:30-31

I am very excited today because we are starting our study of the fourth gospel. I clearly remember reading through the Gospel of John soon after I was saved. God used the words of this book to draw me to Himself and help me to grow as I believed in Jesus and followed Him. Perhaps many of you have also either come to believe in Jesus through the Gospel of John or you have significantly grown in your faith through its words.

I don't think we could overstate the importance of the Gospel of John for our faith and walk in Jesus Christ. Origen, the father of biblical exegesis, said, "The Gospel [of John] is the consummation of the Gospels as the Gospels are of the Scriptures." Jerome said, "John excels in the depths of divine mysteries." Luther speaks of John as being "the unique, tender, genuine, leading Gospel."

James Culross said, "I believe the writings of John have been blotted by more penitents' tears and have won more hearts for the Redeemer than all the rest put together." One has called it "the heart of Christ;" another "the gospel of the Spirit;" and another "the chief of the Gospels." Dr. A. T. Pierson describes it as leading us into "the Holy of Holies." Calvin designated John as the key that opens the way to a right understanding of the other Gospels.

The Gospel of John is both simple and profound. John uses a limited vocabulary and very simple words, but the ideas that he presents in these words are deep. Many have said this book is like a pool in which both a toddler can wade and an elephant can swim. It is no surprise that we often tell seekers and new believers to read John. A child can understand and respond to John 3:16, **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."** But it is also true that scholars have written volumes trying to comprehend some of the themes of John. So whether you are just getting started in your Christian life or you have walked with Jesus for decades, John has something for you. My prayer is that all of us will come to believe in Jesus in fresh and life-giving ways as we study this book.

Most of you know that in our New Testament we have four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each of these presents the good news about Jesus of Nazareth who being the Son of God came to earth as a man, taught us about God, performed miracles proving He was the Christ, was crucified as a substitute for our sins and who was raised from the dead on the third day.

None of the four are what we would strictly call a biographies although they are historical and accurate portrayals of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, and Luke

are called the synoptic gospels. The word synoptic means “seeing together” or the “same view.” These three gospels are very similar in their view of Jesus, although each has its own unique perspective and audience. Matthew, one of the twelve, wrote primarily to Jews, emphasizing that Jesus Christ is the King of Israel. Mark wrote shortest gospel, probably from Rome under Peter’s influence. He emphasizes Jesus as the Son of Man who came to serve and give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Luke was a physician and a co-worker of the apostle Paul. He wrote his gospel having thoroughly investigated the matter from the beginning. His gospel is seems to be aimed at non-Jews like Samaritans or Gentiles and emphasizes Jesus Christ in His humanity as the Son of Adam.

John writes after all of these. And although he tells the same basic history about Jesus, his gospel is very different from the other three. We don’t have to guess John’s purpose in writing his gospel because he tells us plainly. Listen to his purpose statement in **John 20:30-31**,

30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;

31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

John wants his readers to believe specifically that Jesus is the Christ—the Jewish Messiah—of whom the Old Testament prophesied. And John wants you to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, which means, He is God in human flesh (5:18-29). The ultimate testimony of faith in John’s gospel is when Thomas sees the risen Jesus and proclaims (20:28), “My Lord and my God!”

So John wants us to know who Jesus is and to believe in Him. The result of believing in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, is that you may have life in His name. By “life,” John means “everlasting life.” And that life is only found in Jesus who said, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me,”** (14:6).

There are many different ways to outline John’s gospel, but here is a broad outline that gives the flow of the text:

I. Prologue: The Incarnation of the Son of God (1:1–18)

“The Word became flesh” (1:14).

II. The Signs: That You May Believe in Jesus (1:19-12:50)

“The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me” (10:25).

A. The Presentation of the Son of God (1:19–4:54)

“We have found the Messiah” (1:14).

B. The Opposition to the Son of God (5:1–12:50)

“And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?” (8:46).

III. The Preparation of the Disciples by the Son of God (13:1–17:26)

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace” (16:33).

IV. The Trial and Death of the Son of God (18:1–19:37)

“We have no king but Caesar!” (19:15).

V. The Resurrection of the Son of God (19:38–20:31)

“My Lord and my God” (20:28).

VI. Epilogue (21:1-25)

“Feed My sheep” (21:17).

This morning I want to use John’s purpose statement in 20:30-31 as a framework to give a preview of the book. Here we find that The Gospel of John is an eyewitness account of the person and ministry of Jesus, written selectively and symbolically so that you may believe He is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing have life in His name.

1. The Gospel of John is an eyewitness account of the person and ministry of Jesus.

John (20:30) states, “**And truly Jesus did many other signs *in the presence of His disciples* ...**” John was one of these disciples. He was an eyewitness to the words and works of Jesus. How do we know? The author identifies himself in the narrative in 21:24, “**This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.**” Which disciple is it? Back up to verse 20, he refers to himself as “**the disciple whom Jesus loved,**” (21:20).

One of the things you will notice about the Gospel of John is that there is only one person named John in this book, and it is not the author of the book but John the Baptist. In reading through the four Gospels, you will find that Matthew refers to the Apostle John by name three times; Mark ten times; Luke seven times, and John not at all. John does refer to the “sons of Zebedee” in 21:2 but whenever he writes about himself he prefers to call himself “**the disciple whom Jesus loved**” (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). I think it indicates John’s humility and that he never got over the wonder and awe of the fact that he was so loved by Christ.

John and James, his older brother (Acts 12:2), were “the sons of Zebedee” (Matt. 10:2–4), and Jesus gave them the name “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17). John was an apostle (Luke 6:12–16) and one of the 3 most intimate associates of Jesus (along with Peter and James—cf. Matt. 17:1; 26:37).

After Christ's ascension, John ministered with Peter (Acts 3:1; 4:13; 8:14) and became a "pillar" in the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9). Church tradition says before the destruction of Jerusalem he went to Ephesus, from where he wrote this gospel and from where the Romans exiled him to Patmos (Rev. 1:9). Besides the gospel that bears his name, John also authored 1–3 John and the Book of Revelation (Rev. 1:1). In his first letter John writes that he was an eyewitness to and a participant in Jesus' earthly ministry (1 John 1:1–4).

So as he writes in 21:24, **"we know that his testimony is true."**

2. The Gospel of John selectively tells of the person and ministry of Jesus.

Look again at John 20:30, **"And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, *which are not written in this book*."** John admits that there is much about the life and ministry of Jesus that he left out. When you compare John with the other three (Synoptic) Gospels, you discover that John does not include many of the elements contained in the other Gospels. Most scholars think that he wrote his gospel sometime in the 80's or early 90's A.D., and so he most likely knew about the other gospels and did not feel the need to duplicate what they had written.

So John is selective. He even writes in the last verse of the book, **"And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen,"** (21:25).

Let just point out some of the things that John leaves out. When compared with the Synoptic Gospels, John's Gospel does not include ...

- Jesus' genealogy
- an account of our Lord's birth
- any events in our Lord's childhood
- Jesus' baptism
- His temptation
- the Sermon on the Mount
- the account of John the Baptist's doubts
- any casting out of demons
- any healing of lepers
- any parables of our Lord
- an account of our Lord's transfiguration
- the selection and sending out of the 12, or of the 70
- any eschatological (prophetic) address

- a pronouncement of woes on the religious leaders (e.g. Matthew 23)
- the Lord's Supper
- an account of our Lord's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane
- the giving of the Great Commission
- an account of our Lord's ascension

Lest we feel short-changed by a reading of John's Gospel, I should also point out that there is much in John which is not found in any of the other Gospels. Allow me to identify some of the unique contributions of John's Gospel. In John's Gospel only we find ...

- Jesus as the Creator (John 1)
- Jesus as the "**only begotten**" of the Father (John 1)
- Jesus as the promised "**Lamb of God**" (John 1)
- Jesus revealed as the "**I Am**"
- Jesus turning the water into wine (John 2)
- Jesus' conversations with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 3 & 4)
- The healing at the pool of Bethesda (John 5)
- Jesus and the woman caught in adultery (John 8)
- the healing of the man born blind (John 9)
- Jesus the Good Shepherd (John 10)
- the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11)
- Jesus washing the disciples' feet (John 13)
- the Upper Room Discourse of our Lord (John 14-17)
- Jesus' teaching on the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 14-16)
- Jesus' high priestly prayer (John 17)
- Thomas' doubts and confession (John 20)
- Appearance of Jesus at the Sea of Galilee (John 21)

More than half of John's gospel concentrates on the last 24 hours before Jesus' crucifixion and His ensuing resurrection. In summation, over 90% of the material found in the Gospel of John is unique to his Gospel. John avoids repeating those things the other Gospel writers have already written, choosing to devote his attention to that which we have not yet been told. In writing this way John not only gives us additional information about Jesus, but he also helps us to better understand what the other Gospels teach.

John carefully chose all these events and much more to give us this selective insider's portrait of our Savior.

3. The Gospel of John symbolically portrays the meaning of Jesus.

Again John 20:30 says, **"And truly Jesus did many other *signs* in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book."** The key word here is "signs." John does not call Jesus' mighty works "miracles" or "wonders," John calls them "signs." A sign points to something beyond itself. John wants us to see that the miracles of Jesus have a deeper meaning.

Out of hundreds of miracles that he could have chosen, John picked seven signs, not counting Jesus' resurrection and the miraculous post-resurrection catch of fish (21:1-14):

- (1) Changing the water into wine (2:1-11);
- (2) Healing the nobleman's son (4:46-54);
- (3) Healing the lame man by the Pool of Bethesda (5:1-9);
- (4) Feeding the 5,000 (6:1-14);
- (5) Walking on the water (6:16-21);
- (6) Healing the man born blind (9:1-12); and,
- (7) Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-46).

In at least three of these miracles Jesus tells us their significance. After He feeds the 5,000, Jesus proclaims (6:35), **"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."** Before opening the eyes of the man born blind, Jesus says (8:12), **"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."** Before He raised Lazarus from the dead, Jesus told Martha (11:25), **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."**

Those are three of seven "I am" statements that Jesus makes in John. The others are, **"I am the door of the sheep"** (10:7); **"I am the good shepherd"** (10:11, 14); **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life"** (14:6); and, **"I am the true vine"** (15:1, 5). All of these use symbols to help us understand who Jesus is.

Although John does not quote the Old Testament as often as Matthew does, he has frequent allusions to things in the Old Testament. One of the features of these symbols is the manner in which Jesus is assumed to replace Old Testament figures and institutions. He is the new temple, the one of whom Moses wrote, the true bread from heaven, the true Son, the genuine vine, the tabernacle, the serpent in the wilderness, the Passover.

John also uses several key words that have symbolic significance. John will contrast *life* and *death*, *light* and *darkness*, *flesh* and *spirit*, *love* and *hate*, *belief* and *unbelief*, *truth* and *lies*, “*from above*” and “*from the earth*.”

Listen to the words he repeats often. He uses “believe” 98 times; “world” 78 times; “love” 47 times; “know” 131 times; “word” 45 times; “truth” “true” 49 times; “judge” or “judgment” 30 times; “witness” 47 times. Other key words will be “glory,” “My Father,” “abide,” and “ask.”

Two concepts that have significance due to their repetition are that Jesus was *sent* (33 times referring to Jesus’ mission from God) to this earth by the Father to do His will at the appointed *hour* (12 times with reference to the cross).

So John is both selective and symbolic.

4. The Gospel of John is written so that you may believe and have life in Jesus’ name.

Look again at John 20:31, “**but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.**” John wants you to believe. John uses the verb, *believe*, 98 times, but strangely he never uses the noun. John knows that faith is more than just knowing the right doctrine, it is receiving Jesus so that you have a personal love relationship with Him. John 1:12 says, “**But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.**”

To believe in Jesus is to trust Him as your Savior and Lord and walk in obedience to His commands. We will see as we go through John that it’s possible to have a superficial belief in Jesus that does not result in eternal life (2:23-25; 8:31-59).

For John believing in Jesus is not just something we do once and are done with—believing must be we must grow in our believing. both initial and continuing and growing. In chapter 1 the disciples believed in Jesus when they first met Him, based on the testimony of John the Baptist (1:7, 49-50). But they also believed when they saw Jesus perform His first miracle, turning the water into wine (2:11). John reports that when he went into the empty tomb and saw Jesus’ grave clothes, he believed (20:8). Thomas had believed in Jesus before the resurrection, but the risen Christ said to him “**Do not be unbelieving, but believing**” (20:27).

Conclusion

Bob Deffinbaugh tells the story of the first time he taught through the Gospel of John. An unsaved couple began to attend the Bible study he held in his home. Somewhere around the third chapter of John, the wife suddenly blurted out, “*Well, if I didn’t know any better, I’d think that Jesus was claiming to be God.*” A few weeks later, this

pastor was walking down the street with the husband. The man told the pastor that something had happened in his life somewhere in the last few weeks. He was basically saying that he had come to believe in Jesus as his personal Savior and Lord. The pastor asked him when this change took place. He said, "Well, it was somewhere between John chapter 3 and John chapter 6."

I invite you to believe in Jesus as we study of the Gospel of John. Make the message of this book your own. It is my hope that as we go through this book you will not only increase in believing in Jesus Christ, but that you will increase in love for Him. I believe that the greater you know and love Jesus Christ the more you will live for Him. Believe and have life in His name.