

## The Writings of John

### The gospel of John

In our last session we saw how John used his prologue to explain the deity of Jesus to his audience. The prologue of John's gospel is what separates it from the other synoptic gospels insofar as John goes into great detail about the identity of Jesus as part of the Trinitarian Godhead. Indeed, as we read through the rest of the gospel we see John takes this theme of Jesus' Sovereignty throughout the remainder of the gospel.

John's gospel is set out for us in the following way:

The Prologue (1:1-18)

The signs authenticating the public ministry of Jesus, including His rejection (1:19-12:50)

Testimonies to Jesus (1:19-51)

Jesus sets out how we are to approach God (2:1-4:42)

1: First sign: water to wine (2:1-11)

2: The great sign of His resurrection (2:12-22)

3: Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman (3:1-4:45)

Jesus mediates life and judgement (4:46-5:47)

1: Second sign: The healing of the official's son (4:46-54)

2: Third sign: Lame man healed (5:1-15)

3: Jesus' authority over life and judgement (5:16-45)

Jesus is the bread of life (6)

1: Fourth sign: five thousand fed near the time of Passover (6:1-15)

2: Walking on water (6:16-24)

3: Jesus, the bread of life (6:25-71)

Jesus gives living water and is the light of the world (chs. 7-8)

1: Living water at the Tabernacle (ch. 7)

2: Light of the world (ch. 8)

Jesus is the light and the shepherd (chs. 9-10)

1: Sixth sign: The blind man healed (ch. 9)

2: The door and the good shepherd (ch. 10)

Jesus is the resurrection and the life (chs. 11-12)

1: Seventh sign: Lazarus raised from the dead (ch. 11)

2: Jesus prepares for rejection and death (ch. 12)

Jesus "lifted up" (chs. 13-20)

The upper room: Jesus' departure and the Comforter coming (chs. 13-17)

1: Jesus serves and predicts His betrayal and denial (ch. 13)

2: Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (ch. 14)

3: Jesus is the vine and the branches (ch. 15)

4: The Holy Spirit, His suffering and victory (ch. 16)

5: Jesus' High Priestly prayer (ch. 17)

Jesus "lifted up" in death (chs. 18-19)

1: Judas' betrayal, Peter's denial and the trial of Jesus (18:1-19:16)

2: The crucifixion (19:17-22)

Jesus "lifted up" in resurrection (ch. 20)

1: The first day; Mary Magdalene and the disciples (20:1-23)

2: The first day of the second week (20:24-31)

Thomas' confession of faith (20:24-29)

The purpose of this gospel (20:30-31)

The Epilogue (21:1-25)

Fisher's of men (21:1-14)

Shepherd's of God's flock (21:15-25)

The ancient symbol used in paintings to illustrate John's gospel is the eagle, which represents the style of John's writing. His gospel is intended to take us to the highest point of Jesus' existence and shows us the nature of our Lord and Saviour. This is another reason why John's gospel is different from the others because John is not content with the earthly ministry of Jesus, he wants to take us up to the heavenly realm to see Jesus in all His glory. John's gospel is written so that all may believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God who gives eternal life. This is reflected in the fact that John uses the word "Believe" 98 times and the word "Life" 36 times, to stress the importance that one must believe in order to live eternally.

The first chapter gives us an introduction to the Messiah's coming ministry. John gives clear evidence that Jesus is more than just a man as we saw in our last study, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (1:1). John then goes on to tell us that the "Word" is Jesus who became a man and "dwelt among us" (1:14). The beginning verses in the first chapter teaches us that Jesus is more than just a man who came into existence but rather, He is God, infinite and eternal. Chapters 2-12, consist of Jesus' ministry. He meets with a religious leader named Nicodemus and teaches him that no one can enter the Kingdom of Heaven unless they are "Born-Again" (3:3). We often hear the argument that, "Jesus never claims to be God", but in fact there are several times throughout the book where Jesus claims clearly that He Himself is God. "I and the Father are one" (10:30). Jesus also repeats and applies to Himself, the "I AM" statement as found in Exodus 3:14, which is the name God chooses to be known by for example, when Jesus declares, "I am the bread of life" (6:35), "I am the door" (10:9), "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25), and "I am the way the truth and the life" (14:6), He is affirming His Sovereign authority as part of the Trinity. Interestingly, John dedicates approx. a quarter of his gospel to the events in Chapters 13-17, which occur less than 24 hours before Jesus' death. These chapters describe the details of the Last Supper with Jesus and His disciples. Jesus taught many important lessons to His disciples during this time. Some of these were topics about the Kingdom, and about the work of the Holy Spirit that would be sent to them. Chapter 17, recites for us the High Priestly prayer of Jesus where He prays for Himself, His disciples, and for all the future believers.

Chapters 18-21, portray the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. In these final chapters, He is on trial and then convicted illegally. After which He is treated appallingly. He is beaten, humiliated, and then crucified. Then we see His glorious resurrection when Jesus rose from the tomb and appeared to Mary Magdalene and then to His disciples. At the end of the gospel John finishes with one of the most amazing truths about Jesus when he writes this, "*Now there are also many other things which Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself would not contain the books that would be written*" (21:25). This statement alone tells us volumes about the person and work of Jesus. It also reflects the deep faith and love John has for his teacher, his friend, his Saviour and his Lord. As we read his gospel we see how John develops his Christology (an explanation of Jesus' nature and origin), while leaving out much of the familiar material that we find in the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, including, interestingly, references to Jesus's background, and proclamations about the kingdom of God.

In Mark's gospel, Mark brings us a vivid portrait of first century Palestine alongside the earthy Jesus. John's gospel however, is filled with long passages describing Jesus's divinity. John takes us behind Jesus's ministry and includes the basics of Jesus' ministry, His preaching, miracles, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. It is likely that John heard the details about these events from a very early oral source common to all the gospels, and while it might have been written a bit later than the synoptic gospels, (possibly around 90 A.D), the actual author of John's gospel was probably an interpreter of John, and was possibly one of Jesus's original disciples.

John can be divided into two halves, the first half is opened by a prologue and the second half followed by an epilogue. The first half of the gospel is known as a "Book of Signs." Because it tells of Jesus's ministry, focusing on seven major miracles worked by Jesus and the meaning and significance of those miracles. The second half of John is sometimes called the "Book of Glory," because the narrative moves us towards Jesus's glorification through His crucifixion and resurrection.

Finally, the book ends with an epilogue, which some scholars believe was added to the gospel by a later writer, and tells of Jesus's appearance to the disciples after his resurrection. All the gospel narratives differ dramatically after the point of the discovery of the empty tomb and the astonishment of the women, which is where Mark ends his gospel. In Matthew, the women run to tell the disciples and are met by the risen Jesus on the way. In Luke, the women tell of their discovery of an empty tomb, but no one believes them until the resurrected Jesus makes a series of appearances before the other disciples. At this point in John's gospel, Mary Magdalene tells Peter and another disciple of the empty tomb, and, though she first mistakes him for a gardener, Jesus appears to her and discloses his identity. After his appearance to Mary, the risen Jesus appears to the disciples as a group, and John dramatizes the spiritual presence of Jesus when He breathes on his disciples. In both Hebrew and Greek, the word for "breath" is the same as that for "spirit," (Hebrew: ruach. Greek: pneuma).

The gospel of John is perhaps the most difficult of the gospels to understand, not because John is more complex than the others, Luke is perhaps the most technically difficult of the gospels, but because it is so different from the other gospels. Reading John in the context of the other gospels can be a shocking experience because of the theological significance of the picture that John paints of Jesus's life which is in many ways specific to John himself. Yet the gospel of John also contains some of the most beautiful writings of the N. T., such as Jesus's statement, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (8:7). Some scholars believe that this story was circulating orally, and that church leaders were reluctant to add it into any of the synoptic gospels because in official church doctrine, forgiveness for adultery was impossible. Instead of focusing on an official church, John's gospel focuses on individual believers and their relationships to Jesus. John carries out this theme of the believer's relationship to God and the overall care of believer's to maintain a growing relationship to our Saviour and Lord throughout his epistles and into the Revelation he receives from Jesus, and we will look at these writings next time.