



IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

SERIES: JOHN: GOSPEL OF TRUTH

LESSON: INTRODUCTION TO JOHN

INTRODUCTION | 9/20/2020

MAIN POINT

The Gospel of John is a Gospel of truth, written that we might believe.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

People have difference experiences for how they came to know Christ. Perhaps some required lots of proof and evidence that Jesus is the Christ before they chose to believe. Others may have chosen to believe without a lot of proof and evidence. Which one better describes your journey to faith?

On a scale from 1-10, how prepared do you think you are to provide proofs and evidences of Jesus as the Christ, the son of God. Why?

If you were to hear a testimony about an event or person, what qualities of a testimony would make it seem credible as oppose to fabricated? (eyewitness as oppose to hearing it second-hand; can provide specific details rather than vague generalities, motivated by truth not for personal gain, thorough, shares with consistency, shares facts not opinions)

The Gospel of John is a Gospel of *Truth*. The author, John, goes to great effort to present Jesus as the Christ, the son of God, so that his audience might believe in Him. In fact, John expresses the purpose of writing in John 20:30-31 when he writes, “Now Jesus did many others signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; *but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.*” With these verses, John explained his purpose for writing his gospel: that you believe the truth of Jesus for life.

WHO WAS JOHN?

Before we answer questions about John and his authorship, it might be helpful to distinguish John, the author, from John the Baptist.

John the Baptist was a relative to Jesus and forerunner to Jesus’ ministry. John the Baptist’s mother was Elizabeth, who in her old age, bore a John a few months prior to Mary giving birth to Jesus (Luke 1-2). John the Baptist (called “Baptist” for his baptism ministry) was a prophet who prepared the way for Jesus’ ministry (John 1:19-37). John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod because he spoke out against Herod marrying his brother’s wife (Mark 6:14-29).

John, the author, was one of the first to follow Jesus as a disciple. He was a fishing partner with Simon Peter and began following Jesus after a miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:9-11). From careful readings of the gospel, three disciples appear to spend the most time with Jesus. These were Peter, James, and John. These three disciples were eyewitnesses of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1; Mk. 9:21), invited to watch Jesus raise Jairus’ daughter from the dead (Mk. 5:37), sat with Jesus on the Mount of Olives as he instructed them about signs of the end of the age (Mk. 13:3), and retreated to the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus for prayer just prior to His arrest (Mk. 14:33). We mention these events to say that John provides us an eyewitness account that is hard to beat.

John also wrote Revelation and three shorter letters titled, 1,2, and 3 John. Interestingly, John in 1 John 1:1-4 stresses how much he values being a credible witness for the truth of Jesus. He writes,

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life--- the life was made manifest and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us--- that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things to that our joy may be complete.

With these words, John bases the integrity of his testimony about Christ on his eyewitness account that included touching Jesus and hearing Jesus. His gospel account is no different.

IS JOHN THE AUTHOR?

Many New Testament books begin by addressing an audience and the author identifying himself. However, the Gospel of John does not. In fact, John never identifies himself by name in his gospel.

So why do we think John wrote this gospel when he never identifies himself by name? Instead of identifying himself by name, the author chose to identify himself as the “beloved disciple.” John 21:20 and 24 identify the author as Jesus’ beloved disciple. Interestingly, the “beloved disciple” comes up at several points in the gospel account. In addition to the verse that identifies the beloved disciple as the author, other passages include:

- The beloved disciple inquiring about who will betray Jesus at the last supper (13:13-25).
- Jesus entrusted his mother to the care of the beloved disciple while he was on the cross (19:26).
- The beloved disciple and Peter were the first to run to the empty tomb (20:2).
- In a post-resurrection appearance, the beloved disciple identifies Jesus while fishing. (21:4-8)

The clue that John is the beloved disciple rests on a process of elimination from the other disciples. It is interesting to note that in the Gospel of John, the author never mentions by name James and John. In contrast, the author mentioned by name Peter, Andrew, Phillip, Nathanael, Judas, and Thomas. This is insightful given that in Matthew, Mark, and Luke’s accounts, James and John are mentioned frequently and made up two of the three members of Jesus’ inner circle.

The beloved disciple is clearly one of the twelve since he took part in the last supper, which was an exclusive event for the Twelve. This leaves us with the likely conclusion that the beloved

disciple is James or John. Otherwise, it would seem odd for the author to exclude James and John and mention the others, when James and John were prominent disciples of Jesus.

What persuades us that John is the beloved disciple are two things. First, John's writings in 1, 2, and 3 John resemble the literary style of the Gospel of John. Since we have John identifying himself in 1, 2, and 3 John, it seems reasonable to conclude that he also wrote the gospel of John when their styles are similar. Second, James is unlikely the author because Herod puts him to death in Acts 12:1-5. Since James is killed in Acts 12, there would have been little time for him to write the gospel. Coinciding with James' early death, John 21:23 seems to be a verse that tries to squash a rumor that the beloved disciple would not die. This verse would seem out of place given that James's death occurred rather quickly in the book of Acts. This leaves us with the likely conclusion that John is the beloved disciple and the author.

Does John having the reputation of the beloved disciple add some credibility to his gospel account? Why or why not?

Does anything stand out to you about the title *beloved* disciple?

Do you consider yourself a *beloved* disciple? Which wording might better describe how you think of yourself?

- A beloved disciple
- An intelligent disciple
- A hard-working disciple
- A fill-in-the-blank disciple

PURPOSE OF JOHN

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 20:30-31

John gives us a clear purpose statement for his gospel when he wrote, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:30-31).

It is clear from these verses that John was selective in the content he included in his gospel. He mentions that he could have shared a lot more stories than he did. Rather than include everything he saw, John selected the things that served his purpose: that people believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Knowing this purpose is helpful as we study the gospel. Anytime we come to a story or difficult passage, we can ask ourselves some of these sample questions:

- How does the story reveal Jesus as the Christ?
- How does this dialogue define the relationship between Jesus the Son and God the Father?
- How can this account stir up belief in me?
- What does this passage say about *genuine* belief in Christ?
- How does this text describe what newness of life looks like?

Most (if not all) people have doubts about Christ in various degrees. Some doubt because of intellect questions. Other times, people doubt because of hardships and trials. Also, doubts may come because of personal sin or arrogance. Yet, John's gospel is going to address doubts in its various forms and reasons. As a foreshadow to coming weeks, here are a few examples:

- Intellectual doubts can find solutions when we look at the stories and dialogues of Nicodemus (3:1-21), Jesus feeding the five thousand (6:1-70), Jesus conversing with the Jews about how He is the Great I am (8:31-59), and Jesus' debate with Jews about how he is the Good Shepherd, one with the Father (10:1-42).
- Doubts resulting from hardships can find resolution from stories about a man lame for 38 years (5:1-17), the man born blind (9:1-41), and the death of Jesus' close friend, Lazarus (11:1-44).
- Doubts that arise from personal pride find confrontation in the stories of the Jesus cleansing the temple (2:13-25), the Samaritan woman (4:1-44), Jesus washing his disciples feet (13:1-38), and Peter's denial of Jesus and later restoration by Jesus (13:36-38; 18:15-18; 21:1-25).

You can be honest because we all experience doubts from time to time. Is there a pattern or basis of doubts that you tend to experience more than others? Maybe its intellectual doubts, doubts because of a hardship, doubts because of personal pride, or something else. Which one among these do you tend struggle with the most?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

As we embark on the study of John, maybe you can consider reading and journaling through the gospel in your personal quiet time with Jesus. I imagine that no one has the exact same pattern or system for having a quiet time. What are some of the things you do as you approach reading/studying your Bibles for a quiet time? Perhaps some in the group can learn to take some of the things others do and would like to try a similar practice.

Jesus makes some really definitive statements about himself in the gospel of John. Interestingly, there are seven times where Jesus refers to himself as “I am the _____.” He says:

- **I am the bread of life (6:35)**
- **I am the light of the world (8:12)**
- **I am the door (10:7)**
- **I am the Good Shepherd (10:11)**
- **I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)**
- **I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6)**
- **I am the vine. (15:1, 5)**

Do these statements sound familiar to you? Does any one statement stand out to you more than another? Do any of them sound confusing?

Jesus also performs 7 signs (miracles) in the Gospel of John.

- **Turns water into wine (2:1-12)**
- **Healing the royal official son (4:46-54)**
- **Healing a man who had been lame for 38 years (5:1-17)**
- **Feeding 5,000 with a few loafs and fish (6:1-15)**
- **Jesus walking on water (6:16-21)**
- **Healing the blind man from birth (9:1-44)**
- **Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44).**

Do any these stories sound familiar to you? Does any one story stand out to you more than another? Do any of them sound confusing?

Of these seven “sign” stories, at a quick glance does anything stand out to you about the nature or scope of these signs? At first glance what do these signs reveal about Jesus? (Jesus power over creation, healing of sick, Jesus’s compassion for people, the escalation of power demonstrated as Jesus raises a dead man back to life. Also, it is interesting to note how easily Jesus does these signs. All he does to perform them is to say the word and it is done).

PRAYER

Close in prayer, asking God to press this truth on the hearts of all church members—that a vertical relationship with God leads to horizontal relationships with others.

COMMENTARY RESOURCES

GOSPEL OF JOHN

Video Introductions on Youtube:

Bible Project Overview John Ch. 1-12 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-2e9mMf7E8&t=372s>.

Bible Project Overview John Ch. 13-21 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUfh_wOsauk