

Introduction to the Gospel of John

Today, I want to give us an introduction to the Book of John, also called the Gospel of John. And I couldn't be more excited to begin preaching through this text. Like the other three gospel writers, John tells the story of Jesus Christ. But, as we will see, it is very different in style, in structure, in how simple the language is written, different emphases on large doctrines, etc. And as all Scripture, this book was written by a man (just like us). Yet, through the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these are the Words of God, written to first century Christians, AND written for us today. As Isaiah says, **"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever"** (40:8). And, **"Faith comes by hearing . . . and hearing the Word of Christ"** (Rom. 10:17). With this in mind, I expect us (starting with me) to grow in our faith as we read and listen to John.

Here is the plan for our introduction. 1) Author, 2) Purpose, 3) Structure, 4) Some differences with the other three Gospels, 5) Main Themes, 6) Applications.

1. Author. It is very clear to me that the author is the Apostle John. There are at least six early, major, reliable sources that name John the Apostle as author (Papias, Clement, Polycrates, Muratorian Canon, Irenaeus, Dionysius). More importantly, I believe the Book itself gives clear evidence that John the Apostle is the author. In 21:24, speaking of the writer, says: **"This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true."** So how do we know WHICH disciple? Well, five times in Book, this disciple is also called the "beloved disciple" (13:23; 19:26:20:2; 21:7, 20). He was beside Jesus at the last supper. On the cross, Jesus looked at his mother and said, **"Behold your son."** After the resurrection, Peter ran to the tomb with the **"one Jesus loved."** Also after the resurrection Peter and the **"disciple Jesus loved"** went fishing. And when Jesus suddenly appeared, this disciple (fisherman) said to Peter, **"It is the Lord!"** And finally, right before Jesus ascended, Peter asked Jesus about this **"beloved disciple"** and what kind of death he would experience. The other gospels also mention that Jesus was closer to Peter, James, and John. They were always invited into his inner circle and were privileged to see the raising of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51), the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28), and they were with him during his agony in Gethsemane (Mark 14:33). So, without going into more detail, this disciple must be John.

2) Purpose. The purpose of John's writing is clear. Look with me to 20:30-31: **"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 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."** I think we see the same thing in the letters of John, particularly 1 John 5:13: **"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life."** Though this book is written for all the peoples of the earth, John's context was still very Jewish. And as we will see, John is simply showing how all the promises given to the Jewish nation of the OT find their fulfillment in Jesus,

which in turn blesses the nations. Over and over and over again John says to his readers (and to us now) “***Believe on the Lord Jesus; Believe in this Messiah who is both the savior of the Jews and the savior of the world.***” This “belief” begins with conversion and continues all the way throughout eternity. This means John’s purpose was evangelistic. In 1:12 he says that Jesus “gave the right to become children of God to all who believe in him.” In numerous places he says those who believe will have “eternal life” (John 3:16, 36). In this gospel Jesus often promises “eternal life” to those who “believe” (5:24; 6:40, 47). Looking forward to us he even prayed for those who “would believe through his disciples’ preaching” (17:20). Throughout this book we see many who “hear his word” and “believe.” Examples include Nathanael (1:47-51), Samaritan villagers (4:29, 39-42), the man born blind (9:35-38), Martha (11:27), Thomas, who calls him “my Lord and my God” (20:28). Also, the disciples, the crowds, many Jews and Jewish leaders, etc.

Now, though the primary purpose is evangelism, this book is also written to edify and encourage believers. This began with John’s Jewish communities and makes it’s way to the ends of the earth. (And here we are today! This means that we should expect people who hear to become Christians. And, we will be encouraged as we walk by faith.)

3. Structure. What is the structure of John? How does he organize his work? This is important. When an author writes a book he/she thinks through how it will be structured. And how an author structures his/her work determines how well his message will be communicated. Poetry is written in a certain way to help communicate and to help the reader remember the words. Often, music is written (structured) to make the song easier to sing or easier to memorize. The majority of old hymns, for example, usually include 4 stanzas corresponding to Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. For the same kinds of reasons, I believe the structure of John is important.

As I’ve studied for this topic this morning, I have discovered several opinions on how John structures his gospel. Let me quickly give a couple to you. 1. We can view the Book as written in sections. For this is certainly true. Part 1: Prologue (1:1-18), Part 2: Jesus’ work in the world (1:19-12:50), Part 3) Jesus’ return to the Father (13:1 – 20:31), and part 4) Epilogue (21:1-25). If I remember right, my textbook in seminary (Guthrie) said pretty much the same thing except he called the 2nd part the “Book of the Signs” (7 major miracles) and the 3rd part the “Book of Glory.” One of my favorite commentators William Hendriksen divides it much the same, but breaks down each of the two main parts into 7 smaller sections (also Book of Revelation). Looking at John’s Gospel in this way can be very helpful.

2. We can see the Book as a chiasm. “Chi” is the Greek letter that corresponds to our X. This literary structure refers to a progression of statements along the left side that can be traced from the outside going inward toward the main truth (center of the X). Also, the first statement matches the last as it works its way inward. In this way there is a corresponding truth on each side of the Book as it works its way inward to the main truth (explain further). (See Jim

Hamilton's Book, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Finding Meaning in the Literary Structure of the Gospel of John*). In this structure, the central point of John's gospel is that SOME Believe in Son of God; OTHERS do not believe in the Son of God (11:45-12:19). Personally, I find this structure very helpful as it presents John's main reason for writing in 20:31 **"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."** At the end of the day John's purpose is to present Jesus the Son of God to the world as God's Messiah, as the ONE in whom ALL God's promises are fulfilled. And those who believe in Him will have eternal life.

4. Some differences between John and the other three Gospels. Though Matthew, Mark, and Luke speak of the person and work of Jesus Christ, telling his story, John is very different. The language in Greek is very simple. There is less information, as the other Gospels tell lots of shorter stories whereas John has fewer stories, but gives greater details while telling those stories. One commentator notes that only 8% of the material in the other gospels find parallels in John's gospel (Kruse, 5). This means there is so much more to learn about Jesus in John. (See John 21:25 – not enough books to contain Him). Here are some stories not shared in the other Gospels: The wedding at Cana, the conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, the healing of the man at Bethesda, the feeding of the five thousand and the long discourse that follows, Jesus' teaching on "living water" at the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus' discourse regarding Abraham's seed, the cure of the man born blind, the discourse of the Good Shepherd, the raising of Lazarus, the washing of the disciples' feet, his teaching in the upper room and his high priestly prayers, etc.

5. Main Themes. The first theme I want to mention is that more than the other Gospels, John highlights the work of the Triune God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Though we see references to the Trinity in the other Gospels, they are often implicit, unlike John's Gospel, where his references are crystal clear.

Concerning the Father, He is the "holy Father" (17:11), who existed in the beginning (1:1-2). In his essence, his "face" has never been seen by any human being, except Jesus (1:18; 6:46: cf. Exod. 33:18-23). He has "life in himself" (5:26). He raises the dead (5:21). To know Him is to have eternal life (17:3). He is "Spirit" and seeks those who will worship him in Spirit and in truth (4:23-24). He spoke in ancient times to Moses (9:29), and in the latter times to John the Baptist, who testifies about the Son (1:6). In John we will learn He has ONE UNIQUE Son (3:16, 18), upon whom He has placed his seal of approval (6:27), and to whom He has given power over all things (3:35; 13:3; 16:15), including judgment (5:22). The Father loves the Son (3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 15:9; 17:24). He gives glory to the Son (8:54; 12:28; 13:31-32; 17:5) and testifies to him (5:37; 8:18). The Father is one with the Son (14:7, 9-11, 20), yet greater than Him (14:28). He teaches Him and sends Him into the world (8:28; 3:16-17, 34; 5:36-37; 6:57; 8:42; 10:36; 14:24; 20:21). He works through Him ((5:17-19; 10:32) and tells him what to do (10:18; 12:49-40; 18:11).

The Son is described in John unlike the other Gospels. He is the *logos*, the Word of God, who existed before the foundations of the world (1:1-4). He is the incarnation of God. Jesus took on flesh. He is full of grace and truth (1:14), the “one and only Son” (1:18). He is also the Son of Man who descended from heaven and will be lifted up, as the serpent was in the wilderness (3:13, 14-15). He has come from God, but He will return to God (3:31, 32, 34: 13:1, 3). He is the King of Israel who came sitting on a donkey’s colt (12:14-15). In the Gospel of John alone do we see Jesus refer to himself as the “I AM,” which words are reserved for God alone (See throughout).

In this Gospel, I cannot overstate how clear and how often we see Jesus refer to himself as God (either implicit or explicit). Again, we see that Jesus is God in the other Gospels, but they cannot compare to John’s explicit teaching. (See 10:30)

In John, we also have Jesus most extensive teaching on the Holy Spirit. In the other Gospels we read a lot about the role of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus, but only in John do we see extensive teaching from Jesus himself about the holy Spirit. (See 14-17). In John, ONLY the Holy Spirit can cause someone to be born again, to have life (3:3, 5; 6:63). Reading John we are told that the Holy Spirit will be with us always (14:6). (So much more!)

By far, the Gospel of John gives us the fullest teaching on the Triune God.

Another theme is the idea of “eternal life.” In John we see that eternal life looks to the future. However, in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can have this life now. And to have eternal life is to know the Son. Another major theme is John’s emphasis on being a witness. He uses this term 47 times in the Book. Here, we find 7 witness to Jesus: 1) John the Baptist, 2) Other “general” men and women including his disciples and the Jewish crowds, 3) Jesus himself, 4) Jesus’ works, 5) God the Father, 6) the Scriptures, and 7) the Holy Spirit.

We also see much about the church as the place where the glory of God dwells, the bride of Christ, those given by the Father to the Son, the flock of God, a community of mutual service, branches in the vine, the place where God has fulfilled his promises to Israel, etc.

Love and obedience are found throughout the Book of John (See also 1-3 John). Jesus is often described as the One who loves and obeys the Father, which is our example.

There are others. But, I want to emphasize here at the end of this introduction that John is bearing witness that Jesus is the fulfillment of ALL God’s promises made to Israel in the OT. The other gospel writers do the same. BUT, I find John to be, by far the most clear and simple. John is the only gospel writer who organizes much of his teaching around the Jewish festivals, eventually showing that Jesus IS the fulfillment and the ONE to whom those festivals picture. Only in John’s gospel do we see that as God dwelled with his people in the OT through the temple, so NOW God dwells completely in the Son. And by the Spirit NOW, Christ dwells in us.

In this gospel, Jesus is the bread of life, the “manna” that came down from heaven. Jesus is the “light of the world,” the true light that comes down from heaven. Jesus is the “gate” of the sheep; no one can enter the fold but by Him. In John, Jesus is the good shepherd, the One who leads his sheep. Jesus is the “resurrection and the life.” His words are full of the Spirit and of life.

In the Book of John we see multiple quotations from the OT, mostly from Isaiah, the Psalms, and Zechariah. And, not just quotations; there are soooo many allusions and verbal parallels. I so look forward to preaching and teaching this Book! Let’s move on to some applications for us.

Application. Our purpose in this life in all that we do is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Let me remind us again why John wrote his Gospel. John 20:31: **“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.”**

Application. This gospel will help us understand the OT. As you know, I love to preach the OT. In John we will get the pictures and the types fulfilled in Jesus. When you see a major picture fulfilled in John, go and read about it in the OT. Like the Book of Hebrews, John will help us see that ALL God’s promises to Israel are fulfilled in the Son.

Application. Use the stories of the Book of John in your evangelism. Use the Book of John to disciple new believers (No Gospel is so simple to read and understand.)

Application. God will bring all his promises to pass. Jesus is the fulfillment of all God’s promises. Through the reading and preaching of John, I hope that we will see the glory of Christ more and more! For in Him All the treasures of God are found! (Col. 2:3)