

ABIDE Weekly Devotions: Introduction

By John Leighty

Introduction

In 1989, Jim Bitter was leading the 19th Bassmaster Classic heading into the final day. Hank Parker needed 13 pounds, 13 ounces and a limit of bass to take the lead. “Put ‘em on the scale, Dewey,” Hank said, visibly nervous. “Put ‘em on the scale, let’s see what I got!” Hank’s five fish weighed in at 14 pounds, 8 ounces, giving him the lead over Rob Kilby. And with that, Dewey Kendrick called for Jim Bitter to weigh in.

The crowd was so loud you would have thought you were at the 1987 U2 Joshua Tree concert. My brother, in his bright red Zebco hat, was in the front row taking pictures of the entire event on our brand new Polaroid Impulse. He captured Jim Bitter pulling out four bass from the live well of his brand new Ranger boat.

It would have been five, but earlier that day a fish slipped right through his hands and back into the water, so the four he bagged would have to do. They put the fish on the scale and scoreboard read “6 pounds, 7 ounces.” And with that, Hank Parker won the 1989 Bassmaster Classic by 3 ounces.

That’s when I fell in love with fishing. Sure, I was only five years old, but that entire week left quite an impression on me. I remember handing out buttons for Woo Davies and waking up at 4A.M. to make it out to the James River in time to see all the boats launch. I even got Jimmy Houston’s autograph!

When we got back home, I remember taking my Mickey Mouse rod out to the backyard to practice my casting. I tied a rubber weight to the end of my line and would try to hit certain spots on the grass with it. When I got a little older, my friends and I would hop from one neighborhood pond to the next. We even entered few tournaments. Nothing could pull us off that water. And I can say with certainty that if a carpenter had approached us one day and said, “follow me,” I would have run for the hills!

Author

Like Hank Parker, Zebedee was a fisherman too. He ran a successful business out of a small Galilean town in Israel called Bethsaida, which, ironically, means “house of fish.” It lay on the east side of the Upper Jordan River on the north end of Lake Gennesaret, also known as the Sea of Galilee. His two sons, James and John, helped him with the family business. His wife, Salome, was sisters with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and cousins with Elizabeth, John the Baptist’s mother. It was there that a carpenter actually did call out to them and said, “follow me.” But James and John did not follow Jesus to learn how to build cabinets—they called him “Rabbi,” which means teacher.



In Jewish culture, a young boy would have gone to Yeshiva to study the Tanakh, which would have included intense schooling of the Torah (the Pentateuch), the Nevi'im (the Prophets), and the Ketuvim (the Writings). In other words, by the time he was thirteen, he would have had the entire Hebrew Scriptures memorized. When I was thirteen I had the entire theme song to “The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air” memorized and that’s

about it! The fact that John was at home working on the fishing boats tells us that neither he nor his brother had the educational fortitude to continue on in their religious studies. Only the top students were selected by a Rabbi for apprenticeship in the law. But Jesus was not in the business of choosing the ones who looked best on paper—he chose the willing. Jesus said, “You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give to you” (John 15:14-16).

Being called to follow Christ meant leaving everything behind for the unknown. I’m sure John heard stories from older boys in the neighborhood what it was like to go on from Yeshiva to study under a Rabbi, but I’m sure John, at thirteen, was unable to fully comprehend what it was that he was getting himself into. Because of his age, people often picture John as the “disciple whom he loved” (John 19:26)—a quiet, young boy who would snuggle up to Jesus like a child to his father (John 13:23). But it is possible that John also had somewhat of a temper. Jesus called he and Andrew the “Sons of

Thunder” and, upon witnessing the Samaritans rejection of Christ, they asked Jesus if they should “call fire down from heaven to consume them” (Luke 9:53-56). Irregardless, it was John who, at the feet of Jesus on the cross, was commissioned to take care of his mother, Mary, after he was gone. Jesus tells John, “Behold, your mother,” and from that point on John takes Mary in to his own home (John 19:27).



Background

There are 127 Messianic predictions that involve more than 3,000 verses in Scripture, 574 of which refer directly to a personal Messiah. The Hebrew word “Messiah” means “Anointed One” (or in Greek, “Christ”). It was John the Baptist’s commission to prepare the way for the Messiah (Luke 1:76-80). John mentions in his gospel that he and Andrew were with John the Baptist when he announced, “Behold! The Lamb of God...” (John 1:20a) prior to Jesus calling them to ministry. The language used here is intriguing

as it infers that this “Lamb” was a sacrifice sent by God for our sins. John the Baptist understood why Jesus was here, but it may not have been so clear to John and the other disciples.

We do not know whether or not John had been given a revelation of the fulfillment of Scripture before the others; however, it does tell us over and over that the full truth of understanding had been concealed from the disciples until a later time. It was only after the resurrection that their eyes were open to the full extent of the truth (John 20:8-19; Mark 8:12-21; Luke 12:2; Luke 24:13-49; Ecclesiastes 3:1). Even Jesus’ own parents forgot what his mission on Earth was from time to time (Luke 2: 46-50). What we do know is that John was the only one of the twelve disciples with Christ in his final hour. This could be why Jesus entrusted John to take care of his mother. It could also have been because Jesus’ brothers, James and Jude, did not even believe in who he was until after the resurrection (John 7:5; Acts 1:1-14; Acts 2:1-3; Jude 1:1). But we do know that what transpired caused John to tell us about it in his Gospel. After all, gospel means “Good News.”

After Jesus had finished his work on Earth and the disciples had received the Holy Spirit to go out to all nations to spread the Gospel, martyrdom seemed

to be their fate, even John's. According to the ancient Greek author Tertullian, John was plunged into a boiling vat of oil. But when he remained unscathed, Greek authorities exiled him to Patmos, a small island in the Aegean Sea, where it is believed he wrote the book of Revelation. In addition, John penned a number of books in the New Testament, second only to Paul, that includes First, Second, Third John, and, of course, the Gospel of John.



The Gospels

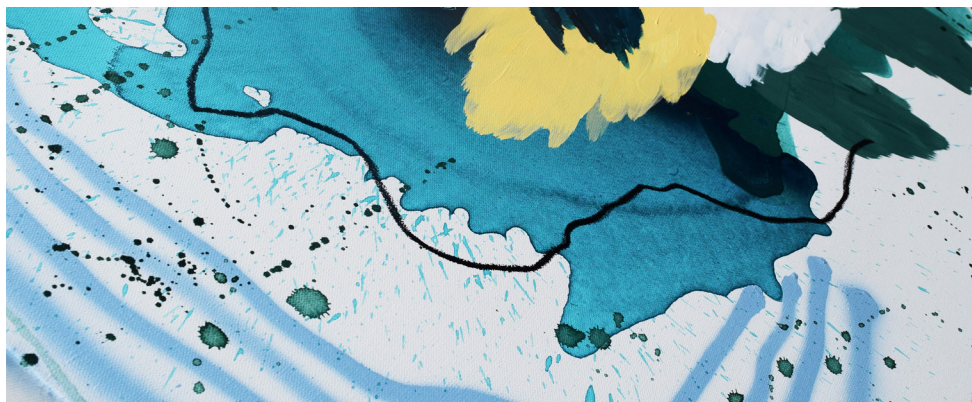
The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are considered Synoptic Gospels. Synoptic comes from the Greek *syn* meaning “together” and *opsis* meaning “view.” They are similarly sequenced, include many of the same stories, contain similar wording—or syntax—and are descriptive in their approach. John's gospel is reflective by nature and differs with respect to audience and reason. For example, John does not include the temptation of Jesus, the Transfiguration of

Jesus, the institution of the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Prayer, or the Sermon on the Mount. There is also no mention of narrative parables in John's gospel (unless you regard "the Vine and the Branches" as a parable).

On the other hand, John includes a number of things not mentioned in the synoptics: Jesus' first miracle at the wedding at Cana where he turned water to wine, Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus, the woman at the well, Jesus' early visits to Jerusalem, and the resurrection of Lazarus. John also has Jesus' public ministry extending over a three year period rather than just one year found in the synoptics.

None of these comparisons are meant to pit the gospels against each other; rather, they are made merely to show that their audience and intent are different. Eusebius, the "father of church history," argues that John was written to complement the Synoptic Gospels, yet all have their place in communicating the gospel to their intended audience. Matthew, a Jew and tax collector, uses Jewish language to convey his message to a Jewish audience, often times referring to the reason for Jesus doing something as the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture (e.g. Matthew 2:13-15). It is also no surprise that he references money more than the other gospels

considering his former profession. Mark is written to a Roman audience—quick and to the point. He underscores the likeness of Jesus as a servant, something that would have been quite familiar to a Roman audience at the time (Mark 10:45). Luke, a Gentile and a physician, wrote to a broad, non-Hebrew audience about the humanity and human traits of Christ (Luke 19:41). Years later, while traveling with Paul, he would write the Book of Acts.



The Gospel of John

The Gospel of John, on the other hand, is written to everyone (John 3:16). He begins his gospel long before the virgin birth and even before the genealogy of Jesus that traces back through the lineage of David. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning” (John 1:1-2). John, being an eyewitness to the life of Jesus, reflects on

the Deity of Christ the Messiah (John 10:30; John 20:28), which embodies the Messianic promise. There is a second part to John the Baptist's statement about Jesus as the Lamb of God. He said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." According to Jewish custom, the Messiah was to come and overthrow the Roman government and restore order. But as John tells us, the Messiah was sent to save us from our sins.

John also characterizes Jesus' authority through a series of "I am" declarations: "I am the bread of life" (6:35), "the light of the world" (8:12), "the door" (10:7), "the good shepherd" (10:14), "the resurrection and the life" (11:25), "the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6), and "the true vine" (15:1), including the absolute "I Am" in John 8:58 (another reference to his existence with the Father before time).

Another theme throughout the Gospel of John is symbolism in the form of Johannine dualism (e.g. light/darkness, truth/falsehood, life/death). Similar language is found in the Qumran, or the Dead Sea Scrolls, and is a literary technique used in John to support the manner in which Jesus in his self-revelation represents salvation. Moreover, the Gospel of John is a petition for all of us to recognize our need for a Savior and to understand his love for us. The

Jewish elite vehemently denounced Jesus' claim as the Messiah but John uses dualism to support Jesus' relationship with the Father. The Synoptics argue against Pharisaic legalism and Paul spoke out against justification on the basis of works of the law, but John challenges the Jewish disbelief of Jesus as the Messiah and reinforces his love for us.



Lastly, John uses the word “signs” to describe Jesus' miracles. The Greek word *tera* means “wonders”; however, John uses the Greek word *sameion*, which means “a sign” (typically miraculous), given especially to confirm, corroborate, or authenticate. It is used to emphasize the end-purpose which exalts the one giving it. People of that day were accustomed to seeing supernatural deeds being done (Matthew 12:22-24), but the use of signs supports Jesus' Deity. The Synoptics refer to many miracles that Jesus did throughout his ministry, but there are a few differences between the Synoptic's references to Jesus' miracles and the ones found in John.

First, John was selective in choosing which signs to include in his gospel. He only mentions eight specific signs done by Jesus. When Jesus turned water into wine in John 2, it was not out of obedience to his mother but rather out of the manifestation of his glory that his disciples might believe in him (John 2:11). Secondly, John mentions signs performed by Jesus that demanded a response. For example, all of the gospels report to us that Jesus fed the 5,000, however, John goes on to tell us that just after that Jesus delivered a sermon in which he declared, “I am the Bread of Life” (John 6:35-59), which the Synoptics fail to do. After Jesus gave sight to a blind man, Jesus declared, “I am the Light of the World.” And after he brought Lazarus back from the dead, he said, “I am the Resurrection and the Life.” See the connections?

These signs were done in the presence of eyewitnesses so that whoever saw them would be compelled to make a choice: believe or not believe (John 20:30-31). Each word and every sign has a purpose:

To recognize the evidence of Jesus’ signs.

To believe Jesus is the Messiah.

To receive new life in Jesus’ name.

This is the purpose for which God made you: that you may have life and have it abundantly. Abundantly comes from the Greek work perissós, meaning “all around, excess,” “more than,” beyond what is anticipated, exceeding expectation, “more abundant,” going past the exceeded limit.

DO YOU GET IT?

John is telling us that through Christ we are not just living beings walking around aimlessly through the world waiting for our time to expire.

We are made alive in Him so that we might
KNOW CHRIST and **MAKE HIM KNOWN.**

