

John Pt 1 Overview of the Entire Gospel of John

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Introduction

John 20:30–31 BSB

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His 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.

We're going to spend a year in this book, so tonight we start somewhere unusual. We start at the end.

Most books make you work to figure out what they're about. John doesn't. Two verses before the book closes, he tells you exactly why he wrote it, in his own words. Then he stops.

Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Then have life in His name.

Say that back to yourself. See who Jesus really is. Then receive life through Him. That order never reverses. You don't get life and figure out later who gave it to you. You see

Him first.

Here's one thing worth knowing about how John writes, because it will change how you read everything else this year. His favorite words are not the words you'd expect from a biography. Witness. Testify. Testimony. Judge. Truth. Condemn. Over and over. John isn't just telling you a story. He's building a case and asking you for a verdict. Hold onto that picture. We'll come back to it tonight in a way that shapes the whole rest of the year.

But before we open the story itself, a few things are worth knowing about the book we're about to spend a year inside.

A. Purpose

John already told us his purpose in the verse we just read. He wrote so you would see who Jesus is and receive life through Him. Every session this year, all forty-nine of them, serves that one sentence. If a session ends without pointing at who Jesus is or the life He gives, we've missed the point of the book, no matter how much true information we covered.

B. Audience

John doesn't name his readers the way a letter would. But

he tells us who they are, one verse before the sentence we just read.

John 20:29 BSB

²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Jesus says this to Thomas, right after Thomas finally believes because he saw the risen Jesus with his own eyes. But notice where Jesus points next. Not at Thomas. At everyone who comes after Thomas. Everyone who will never touch the wounds, never stand in that room, never see any of this firsthand.

That's you. That's every person who's ever picked up this book. John is writing for people who believe on nothing but testimony, his testimony, and he says there's a blessing sitting on that kind of belief that Thomas himself didn't get to have. This book was built for people who can't see. It was built for us.

C. Who Wrote This

The book itself never gives us a name. Whoever wrote it calls himself something else: the disciple Jesus loved.

John 13:23 BSB

²³ One of His disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was reclining at His side.

That phrase shows up five times, always at the most important moments of the story. He's there at the last supper. He's standing at the cross when everyone else has run (19:26). He's the one who reaches the empty tomb first (20:2). He's in the boat the morning Jesus cooks breakfast on the shore (21:7). And near the very end, he's the one Peter turns and asks about, "Lord, what about him?" (21:20).

Here's how you get from that title to a name.

Whoever this is, he was close enough to Jesus to recline next to Him at a meal where, according to Matthew and Mark, only the twelve apostles were present. That places him inside the inner circle. Peter gets named separately, right alongside him, several times, so it isn't Peter. James, John's brother, was killed by Herod around AD 44 (Acts 12:2), too early for a book this developed. That leaves John.

One more small clue points the same direction. Every other Gospel calls John the Baptist "the Baptist," to keep him distinct from John the apostle. This Gospel never does. It just says "John," as if there's no other John a reader could confuse him with. The simplest explanation is that the writer was named John, and had no need to distinguish himself from himself.

Outside the book, the case gets stronger. Irenaeus, writing around AD 180, says John published this Gospel at Ephesus. That's not a guess from a distance. Irenaeus had sat under Polycarp, and Polycarp had sat under John himself. One handshake stands between the author and the man who told us his name.

This case has real counterarguments, and you should know both of them.

A minority of scholars point to Lazarus instead of John. Before "the disciple Jesus loved" ever appears, Lazarus is the one person in this Gospel plainly described as loved by Jesus (11:3, 11:5, 11:36). It's a real observation. It fits less well once you reach chapter 21, where the beloved disciple is out fishing on the Sea of Galilee with Peter, which reads more naturally as one of the original fishermen than a man from Bethany near Jerusalem.

The second counterargument carries more weight in the field. An early writer named Papias, whose work survives only in quotations preserved by the historian Eusebius, seems to describe two different men named John: John the apostle, and a separate figure called "John the elder." Some scholars use this to argue that someone other than the apostle wrote this Gospel, or even that the elder, not the apostle, wrote Revelation, the very book we just spent a year studying together as the apostle's own work. It's a real

question in the field. The stronger case is still the apostle. The chain through Irenaeus and Polycarp is early and specific, and the internal clues fit an eyewitness rather than someone relying on secondhand memory.

D. When Was This Written

Most scholars place this Gospel in the AD 80s or 90s, late in John's life, at Ephesus. That's the majority view, and it fits everything we just covered.

A smaller, serious group of scholars argues for something much earlier, before AD 70. Here's why. In chapter 5, John describes a pool in Jerusalem.

John 5:2 BSB

² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool with five covered colonnades, which in Hebrew is called Bethesda.

He doesn't say the pool "was" there. He says it "is" there. That pool, along with the rest of Jerusalem, was destroyed by Rome in AD 70. A present tense description like that reads most naturally as something written while the pool still stood.

This isn't a fringe idea. A respected New Testament scholar (Richard Bauckham) who spent years assuming the late date

has said in print that this argument disturbed his own position. Nobody has settled it. We'll hold it as a real range rather than a fixed date, and it won't change anything we study together this year either way.

E. The Closing Key

So that's what we know walking in. Written by John, the beloved disciple and an eyewitness, somewhere between the 60s and the 90s, for people who would never see what he saw.

And here's what he wrote, again, because everything tonight builds from these two verses.

John 20:30–31 BSB

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His 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.

Look at what's actually sitting inside those two verses. Signs. Believe. Life. Three words, and every one of them is a door into the rest of the book. The signs are the evidence John chose to include out of everything he could have written. Belief is the verdict he's asking every reader to

reach. Life is what's waiting on the other side of that verdict.

Evidence. Verdict. Life. Hold those three words. That's where we're going next.

The Lens: Evidence, Verdict, Life

Signs. Believe. Life. Those aren't only describing this one passage. They're the shape of the entire book. Every story from here to chapter 21 does one of these three jobs. Let's see each one at work, once, before we go back and read the purpose statement itself even closer.

A. Evidence

The first sign in this Gospel happens at a wedding in Cana, and John tells us plainly what it did.

John 2:11 BSB

¹¹ Jesus performed this, the first of His signs, at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

A sign, and then belief. That pairing isn't an accident here. It's the pattern the whole book runs on. Jesus does something nobody else could do, feeds a crowd, heals a

man born blind, raises a man four days dead, and every single time, John is pointing past the act itself toward what it proves. The sign is the evidence. It was never meant to just leave you impressed. It was meant to leave you convinced.

B. Verdict

Evidence is only useful if somebody reaches a verdict on it. John gives us plenty of people who do, and one of the clearest moments comes right after the man born blind gets thrown out of the synagogue for defending Jesus.

John 9:38 BSB

³⁸ “Lord, I believe,” he said. And he worshiped Jesus.

Notice what that man does with the evidence in front of him. He doesn't stay neutral. He can't. Nobody in this book gets to stay neutral for long. Every sign, every conversation, every claim Jesus makes forces the people around Him toward one answer or the other. That's the verdict John keeps asking for, all the way to the last page, where he turns and asks you for the same one.

C. Life

And here's what's waiting on the other side of that verdict. Not just a right answer. Life.

John 3:16 BSB

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 10:10 BSB

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life, and have it in all its fullness.

This word shows up at nearly every turning point in the book. We'll spend a whole session on it later this year, session 39, where Jesus defines it Himself in a single sentence that's worth waiting for. For tonight, just notice how often the word appears, and notice that it's never just about surviving longer. It's about what Jesus came to give, in full, starting now.

D. Why This Holds Up

Evidence. Verdict. Life. That's not a structure I'm laying over the book from the outside. It's John's own structure, sitting right there in the two verses we opened with tonight. Every one of the forty-eight sessions ahead of us is going to fall into one of these three categories. Some weeks we're looking hard at the evidence, a sign, a claim, a miracle. Some weeks we're sitting with someone in the story reaching their verdict, for better or worse. And some weeks

we're standing right at the edge of what life in His name actually means.

Now let's go back to the two verses we started with tonight, and read them slower than we did the first time.

The Master Key, Read Closely

We've seen how the three words work across the whole book. Now let's go back and look at the actual sentence they came from, one phrase at a time.

John 20:30–31 BSB

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His 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.

"Many other signs"

Start with what that word "other" is doing. John isn't claiming he's told you everything Jesus did. He's telling you the opposite. There was more, plenty more, and he left most of it out. Whatever we read together this year, chapter by chapter, is a chosen sample, not a full record. John had a

whole ministry's worth of material in front of him, and he built this book out of what he decided you needed, not out of everything he had.

"In the presence of His disciples"

This isn't secondhand material. Whatever signs made it into this book, John is telling you they happened in front of witnesses, people who were there, people who could be asked about it. That word "disciples" connects straight back to the man we just spent half the night identifying. The same beloved disciple standing at the cross and reaching the tomb first is one of the very people this phrase is talking about. He's not reporting rumors. He's reporting what he watched.

"Which are not written in this book"

John says this twice, once here and once at the very end of chapter 21. He wants you to know this book has edges. It's not trying to be a complete record of everything Jesus ever did. It's a case, built out of selected evidence, aimed at a specific verdict. Every sign we study this year got chosen on purpose, out of a much larger pool John had to leave behind.

"So that you may believe"

Here's the word we already flagged tonight. John never uses the noun "faith," not once in this whole book. Only the verb. And even the verb shows up in a form that's more like "keep believing" than "believe once and move on." Whatever this book is asking of you, it's not a single decision you make on the way out the door tonight. It's something John expects to keep happening, verse after verse, all the way to the last page.

"Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God"

Two titles, not one, and they're not saying the same thing twice. "Christ" means Messiah, the promised deliverer the whole Old Testament had been pointing toward. "Son of God" is a claim about who Jesus actually is, not just what role He fills. John isn't the only one in this book who reaches that exact confession. Martha says almost the same words, out loud, before Lazarus is even raised.

John 11:27 BSB

²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she answered, "I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

Watch for that pairing again when we reach her story. It's the same verdict John is asking every reader to reach, already sitting inside the book itself.

"By believing you may have life in His name"

Last phrase, and it's doing more work than it looks like. A name in this world wasn't just a label. It carried someone's authority, their character, everything they stood for. Life "in His name" means life that comes through standing on who Jesus actually is, not through some separate thing He hands you on the side. Believe the right thing about Him, and the life follows because of Him specifically, not because belief itself is magic.

That's the whole purpose statement, taken apart piece by piece. Now let's put the pieces back together and look at how the rest of the book actually delivers on it.

How the Whole Book Delivers on That Purpose

We've looked at the purpose statement from every angle. Now let's open the book itself and watch it deliver on that purpose, one piece at a time.

A. One Reading Tool Before We Start

Before we walk through the book, there's a word you're going to run into constantly, and it needs a plain explanation before we get further in. John uses the phrase "the Jews" close to seventy times, more than Matthew, Mark, and Luke put together, and by a wide margin.

That phrase doesn't mean one thing every time it shows up. Sometimes it means people from Judea, a region, the way you'd say "Texans" without implying anything else. Sometimes it means the Jewish people broadly. But from chapter 5 onward, most of the time, it means something narrower: the Jerusalem religious leadership, the priests and Pharisees actually driving the conflict with Jesus.

Here's why that distinction matters. Every major figure in this book is Jewish. Jesus is Jewish. John, the man writing it, is Jewish. Every disciple is Jewish. And Jesus Himself will say plainly, to a Samaritan woman:

John 4:22 BSB

²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.

A book this full of Jewish people, Jewish feasts, Jewish Scripture, with an explicit statement from Jesus honoring Jewish salvation, cannot coherently be read as an attack on Jewish people as a people. The clearest comparison is Jeremiah. A Jewish prophet, speaking hard words to a

Jewish audience, confronting specific Jewish leaders who had failed their calling. Nobody reads Jeremiah as an attack on the Jewish people. That's the same shape we'll see here.

So here's how we'll handle it as we teach. We'll read the text as written. But wherever the context makes clear that John means the Jerusalem leadership specifically, we'll say so, using language like "the religious leaders" or "the Jerusalem authorities." And one more thing needs to be said plainly now, not tucked into a footnote later. This phrase has a real history of being weaponized against Jewish people, for centuries, and real harm came from that misreading. We'll come back to that directly when we reach chapter 8. For now, just carry this framing with you as we walk through the book.

B. Four Parts, One Book

Scholars have a name for each of these four sections, and the names are worth knowing, because each one tells you what kind of reading you're about to do.

The Prologue (1:1-18). Eighteen verses, and they don't read like the rest of the book. There's no narrative here yet, no characters talking to each other, just the narrator's voice laying out, in advance, everything you'll spend the next nineteen chapters watching other people slowly discover. We'll spend all of Session 2 in these verses, so tonight just

notice what John is doing. He tells you on page one that the Word was God, and the whole prologue builds toward one hinge verse where that claim gets as physical as language allows.

John 1:14 BSB

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Everything claimed about the Word in the first thirteen verses, eternal, uncreated, the agent of creation, collides in that one verse with the most ordinary word there is. Became. Whatever that costs to hold together, the rest of the book is going to spend its time working it out.

The Book of Signs (1:19-12:50). The name comes from what fills it, sign after sign, each one pushing the crowd a little further toward a decision they can't keep avoiding. It opens with a formal scene, almost like a deposition.

John 1:19 BSB

¹⁹ And this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?"

Officials arrive from the capital to get an answer on the record. That's the tone for the next eleven chapters. Public ministry, mounting evidence, escalating questions about

who this man actually is. And here's what makes this section worth reading closely all the way to its final verse. It doesn't end on a note of triumph. It ends on the opposite.

John 12:37 BSB

³⁷ Although Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still did not believe in Him.

John wrote his book so that you may believe, because of the signs. But inside the story itself, most people who saw the actual signs in person did not believe. The Book of Signs ends by proving that seeing evidence and reaching the right verdict are two different things, which is exactly why John had to write a book at all. Evidence alone was never going to be enough. Someone still had to make the case.

The Book of Glory (13:1-20:31). Here the pace changes completely. Eleven chapters just carried us through roughly three years. This next section, eight chapters, covers one night, one day, and one morning.

John 13:1 BSB

¹ It was now just before the Passover Feast, and Jesus knew that His hour had come to leave this world and return to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the very end.

"Glory" is the word this section earns, tied straight to the hour we're about to trace. Five chapters of private teaching

at one table, then an arrest, two trials, a crucifixion, and a resurrection, all inside what amounts to about seventy-two hours of story time. Roughly half this Gospel is spent on less than a week of Jesus' life. Wherever John wants you to slow down and stop turning pages quickly, this is where.

The Epilogue (chapter 21). One more scene after the story seems to have already closed. Breakfast on a beach, a restored conversation with Peter, one last word about following. Most scholars treat this chapter as an appendix added after the book's original ending, and there's a real textual reason for that. We'll open that question properly when we reach it near the end of the year. For now, just know it's coming.

Four parts, then. A prologue that tells you everything early, a long public section that ends by proving evidence alone doesn't produce belief, a short intense section that delivers the very thing evidence couldn't, and a short appendix that closes the book gently rather than all at once. Now let's trace the one thread that runs underneath all four parts and ties them into a single clock.

C. The Clock Running Down

There's a thread running through all four parts, and once you know to look for it, you won't be able to stop seeing it. Jesus keeps talking about His hour.

Early on, at a wedding, He tells His mother His hour has not yet come. Later, when religious leaders want to arrest Him, they can't.

John 7:30 BSB

³⁰ So they tried to seize Him, but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.

John 8:20 BSB

²⁰ He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts, near the treasury. Yet no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.

Then, in chapter 12, everything changes.

John 12:23 BSB

²³ But Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

And from there it doesn't turn back.

John 13:1 BSB

¹ It was now just before the Passover Feast, and Jesus knew that His hour had come to leave this world and return to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the very end.

John 17:1 BSB

¹ When Jesus had spoken these things, He lifted up His eyes

to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You.

One warning before you start tracing this yourself. John uses the word "hour" a few other times for something completely different, an hour of true worship in chapter 4, an hour when the dead will hear His voice in chapter 5. Those aren't part of this thread. The thread we're tracing is specifically His hour, the appointed time He keeps naming as still ahead of Him, right up until it isn't. The whole book runs on a clock, and Jesus is the only person in the story who can read it.

D. Seven Signs, Held Loosely

Here's the evidence John chose to include. We'll spend real time on each one as we get there, but even a quick look at the actual words shows what kind of book this is.

The first sign, at a wedding in Cana, we've already read. The second comes when a royal official begs Jesus to heal his dying son from a distance, and Jesus simply tells him to go home, the boy will live, and he does. The third is the man who'd waited by a pool for thirty-eight years.

John 5:8 BSB

⁸ Then Jesus told him, “Get up, pick up your mat, and walk.”

The fourth feeds five thousand people from a boy's lunch. The fifth happens that same night, when the disciples are alone on the water in a storm and Jesus comes walking toward them across it.

John 6:20 BSB

²⁰ But Jesus spoke up: “It is I; do not be afraid.”

Hold onto that phrase. We'll come back to it in a moment. The sixth sign is a man born blind, healed with mud and a command to go wash. The seventh is the big one, a man four days dead.

John 11:43 BSB

⁴³ After Jesus had said this, He called out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”

John numbers the first sign himself (2:11) and the second (4:54). After that, he stops counting out loud. The number seven is something teachers and scholars have assembled by grouping what's left, and reasonable people count differently depending on whether walking on water belongs on the list, since John never calls it a sign the way he does the others. Seven is a useful way to hold these in your memory. It's not something the text insists on.

E. Seven Ways of Saying "I Am"

Now watch what Jesus says about Himself, using the same phrase, over and over, each time finishing the sentence differently.

John 6:35 BSB

³⁵ Jesus answered, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never hunger, and whoever believes in Me will never thirst.

John 8:12 BSB

¹² Once again, Jesus spoke to the people and said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life.”

John 10:9 BSB

⁹ I am the gate. If anyone enters through Me, he will be saved. He will come in and go out and find pasture.

John 10:11 BSB

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

John 11:25 BSB

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me will live, even though he dies.

John 14:6 BSB

⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

John 15:1 BSB

¹ “I am the true vine, and My Father is the keeper of the vineyard.

Bread, light, a gate, a shepherd, resurrection, the way, a vine. Each one takes something the room already knew and says Jesus isn't offering a version of it. He is it.

Now go back to that phrase from the water, "It is I." In the Greek behind that line, and behind every one of the seven statements above, sits the same two words: *ego eimi*, I am. Twice more in this book, Jesus says only that, with nothing after it, and both times the reaction tells you everything.

John 8:58 BSB

⁵⁸ “Truly, truly, I tell you,” Jesus declared, “before Abraham was born, I am!”

John 18:5–6 BSB

⁵ “Jesus of Nazareth,” they answered. Jesus said, “I am He.” And Judas His betrayer was standing there with them.

⁶ When Jesus said, “I am He,” they drew back and fell to the ground.

A group of religious leaders picks up stones the moment they hear it. A group of armed soldiers falls backward on the ground the moment they hear it. Whatever they thought He

meant, it was not a modest claim.

That's the evidence John gathered, the identity He kept naming, and the life He kept offering, all sitting inside one book with four parts and one clock running toward a single hour. Now, with all of that in view, here's the real question. Why did John build this book at all?

Bringing It Together

We started tonight at the end of the book. Let's close by going back there one more time.

John 20:30–31 BSB

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His 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.

Two moves, always in that order. See who He really is. Then receive life through Him. We've spent tonight tracing the evidence John selected, the verdict he's asking you to reach, and the life waiting on the other side of that verdict. Every one of the forty-eight sessions ahead of us is going to fall into one of those three categories.

One thing worth being careful about as we go. Believing, in this book, is never gritting your teeth and deciding hard enough on your own. Every person we'll watch come to faith this year is drawn before they ever move, and yet the choice is still genuinely theirs. Hold both of those at once all year, because this book does.

And life, we already said, isn't measured in years. Later in the book, in a prayer we won't open fully until session 39, Jesus defines it Himself: this is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. Life, in John, means knowing a person. Tonight, just let that sentence sit there.

Now here's the warning, and I want you to feel the weight of this one, because it's the reason this whole series is built the way it is.

You just spent a year with me in Revelation. You remember Ephesus.

Revelation 2:4 BSB

⁴ But I have this against you: You have abandoned your first love.

That church did everything right on paper. Sound doctrine. They tested false teachers and caught every one of them. They worked hard and never quit. And Jesus still said one

thing against them. Not lost. Abandoned. An ember, still glowing, gone quietly cold. And His answer to them was three words we already sat with once this year. Remember. Repent. Return.

Here's why that matters tonight, of all nights. John wrote his Gospel from that same city. The man who told us to look at Jesus and see life spent his final years in the very church that got warned for having everything except love.

A year of verse-by-verse study can do exactly what happened at Ephesus. You can walk out of this series knowing where all seven signs fall, knowing the textual questions, knowing what "the Jews" means in every chapter, and know Jesus less than you do right now. That already happened once, in this book's own city, to people who'd read this very book.

So here's the rule I'm setting for us, for the next forty-eight weeks. Every session has to end pointing at who Jesus is or the life He gives. If a session ends with nothing but an interesting fact about the text, no matter how true the fact was, that session failed.

Now, where we're headed. Four things I want out of this year, the same four we set out for in Mark and Revelation. Real detail, we're not skimming. Real theology, built carefully from the text, not from what we assume it says. Real application, every session pointing at Jesus and the life

He gives. And real answers to the hard questions this book raises, without ducking a single one.

Three things worth knowing about now, so nothing catches you off guard later. Some Bibles in this room have verses that others don't, one small question in chapter 5, a larger one across chapters 7 and 8. We'll handle both fully when we get there, and neither threatens anything we believe about this book. Chapter 6 gets hard. Jesus says something that makes a large crowd of His own followers walk away for good. And chapter 10 makes a promise about security that chapter 15 seems to complicate, eight weeks later. We'll hold both at full strength and let them answer the two different questions they're actually answering.

Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Then have life in His name. Always in that order. That's the whole series, and now you've seen how it's built.