

Sunday July 2, 2023 | Introduction to John

The gospel of John is such a unique book. It is written in some of the simplest straightforward Greek, and the vocabulary of the book is fairly easy. Often it is the book we recommend to non-believers or to new believers to read for its clear presentation of Jesus. Yet in its simplicity John is one of the deepest books. The start of the book makes this very clear.

John 1:1-14 ESV

- (1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- (2) He was in the beginning with God.
- (3) All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.
- (4) In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.
- (5) The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
- (6) There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
- (7) He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.
- (8) He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.
- (9) The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.
- (10) He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him.
- (11) He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.
- (12) But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God,
of God,
- (13) who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.
- (14) And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The book starts with a depth that is unmatched. It presents the deity of Jesus. John backs up to the very beginning of everything, and introduces us to who was already there, **The Word was with God**. It is such an incredible introduction. John spends no time introducing himself, or why He is writing, but gets straight into who is Jesus. This week I wanted to spend some time building some context, of why John wrote this gospel and what His focus is on. When we see this context, we will realize it is no accident why he starts with who Jesus is. First, we need to start with who John is. John will go out of his way throughout the book to not name himself.

John 13:23-25 ESV

- (23) **One of His disciples, whom Jesus loved**, was reclining at table at Jesus' side,
- (24) so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom He was speaking.
- (25) **So that disciple**, leaning back against Jesus, said to Him, "Lord, who is it?"

John will refer to himself as the disciple that Jesus loved multiple times throughout the book. When we compare to the other gospels it becomes obvious that this is John. He is going out of his way not to use his own name. He was one of the earlier apostles called by Jesus.

Matthew 4:21-22 ESV

- (21) And going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and **John his brother**, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, **and He called them**.
- (22) **Immediately** they left the boat and their father **and followed Him**.

James and John were fishermen. Their father Zebedee had a small company, and in another gospel, we are told they even had hired servants their mending the nets as well. Jesus walks up to these brothers and calls them. And immediately they drop the net they were mending and follow Jesus. They leave behind the family business, they walk away from their livelihood, and even leave their family. As they walked away with Jesus that day their father was still on the boat. When Jesus called John and James didn't hesitate, they were in. Jesus will give these two brothers a nickname.

Mark 3:17 ESV

(17) **James** the son of Zebedee and **John** the brother of James (**to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder**);

Boanerges means **house that has been struck by lightning**. They were the sons of Thunder. In the negative sense it could mean **hot tempered, and wrathful**. In the positive sense it meant **loud and energetic**. When we think about thunder, we can see both meanings. The loud crack can be awe inspiring for its energy, and terrifying at the same time. You can see it with how they were called, they are energetic and all in right away. John had a zeal and passion to Him. He and His brother along with Peter would make up Jesus' inner circle. Jesus would take these three aside and let them see things the others did not get to see. Only these three of the apostles were allowed to see the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead.

Luke 8:51-56 ESV

- (51) And when He came to the house, **He allowed no one to enter with Him, except Peter and John and James**, and the father and mother of the child.
- (52) And all were weeping and mourning for her, but He said, "Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping."
- (53) And they laughed at Him, knowing that she was dead.
- (54) But taking her by the hand He called, saying, "Child, arise."
- (55) And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And He directed that something should be given her to eat.
- (56) And her parents were amazed, **but He charged them to tell no one what had happened**.

Imagine walking out of the house that day. They watched Jesus resuscitate a young girl. Bring her back from the dead. They must have been amazed. They were told not to tell, and yet how would they even describe it. These three were given a front row seat to who Jesus is. Peter, James, and John were led by Jesus up to the Mount of Transfiguration and saw the glory of Jesus revealed. They were kept close in the garden of Gethsemane as Jesus wrestled with the reality of the cross. These three witnessed more about who Jesus was and what He did, than any of the other apostles. And yet what is truly amazing, is that none of those stories are directly in the gospel of John.

John 21:25 ESV

(25) Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

The gospel of John is truly a unique. **Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the synoptic gospels** because they share so much of the same content. Each one has their unique perspective of Christ and we can see that in how each start their gospel. Matthew is presenting Jesus as the King and is written to a Jewish audience so he starts with a genealogy to connect Jesus to David and to Abraham. He is proving Jesus' credentials as King.

Matthew 1:1 ESV

(1) The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of **David**, the son of **Abraham**.

Matthew will mention the Kingdom **55** times and overall, the synoptics gospel will mention the Kingdom **121** times. The gospel of John will only mention the kingdom **5** times.

Mark is written to a Roman audience and He jumps straight into the action. There is no genealogy, and he starts with John the Baptist and moves quick from there. His favorite word is immediately, he uses it **41** times. It is a fast-paced book.

Luke wants to provide an orderly account. He gives us the Christmas story and the details about the birth of Christ. He presents Jesus as the Savior to the entire world and in his genealogy connects Jesus to Adam.

Luke 3:38 ESV

(38) the son of Enos, the son of Seth, **the son of Adam, the son of God**.

Luke is showing how Jesus is connected to us all, through Adam. God used each author and their own unique perspective and personality to communicate His truth. Each has their own perspective and purpose but they do not contradict. John stands out as unique in comparison to the other three. **92% of the gospel is unique to it**. It has stories and details about Jesus we do not have in the other 3 gospels. Many traditional stories that we are familiar with are not in the gospel of John. It does not record the temptation of Jesus, the Lord's Supper, any casting out of demons, the sermon on the mount, the Lord's prayer, nor any traditional parables.

This raises the question, **why is the gospel of John so unique?** Why did he through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit choose to include these certain things? John does not leave us in the dark to speculate on this. Near the end of the gospel, He tells us exactly why He included what He did.

John 20:30-31 ESV

(30) 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.

John is very straightforward as to what the purpose of his gospel is. I wanted to make sure we had this lens as we studied the book. John chose to write down these particular signs so that we might believe. This is the key word for his gospel. In fact, he will use the word believe **98** times and the other three use it **34** times combined.

We will have 98 times to study about belief, we will be talking about it a lot. But to start it will be helpful to have a simple Greek definition, this word Belief means **“to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one’s trust.”** John gives us two things that he wants us to believe in after reading this gospel. Two things that we should consider to be true and therefore able to trust in them.

John 20:31 ESV

(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.**

Jesus is the Christ. He is the Father’s Anointed One. He is the Messiah. He was promised long ago in the Old Testament back in the garden. He is the one who will set all things right. He will defeat sin, and defeat Satan. The second thing John wants us to see is that **Jesus is the Son of God.** He wants to show that Jesus is God himself come in flesh. John is pointing us to the core thoughts of the gospel. **Who Jesus is** as the Son of God (fully God and fully man) and **what Jesus did** as the Christ (paying for our sin).

John wants us to believe in these things for a core reason. When we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, **we have life in His name.** This is the truth that provides life. This is the truth that changes everything. Without believing these truths there is no life. Seeing Jesus for who He is and what He did changes everything. **This belief is for non-believers and believers.** The first time someone believes in Jesus for their salvation they now have new life. But as believers we live by this belief. It is where life is found right now.

John is writing this gospel so we can believe in Jesus. John knows how everything in his life has changed because of Jesus. He was a fisherman working in the family business a son of Thunder, and after being with Jesus John changed. He was a pillar of the early church (Gal 2:9) and spoke with boldness about who Jesus is.

Acts 4:13 ESV

(13) Now when they saw the **boldness of Peter and John**, and **perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished.** And they recognized that **they had been with Jesus.**

The religious leaders could not figure out what had happened to Peter and John. These uneducated, common fishermen were standing up and proclaim truth with an amazing boldness. Notice the key phrase, they had been with Jesus. This is what I hope we see as we go through this gospel. That we would see Jesus. That we would believe in who He is and what He did. When we start to see Jesus, it will change us and seeing Him is what will ultimately change us in the end.

1 John 3:2-3 ESV

(2) Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, **because we shall see Him as He is.**

(3) And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure.

Notice it is John that points this out in his first epistle. Jesus is what changes us. At its core Christianity is not a set of rules, or principles, or even a worldview. **It is the person of Jesus.** This gospel draws us to who Jesus is. This is why John starts it the way he does. He wants to show us who Jesus is as the Son of God. **So, we can marvel at who He is.** So, we can believe.

John 1:1-3 ESV

- (1) **In the beginning was the Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- (2) He was in the beginning with God.
- (3) All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.

John takes us back to the beginning of everything. Before anything else existed or had every been created. God was already there existing. The Word was already there existing. The language intentional points us back to Genesis.

Genesis 1:1 ESV

- (1) **In the beginning, God** created the heavens and the earth.

God is the creator. He was never made or created. He always was. Our finite minds cannot fathom that. Everything we know outside of God, has a beginning. I find it amazing that even atheistic scientist agrees that the universe and everything in it has a beginning. But God is outside of this universe. He is the ultimate creator so that gives Him the right to have ultimate authority.

Isaiah 45:9 NLT

- (9) **“What sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator.** Does a clay pot argue with its maker? Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it, saying, ‘Stop, you’re doing it wrong!’ Does the pot exclaim, ‘How clumsy can you be?’

We are the creation. We have no right to argue with our creator. Most of society is doing that today. As a people we argue with our creator. We argue with how he made us. We argue with how He designed us to live and what would fulfill us the most. Anything that He set up we argue with. We have no right; we are the creation. John is linking Jesus to the ultimate creator. Notice in Genesis how God created.

Genesis 1:3 ESV

- (3) **And God said,** “Let there be light,” and there was light.

God created through His Word. This is what John is giving us tremendous insight to.

John 1:1-4 ESV

- (1) **In the beginning was the Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- (2) He was in the beginning with God.
- (3) **All things were made through Him**, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.
- (4) **In Him was life**, and the life was the light of men.

The Word is such a powerful description. We see Him in Genesis with God. Nothing was created outside of God's Word. **"And God said"** God is revealing Himself. He is expressing and creating through His Word. Notice **the Word is a person. He was in the beginning.** John is marveling at who Jesus is. The Word of God has always existed, He spoke everything into existence. This Word is Jesus. The Word of God called out to John when he was mending a net on his Father's boat. Jesus is the Word. He cannot get over this fact. He even starts His Epistle marveling at the Word.

1 John 1:1-3 ESV

- (1) **That which was from the beginning**, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we **looked** upon and have **touched** with our hands, **concerning the Word of life—**
- (2) 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—
- (3) 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.**

John says I have seen, and touched the Word of Life. He cannot move past this. He is drawing people into who Jesus is. He is God. He is the Word, who spoke all things into existence and is the life of everything. John wants everyone to see who Jesus is. He wants everyone to be able to have fellowship with other believers and with the Father because of Jesus. His excitement is contagious. John would ask us how could you not be excited about who Jesus is? He is the Word. John is writing this gospel to reveal who the Word is, (Jesus is the Son of God) and what the Word has done on our behalf (Jesus is the Christ). This is why Jesus changes us. He is that incredible. John was never able to get over the fact that He had fellowship with the Word of God. Do we marvel at what the Word has done for us? Do we marvel that we have the tremendous privilege to be in His church and have fellowship with Him?

Psalms 33:1-9 ESV

- (1) **Shout for joy in the LORD**, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright.
- (2) Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; **make melody to Him** with the harp of ten strings!
- (3) **Sing to Him** a new song; play skillfully on the strings, **with loud shouts.**
- (4) **For the word of the LORD is upright**, and all His work is done in faithfulness.
- (5) He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.
- (6) **By the word of the LORD the heavens were made**, and by the breath of His mouth all their host.
- (7) He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; He puts the deeps in storehouses.
- (8) Let all the earth fear the LORD; **let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him!**
- (9) **For He spoke, and it came to be**; He commanded, and it stood firm.

I love the path this Psalm takes. Verse 1-3 encourage us to worship God with a tremendous excitement. We are to shout for joy, and sing and praise who God is. But this praise is not empty words it is based on truth. Then in verse 4 we are told why we should be praising God. It starts to describe the Word of the Lord; He created all things; He spoke and it existed. We are told to stand in awe of Him. John stood in awe. We should stand in awe over the Word of God, Jesus Christ.