

GOSPEL OF JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

“Introduction”

Open your Bibles to the Gospel of John. We are beginning a new study now, a series I am calling, **“That You May Believe.”** During this session, we are going to do an introduction, and then next time we’ll get into the text. But for flavor, let’s read together the first 14 verses of Chapter 1:

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ⁴In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John. ⁷This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. ⁸He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light. ⁹That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. ¹²But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

This is a familiar passage to most of us. And the book is familiar as well. It contains some of the most precious verses in the entire Bible. I mean, even football fans know at least one verse from the book! Some of you may remember that guy in the 1970’s and 80’s who went to games wearing a colorful wig and carrying a sign that read John 3:16. You have to think that many people searched to find out what that meant and then went to the Bible to read that verse. And that is what John’s Gospel is all about. It is his way of introducing you to not only his Friend, but his Savior. This is what he tells us the book is all about (John 20:31):

GOSPEL OF JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

but these are written *that you may believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that *believing* you may have life in His name.

How many of you, when recommending where a person begin reading their Bible, have directed them to John?

It is a great book for someone to start in. You see, it is both simple and deep at the same time. It has been said that it is “*like a pool in which a child can wade and an elephant can swim.*” According to Pastor Joe Focht, John used only 600 separate words to pen his Gospel. A child learns about 100 words a year. So a six-year-old can understand it. But on another level, scholars have written articles and books that grapple with some of the theological issues addressed by John. So, wherever you are at spiritually, there is something for you in its pages. In fact, it is the most evangelistic of the four Gospel accounts. It is written by a man who was a little rough at the edges, but came to know the love of Jesus Christ in a very special way. That is what he wants to share with us. And that is exactly why I wanted to study this book next.

I believe that the world is suffering from a lack of true love, the kind of love that only Jesus affords. So who better to learn about Jesus than from the “**disciple that Jesus loved?**” Oh, yes, that is who the author of this book claimed to be.

In fact, he never even mentions his name. But he was not only Jesus’ disciple; many believe he was also His cousin. They say that John and James’ mother, Salome, was one of Mary’s (the mother of Jesus) sisters. So John is a guy who saw not just what we have in the Gospels, but also the Jesus as He grew up. Think about that.

On the way to Jerusalem, James, John and Jesus as youngsters may have played games and had fun. But one day, John, the disciple of Jesus, became convinced that this cousin of his, this boyhood companion, was God come in the flesh. To me this gives great authenticity to his Gospel.

But how do we know for sure it was this John that wrote the book?

There is some debate, although the arguments against his authorship are weak. Early church tradition strongly suggests that it was the Apostle John who wrote the book. The early church father Polycarp spoke of his contact with John. And he testified to Iraneus, another church father, that John had written a Gospel while he was in Ephesus. Other church fathers, such as Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Polycrates support this tradition as well. And the historian Eusebius was specific that Matthew and John wrote the Gospels that bear their names (they were the only disciples who did so). So there is plenty of external evidence that John is the author. But there is much internal evidence as well.

GOSPEL OF JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

A big part of the reason liberal scholars question John's authorship is that he never names himself. They call that questionable; I call it humility. He just calls himself, as I stated earlier, **"the disciple whom Jesus loved,"** and says he was the disciple who **"leaned back"** on the breast of Jesus at the last supper (John 21:24, 21:20). This shows us that the person who wrote the book had to be one of the disciples of Jesus. (Only those 12 men were there in the upper room that night.) Not only that, this person also had to be a Jew who was an eyewitness of the events recorded. He has intimate knowledge, as we shall see, of Jewish customs and feasts. Then, in 1:14 he claims to have **"beheld His glory,"** speaking of Jesus. Only an eyewitness can behold something.

We know from the Gospels that John was one of the three disciples (James his brother, Peter his friend, and John) who were kind of an inner circle with Jesus. We also know that James died a martyr's death around AD 44, so he didn't write it. It is hard to imagine that Peter would not have let everyone in the world know if he had written the book. And it was John who was at the cross and was given charge of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Last of all, the language and structure of the Gospel of John and all three of his letters (1,2,and 3 John) are similar. If you put all this evidence together, it is easy to conclude that John is the author. Only liberal scholars who only study the Bible to destroy it think he was not. Now that we have established that John wrote the book, we need to learn a little bit more about this remarkable man.

John was the son of Zebedee and Salome (Mark 1:19, 16:1 and Matthew 27:56). Zebedee was a well-to-do fisherman. We know this because when Jesus called John and James to follow Him, they were in a boat with hired servants (Mark 1:20). The family was from either Bethsaida or Capernaum in Galilee. And Luke records that they were in partnership in the fishing business with Simon Peter (Luke 5:10). So the three young men knew each other and probably knew Jesus even before they followed Him. James was the older of the two brothers. Pastor Joe Focht says that John was most likely just 14 or 15 years old when he began following Jesus. But he was the more spiritual of the two. In fact, most believe that he, along with Peter's brother Andrew, were followers of John the Baptist. Listen to what John wrote in John 1:35-37:

³⁵**Again, the next day, John (the Baptist) stood with two of his disciples.**

³⁶**And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!"**

³⁷**The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.**

GOSPEL OF JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

The two then followed Jesus around all day. But later in the day, Andrew (verse 40) went to his brother Simon (Peter) and told him about Jesus.

So, how do we know the other disciple was John?

We don't for sure. But whoever wrote this had to be an eyewitness; after all, he wrote that John called Jesus the "**Lamb of God.**"

Why wouldn't John mention the name of the other disciple if it wasn't him?

He even wrote the time in which it happened (verse 39). Only someone who was there could write those kinds of things. I believe that John was there.

So because he was spiritually sensitive, you might think that John was mild mannered. Not necessarily so.

Does anyone remember what nickname the Lord gave John and James?

The "**sons of thunder.**" In Luke 9 we may learn why He called them that. I am going to read verses 49-54, because they let us know who John was in the beginning of his relationship with the Lord. Luke writes:

⁴⁹Now John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us."

⁵⁰But Jesus said to him, "Do not forbid *him*, for he who is not against us is on our side."

⁵¹Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, ⁵²and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. ⁵³But they did not receive Him, because His face was *set* for the journey to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴And when His disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?"

It seems that John was not only somewhat legalistic, but a bit of a firebrand as well! He was also somewhat competitive.

After finding the tomb of Jesus to be empty, Mary Magdalene reported to Peter and John that the stone had been moved away. So John and Peter raced to the tomb, but John just had to mention this (John 20:8):

GOSPEL OF JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

Then the other disciple (John), who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed.

The disciple that Jesus loved just had to mention (boast???) that he beat Peter in a footrace to the tomb. You men will understand what happened here. John and his brother James also had their mother go to Jesus and ask if they could be seated at His right and left hand in the kingdom. This kind of put off the other disciples. Just leave it to say that John was a work-in-progress who went from wanting to command fire down on people to writing this account of the life of Jesus. That is what understanding the love of Christ will do for a man or woman. Hopefully, some of that love will pour out on us as we read John's book.

Next, we need to take a look at from where and when the disciple wrote the book. Tradition holds that he wrote the book from Ephesus. We know from Galatians 2:9 that John was still in Jerusalem when Paul and Barnabas were sent to the Gentiles. But it is believed that he left sometime before the Jews were scattered and the Temple was destroyed (70 AD). Some believe he may have left as early as 59 AD. He was most certainly there by at least 69 AD, because he was instrumental in the conversion and discipleship of Polycarp. Sometime during the reign of Domitian (81-96 AD), he was thrown in boiling oil (according to Tertullian) but did not die. Not knowing what to do with the apostle, Domitian banishes him to the Island of Patmos some 75 miles away from Ephesus in the Aegean Sea. It was during this time that he wrote the Apocalypse (Revelation). He was allowed to return to Ephesus during the reign of Nerva and became the overseer of the church there (96-98 AD). And it was there at Ephesus that he died (98 AD). So the question about where the Gospel was written from is easy to figure out. He wrote it from Ephesus. But when he wrote it is less certain.

Some think it was written before he was exiled to Patmos, and others think afterward. And, of course, the libbies think it was written as late as 150 AD and by someone other than John. But the earliest manuscript that we have from the New Testament is a small fragment of five verses from John Chapter 18. Known as the Ryland Papyrus or P52, it has been dated from before that time, as early as 100 AD. Many even believe that it may be a direct copy from the original letter. I am going to go with the guys from Dallas Theological Seminary on this one. In the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, they say that a date of between 85 and 95 AD is best, and I trust their scholarship. So the Gospel of John was written first, then the epistles, and last of all the Revelation.

Next, we need to take a look at the purpose of writing.

If John wrote the Gospel in the time period we just talked about, why did he do so?

GOSPEL OF JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

After all, there were already three Gospel accounts out there; and they were basically in agreement. That is why they are called the synoptic Gospels (which means *taking the same view*). For example, 93% of what is written in Mark is also recorded in either Matthew or Luke. All of them give a brief account of the beginning of Jesus' ministry but focus more on the middle and end. David Guzik gives us this description of the difference between John's Gospel and the other three:

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the three synoptic gospels. The word synoptic means "see-together" and the first three Gospels present the life of Jesus in pretty much the same format. The first three Gospels focus more on what Jesus taught and did; John focused more on who Jesus is.

I think, in part, this is why John wrote it. He may have wanted to supplement the other books. And he does give us a much broader picture of the life of Jesus, as well as make special emphasis of His deity. He wants us to not just believe on Jesus, but to trust in Him more and more every day. Let's take a quick look at the purpose of all four Gospels:

- Matthew was written around 50 AD, and his target audience was primarily Jews living in Palestine. These Jews would have had questions about the coming kingdom of their Messiah. So Matthew's emphasis was on Jesus as the King.
- Mark was written about 60 AD. Because he was Peter's companion, he most likely got much of his information from the apostle. Mark gives rapid sketches of events without extensive interpretation. It is the briefest of the Gospels and emphasizes Jesus as the Mighty Son of God, the Wonder Worker, and victorious Conqueror of Death.
- Luke's Gospel was also written about 60 AD, or slightly earlier. Dr. Luke was the companion of Paul and writes to his Greek friend, Theophilus. His Gospel is a researched historical and chronological account of Jesus as the Perfect Man who came to seek and save sinful men.
- But John's Gospel differs from the other three. Some 90% of his account is not found in any of the others. It gives much more attention to the early part of Jesus' ministry and reports on many events not recorded in the other three. Then John gives great details in chapters 13 to 19 to a period of less than 24 hours that precede the crucifixion. And His point of emphasis is to introduce you to Jesus as the Son of God.

But what we have in these pages are much more than just a supplement. He does give us much additional information, and some passages indicate that he has read the other

GOSPEL OF JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

Gospels. But what he tells us in Chapter 20:30-31 shows us that simply being a supplement must be considered as secondary to his main objective. More on that in a moment.

There are others that say John wrote the Gospel to battle the early Gnosticism of a man named Cerinthius. Gnosticism is a big word for “*full of bologna.*”

This guy Cerinthius taught that Jesus was merely a human and was the natural son of Joseph and Mary. He just happened to be more just and wise than other people. He also taught that, when the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus as a dove at His baptism, He was given the “**Christ**” nature. But it left Him on the eve of His sufferings. So when the Lord died, it was Jesus and not the Christ who suffered and rose again. These are just some of the lies spread by Cerinthius and his Gnostic views. We’ll visit Gnosticism more as we study the book.

The early church father, Ireneus, does state that John wrote the Gospel to battle this heresy. And his first epistle, First John, does seek to correct this error. So it is probable that he had Cerinthius in mind as he wrote. And this can explain why John’s emphasis is on Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who came in the flesh. But his main thrust would be more than just to point out an error.

His purpose in writing is to introduce us to the Truth.

If he does have the heretic in mind, it is only so that he (Cerinthius), like John, can come to a saving faith in Jesus. Listen once again to what he wrote in John 20, but this time I am going to read verses 30 and 31:

³⁰And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

John didn’t just write to supplement the other accounts, or correct an error. In fact, in John 21:25 he writes this:

And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.

I think the reason John wrote this Gospel account is because he wants us to know Jesus like he knew Him. I believe he was in awe, even as an old man, of this God/man that he walked with for three years, but knew his whole life. Think about it like this:

GOSPEL OF JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

What would it be like for you to find out your cousin was not just the guy you grew up with and even admired?

He was very God come in the flesh.

Would it blow your mind to realize that God so loved the world that He sent His Son not to just save the world ... but to afford everlasting life to any and all who would believe on Him?

And this just happened to be your CUZ Jesus!

That is the Lord that John knew, and he wants to help us come to that same knowledge of Him. That is why I love this Gospel.

When someone says he does not know if he really believes that Jesus is God, I can say this (quoting Jon Courson):

*Invest two hours of your life reading the Gospel of John straight through.
Ask the Lord to show you if He's real. And believe me, He will!*

This book is the most powerful tract you can ever share with someone. But it is so much more than that.

The second reason John wrote his Gospel was:

that believing you may have life in His name.

This is written for those of us who already believe. The Greek word translated “**believing**” speaks of a continual action. John is saying that the more we believe, the more life, *abundant life as Jesus called it*, we will experience.

Isn't that what Jesus meant when He said this (John 10:10):

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

John didn't just write to convince the skeptic of who Jesus is. He wants the believer to have the kind of life Jesus promised. And here is why (we talked a lot about this in Romans). Later in life, in 1 John 3:2, the apostle writes this:

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

The more we get to know Jesus, the more we will be like Him. And the more we listen to the words of the disciple Jesus loved, the more we will desire to love others.

GOSPEL OF JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

So John gives us a very distinctive portrait of Jesus. He does not include His genealogy, birth, baptism, temptation, parables or transfiguration. He does not write about Jesus casting out demons, the institution of the Lord's Supper, His agony in Gethsemane or His ascension. Instead, John stresses His ministry in Jerusalem, the feasts of the Jewish nation, and His contact with individuals in private conversations. He also places emphasis on Jesus' ministry to His disciples. The major part of the Gospel is contained in what is known as the "*Book of Signs*."

These teachings begin in chapter 2 and continue through chapter 12. They embrace seven miracles, or "*signs*," which proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. These chapters also contain great discourses in which Jesus explains and proclaims the significance of the miracles. For example, following the feeding of the 5,000 (6:1-15), Jesus reveals Himself as the Bread of Life whom the Father sent to give life to the world.

Does anyone know what Jesus says when He makes this revelation?

He says, "**I AM the Bread of Life.**" In fact, He made seven such "**I AM**" statements in John's Gospel.

What does that remind us of?

The burning bush. When Moses, in Exodus 3:13, asks God, "**What is Your name?**" the LORD says, "**I AM THAT I AM.**" Moses must have scratched his head and thought, "*You are...what?*"

Jesus tells us. He echoes that same declaration of deity and says:

I AM the Bread of Life.

I AM the Good Shepherd.

I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life.

I AM the Resurrection.

I AM the True Vine.

I AM the Light of the world.

I AM the Door.

In essence, Jesus fills in the blank left by the Father when God declared His name to be **I AM**. That is the Jesus John wants us to know.

Why?

So that we would believe more and more every day.

GOSPEL OF JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

For some 95 years or so John had been growing in the grace of knowing Jesus. But He was still in awe. This is what blew his mind:

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ⁴In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Those five verses will be our text next time as we begin our study of John's Gospel. Read them and see what the Spirit has to say to the church.

Let's pray.

SING THE REVELATION SONG