

The Gospel of John: Part 1, The Man

We are going to go through the book of John. Each week we will go through the verses that seem to stay with the same subject. But before we get started looking at the scripture I think it's very important that we understand who exactly wrote the book, when it was written, what was going on at the time, and why did the author feel he needed to write the book. Without understanding some of this it is hard to accurately interpret the text.

All that being said we are going to cover the specifics of who, what, when, where and why but more importantly we are going to look into the heart of the man that the bible calls the beloved disciple. We are going to look at a zealous young man following God and an elderly preacher pleading with his congregation not to abandon the faith to false teachers.

The bible contains 4 books referred to as gospels. They are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the synoptic gospels because they are very similar. They look at Jesus' life in a similar way. John leaves out many of the things that the others record for example: John does not tell us about Jesus' birth or baptism, he does not give us any of the parables, there is no ascension mentioned. Plus there are many things such as Peter walking on water that John does not go into as much detail about. While he tells us about Jesus coming to the boat he doesn't tell us about Jesus telling Peter to come out on the water.

On top of this John adds a lot of stuff, such as the changing of water to wine¹, meeting with Nicodemus², the Samaritan woman³, the raising of Lazarus⁴, and several discourses not included elsewhere⁵. So why is this gospel so different?

¹ John 2:1-11

² John 3:1-21

³ John 4:1-26

⁴ John 11:38-44

⁵ John 3, 4, 6, 13-17

John

John was the only apostle left. Many false teachers had come along by the late 70's and early 80's. Gnosticism was growing. False teachers were saying that Jesus was not God; John wanted to set this straight.

The synoptic gospels were written somewhere in the time period of the late 50's to early 60's. An early church historian named Eusebius⁶ quoted the early church father Clement saying “But, last of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain in the Gospel, being urged by his friends, and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel.”⁷ John did not need to repeat the information in the other gospels. He was familiar with it and knew his readers would be too. He wanted to add what wasn't included. He wanted to write his in a way that gave more theology. That told us exactly who Jesus was. We knew what he said and had done; John wanted us to know who He was. John Calvin stated it this way, “...as all of them had the same object in view, to point out Christ, the three former exhibit his body, if we may be permitted to use the expression, but John exhibits his soul.”⁸

So we have seen that John wrote the gospel in the mid 80's to early 90's so his readers could more fully see who Jesus was. Let's know look at **who John was**.

I want us to try to picture him as I talk about his life. We are going to start with a young man in his mid twenty's. If you are that age then you understand his youthful enthusiasm, his desire to be known and to exceed those around him. If you have managed to live past your mid

⁶ Eusebius of Caesarea, c. AD 263–339

⁷ Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series Vol. I* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 261.

⁸ Calvin's Commentaries, Introduction to John

twenties like me you understand his sometimes misguided youthfulness. This is important to understand, we are separated by 2,000 years, but John was a young man that still had to mature a little and as we read through this you need to sometimes think about how you acted at that age that John was.

John's Family

So John is a young man, his father is a man named Zebedee and his mother a woman named Salome, (cf. Mark 15:40, Matt. 27:56 with John 19:25) who is more than likely the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus (John 19:25). His father owned a profitable fishing business (Mark 1:20) and was well known in the community. (John 18:15-16) His mother went (Matthew 20:20) with John and his elder brother James to follow Jesus.

At night John would go with his father, brother and their hired help to fish. During the day John would go to the Jordan River and listen to a preacher, who also was named John. This man was a little different to say the least. He lived in the wilderness, wore camel skins, and ate locust and honey. He prophesied about the coming messiah that would die for the sins of the world and he would baptize Jewish people.

This baptism would have been odd. The Jewish people only baptized new converts. John the Baptist was baptizing Jewish people and telling them that they needed to start thinking about sin differently. To a young man named John this was revolutionary.

One day a Jewish man about 30 years old showed up with a following. John watched in amazement as his teacher said, "I can't baptize you. You should be baptizing me." Then one day as John and Andrew were with their teacher the Baptist, Jesus walks by and their teacher says,

“Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.” John and Andrew follow Jesus and spend the day with him.

A little later John and his brother are tending their nets after a night of fishing. I can just picture John telling James all the things he has learned from the Baptist and this man Jesus. If you have a younger sibling you probably understand the way they can go on and on about something. It seems they are an endless chatter box. James is trying to work and his brother won't shut up about this man Jesus. Then John looks up and there is Jesus standing in front of him. Jesus calls them. John stands there a minute, drops his net and goes to Him. James follows probably thinking what is my brother getting us into now.

Think about this for a minute. John just made a decision that is going to change his life. He gave up a profitable business, a comfortable home, being well known in the community to follow a man that just knowing can lead to persecution and death. We need to think about this, because Jesus calling us leads to the same thing. Are you willing to leave everything behind to follow Jesus? Because if you are not, you are not following Him, you are just acknowledging that you know Him.

We need to see the special and intimate relationship that John had with Jesus. It's almost as if Jesus sees John as a little brother. Someone that needs your special attention. Someone you love warts and all. A teacher at that time would have a very few people that he would disciple. Many would come to listen to him, but only a few individuals would be invited for that special one on one training.

We know at times Jesus had over 15,000 following Him (Matthew 14:21), we also know that at one time he had 72 students he sent out to preach before Him (Luke 10:1). But there were

only twelve chosen as His close students. They were; Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother;³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;⁴ Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him⁹. Out of these twelve it appears 3 were chosen to go into a deeper and closer relationship with Jesus. They were Peter, James, and John. Only these three got to witness Jesus' transfiguration and see Moses and Elijah with Jesus (Luke 9:28-30). Only these three got to witness Jairus' daughter being raised from the dead (Mark 5:37, Luke 8:51). Only these three got to go deeper into Gethsemane with Jesus (Matthew 26:37).

John was the one that rested his head on Jesus at the last supper (John 13:23). I believe that Jesus had a special relationship with John like the little brother you have to look out for. And lastly John is the one that Jesus asked to take care of his mother as He hung on the cross (John 19:26-27).

When Jesus died Peter and John became close. Acts chapters 3, 4 and 8 record some of their ministry together. We can tell from the book of Acts that Peter, James, and John became leaders in the church. But John's life was not always easy. He watched his brother James be martyred for believing in Jesus. He watched Peter be crucified upside down for believing in Christ¹⁰. As a matter of fact, John is the only apostle that died of old age.¹¹

Just imagine John He is much older in his later years. I'm going to switch gears here a little. I want us to picture John at the end of his life. So use your imagination and go with me to Ephesus. He is an old preacher. Weakened from age and the persecutions he has faced. His body

⁹ Matthew 10:2-4.

¹⁰ John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson; 2000), 8.

¹¹ *Ibid* 5-11

still has the scars of beatings. His mind has the scars of much more. He smiles as he remembers that young man as he was sitting at the feet of his teacher. Oh, how he was so full of life. His Lord had even given him and his brother the name “Boanerges”. That means, “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17).

He still remembers how he slowly grew to understand exactly who Jesus was. He wasn't just a man, He was God with us. A tear drops down as he remembers looking at his teacher hanging from the cross. He stared up into the eyes of his Saviour. He knew this had to happen, Jesus had told him so. That did not make it hurt any less. Then Jesus looked into his eyes and said, “Behold, your mother!” John took the honor seriously and from that day forward he cared for Mary as if she was his own mother.

3 days later he was the first to reach the empty tomb, as he walked by Peter into the tomb he realized it was true, He finally understood why Jesus had to die. Oh, how he loved Jesus how he wanted to share that love with the world.

But it got hard after that. Stephen was the first. Young Stephen, he had the face of an angel. He was chosen as one of the first deacons and then they. Them horrible godless Jews. Yes, they talked religion but they did not know God. (Acts 7) They stoned him as he asked God to forgive them. And that child of Satan Saul stood there holding their coats and grinning. What an amazing work God did in Saul. He truly was a child of God after all (Acts 9).

He still remembers when they took his brother and killed him the blood thirsty Jews were so satisfied with themselves. He hurt for his brother but he also was jealous. He still was here trying to change the world with the good news about Jesus. His brother was there with Jesus.

The persecutions grew and grew. Nero setting Jerusalem on fire and blaming it on the Christians. He still remembers the stories of those Nero dipped in wax and used as human candles in his garden. All the other apostles were murdered. One by one he heard the stories of how they died. But they kept the faith. People were coming to Christ at every execution saying, “Why would these men be willing to die if this wasn’t true.”

He remembers the day they came for him. He can still hear the boiling oil popping as they prepared to dip him. As he went in the oil he prayed and then held his breath waiting on the pain. But he felt nothing. He continued to pray and could understand how Jonah felt in the whale. He looked up and could see Jesus and he remembered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. As they raised him up from the oil he heard a gasp. He looked down at his body expecting to see skin and limbs hanging, but he was fine. He looked and the people were staring at him in amazement. Jesus had delivered him.

John was later banished to Patmos where he had a vision of the end times. Jesus told him to write it all down. He had accomplished a lot in his life. That is a lot for Jesus. He had written a gospel to fill in the details left from the others. He confronted Cerinthus, that horrible heretic¹² in his Gospel. A chuckle came as he remembered the day he went into the bath houses at Ephesus and ran into Cerinthus. He ran out exclaiming, “Let us fly, lest even the bath house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of truth is within!”¹³ Yes his Gospel shined the light on that. How

¹² Early Gnostic teacher Cerinthus, taught a form of docetism—the belief that Christ only “seemed” (from the Gk *dokeo*) to be human. (Ted Cabal, Chad Owen Brand, E. Ray Clendenen et al., *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007), 1567-68.)

¹³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.3.4; as quoted in John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary : John 1-11* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006), 8.

he loves those words, In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

He had managed to write letters to his congregation. How it hurt him to see his church split, but those that knew the Light and the Truth stayed and were faithful.

He hears steps outside. His disciples are here to carry him to church. They pick his weakened body up and carry him to the altar. He leans over looks upon his congregation and in a weak voice he proclaims over and over, “Little children, love one another, this is the Lord’s command, and if this alone be done, it is enough.”

John the beloved disciple. I’m going to finish tonight by talking about that phrase the disciple that Jesus loved. John refers to himself this way 5 times in his gospel. (John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20) When I first started thinking about this, it seemed kinda conceited. I tried putting myself in John’s mind and understanding why he thought of himself that way. Was he saying, “Yeah Peter, you’re a good guy, but Jesus loves me more.” It seemed out of character for a man that was so humble.

Then I realized John wasn’t remarking that Jesus loved him more out of pride. He was remarking that Jesus loved him, despite his failures. I think Paul says something that sheds light on this in 1 Timothy I’m going to read from the New Living Translation. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them all.

John was amazed that Jesus could possibly love him. His anger sometimes got the better of him. Sometimes he acted in ways that weren’t all that Christlike but Jesus loved him. Oh how great it is to be loved by Jesus despite his shortcomings. Here is the thing though, you are

beloved by Jesus. Christ died for all sinners. As you sit there tonight and you think, “Yeah but He doesn’t know what I’ve done.”

Yes He does.! He knew what you would do before the creation of the world. He came and died so that you could be forgiven and have eternal life with the Father. You are loved by Christ. If you have never accepted Christ, then you need to know that He died for you that you are loved by Christ. All you have to do as we will see in a later lesson is accept that and claim your right to be a child of God.

I’ve read Paul’s line before in the King James he says I am the chief of sinners. I’ve thought to myself, “Paul I believe I could take that title from you.” Jesus has every right to hate me. I have been his enemy and even now on a good day I still believe I am an enemy to Him. But He loves me any ways. He forgives me any ways. Nothing you have done is so bad that Christ death will not cover it. You are Christ’ beloved.