

*That You May Believe and Have Life*  
(An Introduction to the Gospel of John)  
Reading: John 3:1-8

Bethany Baptist Church  
January 5, 2020

*...pray...*

This morning I'm *launching* our study of the **Gospel of John!**

Lord willing, *every* chapter –*every* verse! That's a **big** sermon series!

*Why?*

Because I don't want you and me to *lose track* of the fact that Christianity is **not** a *religious* tradition or a *moral* code or a *church* membership.

Christianity is a *relationship* with a living person – **Jesus**.

*I* want to fall more *deeply in love* with Jesus. I want that for *you* too.

I've always found that *time* in the gospels leads to *love* for Jesus.

So let's *spend time* at the feet of our Lord.

**Let's begin by reading an account from the early months of Jesus' ministry –  
John 1:35-41.**

*"We have found the Messiah!"* Can you *taste* their excitement!

Jesus has drawn **two** men to Himself – **Andrew** and **John**. *Both* fisherman. *Both* already known to Jesus. *Both* hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

This morning we'll *examine the background* of this gospel by focusing first on **John**.

*In his humility*, the apostle refused to name himself in our text...*but that's him* (37), there with Andrew, following Jesus.

I'll begin by identifying *this* John as the author of the **NT's fourth book**.

What did John want to *say to us*?

Can his little book fill us with *faith...and love*?

I think so; I think you'll soon agree! May we say with Andrew and John, Sunday by Sunday, *"We have found the Messiah."*

**John never *credits* himself as this gospel's *author*, but from the earliest years of the church, few have questioned that the Apostle John penned this account,**

*...and none have questioned that the Gospel of John belonged among the inspired texts of the NT.*

What do we *know* about John?

It is possible to surmise from Scripture that his *mother*, **Salome**, was a sister of Jesus' *mother*, **Mary**. So perhaps John and Jesus were *cousins*.

We can be certain that John grew up the son of a successful Galilean fisherman named **Zebedee**, successful enough to own a fishing boat and maintain servants.

It was while working on his father's boat that **John**, along w/ his older brother **James**, *heard* Christ call, and *left* the nets to *follow* the Master.

John also spent time w/ **John the Baptist**, before hearing the *Baptizer* say of Jesus: "*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*"

Soon *Jesus* named *John* as one of His **12 disciples**, and among that group John became one of the **3 disciples** in Jesus' *inner circle*.

Beyond *even* that, John appears to have become Jesus' *closest friend*, as we read in this gospel that he was "*the disciple whom Jesus loved.*"

John was there for Jesus' *teachings, miracles, betrayal, mock court*...he was at the *cross* when Christ was *crucified*...and on the **3<sup>rd</sup>** day John *ran* to the Garden with Peter ... Resurrection morning!

It is difficult to imagine a *more qualified biographer* than the Apostle John.

**But to have read the of John's gospel, you would have waited 50 years!**

While the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark & *first edition* Luke) were written between **50** and **63 AD**...

...it appears that John wrote to an entirely *new* generation, in **85-90 AD**, late in the **1<sup>st</sup>** century.

The Apostle had *left* Palestine after the *fall* of Jerusalem to the Romans in **70 AD**, and settled in Ephesus (Turkey).

While the apostle *advanced* in years, he remained *active* in ministry.

He *led* the churches as an apostle, *suffered exile* on the Isle of Patmos, and late in life *wrote*: *1, 2 & 3 John, Revelation* (last?), *Gospel of John*. (Tradition indicates that by this point he was likely to have been the *last living apostle*.)

Though some modern scholars have occasionally tried to put the Gospel's date *much later* (and therefore **not** written by John), the *earliest church father's* agree that John *was* the author, and several things point to a late **1<sup>st</sup>** century writing. **E.g.** ...

John himself discipled a church leader named **Polycarp**, Polycarp later discipled a prominent leader named **Irenaeus** in the mid-**2<sup>nd</sup>** century. **Polycarp** taught Irenaeus that John was our gospel's author.

So though there is really **no** strong argument *against* John having written *earlier* in the **1<sup>st</sup>** century, a consistent *early church tradition* make the gospel a product of the apostle's later years.

And that late **1<sup>st</sup>** century date helps us identify John's *first readers*...

**And an important piece of background information for every book you read in the Bible is the identity of the very first audience.**

*Audience identity* tells you the *cultural, historical and theological setting, predispositions and traditions* of the people the writer hoped to reach.

**E.g.** A gospel written to Jewish **non**-Christians would *make assumptions and stress points* that were different than one written to Gentile believers.

Ultimately, knowing the *audience* helps identify the writer's *purpose*.

John goes to great lengths to *identify and explain* Jewish details (e.g. *Jerusalem festivals, Palestinian geography*) that the other gospels seem to *assume*. And he wrote while living in *Ephesus*.

Both facts indicate he was writing to *Gentiles*.

We've set the *date* of writing at **85-90 AD**, which might indicate that many of John's readers were *already* Christians – the **second** and **third** generation of the church (just like many of you, this morning).

This “**2<sup>nd</sup>** *generation*” idea is further reinforced in that John makes references that seem to assume many of his readers have already read *Matthew, Mark and Luke* (again, written **25-40** years earlier).

So the churches John first wrote to were the *Gentile churches* in and around *Ephesus, late in the first century*. Congregations that had been around for perhaps **40 years**.

**Matthew, Mark, Luke...and John. Have you ever wondered why God inspired *four* gospels?**

If *all* four are *inspired* (→ Gr. *God breathed*) then **none** have any *errors* (God **doesn't** make errors!).

There are **no** *contradictions* between John and the **three** Synoptics.

In fact, as I just noted, John seems to assume you're *already familiar* w/ Matthew, Mark & Luke.

So the *big ideas* of the gospel message are *big ideas* in all **four** books: *Jesus is God's Son, Jesus is the Son of Man, Jesus is Israel's Messiah, Jesus is God Incarnate, Jesus is Savior of the world by the merit of His sin-bearing death & death-defeating resurrection.*

It's *all there*, in all **four** books.

And *no one* has ever debated whether the *Gospel of John* (or the others) *belong* in the Bible.

So *why*, **30** years later, did the Spirit inspire *one more* "Good News" story?

Well, again, as we've just noted, John wrote at a *different* time to a *different* audience (generation & culture) in the church.

And therefore he wrote to answer *new theological challenges*.

So there **are** *differences*...**not** *corrections* or *contradictions*, but *differences* calculated to drive home John's *point* & achieve His *purpose*.

**So what was the Apostle John's *purpose*? Why didn't he just mail everyone a copy of the Gospel of Mark?**

It just so happens that John is the *only* the gospel writer that recorded an explicit *purpose statement*! Let's read it together in **John 20:30-31**.

There is some *scholarly debate* about the Greek text underlying **v.31**.

It *boils down* to this: is John writing to *unbelieving* Gentiles who need Christ, or to *believing* Gentiles who are already in the Church?

If the book is directed to *unbelievers*, then the Gospel of John is quite simply one of history's most wonderful, eloquent gospel tracts (along / M, M & L!). *My lost friend, this potent little book calls you to believe in Jesus, the Son of God!*

If John was writing to *believers*, he was likely trying to *fortify* their grasp of *basic gospel truths*, to guard against popular, heretical attacks on the *deity of Christ*. There was a *lot* of that in the late **1<sup>st</sup> century**.

The easiest way for you and I to *resolve* this is to read the Gospel of John as a powerful account of the *divine identity* and *sin-paying atonement* of the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone has the authority to *save sinners*.

This Jesus is the *Word* who became flesh, was *raised* from the grave, *ascended* to the right hand of the Majesty on high, *makes intercession* for His own, and someday *will return* to conquer, deliver, judge&rule.

The need for sinners to *believe* in Jesus, and for professing Christians to *continue to believe* in Him, is evidenced by the almost **100** appearances of the word "*believe*" (Gr. πιστευω) in John's **21** chapters.

**Believe this, beloved: *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and by believing this you may have life in His name.***

***That's why John wrote his gospel.***

**John's purpose (*belief in God's Son*) is built on a foundation of many *themes*. Let's preview just a few of them...**

***Faith (belief)***. As I just said, the term itself appears almost **100** times in John. And John equates *believing* to *receiving, following, drinking, responding, eating, accepting/hearing, worshiping, obeying, committing*.

***Incarnation (Deity)***. Jesus is God and man. John asserts this immediately in his *prologue*, in **1:1 & 14**: *In the beginning was the Word, and Word was with God and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*. Christ's *deity* is then powerfully reinforced by His **seven** "I am" statements!

***Atonement***. The *death* of Jesus pays for *all* the sins of *all* His people, once and for *all*. **10:15** (Jesus) – "I lay down My life for My sheep."

***Eternal Life***. **11:25** (Jesus) – "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies."

***Holy Spirit***. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit in His teachings in the Upper Room, during the Last Passover Supper. **14:26** – "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and will bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

As you read the Gospel of John, you can think of it as being *outlined* in **two** major sections:

**Chapters 1-12** examine Christ's *public ministry* to the multitudes, concluding with His final *public teachings* during the week of His final *Passover*.

**Chapters 13-21** describe His final, *personal minister* to His disciples, *beginning* with the Last Supper and *concluding* with His charge to Peter on the shore of Galilee.

On Galilee's shore, the fisherman is again called to *follow*.

***Because, after all, that's what true believing looks like – faithful following!***

I'd like to conclude with a simple survey of John – one well known verse from each chapter!

**1:29** – *“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”*

**2:19** – *“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”*

**3:7** – *“You must be born again.”*

**4:24** – *“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit & truth.”*

**5:39** – *“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me.”*

**6:37** – *“I am the bread of life.”*

**7:37** – *“If anyone is thirsty, let Him come to Me and drink.”*

**8:58** – *“Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.”*

**9:6** – *“While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”*

**10:36** – *“I and the Father are one.”*

**11:25** – *“I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in Me will live even if he dies.”*

**12:26** – *“If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will also be. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.”*

**13:34** – *“A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”*

**14:6** – *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”*

**15:5** – *“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”*

**16:24** – *“Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.”*

**17:3** – *“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*

**18:37** – *“...everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”*

**19:30** – *“It is finished!” And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.*

**20:27** – *“Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”*

**21:19,22** - *“Follow Me....You follow Me.”*

The Gospel of John captures *all of this*, so that you & I might *believe* and *follow*; that we might *say* w/ those first disciples...

*“We have found the Messiah.”*

*...pray...*

***Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine***