

The Gospel of John

In this lecture we will deal with the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John is undoubtedly different from the synoptic Gospels, but we must acknowledge that the Old Testament is definitely represented in the Gospel of John. John was steeped in the Old Testament. John 8:54-56 says:

Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day. He saw it and was glad." "You are not yet 50 years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" Let us pray.

Lord, our God, thank You for the entire Scriptures and we thank You too for this Gospel of John. Lord, it is so rich, so meaningful, so helpful. Bless us as we look at this now and grant that we may grow together in an understanding of who You are, Lord Jesus, what You came to do and why. Bless us in Jesus' name, Amen.

The Gospel of John was written about 85 AD, according to the unanimous opinion of most scholars, critical as well as evangelical. (Ladd discusses this on page 215). But there is some debate, with critics trying to show that John's Gospel is the reflection of the church about 50 years after Jesus ascended. They try to show how understanding had developed and evolved.

You may have dealt with this in other New Testament courses, but there are differences between John and the synoptic Gospels that have been pointed out. I have listed 12 of these. John locates practically the entire Gospel in Jerusalem, whereas the synoptics are set mostly in Galilee. The synoptics refer to one Passover. John may be referring to four. Many miracles and parables are omitted by John and he includes one or two that the others do not. (There is a chart of this in the New International Version of the English Bible). John's literary usage is different from the synoptics. He has a unique idiom. The two are very close but he emphasizes different themes. He brings to the forefront things that the others had not. He emphasizes the "I am" statements. I read one of them here this morning—"Before Abraham was, I am." I hope to refer to the other "I am" statements later. The structure of his Gospel is different. Look how differently he begins. But the emphasis is on Jesus' long discourses, whereas the other Gospels refer to many more historical incidents. Then the question is, "Is John reinterpreting these discourses? Is it the way he remembers, is it the way the church believes?" Critics have taken this too far.

John uses a different vocabulary. You might say, "How was it different?" It reflects a Hebrew background rather than a Greek background. John refers to the Hebrew Old Testament rather than to the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. William Albright, after having studied all these differences, said, "There is no fundamental difference in the teaching between John and the synoptics." There are many formal differences, but the fundamental teaching is the same. The contrast between them lies in the concentration of tradition. John represents a different time, but there is nothing to show that any of Jesus' teachings have been distorted or falsified. Albright was often considered somewhat of a conservative critic, and shortly before he died he supposedly came to a confession of Jesus as his Savior. Whether or not this is rumor, let's hope and pray that after all this work, he did come to know the Savior. For years, he did not want to be pressed into any type of a fundamentalistic mode of thinking.

What does John do in the Gospel? He sets forth the Christ, pointing out who He is, what He did, and what He will do, and then John tells us why He wrote.

What about the three main concepts that we have seen that formed the golden cable, as I said last time? The kingdom appears in three verses; John 3:3 and 5, in the discussion with Nicodemus, and in 18:35 where he speaks of “My kingdom.” The word “covenant” does not appear in John’s written Gospel or his three epistles and it occurs only once in the Book of Revelation where he talks about the ark of the Covenant. There John is going back again to the time of Exodus and following. The word “mediator” does not appear, but the word “Messiah” appears in John 1:41 and 4:25 and “Christ” appears about 19 times.

John does not use all the terms, but he sets forth the Christ. How does Christ reveal Himself according to John? Separately from the kingdom? Separately from the covenant? The administrative means is the bond of love and life that God has established, and it is through this that Jesus administers the covenant. No, John does not emphasize that, but the writer of Hebrews does. We do not know whether that was Barnabas or Apollos or Paul. Whoever the author was, he emphasized the fact that we are in the new covenant age. This is the time of the new covenant. The Mosaic covenant and its elements have been superseded with the coming of Christ.

Hebrews was written within the 20-year period before the fall of Jerusalem, during which John also wrote. John was in Asia Minor and if Apollos or Barnabas was the writer they were both probably writing from other areas. Thus this idea of the covenant had to have been clearly pressed upon the minds of the believers. This was probably especially true where the Judaists were active, people who were trying to impress the Old Testament economy, the Mosaic economy, on the New Testament church.

I want to move on now to dualism in John. Ladd, on page 223 and following, speaks of the dualism in John. I am uncomfortable with those who say that John imposed platonic dualism into his Gospel. I want to point out that there is no difference between what I understand and what John understands by the terms that Jesus used. The synoptic Gospels speak on a timeline, speaking of the here, the then, the now and the later. The synoptic Gospels speak more on a horizontal timeline and want us to think of now and the kingdom, like when Jesus sits at the table with His disciples and says, “You will be sitting at the table with Me in the new kingdom.” It is future. Those who read John as being a dualist say that John is always emphasizing the vertical, the above and the below. The critics say that he is using Greek dualism.

Plato talked about “the up there,” and “the down here.” There is no doubt that Jesus talked about “from above” and “from the earth.” But does this reflect a dualism? Light and darkness, Spirit and flesh, these are again contrasting terms that Jesus uses. Is He equating the world – the below, the earth, the material – with sin and darkness? I can understand why some people say that Jesus condemns this material world. And does not Paul also say that our citizenship is in heaven (Galatians 1)? Should we then try to shake off this earth and become heavenly oriented? Should we be striving mainly to get out of here? There are Christians who would say yes, but do they legitimately get this from John’s Gospel? A quick reading can surely give that you impression.

Does John impose platonic dualism into his Gospel? No. Does he present the Christ? Yes. What Jesus works with most of the time is the kingdom of God. The kingdom is greater than the cosmos and the cosmos has been taken over to a great extent by the parasite kingdom of the devil. When Jesus talks about light and darkness he means that the light is here (chapter 1). The light has come, it is available to all men here in this area of darkness. Men love the darkness, love the parasite kingdom. It is not a matter of up there and down here, now and then. It is a matter of the here and now as well as the then

and up there. The kingdom of God is all inclusive. The parasite kingdom has taken over the cosmos in which we live and where we have to work and struggle. Here is the place where we are inclined to be fleshly. We are inclined to the natural, the material, and not to the spiritual, which is just as much a part of our existence in this cosmos. But the great antithesis, the great opposition, the great contradiction is between the devil and his empire and the kingdom of God. Jesus came right into the middle of this with His incarnation, crucifixion, and ministry. He was right in the middle of this cosmos that is infected and in many ways under the devastating influence of the parasite kingdom. If anyone kept this strong antithesis before us, it was Jesus. He used terminology that is sometimes interpreted dualistically, but people are reading Plato and Greek culture into Jesus. Jesus was the great revealer of God and He used whatever terms and idioms and literary structures were available to Him. John did that too later on.

Who is this Jesus? He is the *logos*, the Word, and that means that He is the great revealer. I have five terms that have been used to give expression to who Jesus is. He is the *logos* and, as the *logos*, He is the great revealer. We see four divisions of revelation ministered by Christ. The first of the four acts is in natural or general revelation, extending from the creation of the world and infinitely forward. As I have pointed out here, Christ is the revealer, not just in the cosmos, but within the entire heavenly setting, from the beginning of creation on into the future.

Secondly, Christ was the revealer in the economy of the Old Testament. It was Christ who was speaking through Moses, through the Angel of the Lord to Abraham. It was Christ, the Word, who was speaking at the time of creation to Adam. Christ is the great revealer in the economy of the Old Testament. Thirdly, Jesus was the disclosure of God, which He made during His public ministry on earth, from the time He was born until His resurrection and ascension. At His resurrection and ascension there was another great burst of revelation by the *logos*. The fourth area was the revelation mediated by Him through His apostles, what the apostles did from Acts and the epistles on.

The *logos* is the great revealer, but as the *logos*, He is also the pre-existent one. He was there from before creation, John 1. The *logos* is God. That is clear too in chapter 1. He is the incarnate one. He is the one who became flesh. But remember that He was also the agent of creation. All these things are wrapped up in that word, *logos*. Anybody who tries to go to the old Greek idea of *logos* robs themselves of the richness of what John reveals concerning Christ when he uses the word *logos*. I think he purposefully used that word because it can be filled with so much rich Gospel message concerning who Christ is. He is the great revealer. He is the pre-existent one. He is God, the incarnate one, a human. He is the agent of creation.

Who is Jesus? He is the Messiah, the Christ. He is the anointed one. You should read Ladd on this on page 230 and 242 if you can. Jesus is the anointed mediator of the Old Testament covenant, as the kings and the priests were anointed. They were the messiahs of the Old Testament, then Christ comes and He is the great fulfillment of these messiahs. Thus when He is speaking to the woman at the well He says "I am the Messiah." He is one with the Father (John 10:30). He is God. The disciples had difficulty understanding that. The Jews seemed to understand it even better than His disciples, because they said, "He calls himself the Son of God," which means that He makes Himself equal to God. He calls Himself God and John sets forth Jesus as God, who is loved of the Father. There is that intimate covenantal bond between the Father and the Son, John 15:9.

Jesus spoke of the Father 106 times in John. He spoke of "My Father" 24 times. When you say "My Father," you are saying that you are of the very same nature as the Father. You are a different person, but you have same essential nature as your father. When my eight kids look at me and say, "Father," I look at them and realize that there is an identification of essence here. We have separate personalities,

but we are equally human. We are all persons. When Jesus spoke of the Father and said, “My Father,” they understood.

Now when we pray, “Our Father,” are we saying that we are also identical? No. There is a distinction between the way we speak of God as Father and how Jesus did. I do not want to give you the impression that calling God “Father” means that you consider yourself divine. But when Jesus did it He was speaking of that unique bond between them and how their will was one. There was no doubt in the minds of the people who wanted Him out of the way that He considered Himself divine. And John brings that out. He is the Priest, and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the one who brings the great atoning sacrifice. He is the one who fulfills all this priestly activity that was spoken of, all the sacrifices that were offered in the Old Testament. John says this in one little phrase: “Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Isaiah 53 is summed up in this statement. What the writer to the Hebrews had to explain more fully, John the Baptist said in one statement. Jesus did not deny it; no, He accepted that as Scripture. He was the Lamb. At the same time He was the Priest. He brought the sacrifice. He Himself was the sacrifice. “Are you the King of the Jews?” they asked Him. “You say that I am,” He replied. Jesus never denied that He was King. But we find out in the synoptic Gospels that He went on and told Pilate, “You would not be king if I were not the King. Jesus claimed His royal status, His royal divine status.

The three Old Testament mediatorial offices, the three covenantal offices – the prophet (*logos* revealer), the priest, and the king – were fulfilled in Jesus, according to John’s Gospel. All the Old Testament major covenant terms and offices are fulfilled in Christ. What does He do, being God, Messiah, the covenantal mediator, the priest, and the king? John says He reveals grace and truth. I want to emphasize that John 1:17, which in a way is the great introduction to John’s Gospel, says that when He became incarnate, He revealed grace. That is one of the great themes in his book; the grace of God. When Moses asked God to identify Himself, God said He was merciful and gracious; He was grace. Here He comes showing that the Father is the gracious one and that He has come to reveal grace. Jesus’ loving covenantal attitude reveals God’s heart toward the guilty, toward the undeserving, to those walking in darkness, to those that are caught up in the clutches of the devil, those that are guilty because of sin. He has come to reveal God’s love to them, the unworthy, guilty ones, but He has also come to reveal the truth. There is a difference between “truth” and “true”; do you know the difference? Study these terms again. The truth refers to something that is, in a way, different yet you cannot separate it from that which is true. That which is true corresponds with reality, but *alatheia*, “truth,” puts emphasis on the reality.

Jesus came to reveal the true realities. Some people say Jesus came only to reveal the heavenly realities. When you speak of God the Father, God the Son and the God the Holy Spirit and about all that God has done, are the heavenly realities to be separated from the realities that we have here on earth? If you are a dualist, you can say that. But if you have a good, comprehensive view of the kingdom of God you cannot. We are so caught up under the influence and the terror of the parasite kingdom that we have to understand here and now what the heavenly realities are, what the great truths are concerning God the Father, Son and Spirit, concerning His kingdom, concerning all that He has done as the mediator of the covenant. These great realities that have their source with the Father and the Son and the Spirit within the heavenly palace are made known to us here. John wants us to know now what is known in heaven at the Father’s throne. Here and now, we can live according to those blessed realities and have the true, full, Christian life. Jesus came to reveal the attitude of God, the heart of God, all the truth, all the realities, concerning what God has done in creation for us and what He is doing for us in the great future. Jesus was the great revealer.

I remember hearing a Christmas morning sermon that was very dogmatic, insisting that Christ was the revealer of grace and truth. But we all walked out burdened. We did not know what the preacher had been talking about. The preacher obviously did not understand how Christ is the revealer of the love of God for sinners and how God through Christ has revealed all the great truths about Himself in the heavens and on earth. We can look in the manger and say, “There is the bringer of grace and truth, of the heart of God and the fullness of life.” When you preach on Christmas Sunday morning, do not be too dogmatic, please. Make it real and do not make it so theologically abstract that the people go home wondering if Christmas is here after all.

Christ reveals grace and truth and as He does that, He unites people to Himself. We referred to that before in the synoptic Gospels. Jesus brings the disciples to Himself. He forms not an organization, but He forms a communion. He forms a body. He unites the people to Himself. Here is where the apostles especially come in and love each other, unite together. In chapter 17 of John’s Gospel, Jesus explains how the Spirit of God is the great comforting one, the one who gives you strength. Comfort comes from that combination of Latin terms, *cum forte*. If you want to comfort someone you want to come to them with strength—*cum*, “with,” *forte*, “strength.” The Holy Spirit is the one who comes with power. He comes with strength. He comes giving us that strength that we need so that we can overcome the great difficulties between each other and become a united body. Thus we can be the church; we can be God’s instrument of service within the kingdom and stand together fighting against the influences of the parasite kingdom in the cosmos.

What does Jesus do? He exercises lordship over creation. We referred before to His changing of water to wine, 2:1-11. He is Lord of the entire creation, which He Himself with the Father brought into existence. Through the *logos*, through the Christ, creation came. But He also exercises lordship over the spiritual dimension of people’s lives as it was represented in the temple. John, in chapter two, wants the people of his day know that Christ, the Lord of creation, is the Lord of the church and is the Lord of worship. He will not tolerate people changing the place of worship and offering. He speaks of the spirit of worship when He speaks to the woman at the well. “True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.” They will worship according to the great realities made known. Our worship must be real, developing the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Spirit and ourselves. Jesus comes and John says that He cast the money changers out of the temple and He cleaned it because He is the Lord. He is the Lord of worship, He is the Lord of our spiritual life, He is the Lord of the church, He is the Lord of that whole dimension of life that we want to refer to as the spiritual. There are various other events which show that He is Lord over creation and Lord over the temple.

Jesus surely exercises his Lordship over the parasite kingdom. But Satan can still move about. I remember seeing my father slaughtering a bull and getting kicked so hard by the bull when we all thought it was entirely dead. It was dead, but its leg shot out as it went through the dead throws. The devil is in his death throws, and anyone in the death throws can be powerful in their last strokes before the end. Do not forget it. Christ exercised lordship, but the devil can give some powerful backstrokes yet.

Jesus gives entrance into the kingdom through regeneration by the Spirit. He gives the gift of faith. He tells us how to abide in the kingdom. He tells us how to obey. Jesus exercised the curse and the blessing of the covenant. He knew how to bless, and He knew how to curse. He cursed a fig tree, showing His lordship over nature and expressing the curse because the fig tree showed growth, but no fruit. He makes Yahweh known, especially in the great “I am” statements. Who is the “I am” of the Old Testament, Exodus 3:14? The “I am that I am,” is Yahweh, the Old Testament Yahweh, the Lord, the sovereign one. Now Jesus comes and says “Yahweh (I am) the source of light,” “Yahweh (I am) the great shepherd,”

“Yahweh (I am) the one who opens the door, the resurrection and the life, the truth and the grace.” Jesus identifies Himself with the Old Testament covenant God. To the woman at the well He said, “I am He, the Messiah.” In John eight He says, “I am from before.” He is the Old Testament covenant God; that is the only way that these “I am” statements make sense. “I am the bread”—Yahweh provided the manna. “I am the living water”—Yahweh provided water through the rock, and Paul says the rock was Christ. “I am the light, the pillar, the fire in the cloud by day”—all these are Old Testament symbols, types. Jesus brings them out and says, “Do you remember those things that Yahweh, God, made so real to you? Look at me; I am the fulfillment of all that. What God did through these external things I am doing personally for you here. I am Yahweh, the covenant Lord, the King of creation, the great atoning Redeemer. I am all that the Old Testament covenant people were told through the promises that were given them.”

Jesus reveals the Spirit and He prepares the future for His own. Jesus speaks of the Spirit who regenerates us in John 3, and He also speaks about the Comforter to come. He prepares the future for His own. He does this by His resurrection. He does it by calling His disciples together after the resurrection, reuniting them and giving them assurance that He is indeed the Lord. He is God. He reunites His people and then He prepares the glorious future for them by ascending. I wish we spent more time in our Christian church on the ascension of Christ, because that is the great royal act, His great kingly act that follows His priestly and prophetic acts. He is a revealer when He is sent, but He is the King going home. He is the King going to His throne. Psalm 68 is a prophecy of that. Paul in Ephesians eight refers to the great victor going home—that is the ascension. Thus He prepares a tremendous future for us.

Without the ascension, there would be no heaven prepared for us. How often do you hear ascension services? Why do we not have a special day set aside 40 days after Easter? In my church, we always have Ascension Day services on the 40th day after Easter. Tragically, it is the most poorly attended service we have, in spite of the effort to preach it, to call the people together. Somehow or another the lordship of Jesus Christ just does not come through. But He *has* gone to His throne. He *is* reigning now.

Why does John reveal Jesus in the way he does? Why does he write about Him as he does? He wants to assure the people of his own day that the kingdom is a reality. Jesus is the king, the lord over creation, the great prophet, the great covenantal mediator. But more than that, John says in 20:31, “I have written all this that you may believe.” John loved his congregations in Asia Minor and he wanted them to believe. Do you know what it is to have a burden for the unbeliever? Do not ask people if they are church members, do not ask them to what denomination they belong. Ask them, “Do you believe the Christ, as John sets Him forth?”