

## Lecture 36 – Introduction to John

*But these are written 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 20:31 (NIV)*

### Key Terms

Chiasm, Greek & Jew, meta-plan, “teacher”

### Objectives

\*To state and defend the intended audience(s) of John.

\*To list examples of eyewitness details provided in John that are absent from the other Gospels.

### Lead Question

\*Why are Jesus’ statements in John’s Gospel often presented somewhat cryptically?

### Introduction to John

#### I. Critical Issues Regarding John

- A. The goal of John: “These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31) This causes two questions:
  1. What is precise goal (cf. textual variant)? Did John mean “that you might *begin* to believe” (subjunctive), or, “*continue* to believe” (present subjunctive)?
    - a. John’s riddles and unanswered questions are fully accessible only to disciples.
    - b. Yet John brings readers in direct contact with Jesus and invites faith and eternal life.
    - c. John writes for Jew and Greek, to strengthen the believer and to convert the unbeliever.
  2. What belief does John engender? That Jesus is the Christ, or that the Christ is Jesus? Is the stress on Jesus’ identity, or the Messiah’s identity?
- B. An accusation: Since John is a theological document, critics say John invented or embellished the events and conversations recorded in his Gospel. Charges:
  1. John’s theological reflection takes passage of time, so John wrote 60+ years after events.
  2. It flattens out the various groups of Jews and contains supposed anachronisms.
  3. Diction of Jesus’ speeches sounds more like John’s comments than the synoptic accounts.
  4. It differs from the synoptics in outline, length, and location of Jesus’ ministry.

#### II. Historicity of John

- A. John claims to be eyewitness. He knows things only an eyewitness should know: customs, geography, names that give historian basis for judging. Illustration: Max Doriani and Russia
- B. Customs, religious atmosphere, and geography in John

1. Social and religious setting. The author knew the following:
  - a. The Jews connected Elijah with Messianic expectations, 1:21
  - b. It took 46 years to build the temple of Herod, 2:20
  - c. Judaism held that it was not worthwhile to talk with a woman, 4:27
  - d. Jews and Samaritans lived in hostility, 4:9
  - e. The Jews had numerous rules about Sabbath, 5:10
  - f. The Jews expected Messiah to perform miracles, to be born in Bethlehem from David’s line.

- g. The Jewish leaders were “men of the book,” students of a written revelation 5:38, 10:34
  - h. The Jews attached great importance to religious schools and rabbis, 7:15
  - i. The Jews assumed that illness was the consequence of personal sin, 9:1
    - i. cf. R. Ammi “There is no death without sin and there is no suffering without iniquity.”
  - j. Many Jews believed God could only use a holy man in healings, 9:16, 31
  - k. Palestinian flocks mixed together in one fold, separated only by shepherd’s call, 10:1 ff.
2. He knew geography, architecture and topography. Cana (2:1 ff.), pools of Bethesda with 5 colonnades (5:2), pool of Siloam (9:6), Solomon’s colonnade (10:23), the Kidron valley (18:1)
- C. Conclusion: John is reliable on verifiable points. Therefore presumed reliable elsewhere.

*Why does John take such effort to describe events with sensory terms? How might you apply the same method in ministry?*

### III. John as Eyewitness - Shown in Narrative’s Sensory Notes (optional)

#### A. Special perspective: John the apostle is eyewitness

1. Epistle 1 John, 1:4, says he reports “what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes and our hands have handled.” Explicitly claimed in Gospel of John, 1:14, 29:35, 21:24.
2. Vivid testimony regarding Lazarus (11), foot-washing (13), death and resurrection (19:17-30, 20:3-8).

#### B. Evidence: Sensory reports and sensory appeal in John:

1. Sight: Jesus sees and is seen by disciples (1:29-51). “See” jars filled to brim at Cana.
2. Taste: Jesus’ invitation to eat flesh and drink blood sets teeth on edge (6:51-9).
3. Resurrection of Lazarus appeals to nose (He stinks), eyes (clothes), and ears (weeping).
4. Touch: Thomas wants to touch wounds. The beloved disciple leans against Jesus.
5. John is witness interpreter of the signs. Seeing is not enough. John 2:22, 12:16.

### IV. Structure of John - Overview

#### A. The prologue introduces the central themes of John

1. Jesus’ eternal existence and identity, 1:1-5
2. His entry into history, 1:6-8
3. Jesus came to His own, but they did not receive Him, 1:9-11
4. To those who did > the right to be called children of God, 1:12-13

#### B. Prologue (1:1-18) establishes method and style, introduces main themes

##### Chiasm

- 1 pre-existence (v. 1-5)
  - 2 Jesus came into the world (6-8)
    - 3 Jesus was not received (9-11)
      - 4 Those who believed > children of God (12-13)
        - 3 We have seen His glory (14)
          - 2 John testifies to His coming (15-17)
            - 1 no one has seen God but God > pre-existence (18)

Middle of chiasm is most important, and it fits with the purpose statement at the end - *inclusio*. Therefore, thematic unity. Jn 1:12-13 and 20:31.

C. Prologue introduces John's Christology

D. The prologue introduces the style of John - phrased to attract both Jew and Greek

1. Christology appeals to Greeks familiar with philosophical thought. For Stoics, *λογος* - "logos" is mind of God, the rational principle in the universe, the spark of the divine in man.
2. "Logos" appeals to Jews. God speech at creation, wisdom (Gen. 1, Ps. 33:6, Prov. 8:22ff)

V. John's Intended Audience: Does He Write for Jew or Greek? John seems the most universal Gospel, yet it is also a very Jewish Gospel

A. John ministered in Jerusalem and Ephesus. Therefore able to appeal to both Jew and Greek?

B. John and Gentiles: If John is for Jews, how do novices get so much out of it?

1. John uses universal language: light and darkness, truth and lies, salvation and judgment, God and the world
2. John adapts language of Jesus and OT to terminology the Greeks used.
3. John uses Greek to communicate with Greeks, uses OT to reach Jews. Audience is every man.

C. Appeal to Jews: John shows Jesus subtly fulfills OT events and institutions (more later):

1. Tabernacle, 1:14, 2:12-22. Jesus is presence of God dwelling with His people
2. Jesus is spotless lamb of God, who takes away sins of world, 1:29; 8:46, 19
3. Turning water into wine is symbol of Messianic age (Amos 9:13-14, Hos. 14:7, Jer. 31:12)
4. Most signs refer to some Jewish feast. Jesus fulfills what they symbolize. Example: At feast of tabernacles Jesus says, "I am the living water" alluding to water rituals of that feast.
5. Feast of tabernacles features light rituals too; Jesus said, "I am the light of the world (8:12, 9:5) and verifies His claim by healing man born blind.
6. Jesus is the good shepherd (John 9-10), who cares for the sheep. Like the Lord (Ps. 23), unlike the exploitative shepherds, who fail to care for flock (Ezek. 34).
7. Many passages presuppose knowledge of OT. See Moses (John 1:17, 45; 3:14; 5:45-6; 6:32; 7:19ff; 9:28-9), Elijah (1:21, 25), patriarchs (4:12, 6:32, 8:53-58), bronze snake (Num. 21:8-9).

### **Meta-Plan of John**

Prologue, Ch. 1

Book of Signs, 2-11

Book of Glory, 12-20

Epilogue, 21

John 1-4: The Early Ministry

I. First Sign of the Christ, 2:1-12

A. Theme: The signs of Jesus present His claims, but, by themselves, will not engender faith.

1. Definition: signs are miraculous deeds demonstrating God is working through Jesus.
2. Function of signs: Analogy to dogs, to driving. Responses to signs depend on who you are. Signs do not prove Jesus' deity. They are tokens of it.
3. They resemble and exceed miracles in OT. Ex: Feeding of 5000 and Moses' manna, 6:32-41. The "supply" miracles create food and drink in abundance - as in Messianic age.

4. Events have Jewish setting but language is Hellenistic: Light - darkness, truth - lie, etc.

#### B. First sign: water to wine

1. The place: a wedding in Cana in Galilee. Note Jesus' social, celebratory life.
2. The time: The seventh day since the historical narrative of John began.
3. Incident: The wine runs out. Weddings, customs, and social implications.
4. "Jesus' mother" (2:3) points this out. She expects Jesus to do something.
5. Jesus' reply not rude but establishes distance: I need not acknowledge your request (2:4).
6. Mary delicately accepts Jesus' small rebuff, yet persists. Comment to servant (2:5), "Whatever he says to you, do!" probably intended to have pregnant depth.
7. Jesus acquiesces (2:7). When Mary is mother, she is rebuffed. When a disciple, OK.
  - a. Pattern: Jesus often delivers an initial rebuff, as if to discover if the supplicant has true faith. See John 4:46-50, Matt. 15:21-7 + Gen. 32:26-30, Exo. 33:12-34:9. Is this also Jesus' way today?
8. 2:6-8: Six large stone water pitchers for purification
9. 2:9-11: Jesus turned all the water to wine, "Unlike most, you have saved the best for last." Note: The term "wine" refers to fermented grape juice.

#### C. This is the first sign (2:11). But what does it mean?

1. The time for purification by ritual, by water rites, has ended.
2. Messianic age has come; wine is symbol (Amos 9:13-14, Hos. 14:7, Jer. 31:12). Isaiah 35 is programmatic for Messianic age (Matt. 11, John 2). Beyond healing, Isaiah stresses restoration of creation (35:1-2, 9-10, cf. Joel 2:24, 3:18).
3. John 2-4 stresses replacement: old purifications supplanted by newness of kingdom
  - 2:13-21 Old temple replaced by new, His body, which would truly cleanse sin
  - 3:1-15 Old birth and old ways of Israel's teachers, for new birth
  - 4:1-14 Old water, giving physical life and new water for eternal life
  - 4:15-24 Old places of worship replaced by worship in Spirit and truth
4. Time references corroborate that this is a sign of recreation. Jesus creates the wine on the seventh. This is God's day of rest, but by Jewish tradition, day of recreation too.

### II. Cleansing of Temple, 2:13-25 (Optional)

A. Jewish leaders perceive Jesus' action as challenge to their authority. Their response focuses on turf that rather than justice. Their question is "Who gave you the right?" not "What is right?"

B. "Give us a sign," but God does not offer that kind. They can hardly take up His offer!

### III. First Discourse, John 3, To Call Jesus "Teacher" is Not Enough

#### A. Contexts

1. Jesus' first acts create some shallow faith.
2. "There was a man of the Pharisees" (2:1). The suggestion within an unusual phrase.

#### B. Phase 1, Nicodemus' praise

1. 3:1, The meaning of a nocturnal visit and the darkness
2. 3:2, A generous compliment from the teacher of Israel. Let's have a dialogue!
  - a. Yet Nicodemus asserts dominance by setting agenda. Jesus implicitly challenges him.
  - b. Nicodemus' praise typical of his age and this age: Jesus is important.

#### C. Phase 2, Nicodemus' confusion

1. Jesus: You don't know what you are talking about (3:3). You need second birth, from above. Question: If Nicodemus must be born again, who is exempt?
2. Nicodemus confused (3:4).

D. Phase 3, Jesus' instruction

1. Born again = born of water and Spirit (3:5-8). Natural and spiritual birth needed.
2. Confusion again. Jesus uses obscure teaching proving the need of rebirth (3:9-15).

E. Conclusions

1. Discourse is clear to us but cryptic, pre-evangelistic for Nicodemus, (cf 7:50-2, 19:38-42). John 3:16-36 is John's commentary on interview, given for our benefit (cf. use of Son of Man in NT.)
2. Jesus is more than a teacher.