

The Gospel of John

Introduction

The writer

The internal evidence from the Gospel itself is as follows. In 21:24, the writer of "these things" (i.e., the whole Gospel) was the same person as the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (21:7). That disciple was one of the seven disciples mentioned in 21:2. He was also the disciple who sat beside Jesus in the upper room when He instituted the Lord's Supper, and to whom Peter motioned (13:23-24). This means that he was one of the Twelve, since only they were present in the upper room (Mark 14:17; Luke 22:14). The "disciple whom Jesus loved" was also one of the inner circle of three disciples, namely: Peter, James, and John (Mark 5:37-38; 9:2-3; 14:33; John 20:2-10).

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES AND PURPOSE

The emphasis in the fourth Gospel is more strongly on Jesus' full deity. This emphasis runs from the beginning, with the Word becoming flesh (1:1, 14), to the end, where Thomas confessed Jesus as his Lord and "God" (20:28). John's purpose statement (20:30-31) explains why he stressed Jesus' deity.

It was so his readers would believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and thereby have eternal life. The key word in the book is the verb "believe" (Gr. *pisteuo*), which appears 98 times. The noun form of the word (Gr. *pistis*, "faith") does not occur at all. This phenomenon shows that John wanted to emphasize the importance of active, vital trust in Jesus. Other key words are: witness, love, abide, the Counsellor (i.e., the Holy Spirit), light, life, darkness, Word, glorify, true, and real. These words identify important themes in the Gospel.

John's unique purpose accounted for his selection of material, as was true of every biblical writer. He omitted Jesus' genealogy, birth, baptism, temptation, exorcizing demons, parables, transfiguration, institution of the Lord's Supper, agony in Gethsemane, and ascension. He focused on Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, the Jewish feasts, Jesus' private conversations with individuals, and His preparation of His disciples.

MESSAGE

In one sense, the Gospel of John is more profound than the Synoptics. It is the most difficult Gospel for most expositors to preach and teach for reasons that become evident as one studies it.

In another sense, however, the fourth Gospel is the easiest Gospel to understand. Leon Morris wrote that "it is a pool in which a child can wade and an elephant can swim". It is both simple and profound. It clarifies some things that the Synoptics (i.e. Matthew, Mark and Luke) leave as mysteries.

What are these mysteries?

Matthew presents Jesus as the King, but it does not articulate the reason for Jesus' great authority. John does. Mark presents Jesus as the Servant, but it does not account for His depth of consecration to God. John does. Luke presents Jesus as the perfect Man, but it does not explain His uniqueness from the rest of humankind. John does.

The Gospel of John reveals answers to the mysteries about Jesus that the Synoptics leave hidden. It is, therefore, an apocalypse, an unveiling similar to the Book of Revelation in this respect. The Book of Revelation is the climax of biblical Christology. The Gospel of John plays that part among the Gospels (cf. Deuteronomy in the Pentateuch). It is a revelation of the person of Jesus Christ more than any of the others. John told us that it would be this in his prologue (1:1-18). Though it is an apocalypse in this sense, it does not contain apocalyptic content, which refers to a particular literary genre describing cataclysmic end times events

The statement of the message of this Gospel occurs in 1:18: "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known." (NIV). John claimed that Jesus was the explanation of God the Father. This Gospel presents Jesus as the One who manifested God to humankind. It then stresses the revelation of the truth about God.

People have constantly sought to represent God in some way. We want to know what God is like. Ideas about God that do not come from the revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ are idolatrous. They create a false view of God. Typically human beings without divine revelation have imagined God as being an immense version of themselves, a projection of human personality into cosmic proportions. God's revelation of Himself, however, involved the limitation of Himself to humanity, the exact opposite approach. This is what God did in the Incarnation. God's revelations are often the exact opposite of what one would expect.

John presented Jesus as the Son of God. He wanted his readers to view Jesus and to see God. In the tears of Jesus, we should see what causes God sorrow. In the compassion of Jesus, we should see how God cares for His own. In the anger of Jesus, we should see what God hates.

What do we learn about God from Jesus in John? The prologue gives us the essential answer, and the body of the book explains this answer with various illustrations from Jesus' ministry. The prologue tells us that Jesus has manifested the glory of God by revealing two things about Him: His "grace" and His "truth" (1:14). All that Jesus revealed about God that this Gospel narrates is contractible into these two words. Notice first the revelation of grace in this Gospel.

The Gospel of John presents God as a gracious person. Behind His gracious dealings lies a heart of love. There are probably hundreds of evidences of God's love resulting in gracious action in this book. Note just the evidence of these qualities in the seven signs that John chose to record.

The miracle of changing water into wine (ch. 2) shows God's concern for marital joy.
The healing of the official's son (ch. 4) shows God's desire that people experience family unity.
The healing of the paralytic (ch. 5) shows God's grace in providing physical restoration.
The feeding of the 5,000 (ch. 6) shows God's love in providing material needs.
The miracle of Jesus walking on the water (ch. 6) shows God's desire that people enjoy supernatural peace.
The healing of the man born blind (ch. 9) illustrates God's desire that we have true understanding. The raising of Lazarus (ch. 11) shows God's grace in providing new life.
All of these miracles are revelations of God's love manifesting itself in gracious behaviour toward people in their various needs. These are only the most obvious manifestations of God's grace in this book.

This Gospel also reveals that God is a God of truth. Another one of God's attributes that we see revealed in this Gospel lies behind the truth that we see revealed in this Gospel. That attribute is His holiness. The figure that John used to describe God's holiness is light. Light is a common figure for God's holiness in the Old Testament. The principle of God's holiness governs the passion of His love.

Jesus' great works in John reveal God's love and His great words reveal God's truth. Consider the seven great "I am" claims of Jesus as illustrations of the various aspects of the truth that Jesus revealed about God. All of these claims point to God as the source of, and to Jesus as the mediator of, things having to do with truth.

The "bread of life" claim (ch. 6) points to God as the source of true sustenance.
The "light of the world" claim (ch. 9) points to God as the source of true illumination.
The "door" claim (ch. 10) points to God as the source of true security.
The "good shepherd" claim (ch. 10) points to God as the source of true care.
The "resurrection and the life" claim (ch. 11) points to God as the source of true life.
The "way, the truth, and the life" claim (ch. 14) points to God as the source of true authority.
The "vine" claim (ch. 15) points to God as the source of true fruitfulness.
All of these claims pointed directly to Jesus as the mediator, but they also pointed beyond Him to God the Father. They were revelations of the truth concerning God.

These are all further revelations of the character of God introduced first in Exodus 3, where God said He would reveal Himself as "I am." The Law of Moses was an initial revelation about God. The revelation that Jesus Christ brought was a further, fuller, and final revelation of the grace and truth that characterize God (1:17). These revelations find their most comprehensive expression in the fourth Gospel.

What are the implications of the revelation in this Gospel?

First, such a revelation calls for worship. In the Old Testament, God revealed Himself and dwelt among His people through the tabernacle. In the Incarnation, God revealed Himself and dwelt among His people through His

Son (1:14). The tabernacle was the place where God revealed Himself and around which His people congregated to worship Him in response. The Son of God is the Person through whom God has now given the greatest and fullest revelation of Himself, and around whom we now bow in worship (cf. Heb. 9).

Second, such a revelation calls for service. Under the old Mosaic economy, worship prepared God's people to serve Him. Their service consisted of carrying out His mission for them in the world. The revelation of God should always result in service as well as worship (cf. Isa. 6:1-8). When we learn who God is, as we study this Gospel, our reaction should not only be worship but service. This is true of the church as a whole and of every individual believer in it. Thomas' ascription of worship (20:28) was only preliminary to his fulfilling God's mission for him (20:21-23). Worship should never be an end in itself. Even in heaven we shall serve as well as worship God (Rev. 22:3).

As recipients of this revelation of God, our lives too should be notable for grace and truth. These qualities should not only be the themes of our worship. They should also be the trademarks of our service. Truth and holiness should mark our words and motives. Graciousness should stamp our works as we deal with people. If they do not, we have not yet comprehended the revelation of God that Jesus came to bring to His own. Sloppy graciousness jeopardizes truthfulness, and rigid truthfulness endangers graciousness. Jesus illustrated the balance.

This Gospel has a strong appeal to non-Christians as well. John wrote it specifically to bring the light of revelation about Jesus' true identity to those who sit in spiritual darkness (20:30-31). The knowledge of who Jesus really is, is the key to the knowledge of who God really is. Therefore our service must not only bear the marks of certain characteristics, namely, grace and truth, but it must also communicate a specific content: who Jesus is. People need to consider who Jesus is. There is no better way for them to do this than by reading this Gospel. Remember the stated purpose of this book (20:30-31). Use it as an evangelistic tool. Many people have come to faith just by reading John.