

Introduction to John: (3) – Using John’s Gospel in evangelism

Introduction

With John’s gospel in your hand you are armed with the most powerful thing known to man. God’s good news about Jesus, told his way, opens heaven’s doors, brings total forgiveness and gives life to the dead. It is the power to save absolutely anyone who believes: Jew or Gentile; black or white; British or foreigner; chav or posh; you or me.

But as with anything powerful, we must handle with care. We must get used to how John’s Gospel works. That’s one reason why we spent the last two weeks in Sunday School thinking about the AIM, the STRUCTURE, and the STORY of John’s Gospel.

Remember for a moment John’s aim in writing:

“Jesus’ disciples saw him do many other miraculous signs besides the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that **Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**, and that **by believing in him you will have life** (20:30-31).

So if we were to sit down with a friend – not yet a Christian – and together read and discuss bits of John’s gospel what would we learn? Remember those three key words:

- Jesus
- Belief
- Life

To encourage us in sharing the gospel we’re going to think about some difficult questions that John helps answer and listen to some of his encouragements to speak about Jesus.

A. “I’m glad you asked that…”

1. How can Jesus be the only way to God?

Discuss for a moment why people pose that objection:

Let’s listen to famous words from John’s Gospel that help speak to that question.

- **A key text: John 14:1-6**

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

To say that Jesus is the only way to God flies in the face of political correctness. Why can’t we agree with the Relativists, who say that all views are basically the same, each true in their own right?

- **Relativism is contradictory**

Christianity says Jesus is divine, that he died on a cross, and rose from the dead. Islam says Jesus is not divine, that he did not die on a cross, and so he did not rise from the dead. Relativism summarises by saying: “see: you’re saying the same things. You are each true in your own right.

Wrong. Two people can't both be right when they believe opposing things. Either Andy Murray just won the US open or he didn't. Either Jesus is divine or he isn't.

- **Relativism is arrogant**

Relativism argues: "You absolutely can't make absolute claims. We will not tolerate anyone who does not agree..."

It is arrogant to act like an external onlooker, observing world religions, saying they are all the same, and that no one can make an absolute truth claim.

Tolerance means recognising different views; agreeing they are not all the same; and saying "though you have a right to believe what you do, I disagree with you. So let's talk about together." But how can John help us set out a more positive case...

- **Only Jesus is divine, so only he can tell us the truth (14:6)**

Other religions claim to involve a mysterious revelation from God to earth; Christianity uniquely claims God himself came down to earth in Jesus. Jesus publicly claimed to be the way, the truth and the life; God on earth who tells us the truth. And since all this happened in real history, we don't need to 'blindly believe' someone's opinion about Jesus, we can investigate the evidence ourselves.

- **Only Jesus died for us, so only he can give us a place with God (14:2)**

Other religions claim we can get to God by what we do: be it that the 5 pillars of Islam, the 8 fold path of Buddhism, or the Torah observance of Judaism. Jesus however claims to guarantee us a place with God because of what **he** has done: dying in our place. The only way sinners with our track record can get to a perfect God is if someone always loved by God swaps places with us. Salvation is not about what we do, but rather what Jesus has done.

Saying that only Christians can get to God is not arrogant: we don't think we're better than anyone else, but realise we could never be good enough, but realise that Jesus has died for us to give us a place with God.

2. Why should we trust John's gospel?

Discuss why it is people question the trustworthiness of the Gospels?

Jesus knew he wouldn't be on earth forever. But he was also convinced that his rescue was to be available to all people at all times. We can't see him face to face, so the way we get to Jesus now is through the pages of John's gospel. But why should we trust what we read?

- **A key text – John 14:25-26**

"All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you

- **Jesus promised John would write accurately**

Sometimes people say: "You can never meet a person in a book!" But Jesus and the Bible are different...

Jesus promised His 12 apostles that the Holy Spirit would remind them everything Jesus did. And so when He was gone, they were able to recall what happened and testify to it accurately. He also prayed specifically for people who would believe because of their testimony (17:20). We can be sure that John's account reliably tells us enough about Jesus to bring saving faith (20:31). Jesus himself

provides for and promises the trustworthiness of the Bible. So, if we believe Jesus then we need to believe what Jesus says about the Bible.

- **What we have is what John wrote**

“Such ancient documents must have been altered!”

You can be confident the gospel in your hand is exactly what was written back then (albeit in readable English!). This is because there were so many copies made so early on: scholars can compare more than 5000 complete New Testaments dated from before 350 AD. Compared to other trusted ancient histories like those of Caesar and Pliny, of which there are only comparatively few copies (10 and 7 respectively) and dating much later than when they were written (1000 and 750 years later respectively) the gospels we now have are widely accepted as being incredibly reliable. The evidence overwhelmingly suggests what we have is what John wrote.

- **What John wrote is what took place**

“The Christian writers must have distorted the facts!”

We can also be sure that John told the truth. There is remarkable consistency throughout the New Testament about what Jesus said and did. The gospel accounts, though written by convinced Christians, are self consciously historical documents; John makes constant references to external places and events that confirm he knows what he’s talking about. Add to this the fact that many of the NT writers died for what they wrote, something you’d never do if you knew you were lying.

If John’s gospel is real history, you would expect non-Christian historians to write about Jesus too. And many do, including Jewish historian, Josephus:

“About that time there lived Jesus... he was one who undertook surprising feats and was a teacher of people who accept the truth with joy... He was the (so-called) Messiah. When Pilate had him condemned him to be crucified, those who had come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them, restored to life...”

It becomes apparent that what John wrote really happened. As we read John’s account, the question of trust swings back at us. In the face of such convincing evidence about Jesus, what’s to say that we can trust ourselves apart from Him?

3. Why does God allow suffering?

People ask this question for many reasons: some intellectual, some personal. When Bertrand Russell wrote “Why I am not a Christian” this was the #1 reason he cited as his answer to that question.

- **Suffering is a result of a broken relationship**

The world we live in is not the world God made. But when mankind rebelled against God’s rule over this world, God sentenced mankind to pain and death and exclusion from his presence. We have rebelled against our Creator and are suffering the consequences in a corrupted creation.

Specific suffering and specific sin are not necessarily connected – the healing of the man born blind in John 9 makes that point for us. But, overall, suffering is a result of a broken relationship.

- **Jesus suffered to restore that relationship**

He endured the pain and grief of an unjust trial and death upon the Cross (and, as Christians we would add, not just physical but spiritual agony of an atoning death). He suffered. He knows what it is to suffer. As the First World War poet Edward Shillitto said of Christ: “not a god has wounds but thou alone... show us thy wounds, we know the counter-sign.”

B. John's evangelism masterclass...

1. Pray for open hearts and open mouths!

The only way someone can enter God's kingdom is by being **born again by God's Spirit** (3:5-8) leading to faith in Jesus. The only way we will be useful in evangelism is we are **desperately reliant on God to enable us** (15:5). Every day lets pray for open hearts (for lost friends) and for open mouths (for us and the whole church), because "Apart from me you can do nothing" (15:5).

2. Get to know John's message!

We often misuse Jesus promise to His 12 apostles that the Spirit will "guide us into all truth" as an excuse to not do the hard work of **personal preparation in evangelism**. We've got to get to know John's message, which the Holy Spirit inspired John to write truthfully, in order to faithfully tell people about Jesus

3. Say what Jesus has done for you!

We all have a testimony like that of the Samaritan women. She joyfully told the village that she had met Jesus the Messiah; that He had supernaturally spoke into her life; and that she was convinced he was who he claimed to be (4:29). Let's tell everyone what **Jesus has done for us**.

4. Let people meet Jesus themselves!

It was not sufficient, though, for the Samaritan merely to talk to the villagers about what Jesus had done for her. They had to **meet Jesus themselves**. It was being personally introduced to Jesus that led to their faith in Him. We need to persuade our friends that as they read the gospel they will meet Jesus themselves, take Jesus' word for it (17:20).

5. Don't write the wrong people off!

Think: Who do you expect will accept Jesus? Who do expect will reject Jesus? Rethink. Jesus came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive Him (1:11). We just don't know the kind of person who'll accept Jesus: the football captain everyone loves, or the girl everyone walks past. All it takes for someone **to believe and accept Jesus and they can become a child of God** (1:12).