

Introduction to John's gospel: (2) – The "story" of John's Gospel

Introduction

Today we begin a preaching series in John chapters 1-4. Over the next year or 18 months we're going to aim to preach through the whole of the gospel. So, in adult Sunday School we're spending three weeks having a bit of an introduction to John's gospel.

- Last week = the AIM of John's Gospel. From those key verses in 20:30-31 we learned that the aim is summed up in three words: JESUS, BELIEF and LIFE. The signs and the explanations that go with them work together to teach us who Jesus is, what true faith looks like, and what the life he brings is like.
- This week = the STORY of John's Gospel.
- Next week = how John can encourage us in personal evangelism.

As we begin we'll pray and read through the whole of John chapter 4.

The plan for today is that we're going to take a whistlestop tour through the whole gospel. Last week gave you an outline of the Gospel. We're going to work our way through it, and dip our toes briefly into each part of the gospel. Overall, we will (hopefully) get a feel for the flow and the "story" of the whole Gospel. Here's that outline again...

Chapter 1. Introduction

1:1-18	Jesus is God
1:18-50	Jesus is Messiah

Chapters 2 – 12. Jesus comes from the Father.

Jesus' identity and work is revealed in signs and words, leading to final rejection by the Jews, and the Gospel goes to the Gentiles.

Chs 2-4.	Jesus is the promised king
Chs 5-10.	Jesus is the divine king who gives eternal life and judges
Chs 11-12.	Jesus will bring resurrection life through his death. The Jews reject him, Gentiles begin to believe.

Chapters 13-20. Jesus returns to the Father – via the Cross.

Jesus goes to the Cross and teaches the disciples how to live in the light of the Cross

Chs 13-17.	Trusting Christ and living for him once he's returned to the Father
Chs 18-19.	Jesus' obedient, glorious, wrath-bearing sacrifice
Ch20.	Jesus is risen. Believe the witnesses

Chapter 21. Epilogue

... the Gospel really breaks down into **two large central sections** (chs 2-12 and 13-20), plus an introduction and an epilogue.

So, seatbelts on: here's the whole of John's gospel in about 40 minutes. Listen hard, take notes. I'm going to ask you to do some work as we go along. And remember as we go: it's all about **Jesus, belief, and life**. Listen out for what we learn at every point under those three headings.

Chapter 1. Introduction

There are two main ideas in ch1:

First: in vv1-18 – Jesus' relationship with God. He IS God. And he REVEALS God to us.

- Q. What do we learn about Jesus' rel w God in vv1-18?

Look at vv1-5, 14, 18.

Second: in vv19-50 – Jesus relationship with the Old Testament. He is the one PROMISED BY THE OLD TESTAMENT.

- Q. What are the different titles and tasks applied to Jesus in vv19-50?

Look at vv23, 29, 33, 34, 36, 41, 45, 49, 51.

These two ideas set up the whole Gospel: **Jesus is God** and **Jesus is the Messiah, the saviour king promised by the OT**. Or to put it another way we could say that:

- firstly, Jesus is "God the Son" (vv1-18).

- He is the second person of the Trinity.
- He is eternally begotten of the Father, before all worlds.
- Everything that makes God God is in Jesus. He is eternally God the Son.

- secondly, Jesus is the "Son of God" (vv19-50).

- "Son of God" is a title. It's not a title that has existed for eternity past, except in God's mind.
- In the OT "Son of God" was a special title given to the people of Israel and to her kings. Important texts to note here are Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14. (cf Acts 4, 13. Rom 1:4. Heb 1).
- The OT awaited the perfect Son of God, would be perfect King, ruler and Christ.

Wonderfully and awesomely "God the Son" and "the Son of God" come together in the person of the Lord Jesus.

(To say Jesus is "God the Son" is to say something different from saying Jesus is "The Son of God." Perhaps we've never realized that those two things are different. For a long time I was pretty fuzzy about that. And I got confused when I read in Bible about how Jesus "became" Son of God (hasn't he always been Son? – see Romans 1:1ff). I was confusing two categories: God the eternal Son "becomes" "Son of God" through his death and resurrection.)

The rest of the Gospel unpacks these two claims and seeks to prove to us that they are true. John wants us to see that Jesus is the divine Messiah, that he is a divine saviour and king. And we're invited to believe in Him – for the first time or for the umpteenth time. And as we believe to enjoy life in His name.

Chapters 2 – 12. Jesus comes from the Father.

Jesus' identity and work is revealed in signs and words, leading to final rejection by the Jews, and the Gospel goes to the Gentiles.

Chs 2-4. Jesus is the promised king

Let's think about the two signs that bracket this little section:

- Chapter 2 – turning water into wine. This picks up OT passages like Amos 9 and Isa 25. They speak of messianic expectation and show to us that Jesus is the Messiah-King.
- Chapter 4 – the healing of the official's son picks up on similar themes and one of the same OT passages. Isa 25 also promises that death will be swallowed up and destroyed.

So, these signs show us that Jesus is the promised King. And they give a glimpse of what his Kingdom will be like.

The passages in between the signs – in chapters 3 and 4 – flesh this out a bit more.

- Chapter 3: you must be “born again” to enter the kingdom. Jesus offers new birth to those who believe in him. He offers washing, cleansing, re-birth, and the work of the Spirit. These are the blessings which the OT looked forward to (eg. in Ezekiel). Jesus says that he can supply them.
- Chapter 4: the Samaritan woman and a whole bunch of Samaritans believe in Christ. They end up by saying in v42 that “this man really is the Saviour of the World.” New life begins to go beyond the Jews, to the Samaritans who are a half-breed and half-Jewish outcast people.

Chs 5-10. Jesus is the divine king who gives eternal life and judges

The pair of signs that bookend this section are in chapter 5 and chapter 9 (with chapter 10 being a chapter of explanation that flows out of the second sign.)

The significance of both signs is WHEN they happen? What's the big deal about the timing of the miracles? The man at the pool and the man born blind are both healed by Jesus on the SABBATH.

This immediately that provokes the Jews, e.g. in 5:16. “Because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him.” As Jesus and the Jews debate and as the religious leaders reject Jesus' claims we the readers are taught.

The key word in this section is “WORK.” That word comes again and again in this section. And it's about the “work” of God and how Jesus' does this work that we are specifically taught. [The works of God, noun and verb, and in Greek *erga, ergazomai*. References include 4:34, 5:17, 5:20, 5:36, 6:29-30, 7:3, 7:21, 9:3, 10:25,10:32, 10:37-38, 14:10-12, 15:24, 17:4.]

The key questions running through this section are these:

- Does Jesus have the authority to work on the Sabbath?
- If so, what is the work which he's going to do?

A key passage is 5:17-20. We note here that in v20 the NIV rendering “things” is literally “works.”

Jesus claims equality with the Father. He is entirely submitted to the will of the Father. But he is fully divine and he is doing the works of God. Jesus says this: “like God, I can work on the Sabbath. In other words, I am divine and I do the very works of God.”

Thus, as chapters 5-10 unpack the person and work of Jesus they don't JUST show us that Jesus is the Christ. The main thing they teach is that Jesus is the DIVINE Chris: the Son of God is God the Son, and the promised king is God.

The pair of signs in the middle of this section (the feeding of the 5,000 and the walking on water, both in ch6) function to reinforce Jesus' identity. They are signs straight out of the Exodus. They reveal Jesus to be NOT ONLY the redeemer of the Exodus, BUT ALSO the LORD God of the Exodus.

So, what is the work that God the Son does? In brief, it is to give life and to judge. It is to provide true rescue, Manna from heaven, both now and in the future. But in the future also He will judge.

[Also we learn of the preservation aspect, 6:37,39, and in the good shepherd discourse in chapter 10.]

And through the rest of chapters 5-10 we see different reactions to Jesus, chiefly among the Jews. Mainly, we see growing rejection. As they learn more of Christ, the more they are hardened against him.

Chs 11-12. Jesus will bring resurrection life through his death. The Jews reject him, Gentiles begin to believe.

- 11:1-54

Chapter 11 is the great climactic sign of the resurrection of Lazarus (11:1-54). It's a sign that points to the resurrecting and life-giving power of Jesus. Jesus sums it up in the discourse that follows, notably in 11:25 - "I am the resurrection and the life."

Straightaway some of the Jews plot to kill him. And in 11:50 the high priest Caiaphas unwittingly speaks as a prophet. He says: "You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." He was right. Jesus would die *for the people*, as a substitute instead of God's people. THAT is how Jesus will bring life. That's the means by which he will bring life: through his own, substitutionary death.

- 11:55-12:50

At 11:55 we're almost at the end of this big section. It's "almost time for the Jewish Passover." On in 12:1 we learn that it's "six days before the Passover. The clock is ticking down before the Passover., the day when the lambs get killed. All the while the clock is ticking down before Jesus will die as THE Passover Lamb.

There are many anticipations of Jesus' death. Not just on Caiaphas' lips, but also in 12:23, 24, 31, 32.

And right in this passage we see Jesus begin to draw "all men" to himself. Jesus enters Jerusalem, he is acclaimed as King of Israel, King of Zion. The Pharisees rightly note that the "whole" world is coming to him (12:19). This doesn't mean every single individual without exception, but people from out of the Gentile nations, from out of the "world."

And the story of the rest of chapter 12 is one of Gentile belief and Jewish rejection. We see how the Gentiles believe in Jesus (see vv20-24). And as the Greeks come to Jesus we are told that Jesus' "hour" is now; the hour of glory and the producing of many seeds has come. This glorious hour is his death upon the Cross. In v32 we see that all kinds of men – not just Jews – even Greeks will be saved by the King of Israel. Tragically, from 12:37 to the end of the chapter we see the Jews reject Jesus.

It's like 1:11-12 are being played out here:

- Jesus came to his own [his own things; *idia*, neuter], but his own people [*idioi*, masc] would not receive him. But to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

Summary:

Through chapters 2-12 Jesus’ identity and work is revealed:

He’s the divine king, who wields resurrection power.

His job is to give life and also to judge.

By the end of ch12 that revealing work is complete. There’ll be no more “signs” as we’ve been accustomed to them so far – that is, to encourage the reader to believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. The signs at the end of the Gospel are a little different. All the revelation that is necessary has happened.

And as the chapter closes, Jesus says his “hour” has come: the Jews finally decisively reject Jesus, but some Greeks (who are representatives of the big, dark, wicked, pagan “world”) come to Christ.

Or we could think about using the map which 16:28 gives to us: Jesus has come from the Father and entered the world. That part is done.

All that remains is for Jesus to return to the Father. And he will return via the Cross.

Think about “BELIEF” in chs 2-12

- Read 2:23-24 and 4:45-48. What’s faulty about their faith?
- Read 6:60 and 6:66. What’s surprising here?
- Read 8:31 and 8:59. What’s surprising here?
What do we learn about their “belief”? What revealed their true heart-attitude?
- Read 12:42-43. What do we learn here about false faith?
- What does real faith look like? How does Jesus define real faith?
eg. 6:66-68, 8:31, 10:25-29

Lessons for us from false faith: there IS a wrong faith that looks like the real deal for a while. It is exposed by Jesus’ words. True faith = keeping with him, and his Word, even when we hear things we don’t like.

Chapters 13-20. Jesus returns to the Father – via the Cross.

Jesus goes to the Cross and teaches the disciples how to live in the light of the Cross

The consistent drumbeat here is that Jesus is returning to the Father. We are told this ten times in this section - see 13:1, 13:33, 14:2, 14:12, 16:5, 16:10, 16:17, 16:28, 17:11, 17:13,

Until now the message has always been that “the time is not yet.” (eg. 2:4, 7:8). But now it is time for Jesus to leave this world and go to the Father. However, it’s not just a simple return journey. “Returning to the Father” is Jesus’ shorthand for his death and resurrection.

Chapters 13-17. Trusting Christ and living for him once he’s returned to the Father

From chapter 13 onwards, Jesus addresses himself only to his followers, only to his people, to those already convinced that he is the Christ, the Son of God. This is one reason why the end of chapter 12 probably forms the end of the first big section of the Gospel.

Chapters 13-17 form what’s sometimes called the Upper Room Discourse. It’s the night before the crucifixion. Jesus is in a room with his disciples. He is serving, teaching and praying for them.

The actual events of Jesus’ trial and death are in chs18-19. They’re still a few hours away. But the Cross looms large even here.

In chapter 13 as Jesus washes the disciples feet he gives a picture of his cleansing work on the Cross. This is a washing that all his people must have share in, if ever they’re to copy Christ’s love themselves.

Once Judas Iscariot leaves to complete the final betrayal, the rest of the Upper Room Discourse consists of Jesus’ teaching and praying about how his people are to believe and live once he has returned to the Father. Life without Jesus’ bodily presence is the theme of the Discourse.

But even without Jesus’ bodily presence what his disciples will enjoy is still “LIFE”. Eternal life is possible even in the bodily absence of Jesus. The disciples – and we – may enjoy relationship with God through Jesus. And that’s made possible through the work of the Holy Spirit. (See that briefly in 14:15-18).

Relationship with God is chiefly characterized by:

- access to God, which we see in answered prayer
- and by joy.

Chapters 18-19. Jesus’ obedient, glorious, wrath-bearing sacrifice

At chapter 18 the narrative picks up. We move to the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus. And all the way through, John doesn’t just tell us what happens, he gives us explanations as to what it means. Sometimes he does so explicitly. Sometimes he does so implicitly through the way he arranges his material.

Some key verses are:

18:11– Jesus will drink the cup of the Father’s wrath.

18:14– it will be a substitutionary, wrath-bearing death.

19:30 – “It is finished.” It is accomplished. LIFE is purchased for the people of God.

Chapter 20. Jesus is risen. Believe the witnesses

Here is the glorious resurrection chapter. Specifically, the issue of belief is raised here. I wonder if you noticed when we read through chapter 20 what gets repeated? They “SAW” (vv8, 18, 20, 25, 27).

What’s the point? It’s that belief is based on evidence which has been seen with human eyes. Belief is not irrational. It’s not based on hearsay. It’s based on eyewitness testimony.

Yet the way WE access that eyewitness testimony is different from the way the first disciples did.

- we don’t see with our own eyes.
- we don’t talk with the very first eyewitnesses.
- but we do hear their testimony in the Scriptures. And we’re commanded by the Lord to believe on the basis of their testimony.

Those who haven’t seen the risen Jesus with their own eyes are encouraged to believe on the basis of the eye-witnesses who did. That’s why THOMAS is so important. In 20:29 we read that “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” We learn that “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.”

Chapter 21. Epilogue

Jesus appears to his disciples beside the sea. He miraculously feeds his disciples. And then he instructs them to go and feed Jesus’ other sheep.

The command to the apostles to “feed” – that is, to teach – Jesus’ sheep is the final big note of the Gospel. Just like Matthew’s Gospel ends with the great commission, John ends with a great commission too. Go and teach Jesus’ people.