

JOHN THE BAPTIST AND THE COMING KING

We are about to embark on a momentous journey through the Gospel of John. While this gospel shares some characteristics with the other three gospels, it is also unique in several ways.

Whereas the first three Gospels concentrate on describing events in the life of Christ, John wrote of the meaning of these events. John records fewer miracles than do the other gospels, and those miracles are usually chosen to illustrate or emphasize the teaching that he is dealing with at the time. For example, all four Gospels record the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 but only John records Jesus' sermon on "The Bread of Life," explaining the meaning of that miracle for the people.

We will find that John continually focuses on one major theme that runs throughout His Gospel: Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and if you commit yourself to Him, He will give you eternal life (John 20:31). There is a strong emphasis on the meaning of faith and on the Person of Christ. This gospel contains no parables but gives us a number of Christ's personal conversations. The gospel also relates His sermons (discourses), which focus on who Christ is. In the first chapter of this book, John records seven names and titles of **Jesus** that identify Him as the eternal God.¹

The revelation of God's glory is also a focal point in the Gospel of John. Jesus revealed God's glory in His person, His works, and His words. John recorded seven miracles that clearly declared the glory of God (John 2:11). The glory of the Old Covenant of The Law was a fading glory, but the glory of the New Covenant in Christ would now be the glory forever. Paul gives us more detail of this in 2 Corinthians 3:6-18 NLT:

6 He (Jesus)² has enabled us to be ministers of his new covenant. This is a covenant not of written laws, but of the Spirit. The old written covenant ends in death; but under the new covenant, the Spirit gives life.

7 The old way, with laws etched in stone, led to death, though it began with such glory that the people of Israel could not bear to look at Moses' face. For his face shone with the glory of God, even though the brightness was already fading away.

8 Shouldn't we expect far greater glory under the new way, now that the Holy Spirit is giving life?

9 If the old way, which brings condemnation, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new way, which makes us right with God!

10 In fact, that first glory was not glorious at all compared with the overwhelming glory of the new way.

11 So if the old way, which has been replaced, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new, which remains forever!

¹ Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 1:1

² Parentheses added.

12 Since this new way gives us such confidence, we can be very bold.

13 We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so the people of Israel would not see the glory, even though it was destined to fade away.

14 But the people's minds were hardened, and to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ.

15 Yes, even today when they read Moses' writings, their hearts are covered with that veil, and they do not understand.

16 But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

17 For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

18 So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

The Law given to Moses could reveal sin but it could never remove sin. Jesus Christ came bringing grace and truth, and both of these things are available to all who will trust in Him (John 1:16).³ As you study John's Gospel, you will find Jesus teaching the people that He is the fulfillment of all that was required in the Law.⁴

The people saw His works and heard His words. They observed His perfect life. He gave them every opportunity to grasp the truth, believe, and be saved. Jesus is the way, but they would not walk with Him (John 6:66–71). He is the truth, but they would not believe Him (John 12:37ff). He is the life, and they crucified Him. But sinners today need not commit those same blunders. John 1:12–13 gives us the marvelous promise of God that anyone who receives Christ will be born again and enter the family of God. John says more about this new birth in John 3, but he points out here that it is a spiritual birth from God, not a physical birth that depends on human nature.⁵

So with that introduction let us now look more closely at this Gospel.

John 1:1-5 ESV:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was in the beginning with God.

3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

It is always important to start at the beginning. Matthew and Luke open with telling about Jesus' birth, His earthly beginnings. But John goes back farther than that; he establishes

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

the eternity of Christ, the fact that He has always existed.

In Genesis 1, that is in the beginning, God spoke and the entire universe came into being. In the Bible generally, the “Word” represents God’s way of communicating with human beings. It is appropriate therefore that John used it in a unique way, to teach that Jesus was the embodiment or expression of all that God is. We just said a few minutes ago that this Gospel places more emphasis on Christ’s words, whether in conversation or discourse (public speaking), than the other gospels do. So it is only fitting that Christ is introduced as *The Word*, the Word incarnate (God has come to earth as a man). We will soon see that the Word was important in Creation.

Throughout Scripture we learn that God’s *creation* is one way that He reveals His existence to us (John 1:3). God revealed himself first as **Creator** (Genesis 1) and later as **Redeemer** or **Re-creator** in the person of Jesus Christ. John presents Christ’s work as the beginning of a **new creation**. Similarly, Paul calls the Christian a “new creation” in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).⁶

It is most interesting to compare these first five verses in John with the first five verses in Genesis 1:1-5 ESV:

- 1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*
- 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*
- 3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.*
- 4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.*
- 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

Notice first the role of God’s Word. He spoke and there was light. In the creation account in Genesis 1 we often see the pattern: “*And God said . . . and it was so*” (Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14-15, 24).

Now note that the first five verses in Genesis 1 and in John 1 both make references to *the beginning, creation, light, and darkness*. This certainly seems that it is not mere coincidence, but that there is a definite meaning being communicated.

“*Light*” and “*darkness*” are frequent themes in John’s Gospel. Jesus was the source of spiritual light (John 8:12; 9:5). “*Darkness*” referred to the realm of spiritual evil—the satanic world system set against God (John 1:5; 3:19; 8:12). John tells his readers right at the beginning of his Gospel that the darkness could not extinguish the light of Christ (verse 5).⁷ In other words, Satan does not have the ability to overpower Jesus.

⁶ Hughes, Robert B. ; Laney, J. Carl ; Hughes, Robert B.: Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (The Tyndale Reference Library), S. 465.

⁷ Op cit. s. 466.

It would be difficult to find another passage in all of Scripture that contains more meaning than the first five verses of John's Gospel. Here we see Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God. Verse 1 tells us that Jesus has been around since the very beginning. In the beginning the Word already existed. Jesus was with God and He was God.

In John chapter 1, verse 2 tells us again that Jesus was with God the Father from the very beginning. Verse 3 tells us that as part of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) Jesus created everything. Verse 4 tells us that Jesus is both the light and life of all humankind. And verse 5 tells us that the darkness of the fallen world could not put out Jesus' light. John clearly points out in these first 5 verses that Jesus truly is the Son of God. These opening verses also confirm what the Bible teaches about God being a **Trinity** (Genesis 1:26).

John 1:6-13 ESV:

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

*7 He came as a witness, to bear **witness** about the light, that all might believe through him.*

*8 He was not the light, but came to bear **witness** about the light.*

9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

In verses 6-8 John is not referring to himself but to **John the Baptist**. John (the Baptist) was sent to alert the Jews that their Messiah was coming. He was sent to tell people that the Light had come into the world. But the nation of Israel, in spite of all its spiritual advantages, was blind to their own Messiah. John the Baptist bore witness to Jesus, telling the people that "*This is the Son of God. This is the true light.*"

How desperately the world needed that Light is revealed in these words, written by Alfred Edersheim, which give us a picture of the world into which Jesus came:

. . . Rome became to all the center of attraction, but also of fast-spreading destructive corruption. . . . Religion, philosophy, and society had passed through every stage, to that of despair. . . the issue lay between Stoicism and Epicureanism. The one flattered its pride, the other gratified its sensuality . . . Both ultimately led to atheism and despair—the one, by turning all higher aspirations self-ward, the other, by quenching them in the enjoyment of the moment; the one, by making the extinction of all

feeling and self-deification, the other the indulgence of every passion and the worship of matter, its ideal.

It would be unsavoury to describe how far the worship of indecency was carried; how public morals were corrupted by the mimic representations of everything that was vile, and even by the pandering of a corrupt art⁸. . . . It has been rightly said, that the idea of conscience, as we understand it, was unknown to heathenism. Absolute right did not exist. . . . The sanctity of marriage had ceased. Female dissipation and the general dissoluteness led at last to an almost entire cessation of marriage. Abortion, and the exposure and murder of newly-born children, were common and tolerated; unnatural vices, which even the greatest philosophers practiced, if not advocated, attained proportions which defy description.

. . . . What is worse, the noblest spirits of the time felt, that the state of things was utterly hopeless. Society could not reform itself; philosophy and religion had nothing to offer: they had been tried and found wanting. . . . All around, despair, conscious need, and unconscious longing.⁹ Can greater contrast be imagined, than the proclamation of a coming Kingdom of God amid such a world; or clearer evidence be afforded of the reality of this Divine message, than that it came to seek and to save that which was thus lost?¹⁰

It is very sobering when one comprehends the definite parallel between the society and culture into which Jesus was born and the current situation in which we live in the twenty-first century.

The function of John 1:6–13 is to explain to us how the “world” would not accept Jesus as the Messiah. John the Baptist was sent by God to be a witness to the world. We will find the word “believe” used many times in the Gospel of John. We see it first used here in verse 7. The word as used here actually means “trust”, a total reliance on what is being said about Jesus. “Light” as used in these verses is the kind of light described back in Genesis at the dawn of the original creation. Beginning in John 1:10 we see the good news that God was present in the world and how the world sadly rejected that presence. In verses 12 and 13 John emphasizes not the essential importance of Jesus’ birth, although that certainly was important, but of the Christian’s spiritual birth. To those who “believed” (1:12), trusted completely in Christ’s mission here on earth to provide atonement for sins, they have a belief that results in a new birth, not a physical birth but a

⁸ My footnote. I couldn’t help but associate Edersheim’s description here of the Roman Empire with the Hollywood entertainment industry today.

⁹ My footnote. Does this description not also remind you of conditions in the world today?

¹⁰ Edersheim, Alfred. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Originally published in 1883; 1973 printing; Bk. II, pp. 257, 258, 259, 260.

spiritual birth, into the family of God. One becomes a brand new creature just as they were brand new physically at their physical birth (2 Corinthians 5:17).

John 1:14-18 ESV:

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

15 (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”)

16 And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

How incredible is this truth. God came to earth in the form of the Man, Jesus Christ, being fully God and fully man. As hard as we try I am not sure any of us could really understand that concept. But Jesus Christ was God and a man, with all the physical characteristics of a man and all the spiritual characteristics of the Divine in the same person.

John the Baptist is a very important New Testament figure. In fact he is mentioned just under a 100 times. John was privileged to be able to announce the coming of the Messiah, as well as the more difficult task of convincing the people that Jesus was the Messiah. He called them to repent of their sins and to be baptized as a proof of repenting from those sins.

In John 1:15-18 the apostle John summarizes what John the Baptist said about the coming Messiah, Jesus. First, John tells us in verse 15 that Jesus is an eternal being. You see John the Baptist was actually born six months before Jesus (Luke 1:36); so in verse 15 John is referring to Jesus’ preexistence, not His birth date. Jesus existed before John the Baptist was ever conceived.

John recalled the message of John the Baptist concerning Christ’s greatness. Christ did not come to give a new law, but to proclaim, and by his sacrificial death, make possible God’s grace, which is God doing for humans what they cannot do for themselves. Though several Old Testament saints “saw” God (Isaiah 6:1–7), none had seen His essential nature. This was disclosed only in and through Jesus (John 14:8–9).¹¹

Jesus Christ represents the fullness of grace and truth (John 1:16–17). Grace is God’s favor and kindness bestowed on those who do not deserve it and cannot earn it. If God dealt with us only according to truth, according to the actual way we have lived our lives, none of us would be saved. But He deals with us on the basis of grace and truth. Jesus Christ, in His life, death, and resurrection, met all the demands of the Law; so now God is

¹¹ Willmington, H. L.: Willmington's Bible Handbook. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, 1997, S. 607

free to share the fullness of His grace with those who trust Christ.¹²

In John 1:17, John acknowledges that something newer and far better has replaced the Mosaic system. John was not suggesting there was no grace or truth under the Law. The Law contained both. The sacrifices that were offered in the Temple represented the grace of God. In Jesus Christ, however, grace and truth reach their fullness; and this fullness is available to you and me. According to Ephesians 2:8-9 we are saved by grace:

*8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,
9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (ESV)*

We also live by grace according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:10 ESV:

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

We depend on God's grace in everything we do and God's grace just keeps on giving and giving and giving. James 4:6 tells us:

6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (ESV)

Getting back to John 1, in verse 18 John says something that far too many people skim over. He says, "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." So in verse 18 John tells us that Jesus Christ reveals God to us. Let us read it from the Amplified Version to get the full impact.

No man has ever seen God at any time; the only unique Son, the only begotten God, Who is in the bosom [that is, in the intimate presence] of the Father, He has declared Him – He has revealed Him, brought Him out where He can be seen; He has interpreted Him and He has made Him known.

So then we ask, how does Jesus reveal God to us?

Colossians 1:15 ESV:

15 He (Christ)¹³ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

And Hebrews 1:3 tells us:

3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his

¹² Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 1:15.

¹³ Parentheses added.

nature. (ESV)

The word *Son* is used for the first time in John's Gospel as a title for Jesus Christ (John 1:18). The phrase "only-begotten" means "unique," the only one of its kind." Jesus is called "**the Son of God**" at least nine times in John's Gospel.¹⁴

John the Baptist is one of six persons named in the Gospel of John who gave witness that Jesus is God. The others are Nathanael (John 1:49), Peter (John 6:69), the blind man who was healed (John 9:35–38), Martha (John 11:27), and Thomas (John 20:28). If you add our Lord Himself (John 5:25; 10:36), then you have seven witnesses. The circle of witnesses to the powerful work of God is exclusive. Not everyone is able to bear witness, but only those who have seen and believed God's glory, and witness through Jesus.¹⁵

¹⁴ John 1:34, 49; 3:18; 5:25; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 19:7; 20:31.

¹⁵ Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 1:15.