

# Intro to the Gospel According to John

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[0:00] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all. Please take your copy of God's Word and join me in the Gospel according to John. Let's see.

I am not perfect, and I cannot plead my perfection before God, but must plead the perfection of Christ. What a good reminder this morning as we sang a song called, It Was Finished Upon That Cross.

Today we're going to have an introduction to the Gospel according to John. It's been some time since I have preached, and I'm very grateful to be back at it today.

So this marks the beginning of a verse-by-verse exposition of this Gospel. So the verse-by-verse part of that will begin next week.

And I just want to say a brief word about verse-by-verse exposition. Well, the idea of an exposition or to exposit a text means that you bring out the completion of it.

[1:30] You're not neglecting any part of that text. And we find as a general habit that verse-by-verse exposition is an important task to take up.

That's not to say that it's more holy than any other kind of preaching, but it's just a good habit. Sometimes the word exposition and the word exegesis is used interchangeably, and this just shouldn't be the case.

I was speaking to a pastor earlier this week who kept saying he was going to exegete something, and I think what he meant was exposit it. But if you're expositing it, you're also exegeting it to be clear.

So exegesis, that word comes from the Greek, and it simply means to come from the source, to come out of the source.

And it's put in opposition to eisegesis, which means to read things into the source. And so any good preaching, faithful preaching, God-exalting preaching is going to be exegesis.

[2:41] It's going to come out of the text. But not all preaching can be exposition because not all preaching can lay out the entirety of a given matter.

So like when we preach topically, it's very difficult. I think it can be done, but it's very difficult to exposit a topic because that's to say you'd have to say everything there is to say about that topic. That's difficult to do. Sometimes topical preaching is the most difficult because you have to figure out what not to say versus what should be said.

So for those reasons, we like verse by verse. It's a wonderful thing to have a text just laid before you and to say, okay, this is what God intends for his people to hear on this day.

That said, an introduction really can't be an exposition. I can't give you an entirety of John's gospel this morning.

[3:41] We're going to do that across some time, but it should be exegetical. It should still derive from the source the information.

So we're not going to rush our study of this gospel. It's looking like, as I'm working through an outline, it's going to be something like 70 or so sermons.

So we'll spend the next year, year and a half in this text. It surely shouldn't be the only Bible that you're getting. You need to be reading the Bible more broadly, but I really, really hope that us drilling down, expositing this text will serve you.

And because we're about to set ourselves on this journey, we need to do some introductory work. It's helpful for us to kind of prerequisite the study of John's gospel.

So today we're going to consider the book's authorship, its context, its purpose, and its major themes.

[4:47] And my hope for today is that you get excited about the time our church will spend together in this portion of God's word. So first, let's talk about the authorship.

Now you have already heard me say that this book is titled The Gospel According to John. Your Bible likely has that exact title or some variation of it.

However, the book never names John as its author. That said, and while there is some minor disagreement about its authorship, the widely accepted understanding is that the apostle John wrote it.

I don't really think we need to have any arguments about it, but I do want to give you some evidences that John did in fact write this gospel account. The testimony of the early church bears witness to what I just don't mind stating as a fact.

John wrote this gospel. Irenaeus was the first person to name John as its author in his work against heresies written in the 2nd century.

[5:54] Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John. So just a generation of discipleship removed.

Also, Theophilus of Antioch, who lived at the same time, wrote, quote, quote, The holy writings teach us, and all the inspired men, one of whom, John, says, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, end quote.

I could go on. There's lots of early church evidence that they consider John its author, but I will spare you more historical names that I likely can't pronounce and further quotations.

The point is, the early church understood this book to be authored by John, so we have them as a strong external testimony. We also have some internal testimony, though not definitive, that gives strong evidence of John's authorship.

So let me show you four. I told you to take out your Bibles to John. You may appreciate flipping around to some of these and seeing them. I'm going to move fairly quickly through these, because this is not the ultimate point of this morning.

[7:08] Firstly, though, the author was a Jew, and we get this evidence because he was familiar with Jewish traditions and opinions about a number of matters, including the Messiah.

We see this in chapter 1, verse 21, chapter 6, verse 14 through 15, chapter 7, verse 26 through 27, etc. The importance of religious training, the relationship of suffering to personal sin, avoiding ceremonial defilement, wedding and burial customs, the need to be purified before celebrating Passover, and more.

There's a lot of evidence that he was very familiar with Jewish traditions and opinions about a bunch of different matters. Secondly, we can derive from the text that the author was a Palestinian Jew.

His knowledge of local places could only be known by someone who had lived in Palestine. He gives specific distances from one place to another as an example.

They didn't have maps to reference or some device to look it up on. He would have had to travel those distances. A simple example is he distinguished between the Bethany beyond the Jordan, in chapter 1, verse 28, and the Bethany on the outskirts of Jerusalem, chapter 11, and verse 1.

[8:35] So his familiarity with the geography speaks to the fact that he was a Palestinian Jew, lived in that region. Thirdly, the author was an eyewitness.

He includes specific details that aren't essential to the stories that he tells, which are not found in the other three gospel accounts. So he's not pulling these details from someplace else.

He must have himself witnessed these things. Details like the name of Judas Iscariot's father, you can see in chapter 6 and verse 71, as well as other details.

And then fourthly, the author is not mentioned. Let me explain. The other three gospel accounts mention the apostle John.

John was one of the three apostles who were closest to Jesus, often called his inner circle. It was John, his brother James, and Peter that were, for example, invited to witness Jesus' transfiguration.

[9:41] The other three gospels mention him by name. This one does not. The gospel before us does mention the apostle whom Jesus loved.

Chapter 13, verse 23. Chapter 19, verse 26. Chapter 21, and verse 20. Which strongly implies that John is referring to himself.

And what a wonderful way to refer to yourself. So John was a Jewish, a Palestinian Jew, an eyewitness, and he's not mentioned in the text.

All of this evidence, taken together, gives us plenty to be confident in this book's authorship. But I encourage you to shut down anybody who wants to argue with you otherwise. It is the gospel according to John.

Second, and very briefly, John's context. This book was written in the last part of the first century, most likely between 80 and 90 A.D.

[10:50] Once again, there's some controversy about this dating. Typically meant to erode confidence in this gospel, and I would be really glad to speak with you further about the dating if you'd like to hear it.

I think most people don't, so I'm not going to at this moment. But there's some really good reason to believe that it was written between 80 and 90 A.D. Church tradition holds that John was in Ephesus at the time of its writing.

Text doesn't give us any clue to that, but the church tradition says that that's where he was located in the later years of his life. Third, what was the purpose for the writing of John's gospel account? Now, we, of course, believe that the scripture is inspired. So John is being led to write this by the Spirit of God who dwelt within him, but he's got something in mind as he sits down to write this particular gospel account.

John is unique among the gospels. The other three are often called the synoptics or the synoptic gospels.

[12:00] This word comes from a Greek word which means to see together, and often we just think of that word as meaning similar. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all have distinct emphases and themes, but they follow the same general outline of events and have similar content, structure, and perspective.

So in that way, they kind of sit together, and John sits a little oddly, uniquely, off to itself. More than 90% of John's gospel is not found in the synoptics.

John speaks of Christ's preexistence and creative power, chapter 1, verse 1 through 3. Jesus' early ministry in Judea and Samaria, chapters 2 and 3.

His dialogue with Nicodemus, chapter 3, verse 1 through 21. His bread of life teaching, chapter 6, verse 22 through 71. His discourse about being the good shepherd, chapter 10, verse 1 through 39. The washing of the disciples' feet, chapter 13, verse 1 through 15. The upper room discourse and the high priestly prayer, chapters 13 through 17, and more.

[13:20] We find all of this in John and not in the synoptic gospels. It explores the tragedy of the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

And then John, with great clarity, lets us know exactly why he wrote it. And I just love that he does this for our sake.

John, chapter 20, verse 30 and 31. He writes this, Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written 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, you may have life in his name.

So there it is. The purpose of the writing of this gospel account. Now it could be argued, of course, that this is the purpose of the writing of the entirety of the Bible.

[14:20] But John doesn't leave us guessing at all why he is penning this letter. John's focus is on proclamation, not on instruction.

He desires for his readers to behold Christ, to see Christ, to understand his person and his work, that by believing in him, we might have life.

Calvin said this gospel is the key to understanding the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christ. Now we are going to return to chapter 20, verse 31, time and time again as we study this book.

Written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the one, the Messiah, the one who has come to redeem his people, to deliver them from sin and death and to give him life.

The Son of God, that by believing you may have life in his name. The purpose is abundantly clear. But we shouldn't, and won't, neglect the major themes that serve the purpose of John's gospel account.

[15:38] You may hear that and you may think, well, I've already believed in the person and work of Jesus Christ, right? I've already been granted this life that John speaks about. Do I have any need to read this and to hear it preached over so much time?

I will say to you, yes, yes, you most certainly do. There are undergirding themes that are going to be of great help to us in thinking about our salvation.

So, fourth, let's consider five major themes of the book of John. First major theme is the deity of Christ.

The opening words in the beginning was the word. John chapter 1 and verse 1. Echoes Genesis chapter 1 and verse 1, declaring Christ as the eternal God.

Next week, we're going to celebrate Easter, and we're not going to stop just to talk about the resurrection. We're going to get right into the very beginning of John chapter 1, right?

[16:47] The resurrection affirms everything that Jesus said about himself, namely, most importantly, his deity. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

Jesus is explicitly called God in the Gospel of John. He calls himself this. John chapter 10, verse 30, is an example. I and the Father are one.

We see it in chapter 8, verse 58, and chapter 20, verse 28. Jesus makes seven I am statements that reveal his divine nature.

Jesus calls himself the bread of life. I am the bread of life. Chapter 6, verse 35, and verse 48, and verse 51. Jesus says, I am the light of the world.

Chapter 8, and verse 12. He says, I am the door. Chapter 10, verse 7, and verse 9. He says, I am the good shepherd.

[17:59] Chapter 10, verse 11, and verse 14. He says, I am the resurrection and the life. Chapter 11, verse 25.

He says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. Chapter 14, verse 6. And he says, I am the vine. Chapter 15, verse 1 through 5.

He's got a lot to say, right? And this is why this is not exposition because I want to develop all of those thoughts and we will when we get to those verses.

So it sets out for us a major theme of the deity of Christ. Second major theme, the sovereign work of God in salvation.

The sovereign work of God in salvation. We cannot save ourselves. It must be known that your sin makes you utterly incapable of saving yourself.

[19:02] Right? You have nothing to plead before God except for the saving work of God on your behalf. So John makes a case for monergistic salvation.

God coming and saving a people. Let me show you a couple examples. John chapter 1 and verse 13. John says that men, people who believe in Christ are born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God.

People who belong to God are born of God. John chapter 6 verse 37. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

Draws him. And this word draws is used in extra-biblical language to talk about the drawing of water out of the well. Water is brought forcefully up out of a well.

Chapter 10 verse 26 through 29 says, But you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

[20:14] I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's

hand. Praise God that God saves because we would not save ourselves. We find ourselves this morning in Christ because of God's sovereign work on our behalf.

John chapter 15 and verse 16. There Jesus says, You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.

We sing a song called My Lord. And so I get one of my and every time we sing it I just expect somebody to come up to me upset about that song and so I get one of my ribbon markers and I put it in John chapter 15 verse 16 and to date nobody's been upset at me about that song.

I think that's a wonderful thing. It's a profession of what Jesus says is true in John chapter 15 and verse 16 and all of this is taught so that God's people will be comforted.

[21:25] God is the one who saves. I'm so grateful this morning that it is not my supposed perfection that I plead before God because my supposed perfection is not perfection.

I've shown myself to be imperfect as my eyes opened this morning. I need to plead a true perfection. A righteousness that doesn't come from me. An alien righteousness as Luther called it. The righteousness that belongs to Christ. He also under this theme of the sovereign work of God and salvation argues for the necessity of regeneration.

That we need to be changed not in degree but in kind. We need to be changed from one type to another type. We see the record of a conversation between Jesus and a man named Nicodemus in John chapter 3.

There we read this man came to Jesus by night and said to him Rabbi we know that you are a teacher come from God for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him. Jesus answered him truly truly I say to you unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

[22:41] Nicodemus said to him how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? He is basically saying what are you talking about to be born again?

Jesus answered truly truly I say to you unless one is born of water and the spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. So we are born once that natural way that biological way and we must be born again that supernatural way of the spirit to be accepted into the kingdom of God.

So that first major theme again is the deity of Christ, the second the sovereign work of God in salvation. Thirdly the glory of Christ revealed in signs or you could replace that word with miracles. John's gospel records seven miracles that demonstrate Christ's divine power. John chapter two Jesus turns water into wine.

[23:51] In John chapter four in a declaration of Christ's authority over life he heals the official's son. In John chapter five in declaring a sovereignty over the Sabbath he heals the lame man.

John chapter six Jesus feeds the five thousand. John chapter six also the walking on water. John chapter nine he heals a blind man and he declares his power over death in chapter 11 by raising Lazarus from the dead.

So we see the glory of Christ and these miracles recorded for us. fourthly the major theme that's developed is the cross and the lamb of God.

John alone records John the Baptist's declaration quote behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John chapter one and verse twenty nine.

John makes it clear that the cross is not a plan gone wrong but the preordained mission of Christ. Jesus says in John 10 and verse 18 no one takes my life from me but I lay it down of my own accord.

[25:16] I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my father. See also John chapter 12 and verse 27.

Further John's gospel emphasizes the Passover connection. That Passover meal just before God's people were delivered from Egypt. The Exodus account that they huddled in their homes at night and they killed a lamb and they spread its blood over their doorposts so that the angel of death would pass over their homes.

Jesus is the fulfillment of that type. He's the true Passover lamb. His blood takes away the death that is owed us.

John chapter 19 and verse 36. So we see this developing major theme of the cross and the lamb of God. And the fifth major theme that we see is the triune God at work.

John's gospel gives profound insight into the trinity. We see the father sending the son. John chapter 3 and verse 16.

[26:32] For God so loved the world that he gave his only son. The Lord believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. We see the son accomplishing the work of three quarters of that song and Alex led us in the rest of it.

There in John chapter 19 verse 30 Jesus says it is finished and he bowed his head and he gave up his spirit. He accomplished the redemptive work on behalf of the people that the father sent him for. And we see the spirit applying that salvation. John chapter 14 verse 16 and 17 Jesus says and I will ask the father and he will give you another helper to be with you forever even the spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him.

You know him for he dwells with you and will be in you. The father the son and the spirit doing this great work on behalf of his people.

Additionally the high priestly prayer John chapter 17 shows trinitarian unity in the work of redemption. So those are the five major themes that are serving that great purpose that we believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God that we would believe in him have the salvation of our souls and life forevermore the deity of Christ the sovereign work of God and salvation the glory of Christ revealed in miracles the cross and the lamb of God and the triune God at work.

[28:20] So I think we've hinted around that it a bit but why is the study of John a timely study for our church? People ask that question sometimes.

Are your elders decided together we're going to preach through the gospel of John at a bunch of Bible book names on a board?

We stop and we think we consider together what might be good for us to spend time studying together and there's four reasons that I want to share with you.

I hope there are more. I hope there are other ways that our study of this is helpful to you but four reasons that I could think of that this would be good for us to study together and then we'll close our time together.

Number one it is always always good to know more of Christ and we know him by beholding him in the word.

[29:21] You will not ever get bored studying the scripture. Read it and read it and read it by the power of the spirit he's going to continue to unfold for you in these pages is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In an age where people form Christ they imagine a Christ to suit their own desires we need to be laser focused on who Jesus really is.

As he's revealed in the text as he's revealed himself we need the actual Jesus clear in our minds to help us discern the false.

Christ we will never fail if we hold up to one another in scripture Christ it's always good to know more of Jesus second reason I think it's helpful for us to study John to nudge at a growth in reverence the high view of Christ in John should lead us to a high view of gathered worship of this Christ Sundays beloved are serious days and I don't mean that they are an unjoyful day Sunday should be full of joy but I do mean that they are weighty days we are invited to come together as an outpost of God's people to sing praises to his name to open up his word and to learn from it to speak truth to one another and I think that if we give serious consideration to who we gather to worship we may find ourselves approaching this day more importantly now at the fear of indicting anybody this morning

I'm not going to give you examples but if you want some come ask me I'll be happy to share with you some ways I think we could grow in our reverence as a church thirdly I think a study of John's gospel will be good it'll serve our church to remind us of God's sovereignty and anchor our souls for difficult days once again I think this is a thing we need to be reminded of constantly we need to see God held up at the center of the story of the Bible and therefore at the center of ours controlling the minutia of every single moment day because we're going to experience difficult days and we need to remember who is ultimately in control of all things fourthly good for us to study John's gospel account to spur on bold gospel proclamation

[32:17] God is saving a people for his praise and he's using his people to accomplish that work we gather together as a church in order that we might be sent in order that we might go and in our going we're meant to go gather people back together for the praise of Christ we're going to note

Jesus saying things in this gospel account like in John chapter 12 verse 49 I have not spoken on my own authority but the father who sent me has himself given me a commandment what to say and what to speak we see Jesus just going in his going about right he's saying the things that the father tells him to say in other places we'll see him doing the things that the father tells him to do and then he says this in John chapter 20 verse 21 peace be with you as the father has sent me even so

I am sending you right that we would just go about in our going right believing in the sovereign God that saves his people and we would make bold gospel proclamation as we do we'll talk a lot about that in this coming year beloved the Lord is blessing our church with children I am so so grateful for this we had two born just this past week and they and their families are in our prayers if I'm correct I think I am we still have nine women currently pregnant right now 130 children 85 of those children are four and under and all of those numbers are plus or minus but I think I'm pretty accurate they're precious!

souls! we are grateful for each and every one of them if you are a parent the evangelizing and discipling of your children is front line work and we do that together like we partner in that effort together with these kids but let us not forget our broader command to go we have neighbors and co-workers and classmates that need the gospel of Jesus Christ praise God for our biological growth don't hear me for a minute downplaying biological growth we are so happy for it but let us also not lose sight of the wonderful potential of conversion growth we want to see dead people come to life and be part of our church I hope that our time together this morning this brief bit of moment we've had has given you some bearing for our intentions and pray for me as

I prepare these sermons other men will also come and preach from this book as well pray that we might rightly behold Christ and grow into his likeness in ever increasing ways together let's pray to that end