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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

44. THE BOOK OF JOHN

Reading: John 1:1-14

An elderly English socialite, the widow of the late ambassador to France attended the one hundredth birthday party of Robert Mayer at the Festival Hall in London. Robert Mayer was a man given to help those who were less fortunate than himself. During this reception this lady who was afflicted with failing eyesight chatted with another woman for several minutes before she suddenly realized that she was talking to Queen Elizabeth the Second. Realizing her mistake the woman blushed, curtsied and stammered “ *Ma’am oh ma’am I am sorry, I did not recognise you without your crown.*” The Queen smiled sweetly and said, “ *This is Sir. Robert’s evening, so I decided to leave it behind.*” The gospel of John is the story of Jesus Christ, the Lord of creation, the One who was with God in the beginning and who truly is God yet chose to leave His crown behind. And because the Lord Jesus came to earth without His crown people did not recognise Him.

Now the moment we pick up John’s gospel we are aware that it is different from the others. The first three gospel’s Matthew, Mark and Luke are usually called the synoptic gospels, from a Greek word that means “ *to see together,*” or to “ *with the same vision,*” or “ *with the same eyes.*”

Matthew, Mark and Luke all view the life of Christ from a similar way each with his own emphasis.

The Gospel of Matthew: was written to the nation of *Israel*. It presents *Christ as the King and is Lion-like*.
(Ezekiel 1:10)

The Gospel of Mark: was directed to the *Roman*. It presents *Christ as the Servant and is Ox-like*.

The Gospel of Luke: was written to the *Greeks*. It presents *Christ as the Perfect Man and is Man-like*.

The Gospel of John: was written to *Believers*. It presents *Christ as the Mighty God and is Eagle-like*.

Unlike the other gospel writers, John was not concerned so much about ***the where and the when of Christ’s birth,*** as he was the ***who and the why of Christ’s birth.*** John assumed the reality of the manger, but he wanted us to understand the revelation of the manger. Now when you compare John to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, you will discover quickly that John was not the *broadest* writer, but he was definitely the *deepest*. You read nothing in John's gospel about the birth of Christ. You do not read about the manger, the angels, the shepherds, or Bethlehem. John does not talk about the baptism of Christ, the temptation of Jesus. You read nothing about the garden of Gethsemane.

Not one of the thirty-nine parables that the Lord Jesus told are found in John’s gospel. *John was not a wordy writer, but he was definitely a weighty one.* You see, when you look at the first three gospels, you see ***Jesus Christ coming to earth from an earthly perspective,*** but when

you look at John's gospel you see *Jesus Christ coming to earth from a heavenly perspective*. Isaiah says, “ *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.*” (Is 9:6) Well, Matthew, Mark and Luke present *a child is born* but John presents *a son is given*. Now notice for a moment,

1. The Author of this Book:

The early church father Irenaeus (130-220 A.D.) was a disciple of Polycarp (70-160 A.D.) who was a disciple of John and he testified on Polycarp's authority that John wrote the gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia Minor when he was advanced in age. Now John's name is absent from this gospel but he does talk about the disciple “ *whom Jesus loved.*” (13:23 19:26 20:2 21:7,20) If four people take a trip together and each carries a camera the group shots each person takes will naturally not include them. In fact, someone else could probably guess who took the picture by which member of the group was absent. John's gospel works the same way. John's absence by name shouts his presence. Now who was John ? Well,

He was a Fisherman: His father was called Zededei (Mk 1:19-20) his mother is thought to have been Salome (Matt 27:55-56 Mk 16:1) and his brother was called James (Matt 4:21-22) Also of interest is the possibility that John was a cousin of Jesus. (19:25) His early life was spent in Galilee but he gave up his fishing trade to follow the Master.

He was an Apostle: he was one of the twelve chosen by our Lord Jesus Christ. (LK 6:12-16) John was also part of,

An Inner Circle: who along with James and Peter were especially close to the Saviour.(Matt 17:1-3) John was,

The Last Apostle: His brother was James was dead. Peter the leading apostle to the Jews was dead. Paul the apostle to the Gentile world was dead. All the apostles were dead, except one. There in Ephesus lived a lonely old man, the great apostle to the church, his name was John which means “ *Jehovah is gracious.*” Of course John was,

The Author of this Book: possibly One of the last books to be written (80-90 A D.) Besides the gospel John also authored 1, 2 and 3 John and the Book of Revelation. (Rev 1:1) In these five books we find that,

*The Gospel emphasis Salvation:
The Epistles emphasis Sanctification:
The Revelation emphasis Glorification:*

*The Gospel is Past History:
The Epistles are Present Experience:
The Revelation is Prospective Hope:*

*In the Gospel Christ died for us:
In the Epistles Christ lives in us:
In the Revelation Christ is coming for us:*

2. The Aim of this Book:

It is characteristic of John in his writings to put a key at the front or back door of the book, which will unlock its meaning. (Rev 1:19 1 Jn 5:13) In this gospel John puts the key at the back door. Look at (20:30-31) Can you see that John's purpose is twofold ? It is Evangelistic: " *that ye might believe*," the word " *believe*," is used almost a hundred times in this gospel, emphasizing the importance of personal commitment to Christ. But look at John's other purpose. It is Apologetic: that means " *to explain and defend the truth*." For John wrote to convince his readers of Christ's true identity as the Son of God. You see, John organized his whole gospel around seven or eight " *signs*," or proofs that reinforce the Saviour's identity leading to faith.

3. The Arrangement of this Book:

For John arranges this book around the number seven. There are seven witnesses to Christ's deity: John the Baptist (1:34) Nathanael: (1:49) Peter: (6:69) Martha: (11:27) Thomas: (20:28) John: (20:31) and Christ Himself: (10:36) In Jewish law two or three witnesses would have been enough to establish the truth but here John includes the perfect number of people to testify that Jesus Christ is really the Son of the living God. There are seven miracles before the resurrection, testifying to His absolute deity. (Ch's 2,4,5,6, 9, 11) There are also seven " I am," sayings testifying to the Lord's deity. (Ch, 6,8,10, 11, 14, and 15) You see, John's whole purpose is to declare that Jesus Christ is God manifested in flesh. Let's see how he does it. John's gospel begins with a prologue (1:1-18) and ends with an

epilogue. Dr. Alan Cairns says, *The entire doctrine of the Gospel is summarized in the prologue. This is John's gospel in embryo. Its great theme is " the Word," the Logos the essential self-expression of deity.*

(1) THE SON OF GOD: HIS PERSON Ch's 1-4

John begins his gospel with a verbal trumpet flourish. " *In the beginning was the Word*," (1:1) Now we know who John meant by the " *Word*," for (1:14) tells us, " *And the Word was made flesh*," John is saying that Jesus Christ is absolutely, unquestionably, sovereignly and eternally God in every sense of the word. Here we have,

(a) *The Incarnation of the Son of God: 1:1-18*

Logos is the Greek expression for " *Word*," and it's used of Christ because just as a word gives expression to an invisible thought, so the Lord Jesus gave expression to the invisible God. *A word is the visible expression of an invisible thought*. You can see what I am thinking by what I am saying. *Now Jesus Christ was the visible expression of the invisible God*. If I were to ask a variety of people the question " *who is Jesus Christ ?*" I think we would get many answers. Some would say He was a religious fanatic. Still others tell us that He was a fake. Others say He was criminal, a phantom, a political revolutionary. I mean there are many explanations about who the Lord Jesus was but I want to hear what God says about who He is. Several years ago Andrew Morton wrote a biography of Diana Princess of Wales. In his publicity tour for the

book he said his information was based on conversations he had with some of her closest friends. His book sold thousands of copies. After Lady Diana tragic death in a car accident in Paris, Andrew Morton's was re-released. *This time he revealed that the source of his information had not been intimate friends of Diana's but Diana herself.* He then produced hours of taped conversations with the princess as proof. And his book sold hundreds of thousands of copies. You see, it made an enormous difference to the reading public to discover that the book was not hearsay but what Diana had said about herself. Is this not what the gospel of John is all about ? *It's about what God says about His Son, its what Christ says about Himself.* Look at " *the Word,*" the Lord Jesus in these opening statements. Can you see,

1. His Eternality:

" *In the beginning,*" (1:1) In what beginning ? For there are several " *beginnings,*" mentioned in Scripture ? The first one is obvious. In (Gen 1:1) we are told about the beginning of creation. " *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*" In (Mk 1:1) we are told about another beginning. " *The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*" But the beginning mentioned in (1:1) clearly antedates all these beginnings. This beginning in (1:1) precedes the making of all things in (1:3) Now this earth of ours is old, how old we're not sure but " *The Word,*" was before all things. Did you notice the little word " *was,*" is used three times in the opening statement ? It conveys the idea of *continuous existence.* What John is saying is that in the beginning

always existed the Word. *That's the eternal pre-existence of Christ.* The Lord Jesus was not only **from** the beginning, but He was **in** the beginning. Now if He was **in** the beginning, then He Himself was **without** beginning, which is the negative way of saying that He was **eternal.** Do you recall that in His great High Priestly prayer He prays, " *And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me, with Thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.*" (Jn 17:5) " *In the beginning was the Word.*" (1:1)

Like God the Father, God the Son never had a beginning and will never have an ending. The Lord Jesus eternally existed in a time when there was no time, and now lives in a place where there is no time. ***Jesus Christ had His birth at Bethlehem but not His beginning.*** In other words, there was never a time when Jesus Christ was not God, and there was never a time when Christ was not. The Word did not have a beginning. The Word will never have an ending. The Word belongs to eternity. That is where we must begin when we think of the Lord Jesus. We must think of Christ as never having begun at all.

2. His Equality:

For Jesus Christ is equally God. " *In the beginning and the Word was with God.*" The Lord Jesus did not live with Mary Magdalene as some critics would have us believe, He lived with God. There's a beautiful verse in (Prov 8:22) which tells us of the happy fellowship which existed between the Word and God before ever the world was. " *Then I was by him, as one brought up with him,*

and I was daily his delight rejoicing always before him.”
“ And the Word was with God.” In other words, there is more than one person within the Godhead, and Jesus Christ was one of those persons. Mind you John does not say that He was **in** God but **with** God. Moreover John does not say “ *And the Word was with the Father,*” but “ *The Word was with God.*” The name God is common to the three persons of the Holy Trinity, whereas the “ *Father,*” is the special title of the first person only. Had John said, “ *The Word was with the Father,*” the Holy Spirit would have been excluded, but “ *with God,*” takes in the Word dwelling in eternal fellowship with both the Father and the Spirit.

My the very first sentence in the Bible expresses the idea of plurality in the Godhead. Do you recall it ? “ *In the beginning God (Elohim, a plural noun) created (a singular verb) the heaven and the earth.*” (Gen 1:1) You see, while God is One He exists as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Three persons, one God. But you say, “ *Did Jesus Christ really make Himself equal with God ?*” Well let me give you John’s reply in this very Gospel. “ *Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He had not only broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making himself equal with God.*” (5:18) Now listen, the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet they are not three Gods, but one God, three persons in one God. Do you understand that ? Of course you don’t. The wisest man that ever lived didn’t understand it but you accept it because the Bible teaches it. Now are you getting to grips with John’s theology ?

3. His Deity:

“ *And the Word was God.*” That is in His essence, in what He actually is. Now is this not what John’s gospel is all about ? To set forth the deity of the Lord Jesus.

4. His Creativity:

Look if you will at (1:3) “ *All things,*” (1:3) All things have their source in His creative glory. Christ did it all. What power, what genius. There is no room for evolution here. A little girl asked her mother, “ *How did the human race appear ?*” The mother answered, “ *In the beginning God made Adam and Eve, they had children and so was all mankind made.*” Two days later the girl asked her father the same question. The father answered, “ *Many years ago there were monkeys from which the human race evolved.*” The confused child returned to her mother and said, “ *Mum, how is it possible that you told me the human race was created by God, and Daddy said we came from monkeys ?*” The mother answered, “ *Dear, its very simple. I told you about my side of the family and Daddy told you about his.*” “ *All things were made by him.*” (1:3) He is the creator of the universe. And since He created everything there is nothing beyond His power to fix or mend or heal or restore. Is your heart broken ? Does your life need mending ? Who or what do you know that needs fixing ? The Lord Jesus is the Creator of it all. He knows how to make it work. Let Him take charge.

5. His Victory:

Do you recall that God's first creative act in (Gen Ch 1) was producing light ? You see, life comes from light. In John's gospel you find a conflict between light (God) and darkness (Satan) This is indicated in (1:5) which could be literally translated "*And the light shines (present tense) in the darkness and the darkness has not been able to put it out or lay hold of it.*"

6. His Glory:

For John says "*And we beheld his glory,*" (1:14) What does that mean ? Does it not mean His supreme excellency, His personal perfection's ? There are His Essential Glories: as for example His Omnipotence, there are His Moral Glories: as for example His meekness, there are His Official Glories: as for example His priesthood. Moses said, "*Show me, Thy glory.*" (Ex 33:18) John says, "*We beheld His glory.*" The word for "*beheld,*" is (theaomai) is the word from which we get our word "*theatre.*" As someone, would observe in a theatre. John says, we looked intently on all the acts and scenes of His life. We didn't hear about it, or read about it, it was a first-hand experience. "*We beheld His glory.*" What a revelation of the Word is this. Do you see,

7. His Humanity:

"*And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*" (1:14) How was the Word made flesh ? By the miracle of the Virgin Birth. (Is 7:14 Matt 1:18-25) The words "*was made,*" do not refer to the beginning of something new, they refer to something that already existed but that is

now made manifest in a different form. The birth of a baby marks the beginning of a new life, the creation of a new personality, but when Christ was born it was not the creation of a new personality, it was the coming into this world of a person who had existed from all eternity. The word "*dwelt,*" means "*to pitch one's tent.*" Now although Christ became flesh He did not cease to be God. God translated deity into humanity without losing anything of the deity or distorting anything in the humanity. *The Lord Jesus was at once both perfectly God and perfectly man.* He never ceased to be God and since that time He has never ceased to be Man. It was Dr. G. Scroggie who said if "*He had not been God He could not have saved us, and if He had not been Man He could not have sympathised with us.*"

Now will your "*turn your eyes on Jesus,*" this ? Now I deliberately spent this time on John's prologue for as Alan Cairns says "*the whole gospel is summarized here.*" (a)

(b) *The Presentation of the Son of God: 1:19-4:54*

For in this section we see the *testimony of John* (1:19-51) and the *triumphs of Jesus*. (2:1-4:54) You see, having introduced the Eternal Word made flesh, John gets right down to his theme, showing how John the Baptist faithfully witnessed to Christ both as Lord and Lamb. He showed how the disciples of the Baptist "*heard him speak and they followed Jesus.*" (1:37) He told how they recognised Him as Messiah, and how Nathanael confessed Him as "*Son of God,*" and "*King of*

Israel.” Isn’t interesting to notice that John the Baptist presented the Son of God as the Truth: the Revealer (1:15-28) he presented the Son of God as *the Way: the Reconciler*: (1:29-32) he presented the Son of God as *the Life: the Reservoir*, the Baptizer with the Holy Spirit. (1:33-34) Incidentally, are you pointing away from yourself to Christ ? Is your constant cry ?

**Happy if with my latest breath
I may but speak His name
Preach in life and cry in death
Behold, behold the Lamb**

(2) THE SON OF GOD: HIS POWER Ch’s 5-12

Now let’s not forget John’s purpose. He is writing this gospel under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to convince his readers of Christ’s true identity. Well, how does he do it ? He does it by revealing,

(a) The SIGNS of the Son of God:

Now look at (20:30) Do you see the word here that John uses for miracles ? He calls them “ *signs*.” A sign always points to something beyond itself and these signs point to who Christ was. Now out of the many miracles that Christ performed John selected seven to prove His deity. The eighth one in (Ch 21) was for the disciples alone. It’s interesting that John highlights miracles that no-one else could do. I mean look at these miracles.

Turning water into wine: (2:1-12) An unmistakable miracle.

Healing a nobleman’s son: (4:46-54) while miles away from the sick person without seeing or laying hands on him.

Healing a lame man at the pool of Bethesda: (5:1-17)

Feeding the five thousand: (6:1-14) a miracle which all four gospels include.

Walking on water and stilling a storm: (6:15-21)

Giving sight to the man blind from birth: (9:-41)

Raising Lazarus from the dead: (11:17-45)

John is saying that these are signs pointing to the deity of the Lord Jesus. They form a beautiful picture of salvation don’t they ? The first three signs show how salvation comes to the sinner.

Water into wine: *salvation is by the Word*

Healing the nobleman’s man son: *salvation is by faith*

Healing the paralytic: *salvation is by grace*.

The last four signs show the results of salvation in the believer.

Feeding the five thousand: *salvation brings satisfaction*

Stilling the storm: *salvation brings peace*

Healing the blind man: *salvation brings light*

Raising Lazarus: *salvation brings life*

Think of them again, for do they not show us *the areas of life in which we need His power* ? The turning of water into wine at the marriage at Cana reminds us that we need Christ in the home. In a day when every other marriage is

breaking up, do we not need the Lord in our marriages ? Like the nobleman we need Christ's touch on our children. Do we not need to pray to that end ? Like the man at the pool we need Christ's power in times of great weakness. We also need spiritual sustenance and thank God for Him who is the "*bread of life*." There will be times when we will be caught in the storms of life and we will need One who can make the storm a calm. We will need Him to illumine us in times of darkness and show us His resurrection power in times of death and bereavement. Of course every miracle or "*sign*," was testifying to the deity of our wonderful Lord. (a) But then there were,

(b) *The SAYINGS OF THE SON OF GOD:*

Twenty three times in this gospel Christ uses that mighty statement in the book of Exodus when God said to Moses, "*I am that I am*." (Ex 3:14) It's a declaration of absolute deity. "*I am the bread of life*," (6:35) "*I am the light of the world*," (8:12) "*I am the door of the sheep*," (10:7) "*I am the good shepherd*," (10:11) "*I am the resurrection and the life*," (11:25) "*I am the way, the truth and the life*," (14:6) "*I am the true vine*." (15:1) My as you come to read this gospel you come to realize that Christ is the very Son of God and that omnipotence belongs to Him. (1) (2)

**(3) THE SON OF GOD: HIS PROVISION
Ch's 13-17**

John says He came "*unto His own and His own*

(*people*) *received Him not*." (1:12) Now He departs from His public ministry to the nation and gathers privately with "*His own*," the disciples. Here we see them,

(a) *IN THE UPPER ROOM 13:1-14:31*

As the Saviour gives them instruction about *Service* (13:1-20) about *Son-ship* (13:21-14:14) and about the *Holy Spirit*. (14:15-16:33) You see, what the Lord was doing was this, He was preparing them for what lay ahead. Now Christ has much to say about the Holy Spirit in these chapters but notice what He calls Him in (14:16) "*the Comforter*," literally means "*the One standing alongside to help you*." The word "*another*," means "*another of the same kind*," for the Spirit is God just as Christ is God. You see, the Spirit living within the disciples would take the place of the Saviour living beside the disciples. For Christ says "*He dwelleth within you and shall be in you*." (14:17) My how are we going to witness effectively without the ministry of the Holy Spirit ? How are we going to be guided continually without the ministry of the Holy Spirit ? How are we going to be revived spiritually without the ministry of the Holy Spirit ? (a)

(b) *ON THE GETHSEMANE ROAD: 15:1-17:26*

Its interesting that John's purpose was not to describe the agony in the garden. Instead he revealed some of the Lord's conversation on the way to Gethsemane, **how He talked to them about the Father**, revealed Himself as

the true Vine, added more information about the Holy Spirit and warned them of the severe ordeal of the next few hours and days. And **how he talked to the Father about them** in what has been called “ *The Holy of Holies in John’s Gospel.*” Here Christ prays that the Son might be glorified: (17:1-5) the apostles might be sanctified (17:6-19) and that the church might be unified. (17:20-26) Is this not a picture of Christ’s present ministry in heaven for us ? Do you want to know what the Lord Jesus is praying for you ? Well, have a read at (Ch 17) He is praying that your soul might prosper. Christ left the place of prayer for His meeting with His enemies for the last section of this gospel deals with,

(4) THE SON OF GOD: HIS PASSION Ch’s 18-21

There is,

(a) The Aspect of Condemnation: Ch 18

As we see the *Arrest*: (18:1-14) the *Denial*: (18:15-27) the *Trial*: (18:28-40) “ *Ye have a custom,*” said Pilate. How sad that Pilate knew the religious customs but did not know Christ. How many folk will be in hell because they observe religious holidays and customs but they do not know Christ ?

(b) The Aspect of Crucifixion: Ch 19

John alone of the gospel authors includes the cry from the cross, “ *It is finished.*” (19:30) It means “ *Paid in full.*” “ *Lifted up was He to die,*”

(c) The Aspect of Conquest: Ch 20

As the Lord arose from the dead and appeared to Peter, a challenge to the *mind*, He appeared to Mary a challenge to the *heart* and He appeared to Thomas a challenge to the *will*.

(d) The Aspect of Commission Ch 21

For do you see how this “ *spiritual gospel,*” ends ? It ends with a *Love for Him*: “ *lovest thou me more than these ?*” (21:15) Do you honestly love Him ? It ends with a *Labour from Him*. “ *Feed my sheep.*” (21:17) It ends with a *Longing after Him*: “ *Follow thou me.*” (19:22) Until when ? Do you see (21:22) “ *Till I come.*” Now do you recall John’s purpose in this gospel ? “ *But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*” (20:31) How can you stand in the presence of this divine mystery and not feel your heart drawn out to Him ? My when I look around me today and see the changing world scene, see nation rising against nation, men’s hearts failing them for fear. It makes me want to draw closer to my Saviour and serve Him more. **When I consider The Glory of Christ, I want to resolve until His Omnipotence is overcome I will worship Him, Until His Almightyness is abolished, I will adore Him. Until His Kingdom Crumbles I will serve Him, Until His Superiority is Superseded I will extol Him, Until His Dominion diminishes I will love Him, Until His Faithfulness Fails I will follow Him. Will you ?**

