

## The Book of John: *An Overview*

Good evening!

Tonight, we're starting a new series for our Midweek service on the Book of John.

The series will run for 16 weeks, and will take us through the highlights of John's Gospel. It will feature at least six different speakers.

We're excited about taking this journey with you!

To start the series off, this message will be an overview of John's Gospel, some history to help give us some context to the series and our study of John.

How many know that proper context is crucial in understanding Scripture? In fact, proper context is crucial in understanding anything!

A former archbishop of Canterbury came to the U.S. to visit New York City. A newspaper reporter asked him, "*Will you be visiting any of our nightclubs while you are here in New York?*" The archbishop, trying to be funny, replied facetiously, "*Are there any night clubs in New York?*" The next day the newspaper headline read: Archbishop's first question on arriving in New York: 'Are there any night clubs here?'

How easy it is to misquote or misunderstand something without a proper context!

Tonight I want to do my best to put this Gospel account into a general context which will, hopefully, help us better understand the what, and the why John says what he says in his book.

So let's get started.

To do that, to better focus on the Gospel of John, we're going to need to first, widen our focus a bit and see how John fits with the other Gospel accounts.

We all know the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Gospel means good news, and these four books are indeed the good news about Jesus Christ! They are the biographical, and historical records of the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

The first three, Matthew, Mark and Luke, are what are considered the synoptic Gospels. That is they were written around the same time, and include many of the same accounts.

One of the really cool facts about the Gospel accounts, is they are basically eyewitness testimonies of what Jesus said and did. That is, they were either written by people who were with Jesus during His public ministry, His death, resurrection and ascension. That's the case of Matthew and John. Or, they were written by people who were writing down the eyewitness testimony of the people who were with Jesus, as is the case of Mark and Luke. Luke likely getting his history from the apostles Peter and Matthew, while Mark got his primarily from hanging out with Peter. In fact, many theologians consider Mark, whose name is John Mark, and was a cousin of Barnabus, was actually writing The Gospel according to Peter.

Compare that to other ancient historical biographies. We know the biography of Alexander the Great wasn't written until 500 years after his death. A lot can happen to oral histories in 500 years!

Things that are either added or lost that can cast doubt on the veracity of the events described.

But God made sure that the eyewitnesses were the ones who either wrote or dictated the written history and biography of Jesus!

The synoptic Gospels were all written relatively close to each other, between about 55 AD and 68 AD, which is about 20 to 30 years after Jesus time on earth.

The folks who are the experts on this sort of stuff, believe Mark was the first Gospel account written, with Matthew and Luke being built on the chassis of Mark.

As the generation that witnessed the life and death and resurrection of Jesus began aging out and dying off, for the gospel to continue to be spread, it was imperative that the account of Jesus' life was written down. And so it was.

In a nutshell, Mark was written primarily for a Roman audience, presenting Jesus as the authoritative, miracle working Son of God. Matthew was written primarily to a Jewish audience and presented Jesus as the long awaited Jewish Messiah. Luke was written to the rest of the Gentile world and emphasized a Jesus who was not only the Savior of all people, but a divine friend of sinners, who came to seek and save the lost.

What about the Gospel of John?

According to historians and theologians, John didn't write his Gospel account until sometime between 84 and 95 AD, or, roughly 20-30 years after the synoptic Gospels were written. Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Romans by then, and the church was spreading quickly throughout the world, despite some pretty tough persecution.

But as people began to join the church, they did what a lot of us do when we join a church, they brought with them their baggage their pagan and heretical beliefs and traditions!

Amongst that baggage was a particular heresy that was moving through the new church at that time, Gnosticism. Very basically, Gnosticism was the belief that salvation came by accessing a secret knowledge. And that Jesus was not a man, but a wholly spiritual being, because all material things were wholly evil.

Combine that with others coming into the church who believed Jesus was just a man, and was not God and you can begin to understand what spurred John to write his Gospel account.

We don't have to guess what John's purpose was in writing his Gospel, he tells us specifically in John 20, verses 30 and 31. Let's look at that.

**John 20:30-31** where John says, <sup>30</sup> *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;* <sup>31</sup> *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.*

John's purpose in writing his Gospel account was to emphasize the deity of Jesus, and thus dispel the heresy that Jesus was not God.

And John goes hard at that, right from the start of his book.

Look at **John 1:1-5**, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* <sup>2</sup> *He was in the beginning with God.* <sup>3</sup> *All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.* <sup>4</sup> *In him was life, and the life was the light of men.* <sup>5</sup> *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

John is strong in his identification of Jesus as God. Notice the words he begins his Gospel account with: In the beginning.

Where have we heard that before? Those are the words that begin the book of Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament! And their use here is most certainly no accident!

In making the case for Jesus' deity, John goes back to the creation of the world. In the beginning, not at the beginning, or, right after the beginning! In the beginning! John puts Jesus front and center and playing a crucial role in creation, existing before creation!

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God! Jesus was with God the Father during creation. This is proximity language! This is relationship language! The Word was with God the Father!

And just in case you missed the significance of that, John immediately follows with the definitive declaration: and the Word was God! And not as in "*was, but is not anymore*", but as in, "*was always*". The Word was always God, there was never a time the Word was not God.

People in the first century, were much like people now, they hear about Jesus and can see Him as being a man, a human being, but whole God thing, that comes a little harder to people.

We hear Son of God and we think sons are created. Jesus was not created! John uses the powerful language he does, to destroy that heresy.

In fact, so did Jesus! Jesus, in His own words from **John 3:16** says,  
<sup>16</sup> *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

Notice the phrase there; “begotten Son”. Begotten, that’s the key!

C.S. Lewis says this:

“When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself. A man begets human babies, a beaver begets little beavers... But when you make, you make something of a different kind from yourself. A bird makes a nest, a beaver builds a dam. . .”

In other words, God created man. And even though we’re created in God’s image, we’re not gods. But God beget Jesus. Jesus is of the same kind as God, Jesus is God. Like God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, Jesus is God, Jesus is eternal, and John is very clear in his Gospel about that fact.

Another thing important to note in the first three verses of John... is the clear implication of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

The phrase in verse one, *the Word was with God*, and then stated again in verse two, *He was in the beginning with God*, stresses the intimate relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

The apostle Paul explains this in even more detail, in his letter to the Colossian church. Listen to **Colossians 1:15** through **20**:

<sup>15</sup> *He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.* <sup>16</sup> *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*

*17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.*

*19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

Do you hear that? By Him, in Him, through Him, to Him... this all speaks of the very close, very intertwined, very intimate, very intentional relationship between God the Father and God the Son. And not only that, but God's intention to extend that very close, very intimate, very intentional relationship to us, through God the Son.

The invisible God becomes visible to mankind in the person of Jesus. And the intent of that visibility is to make possible the redemption of mankind... and to promote the restoration of mankind to a genuine relationship with God the Father, made possible through the work and the person of God the Son – Jesus Christ!

None of God's plans for the redemption and restoration of mankind are possible without Jesus Christ being fully God and fully man! And that's why John is so adamant in portraying Jesus that way!

John knew that our understanding of the deity of Jesus is crucial to our correctly understanding the purpose of Jesus' life here on earth.

God created us to be in relationship with Him! God's desire is for us to enjoy a real live, genuine, eternal relationship with Him! God in His infinite wisdom knew the only way that would be possible, was for God to create mankind with the freedom to choose to be with Him - or to reject Him, because real love always involves a real choice.

Knowing from the start that every one of us would pervert that freedom to choose, that is, we'd sin and move away from Him, before God ever breathed breath into Adam, He pre-ordained His plan to redeem us!

That plan involved the incarnation of Jesus into human flesh... to do for us, what we were incapable of doing for ourselves, living a perfect, sinless life. Jesus did that!

**Hebrews 4:15** tells us, *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*

And **2 Corinthians 5:21** explains the purpose of Jesus' sinless life: to have the personal value, the worth to actually pay the price to redeem us from our sin, *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Understanding Jesus' deity, and purpose gives us the confidence to believe Jesus when He says in **John 14:6**, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me..."*

All of that, is only possible if Jesus is God and if we know Jesus is God! And that's why John states that truth so strongly!

John understood it's only when we know Jesus, really know Jesus, that we can know who we are in Jesus!

John understood that. John, because he knew who Jesus was, knew who he was! That's why six times in his Gospel account John refers to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved!

I used to think John was being exclusive or self-serving by referring to himself that way. Like John was all, *“Jesus loved me the best you know! I was His favorite!”* But that’s not what John was saying at all!

John, in referring to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved, is merely and correctly conveying to his audience that he knows who he is because he knows who Jesus is!

That is a crucial understanding that all Christians need to have!  
A crucial understanding that needs to guide our very lives!

We are the disciples that Jesus loves! That truly is who we are! That is our identity!

Do you know who you are in Jesus?

In Jesus, you are:

A new creation **2 Corinthians 5:17** tells us!

**Philippians 3:20** says you’re a citizen of heaven!

**Romans 15:7** says you are accepted by Christ!

**Ephesians 1:3** tells you, you’re blessed with every spiritual blessing!

The next verse, **Ephesians 1:4** tells you that in Christ you are chosen, holy and blameless before God!

In Jesus, **Romans 8:2** says you have been set free from the law of sin and death!

**Romans 8:7** says, you are a child of God, a fellow heir with Christ!

**Ephesians 2:13** declares that in Christ you have a boldness and a confident access to God!

And John himself, in **John 15:15** declares that in Jesus, you are a friend of Christ!

That's who you are in Jesus! But you'll never know who you are in Jesus, until you know who Jesus is! And that is what John says is the purpose of his Gospel account, remember? Remember **John 20:31**?  
*...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.*

I've told this story before, but it fits so well here! In the late 1850's Charles Blondin, became famous for walking on a tightrope back and forth across Niagara Falls. The journey was over a quarter of a mile long and the tightrope was 160 feet above the Falls, and there was no way Blondin could survive if he fell! Blondin walked across the falls forward, backward, blindfolded, pushing a wheel barrow. Routinely, thousands of people would come to see Blondin's act.

One day, after walking the tightrope from the American side of the Falls to the Canadian side, Blondin announced he was going back, but this time he wanted a little audience participation. This time he asked for a volunteer to ride on his shoulders while he walked the tightrope back.

The crowd, who had been noisily cheering Blondin moments before, became deathly quiet. No one volunteered, until one man stepped forward. It was Blondin's manager, Harry Colcord. Of course Colcord didn't want to do it, he was only volunteering because no one else would and it was good for business. But as Colcord was being strapped to Blondin's back, listen to what Blondin told him, Blondin said, *"Look up, Harry, you are no longer Colcord, you are Blondin."*

*Until I clear this place, be a part of me, mind, body, and soul. If I sway, sway with me. Do not attempt to do any balancing yourself. If you do we will both go to our death.”*

The amazing thing is, Colcord trusted Blondin, he knew who Blondin was and believed Blondin was able to do what he said he would do, so Colcord followed Blondin’s directions. And in doing so, they successfully made it to the other side!

People! Isn’t that a whole lot like how Jesus calls us to walk with Him? Jesus tells us, *“Look up! See who I am! And know who you are in me! Know that washed in my blood and clothed in me you are the sons and daughters of God, indeed in me you are the very righteousness of God! In me you can do what I do, and what you accomplish, will be accomplished not through your power, but by the power of God Himself!*

So as we go through this series on John, listen for John’s descriptions of Jesus’ deity. Listen for Jesus’ descriptions of who He says He is! Jesus says He is the Word, the Way, the Truth, the Life and the Light. Listen and hear! Let these words, these truths about Jesus move from your head to your heart! Let them begin to change you, your very being... into the person God has called you to be, the person who can, no matter what, travel through this life and into eternity with Him!

That’s what God wants! That’s why John wrote his Gospel account! *...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.*