

Route Sixty-Six

Part Forty-Three

John

And God Was the Word

(John 5:39; John 20:30)

With Study Questions

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...but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30).

Introduction

Following our worship service, we have a time for questions and answers. I have found great value in this for a number of reasons. It helps clarify things that were not well-defined in the sermon. It is critical to understand what's being done and taught in church (1 Corinthians 14:15, 16). It helps me, as the pastor, to grasp what people do know or what they desire to know or what they don't know. Teachers should be aware of those to whom they seek to minister (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). It also gives the congregant an opportunity to **"test all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21)** and to be **"noble-minded...search[ing] the Scriptures" (Acts 17:11)** to determine accuracy.

On occasion, through question and answer, I will find that I misspoke in a sermon or, at very least, gave a wrong impression. In our last sermon on the Gospel According to Luke, I presented the idea that Luke emphasized the humanity of Christ. During question and answer it was brought to my attention that it almost appeared that I was communicating that the deity (Godhood) of Christ was relatively unimportant in our redemption. Such a declaration (i.e. that the deity of Christ is remotely unimportant) by me, or any pastor, would be a gross error.

Yet here we see yet another example of the value of four gospels. For John opens his gospel with an incontrovertible declaration of the Divine nature of Jesus.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God (John 1:1, 2).

Perhaps clumsier to read, but more powerful in the Greek, “**and God was the Word**” *kai theos en hos logos*. A few verses down, just in case we might be confused about who the Word is. John writes,

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

It is quite difficult (one might say, gloriously incomprehensible-for who would want to serve a God that is finite enough for us to draw a circle around) for us, as creatures to get our arms entirely around the Creator when it comes to how God and Man can exist in one Person. John is not presenting a contradiction. But he is presenting the unfathomable, the unsearchable.

We have spoken of how it is a mistake to make too much or too little of the distinctions in the four gospels. They all contain the heart of the life and redeeming victory of Jesus. But they are not mere repetitions of each other. Recall that Matthew (in his impressionistic style) highlighted Christ as the *Promised Messiah*. Mark’s rapid account placed a special spotlight on Christ’s *work*. Luke’s pen-art gave us the Norman Rockwell like portrait of Christ’s *humanity*. Even with these distinctions, the first three gospels are quite similar. Hence, they are often called *synoptics* (able to be seen together). John’s gospel is quite dissimilar to the first three.

John’s recurrent theme is distinct from the first three. In Matthew, Mark and Luke we learn about *who* Jesus is (the Promised One, the Obedient One, even the Human One). But John opens unapologetically with *what* Jesus is. To be sure, He is the answered promise, obedient and human. But John offers with full-force an attribute which will separate Jesus from any and all religious figures (or any figure at all, for that matter) in human history. Jesus is the Living God. It is a *truth* necessary for true redemption. It is a *claim* that will cost Jesus His life.

Survey of John

After recording His deity, John brings us to a wedding where Jesus turns water to wine, then the cleansing of the temple. We then find ourselves listening in to one of the more powerful, and oft quoted, conversations in all of Scripture between Jesus and Nicodemus (a ruler of the Jews). In this conversation we learn our utter dependency on God to rebirth us. It is here that Jesus will compare Himself to the “**serpent in the wilderness**” (John 3:14) that Moses lifted to be gazed upon for healing. It is in this conversation where that most quoted verse is deposited.

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 (John 3:16).

The leaders of Israel needed to learn that redemption extended beyond the borders of Israel and to the entire world. We see an immediate example in the next chapter where Jesus has another conversation. This time with a person quite the opposite of Nicodemus. A Samaritan woman with a checkered past. Jesus would not bow to the culture. There were three cultural reasons He should not have spoken to her: She was a Samaritan. She was a woman. And she had a questionable reputation. We may not think much of this. But she and His disciples all marveled at this interaction (John 4:9,27).

John records various miracles of Jesus. Eight to be precise. All of them truly happening and all of them carrying messages. He turned water to wine (sad to glad), healed the nobleman’s son (disease to health), cured the paralytic in Bethesda (paralysis to energy), fed 5000 (hunger to fulness), walked on water (agitation to tranquility), gave sight to blind (darkness to light), raised Lazarus (death to life), miraculous draught of fishes (failure to success).

In all of this, His detractors, rather than being moved to faithfulness, sought to accuse Him of violating their traditions (usually revolving around Sabbath keeping). He also calls out the kangaroo court seeking to stone a woman caught in adultery. This is followed by one of the most heated conversations recorded in all of Scripture. The Pharisees will accuse Jesus of (as some read it) being born out of wedlock, being a Samaritan and having a demon (John 8:41, 48). Jesus tells them their father is the devil

(John 8:44). But even here it is Jesus' claim of deity that puts stones in their hands (John 8:58, 59).

In chapter thirteen we see this "new commandment" (John 13:34).

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another (John 13:34).

Yet loving one another is hardly new. The Old Testament was replete with such admonitions. Loving God and love one another that on which the Law and the Prophets hung (Matthew 22:40). It is said that it is new in feature or depth. Christ's love would extend to giving His life as a ransom. This model of love is deeper than previously taught or understood. We must be careful. There are those who will quote this verse as if we are to ignore all the commandments and replace them with (and I hope I don't sound uncharitable) our own vague notion of what it means to love.

In chapter fourteen we read of Christ comforting His disciples in light of His departure. There are many dwellings for those who trust in Him. He goes to prepare a place. He also spends a good deal of time recording Jesus' teaching of the coming "Helper" or the Holy Spirit. In His ascension, we are not left alone.

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27).

John records Jesus' teaching the vine and the branches in chapter fifteen. In chapter sixteen He gives them the difficult prophecy of their own weeping and lamenting for the difficult times ahead. It culminates with these words:

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

In chapter seventeen we are given the opportunity to listen in on Christ's High Priestly Prayer. I will not attempt to do justice to this

glorious chapter in so short a time. I will merely offer this historical notation:

John Knox, on his death-bed in 1572, asked his wife to read to him John 17, "where", he said, "I cast my first anchor."

In the remainder of this gospel account we read of arrest of Christ, the various trials of Christ, His crucifixion, burial, resurrection. Truly, this gospel contains the clear account of how we are redeemed.

Jesus, the I AM

Before we close, let us turn to the unique emphasis of John. The self-designation "**I Am**" *ego eimi* is used 23 times in John. Any remotely learned student (of which Jesus had many) could not miss the implication. When Moses asked God what His name was.

God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you' " (Exodus 3:14).

It was when Jesus said to the Pharisees,

Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM (John 8:58),

That they took up stones to throw at Him.

But there were seven tremendous times that Jesus used the I AM designation: I AM the Bread of Life (John 6:48), I Am Light of the world (John 8:12), I Am Door (John 10:9), I Am the Good Shepherd (John 10:11); I Am the resurrection and life (John 11:25), I Am the way, truth and life (John 14:6), I AM the true vine (John 15:1). It is little wonder, in a world where people demand to be the final arbiters of truth, that a claim of ultimate Godhood would be infuriating.

Add to this how He deconstructed their temple worship, which had become idolatrous and virtually replaced all of its meaning with His own life. They had an altar, but He was the Lamb (John 1:36). They had a laver

for ceremonial cleansing, but He would be the one who would make them clean (John 13:8). They had showbread, but He was the “bread of life” (John 6:48). They had a candle-stand, but He was the “light of the world” (John 8:12). They had an altar of incense, but it was sacrifice and His High Priestly Prayer which provided a fragrant aroma to God (John 17). They had an Ark which demonstrated covenant access, but it was His sacrifice that would grant them access (John 14:3). They had a mercy seat, but mercy would be found in Christ and in no other.

Conclusion

Perhaps something more emphatic than all that we’ve examined so far can be seen in John’s own spotlight. He himself tells us why he wrote:

...but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:31).

The word “**believe**” in its various forms is found ninety-eight times in this gospel. Believe and live or life (or related implications) are continually found together (John 3:14-16; 5:24; 6:40; 11:25, 26). But one is hard-pressed to find a passage which more clearly and powerfully illustrates how one finds themselves children of God. A passage which also indicates where life is not found.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12, 13).

True rebirth is found by the blood of Christ, the Holy Spirit opening our eyes, bringing us to receive Him by faith.

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 (John 3:16).

Questions for Study

1. Why is it valuable to ask questions and seek to have them answered when it comes to church (page 2)?
2. What incontrovertible truth does John open with in his gospel (pages 2, 3)?
3. Review that which is emphasized in the first three gospel. Why are they called 'synoptics' (page 3)?
4. If the first three gospels addressed who Jesus is, what does John address? Explain (page 3).
5. Give highlights of Jesus' conversations with Nicodemus and the woman at Jacob's well (page 4).
6. What lessons do we learn from Jesus' miracles (page 4)?
7. What is new about the new commandment (page 5)?
8. Why do you suppose people find such comfort from chapter 17 (page 6)?
9. What is significant about the designation I AM? How did Jesus teach in such a way as to compare Himself to the temple (pages 6, 7)?
10. What was John's reason for writing this gospel? What does that mean to you personally (page 7)?