

DATE: April 26, 2009

TEXT: John 20: 29-31

TITLE: “The Gospel of John I : An Introduction”



In one sense I am beginning a new sermon series today... in another sense I am continuing a sermon series today. I have decided to preach through the gospel of John. I have already begun this series. During lent I preached through the 17th chapter of John as we looked at the High Priestly prayer of Jesus. I will not repeat those sermons when we get to the 17th chapter about 6 to 8 months from now.

I am excited about this series. In all my years in this pulpit I have never preached through a Gospel. We just finished a long study of Genesis. Before that we went verse by verse through the book of Ephesians. A few years ago we looked at the book of Hebrews. Before that we looked at 1st and 2nd Peter. It is now time to turn to John. Of course all my sermons are about Jesus... but I am very excited that for the next number of months I will be preaching directly about our Lord, Jesus.

This morning I am going to introduce you to this book. Introductory sermons are always

difficult. They are often full of facts and light on inspiration. I always begin a new study with a brief introduction to my philosophy of preaching. I have done this in detail in the past so let me be very simple this morning.... I believe God has revealed Himself to his creation. I believe God has revealed himself in four primary methods. **First**, He sent His messengers to this world... the prophets... the godly kings...the apostles. We saw this again and again in our study of Genesis. **Second**, he sent His Holy Spirit to this world. In both the Old Testament and the new Testament we see the reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Today the holy Spirit is still present in our lives revealing god to you and me. **Third**, God himself came to this earth to reveal himself to us. This was the coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the greatest revelation of God ever seen by humanity. **Finally**, God has given to us the written Word... the Bible. Through the witness of the prophets and apostles and through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, truth is given to us in the written Word of God.

My task as your Pastor is to take God's revealed truth... from all of these sources... and apply them to our lives. I believe the prophets spoke the truth. I believe th Holy Spirit speaks

the truth (yes, he does speak and yes it is truth). I believe Jesus is indeed the “way and the truth.” And I believe scripture is true. I will not look for some deep dark mysterious meaning within scripture. I will not try to discern what is the truth in the Bible and what may not be the truth... that would be idolatry. I will take God’s Word. I will study God’s word. I will accept God’s word. I will share with you God’s Word. I do not promise complete accuracy. I am fallible... I make mistakes. But let me tell you I am almost 100% a traditionalist. I will not make up my understanding of scripture. Generally, I will share with you the understanding of scripture that has been taught by Biblical scholars for thousands of years. I do not see my task as finding the “new” understandings of scripture..... I see my task as sharing the “true” understandings of scripture. I am not bright enough to make “new” discoveries... I am only educated enough to study and share traditional interpretations. When there is a difference of opinion in traditional interpretations I often will share with you those differences. You will see the truth of this statement in my lessons today. Let’s dig into the Book of John. I will do so with a series of questions and answers.

Question # 1 Who wrote the book of John? Do you know the gospel itself never

specifically identifies the author? We have these clues to who wrote this gospel... *John 13:23*

states....."**One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him.**"

John 19:26 states.... "**When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved**

standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," And finally at the

very end of the gospel of John we read this in *John 21:20-24*

20Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them.... 21When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." 23Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

When you put these verses together you have these facts.... the author of the book was a disciple of Jesus. He was a disciple that Jesus especially loved... as a matter of fact he is often called "the beloved disciple." He is a disciple who lived to be a very old man. Only one man fits these facts... it is the disciple John. Early in the 2nd century John is identified as the author of this book.

It is probable that John had a school of believers with him. It is possible that this school of believers had an influence on the book and served as recorders and editors of the book but it is primarily the work of John.

Question # 2 Where was the Gospel of John written? John was the only disciple to live a long life. All the other disciples were put to death for their faith. It is generally believed that John lived most of his later life in the city of Ephesus. Near the very end of his life he was exiled to the island of Patmos by the Emperor Domitian. It is believed he wrote the Gospel from Ephesus and the Book of Revelation from Patmos.

Question # 3 When was the book written? There are two views on this question. The most common view is that it is the latest of the Gospels. This view believes that the book was written about 90 A.D. This later date is believed primarily from the contents of the book. The Gospel of John has the most fully developed understanding of Jesus of any book of the bible except maybe Hebrews. It also shows the most influence by belief systems that many believed did not arise until the end of the 1st century.

The other view is that The Gospel of John is the earliest of the Gospels and it was written around 65 to 70 A.D. This view is based on two primary facts. One, no mention of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple is made in the Gospel. This was a huge event in the life of Judaism and many say if it was written after this event John would have indicated it. Two, there seems to be little reference to the other three gospels in this book. If it was written 20 years after Matthew, Mark and Luke it would be expected to have more reference to these books. I, for the most part, believe in the later date... but the problems are curious. This leads us to the next question.

Question # 4 How similar is the Gospel of John from the other 3 Gospels? The amazing fact is this..... not very. 70% of the content of John is not found in Matthew, Mark or Luke. Let me share with you briefly the history of writing the gospels. After the death of Jesus oral stories were maintained about the life of Jesus. For over 2 decades this was all that there was. This was common in this culture. Unlike today... written records were not considered critically important and oral stores were maintained very accurately. Remember, early in the church it was expected

that Jesus would return very quickly. There was no need for a written account. During this time one document probably existed. It was written probably in Aramaic as was a record of the saying of Jesus. This document has been given the name “Quelle” or ‘Q’ (source in German) It is generally believed that Mark was written first in the 50's. Then Matthew was written and then Luke. All three gospels seem to have exact quotes of the Q source and Matthew and Luke seem to quote Mark. The Gospel of John on the other hand does not quote the earlier Gospels and does not quote the Q source but does heavily rely on eye witness accounts and oral tradition.

Why? Why is John so different. First, John does not try to follow a time line of Jesus' life. John picks 7 stories from the life of Jesus and gives practical lesson on these stories. Also, John seems to purposely pick events in the life of Jesus that took place in Judea and southern Israel. The other gospels concentrate on Jesus' ministry in Galilee and northern Israel. In other words, John was purposely filling in the blanks. Jesus had not yet returned and John said “lets not forget these stories of Jesus... and so he wrote them down.

Finally, Question # 5 What was the purpose of writing this book? John himself answers

this question. He answers it near the end of his writing. *John 20: 30-31 states...*

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written 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 wrote this book as an evangelistic tool. John wrote so that people would come to know Jesus. *The New American Commentary* gives this wonderful understanding

The best way to understand the evangelist's story is, however, is to realize that he is not satisfied with achieving a set level of believing. Rather, John, like Jesus, would constantly push the reader and the believer to more intense stages of believing. Accordingly, a follower of Jesus should never be satisfied with having attained to a stage of belief. Instead, the believer's life should be constantly more integrated into the life of the Lord as branches are called to abide in the vine. Abiding in Jesus, therefore, would be a better way of interpreting for contemporary readers what believing implies in John. As will be evident in the Gospel, believing is not mere intellectual assent but involves committing oneself to Jesus. Genuine life is identified for the reader as the goal of human existence.

This quote sums up the purpose of this sermon series. It will be challenging. We will be pushed into **“more intense stages of believing.”** We will be challenged to have our lives **“more integrated into the life of the Lord.”** We will be challenged to “abide” with the Lord.

Not just believe... abide. And we will be challenged to discover “genuine life.” It is the purpose of John writing 2000 years ago... it the purpose of my preaching today. I am excited.... I hope

you are too

AMEN