

Lesson 3: John's Gospel – Prologue Part II

Review: Themes/Items to Watch For

1. Cosmic, “Spiritual/Mystical” Gospel: Jesus is Sent from God, Bringing the Heavenly Down, and then Returns
2. The Heavenly is Salvation as Revelation of the Truth (7s – Signs, I Am statements, etc.)
3. Truth→Cosmic Trial – and Reversal: Jesus Vindicated, All Others Convicted
4. Salvation involves Individual Belief in Jesus the Truth and a Relationship of Love & Friendship with Jesus and One's Fellow Disciples
5. This Coming Down is the Descent of a Glory that Ultimately Includes the Cross
6. In this, Christ IS the Life of all AS the Way to God, Truth, Glory, and Love
7. The Life, Glory, and Love Jesus thus shares with Us is grounded in Life, Glory, and Love He Shares with the Father and the Spirit from Eternity (i.e., in the Triune Life itself)

Review: Structure of the Gospel

- **Revelation-Drama** (Jn 1-12)
 - **Prologue:** Jesus, the Word Made Flesh (Jn 1:1-18)
 - **Act 1:** Messiah's Signs and Rejection by “His Own” (Jn 1:12-12:50) – Sign-Drama
- **Love-Drama** (Jn 13-21)
 - **Act 2:** The Messiah's Passion and Preparation of “His Own” (Jn 13:1-20:31) – the Cross-and-Resurrection Drama
 - **Epilogue:** Final Resurrection Appearance and Commissioning of Peter and John

Review Prologue: Opening Notes (Weinrich, 83)

- Like the Overture to an Opera; also a personal confession of what was witnessed
- Three clear sections: 1-5, 6-13, 14-18 with parallels between 1-5 and 14-18 (on Word)

Read the Prologue, Jn 1:1-18

Re-read Jn 1:3-5

1. Creation and Life in and Through the Son

- “All things made through him. In him was life.”
 - Why is this important?
 - a) There is no life that is NOT life in the Son
 - b) The Son does NOT become our true life only in response to sin, or only as redemption. ALWAYS our life.

- Creation and the Logos
 - Stoics – Logos plants an element of itself, a divine “spark” or “seed” (logos spermatikos), in all things as the basic principle by which their specific being unfolds.
 - Christian Fathers adapt this idea in connection with John 1. Starts with Justin Martyr in the early 100s, runs especially through Maximus the Confessor in the 600s and then Thomas Aquinas in the 1200s.
 - a) Major adaptation – Stoics are materialists and pantheists – God is nature. Christians – no. Instead, the “spark” of our being remains the mind of God and we “participate” in it without it being a “thing” simply dumped into us.
 - **Q:** What do you think might be the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?
 - a) Strengths: what we truly are, and what “animates” us, lies in God and indeed is nothing other than his conception of us and plan for us. That tracks!
 - b) Potential weaknesses:
 - While it also seems to connect with the core idea that our life is “outside us” in Christ (extra nos) and the Fathers are trying to safeguard against “pagan” misunderstandings, does the specific language of “seed” or “spark” still effectively put it IN us, as our possession?
 - Does that still steer too close to “pantheism” – God in/as all things?
 - Does it put too much within our possession and power and/or incline us to think of our own natural abilities or inclinations as more stably directed to God than they are?
 - These concerns receive a sharper point as we follow out John’s connections of Word-life to LIGHT...

2. Creation→Life→Light: “In Him was life and that life was the light of men”

- What do you think it means for the life of the Eternal Son to be LIGHT?
- Fathers – connect with a parallel in OT - Psalm 36:9 “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.”
 - Fathers – SEE light. Ancient understanding of reason as “light” (“enlightenment”). Fathers like Augustine with Logos-Revelation point: God’s mind is literally the light that enables our reason to perceive any truth it perceives.

- a) Again, Aquinas huge in passing on this idea; he also connects it to providence – the light of human reason is a participation in the light of divine reason *which works by being provident both for itself and others* (ST I-II 91.2). This is the nature of reason: the creature seeking to provide, in the image of God.
- b) Again, the strength and weakness:
- Strength – true life and power is in God, we are dependent on
 - Weakness – too much our possession? Too weak a grasp of sin’s effects?
 - Rm 1:21 “²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”
 - A deep darkening.
 - In contrast, the insistence that our creaturely life and reason simply ARE, ENTIRELY a participation in God tends to suggest that as long as we are alive, we are still participating in some basic and ineradicable sense.
 - Both of these are traditional Protestant objections and dividing points with Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, both of whom retain the Fathers’ idea. In so doing, we argue, they usually end up having a hard time not acting as if most people are basically ok because of creation, despite the claims of passages like Rm 1 that the effects of sin are DEVASTATING on our creaturely minds.
 - Still another – misses *what JOHN ITSELF says about HOW/WHY Christ is our life AS Light...*
- For in fact, John himself provides a description of what it means for Christ to be our Life AS LIGHT (v.4) in the next verse, v.5: “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”
 - Opening notes about the verse itself:
 - a) V.5 verb change – up until then, past or past perfect forms – things that happened and the state of affairs they produced. But in v.5, “shines” is present tense. So the point is: the given state of affairs is that at Creation, the Son became the life and light of all. And so now, the light *continues to shine* in and against the darkness
 - b) Sidebar: “overcome” – **Q**: does anyone have “understood”?

- c) Greek verb is κατέλαβεν (katalambano), which most basically means, “to lay hold of or seize”
- *Can* mean understand – i.e., “grasp” intellectually. Moreover, in just a few verses, the Prologue will talk about the way that Jesus was not recognized, and the rest of the Gospel will continue to underscore specific ways he is “misunderstood.” So some translators, “did not understand it.” Makes a certain sense.
 - At the same time, katalambano can also mean “overcome” in the sense of “conquer” and/or “catch up with you from behind, overtake”
 - The only other time katalambano is used in John’s Gospel, it is used with this meaning. So most translators prefer that meaning.
 - Another reason – while human misunderstanding is a problem discussed *later*, the point of *John 1:1-4* is to assert that the Son as Life is a POWERFUL and EFFECACIOUS Light (a point that will also be underscored further in the Prologue and elsewhere in the Gospel). So it would be weird to finish out the 1-5 set by making the “*final*” point that the Light *fails* to be enlightening.
 - Back to the meaning. **Q:** what is the darkness that the Son overcomes?
 - a) Jn 3:19 “And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.” Here: darkness associated with EVIL WORKS
 - b) Jn 8:12 “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” What is the darkness here? [inability to see & find the way – WALK]
 - Reinforced, Jn 12:35 “So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.” [NB: this is the only other use of katalambano, and it is the exact opposite overtaking – that the darkness will catch up with you and overtake you if you don’t walk in Jesus, the light.]
 - Connect this with the theme that Jesus comes from God and returns to God, and his statement in John 14:6, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”
 - a) In following his “way” from the Father to earth and back, Christ BECOMES the Way, and LIGHTS the Way, and this Way IS both Truth and Life.