

Lesson 4: John's Gospel – Prologue Part III

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

Got Kind of Lofty Last Week. Reprise Jn 1:1-5, focusing on core claims

- Vv.1-2 –
 - “With” God and “Was” God – provocations toward the Trinity;
 - “Word” (Logos) – the Eternal Son is both the mind and speech of God. Revelation to us let's us in on that divine mind and conversation.
- Vv.3-5 – The Word is the life and light of all things, a light no darkness can overcome
 - We kind of went out into the stratosphere, so a quick recap of the core points:

- a) This shows us that the Word, the Son, IS our life *from creation on*, not just in redemption and forgiveness
- b) This also grants a kind of divine light and glory to ALL creatures, which gives dignity and value
- c) Looking at the rest of John, we saw that the darkness against which the light stands is both evil deeds and desires (John 3:19) *and* the inability of human beings to “see the way to walk” on our own (Jn 8:12, 12:35).
- d) We then connected this with Jesus’s own summary of himself in John 14:6, i.e., that He IS “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” All put together, these verses thus indicate that Christ is Life AS the Light of the truth about God, a power that drives out evil desires and deeds, AND the one who not only shows but BECOMES the path back to God.
- e) Put together, maybe this makes it easier to see what I was after with the criticisms I raised with regard to the Catholic-Orthodox suggestion that the Logos, as light and life, becomes a “seed” in each person, including in the reason of human beings.
 - One issue with this is that it can override a deep appreciation of how sin “darkens” the heart and mind, as in Rom 1 and also Jn himself (3:19 – men LOVED darkness, rather than light)
 - But perhaps the even bigger issue is that this ultimately collapses life into something the person possesses in himself. But the double problem there is: 1) John says life is *in* Jesus, the person – it is not a mere property that even COULD become “ours”; and 2) this Jesus is a specific HISTORY and WAY of Life (as Anne said) that does not arise automatically or self-evidently simply from nature, but rather always continually SHINES into from outside itself, from Jesus.
 - So the ultimate concern is, once you vest the life and light IN human nature, you start to humanity instead of God as the source of life and goodness, and you look only at what was already given and not the further life, history, commands, and WAY of life God continues to spell out across all of salvation history as it culminates in Christ.

Turn to Prologue Segment II, John 1:6-13. Re-read just 1:6-8

- Introduces John the Baptist. **Q:** What does it say about him?

- His name was John
- “Sent from God” – Eternal Son was sent. But also one who is “just” a human being. So Jesus not the only “sent” one (foreshadowing also us!)
- And yet, though both sent, quite distinct! Here the passage underscores the “just” a human being – he was NOT the light.
 - Throughout the Gospel, we will continue to see others whom Jesus is “greater than”: Jacob (Jn 4), Moses (end of prologue and Jn 5), Abraham (Jn 8), and even the OT Scriptures considered just in themselves (Jn 5).
 - Not a diminishment of John, just a proper placement of him “before” and in contrast to *the fulfillment* who IS life and light itself, Jesus.
- So if not directly the Light himself, what WAS he?
 - A *witness* – that was he purpose: “he came as a witness TO the light”
 - John ties this witness to what he will later name directly as the purpose of his Gospel as a whole – the Baptist came “that all might believe” (cf. 20:31 – “these things are written that you may believe”)
 - **SIGNIFICANT SIDEBAR, “believes”**: in John’s Gospel, the noun “faith” is never used. Only the verb “believe.” What is the force of always using the verb?
 - “Belief” never becomes a static given. Always and CONTINUOUSLY called to believe.
 - Great segue to next verses...

Re-read 1:9-13

Let’s break this down verse by verse:

- V.9 – **Q**: what is the main idea in this verse? [Ans: the light that has from the beginning given light to all Creation is now coming into that Creation.]
 - Segue - But what happens in v.10?...
- V.10 – the WORLD, though made through him, did not recognize him
 - Lack of understanding – the sin point above! There’s a failure of knowledge, of recognition. *Lack* the light of true reason, *in and of themselves*
- V.11 – he came to his own, but his own did not receive him
 - **Q**: Is that just a restatement of v.10, or is it referring to something different?
 - Hint: who are “his own”?

- Ex 19:5: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be *my treasured possession* among all peoples.”
[ANSWER: ISRAEL]
- So a double rejection: the world and even Israel
- Sidebar – he came to “his own,” but “his own” did not receive him
 - In English, exact same words. But in Greek, subtly different
 - Second “his own” (oi idioi) is a noun that refers to people. So that is the main point about he came to His Chosen People.
 - But the first “his own” is a related but slightly different noun (ta idia) that actually refers to his “stuff,” his “personal things”; and in the ancient world, this phrase is used as an idiom for one’s *homeland*
 - So the fuller point John is making would be something like, “he came to his homeland [that is, to Judea], and yet his own people didn’t recognize him.” Even more historically concrete.
- Now to vv.12-13. So neither the world nor even his own people received him. But some did. **Q:** And what did he do with them?
 - [ANSWER: He gave the right to become children of God, born not of blood nor human will but of God. Several key points to touch on here:]
 - What does it mean, born of blood?
 - Options – literal blood involved in a natural birth; blood as human genetic descent, “share our blood.”
 - Either way, same fundamental point; here, John introduces a theme that will become especially significant in Jn 3, with Nicodemus – the contrast b/w natural birth (which makes you a member of a human family) and supernatural or spiritual birth (which makes you a member of God’s family).
 - Who, in particular, would this be an argument AGAINST?
 - Answer: Jews who want to tie their “saved” status simply to being the “natural,” “flesh and blood” children of Abraham! (see again in Jn 8).
 - Spirit-flesh is contrast between “life from outside, from God” vs. “life proceeding from natural “seeds” [again, a reason to resist fathers]
 - Born of the will of flesh, the will of man
 - Parallels? Maybe
 - “Flesh” elsewhere in bible – the specifically *sinful* nature. So here, i.e., not born of human lust

- “Will of Man” would then highlight human *agency*, perhaps especially man as head of a human house, vs. divine agency
- “believe in” – Greek: *pisteuw eis* + accusative = not just general knowledge but *commitment to a person in obedience and trust*.
 - “Believe in” your generals or other leaders, for example
 - So in John, this is a “full discipleship” word: “trust AND obey” – or trustfully obey, obey because trust, etc. Put your confidence in and follow.
 - Connects with Christ as the Life that Lights the Way!
- “gave the RIGHT to become children of God”
 - Greek: *exousia* – AUTHORITY/LICENSE and POWER/ABILITY – an authorization or standing, and an empowerment
 - Underscore – as the rest of the verse says, this authority/power to become a child of God ultimately means that we are “birthed” *by God*. So unlike other, earthly forms of power and authority, it is not one that we exercise *in and of ourselves*. Rather, God does it, in and for us.
- Rejection / Reception, linked to the theme of “his own,” will become structural for the Gospel as a whole
 - First half (Chs. 1-12) – the rejection of Jesus by those who were “His Own” as the Incarnation began, i.e. the majority of Jews and their leadership.
 - Mentioned before – all of Jesus’s signs except the Resurrection are given in the first half, and even the Resurrection is forecast in the first half – the so-called “Book of Signs.” As we will see, these signs are all thus given and intended *for God’s “first” people, Israel*. But they are not recognized or received by “his own” – just as John 1 says.
 - Second half (Chs 13-21) – the constitution of a new group of people who become “His Own” *by* receptive belief.
 - Chapter 12 features a pivot to the Gentiles
 - *But Note – we should also recognize: 1) though Jesus was rejected by the majority, he was not rejected by all Jews (the Twelve and most of his first disciples were all Jewish), 2) also, as Paul says in Rom 9, just because many of the Jews rejected Jesus at the time of his earthly ministry doesn’t mean God stopped pursuing *them*, either – the gifts and call of God are *irrevocable*, Paul says; so God will always chase us and work to convert us. And thus, as Paul says in Rom 10-11, the coming of the Gospel to the

Gentiles, which happened in part through Israel's rejection, nevertheless became a provocation for the Jews to believe as God came around for them again.

- **Q:** So what, overall, should we take away from vv.6-13?
 - The purpose of John the Baptist was WITNESS.
 - Belief is not mere knowledge but trust and commitment in Christ to lead and guide, which connects with Christ as the Life that lights the Way
 - There's an absolute dividing point between those who believe and become "God's own" and those who do not
 - Belief is ongoing and active – those who *were* "his own" but stopped believing no longer were his own! ["Don't Stop Believin'"!]
 - As it happens in real time, this belief is a gift in which God himself gives us a new spiritual birth that does not come from anything natural in us – REASSURANCE!
 - At the same time, while we cannot cause such a birth ourselves, we *can* refuse or step away from it. So receive it!