

Lesson 6: John's Gospel – Prologue Part V

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:

- Like the Overture to an Opera; also a personal confession of what was witnessed
- Three clear sections:
 - **1-5:** The Word, Creation, Life, and Light
 - **6-13:** John as Witness; Jesus came to both Creation and Israel, His Own, but was neither recognized nor received. Yet to those who DO receive by belief, he gives the right to be children of God through this new birth into true spiritual life, the life of faith
 - **14-15:** John returns to the theme of the Word and now links it to glory. Glory as beauty and visible splendor links to the theme of light but also connects with renown; in the OT, glory is also the “weighty presence” of God, taking up space in the world and affecting things. It was present from the burning bush through the Exodus to Sinai and then the tabernacle and temple. Now it “tabernacles” in the

flesh of our Lord Jesus, who is its supreme instantiation and the supreme revelation of the true meaning of glory. The whole of John's Gospel is a depiction of what true glory IS.

- V.15 talked about John the Baptist as a witness to this Glory
- Segue: as we will see today, John 1:16-18 also takes up the theme of glory as well as two other themes from v.14 we did not yet explore, namely: Jesus as "full of grace and truth" and Jesus as "the one and only Son."
 - Let's read the prologue again, paying special attention to vv.16-18:

Read the Prologue, Jn 1:1-18 [Pay special attention to vv.16-18]

V.14,16 - Grace and Truth

- So hopefully you already see the connection back to v.14 on grace and truth:
 - V.14 – the Word that became flesh is FULL OF grace and truth
 - V.16 – from his...what? [FULLNESS], we all have received, grace upon grace.
 - So what the Word is in himself is the treasury from which we also receive.
 - But what is that which He is in himself? Let's look at each of those words...
- **Q:** What IS grace?
 - Mounce Greek Lexicon: Grace is KINDNESS or FAVOR, often resulting in a GIFT, BENEFIT, or BLESSING to the receiver
 - So it is a disposition that becomes an action
 - **UPSHOT –Q:** So what does it mean to say that Jesus is full of GRACE?
 - Jesus is completely filled up with (constituted by, IS) the kindness and favor of God, both in God's own heart/being and as it is enacted in and for the world.
- **Q:** What is truth?
 - What is accurate to reality, in accord with reality
 - But also, OT, "emet": truth in that sense, but also truthfulness (sincerity, honesty) and *faithfulness* (being "true" to a person, "true" to your word or commitment)
 - **UPSHOT –Q:** So what does it mean to say that Jesus is full of TRUTH?
 - Jesus is completely filled up with (constituted by, IS) both the accurate REVELATION of the actual reality of things AND the fullness of the sincerity, honesty, and faithfulness of God.
- Interject one connection back to v.14. Last time discussed that all of John is a revelation of what ALL glory truly consists in. Here, two key elements: true glory – that is, beauty,

renown, and WEIGHT in the world – consists among other things in GRACE – favor and kindness resulting in gift and blessing – and in TRUTH – not only accuracy to and revelation of reality but also sincerity, honesty and faithfulness

- Key Word, v.16: FULLNESS
 - What means? Completeness. Total being, total manifestation, nothing lacking
 - From his fullness – Jesus has all that is necessary.
- “Grace upon grace” – what does that mean?
 - Just keeps on coming
 - Connects John 10 – “in me you will have life and have it *abundantly*”
 - BUT ALSO, note the word that comes next to start v.17 – “for”
 - “for” means that the thought of v.16 is being connected more specifically with what comes next in v.17. So let’s see what that is...

V.17: If Jn 1 links to Gen 1 and Creation, and John 1:14 to the Tabernacle and Temple, what does vv.17 link to?

- Exodus and Moses
 - So at least three huge, central epochs in the history and identity of Humanity and Israel are being recapitulated, brought to fulfillment, in Christ.
- In fact, a contrast of some strong kind between Jesus and Moses: “the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”
 - Huge pause here. Sounds like the familiar Lutheran Law-Gospel contrast. But that would suggest that there’s no grace in what came through Moses. Is that true?
 - Nope – as soon as law is given, people violate it with the golden calf...and God extends grace and forgiveness; and so on it goes through whole OT
 - Likewise here in John: “grace upon grace”; or perhaps better, “grace in place of grace” or “grace exchanged for grace” = BOTH Moses and Christ, Old Covenant AND New are grace.
 - So what then IS the contrast
- Key point: “Law” for original audience does NOT mean “law” like Lutherans usually mean it, i.e. God’s commands *as a source of accusation with regard to our justification*.
 - Rather, “law” here is the Greek translation of Torah. And Torah refers to several things: 1) the first 5 books of the bible, the books of Moses, 2) the OT Scripture as a whole (in Jn 10:34, Jesus will refer to the Psalms as “the Law”), and 3) to instruction in general – indeed, that is the most basic meaning of the word, Torah. And in that sense, it is a basic synonym for the WORD of God.

- Remember, then, that the starting point of this pericope (Jn 1:14-18) is the claim that in Jesus, the Word became flesh.
- Put these two points together, and what you get is that the real contrast John is drawing is not between “accusatory law” and “grace” but between the Word of God through Moses and the Word that becomes incarnate in the world as the person, Jesus Christ.
 - So the contrast is not between the *nouns*, law and grace, but between the *verbs*: was GIVEN vs. CAME: “the Word was *given* through Moses, but it CAME in Jesus Christ.”
- With this in place, we can also hear the connection between v.16 and v.17 properly:
 - “For from his fullness, we all have received, grace upon grace. For the law came through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”
 - Implications:
 - BOTH the Mosaic Torah and the Incarnate Torah proceed from the fullness of grace that exists in God and specifically in the second person of the Trinity, the WORD.
 - Therefore, we can also expect the overall shape ALSO OF THE OT TORAH already to reflect the nature of life and glory and so on that are finally fully revealed in Christ.
 - John 5 – you search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have life [implied: and that’s right]; but they speak OF ME.”
 - **Key clarification:** does NOT mean we should try to look in every word of Scripture for some sort of pointer to Jesus of Nazareth and the events of the 1st century – as if all the Old Testament is the kind of direct messianic prophesy you get in passages like Isaiah 53, Psalm 110 and others.
 - What it means is that we should expect to see all of God’s Old Testament words and actions, including yes, the more literal “laws,” to have the same character and purpose that is ultimately fully revealed in Christ: namely – grace, and truth, and everything else we will see in the Gospel as the core characteristics of Christ and the life and glory we find in Him.
 - One example – lex talionis: “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth”; often taken as sort of the opposite of the mercy we see in Christ – this is straight up vengeance, get your pound of flesh, pound for pound.
 - But the character of God we see revealed in Jesus Christ should make us realize that can’t be right.

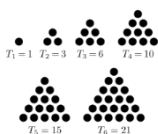
- First off, not a spirit of vengeance but of justice, which *in God's grace* is focused on showing the value placed on the victim and on what they have lost; so the accent is not on “getting” the enemy but on restoring what was lost if possible and where not, publicly recognizing the value of what was taken from the victim and thus showing solidarity with the victim.
 - One way we see that – in OT law codes, where an eye was actually lost, doesn't say literally gouge out the other person's eye, it says, make significant financial restitution to the victim that attempts to offset for the loss caused to the victim by taking their eye.
- Another way we see that is by contrast with the frequent mode of response *in the world*, then and today, which is precisely, vengeance: they take from you, you take from them, *and*, you escalate: they killed your spouse, you kill their spouse and kid. In this sense, eye for an eye is in fact about a far more proportionate justice, tempered by mercy: take only what corresponds, do it through legal channels, don't perpetuate the cycle of violence begetting violence.
- Connect also with v.18 – “no one has ever seen God”
 - Another connection to Moses – **Q:** What is it?
 - **Ex 33:18-20** “¹⁸ Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” ¹⁹ And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. ²⁰ But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.”
 - GLORY theme!
 - Moses wants to see God's full glory, His Face.
 - God says “no one can see me and live” – like Jn 1:18
 - But unlike Moses, now we CAN and DO see his glory – REVEALED in the Word but now “veiled” in flesh, in a form that won't kill us!
 - So a key part of the FULLNESS of grace and truth that is in Jesus Christ, which makes him greater than the grace and truth given through Moses, is that he reveals God COMPLETELY and SHOWS HIS GLORY IN A WAY WE CAN RECEIVE. There is this face to faceness that no one ever had before.

Connects then to the final key element in v.14, 18 - “Only Son [from the Father]”

- But Israel is called “God’s Son” – and ultimately, so are we. So is he really the “only”?
 - Greek: monogenēs
 - Some have thought this comes from the verb for beget (gennaw), and so translate it as “only-begotten.” Might see in some bibles.
 - Theologically correct, but not the right grammar; not what’s being said *here*.
 - Word is from *genos*, like Latin “genus,” a “kind” – so: Jesus is “one of a kind” – a unique Son
 - Ancient world – used of sons even with other “brethren” that were nevertheless special and unique in some sense.
 - V.18 – “has made him known” (literally “exegetes” him to us, the word we use for “explaining” the biblical text)
- What is unique: v.14 – “FROM the Father”
 - As whole of Jn 1 underscores, only THIS Son is Eternally “with” the Father and sent “from” the heart of the divine being itself; only this Son IS God and therefore a complete and FULL reflection of God.

Further Point: Numerology in John 1 (Bauckham, *The Testimony*, 274ff)

- Prologue – 496 syllables
 - 496 is a “triangular number” (here, all the numbers from 1 to 31 added together; called “triangular” because if you represented 496 as dots, you could line them up into an equilateral triangle)
 - It is also a “perfect number,” i.e. equal to the sum of all its factors
- Why does that matter?
 - Jewish system called gematria – each letter, and therefore each word, has a numerical value
 - Revelation – on one way of counting, 666 in Revelation is equal to the value of the name Nero
 - In John 1:14, the “gematria” value of “one and only Son” (monogenes), the Naming of Jesus as the Unique and Only Son, is...anyone want to guess? 496!
 - UPSHOT: the syllable count matches and highlights the exaltation of Christ as the “one and only Son,” and thus Unique and Uniquely-qualified, REVEALER of God.



- How many think this seems cool and interesting...but also a little far-fetched that John would do it, or anyone reading could recognize it?
 - Fair enough, but should know: ancient world was obsessed with numbers; idea that they have religious or mystical significance was *common popular belief*.
 - For example, Pythagoras (6th c. BC, of theorem fame) – founder of a whole religion based on finding meaning in numbers.
 - Likewise, even the common people would use systems like gematria. For instance, in Pompeii, they found a little graffito on a wall: “I love the girl whose number is 545.”
 - Bauckham, 284: triangular and perfect numbers were well known to anyone of any education and were popularly regarded as spiritually significant
 - Furthermore:
 - Symbolic numbers of course significant in OT (7, 40, etc.), i.e. true faith, *and John* is explicitly interested in this and picking up on it (7 I am statements, etc.)
 - Jews developed their own version of religious gematria.
 - Also, PRACTICALLY: in the ancient world, counting syllables was something the scribes already routinely did in order to ensure they had copied a scroll or text correctly. So it’s not like someone has to consciously sit down and say, “okay, now let’s see about the numerology and gematria.” Simply in the act of counting and copying, they would hit upon “OH! That’s a perfect, triangular number of syllables I just copied!”
 - Finally, we will see other examples across the Gospel – which makes a very strong case that John is doing this consistently and intentionally. It’s:
 - In the first gathering of the disciples in Jn 1:19-2:11
 - In John the Baptist’s announcement of Jesus as “lamb of God”
 - In Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer in John 17
 - In “gematria” linked to the names of John and Peter
 - In the meaning of the 153 fish in John 21
 - And most relevant to where we are today: the last chapter and Epilogue of John, John 21, *has 496 words*.
 - Thus 496, the representation of “Only-Begotten” introduced in John 1 becomes an inclusio: a message present in both

“bookends” to the book: the whole Gospel is a witness to this Unique and Only Son.

Final Q: What, then, are the implications of the “uniqueness” of Jesus as the son for our lives?

- Look to him for definitive revelation of truth about God
- But also, because He IS God, because He IS that presence, look to Him for the definitive site of revelatory ENCOUNTER with God.
 - Even what Moses experienced with the burning bush and on Sinai, and the people of Israel in the Tabernacle and Temple, is far less than what we have in encountering God through the Incarnate Christ.
- Allow overall purpose and being of God revealed in Christ guide what we look for in all other Scripture (without overriding what is distinctive in each passage in its own right)
- Expect a FULLNESS of grace and truth to be delivered practically to our real lives in the Lord Jesus!