

Lesson 8: John's Gospel – John 1, First Week JB 2 and First Disciples

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

Next Up: The Witness of John the Baptist, Continued

Read John 1:29-34

Opening Points:

- Unlike the other Gospels, John does NOT offer a direct narrative of Jesus' Baptism here. What is it, instead?
 - John the Baptist's *testimony* to his *memory* of it→John as Witness
- At the same time, it is very dramatic and forward moving memory and testimony → it requires that Jesus be there for the reference “behold!” to work; and because Jesus IS there, the memory now gets linked to the messiah forever for John's hearers.
Segue: so let's consider the testimony...

V.29: “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

- **Q: What does it mean for John to call Jesus the Lamb of God?**
 - Lamb – sacrifice in the Temple
 - Especially, Isaiah 53 – v.7, the Suffering Servant is compared to a lamb, and then v.12 specifically says “he bore the sin of many” (Sidebar: the Greek LXX says “sins,” so we know John was reading the Hebrew here).
 - “Of God” – GOD is now offering the sacrifice. Abraham to Isaac (Gn 22): God himself will provide the sacrifice. Luther: God will provide *himself*, the sacrifice
 - In fact, according to Jewish tradition, God treated the “binding of Isaac” as a real sacrifice – specifically, as the kind of “burnt offering” that would later be offered in the temple.
 - What about the Passover Lamb? *Not* for sin-bearing.
 - However, Rabbinic principle – Gezerah shavah (“equal category”) – similar words or phrases are meant to be linked.
 - In addition, Jewish tradition also saw the original Passover as occurring on the anniversary of the binding of Isaac as well.
 - So in Jewish tradition, the “lambs” of Abraham’s sacrifice, of Passover, of ongoing Temple service and of Isaiah’s prophecy were all already linked. Jesus fulfills ALL!
 - Distinctives to John:
 - Though “lamb” is used of Jesus in a couple other passages, the ONLY place “the Lamb of God” is used as a *Title* of Jesus is here in John 1:29 and, as we will see shortly, again in Jn 1:36. Big for John.
 - Further highlighting the importance to John – note that this is the very first title attributed to Jesus after the Prologue. A “leading” place.
 - Numerology (Bauckham, 276): the numerical value for the Hebrew name of Jesus, Jehosuah (Joshua) and the numerical value for lamb of God are the same: 391. “So when John the Baptist sees Jesus and says, “Behold the Lamb of God” (1:29,35-36), he is interpreting the name Jesus by gematria.”
 - In addition, in John 19 (the narrative of the crucifixion), v.36 connects the fact that Jesus’s legs aren’t broken on the Cross to the command in Ex 12:46 that the legs of the Passover lamb should not be broken.
 - Anyone want to guess how many words there are between that verse and the first mention of the name Jesus in that chapter?
 - Yep, 391 – the number for “Jesus” and “Lamb of God”

v.30 – “This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’”

- The testimony we already saw assigned to John in Jn 1:15. This is featured as a central part of John’s testimony, i.e. the pre-eminence of Christ.
- Take the next bit as a chunk...

V.31-34 – “³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” ³² And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”

- **Q: What does this passage indicate about when John knew Jesus was the messiah?**
 - Answer: Not until Jesus’s baptism.
 - Then, John knew because God had actually spoken to him and TOLD him that the Spirit’s descent would be the sign that marked out the messiah.
 - **Question:** what do you think the days between God telling him and Jesus coming would have been like for John?
 - I’d imagine, distracted – there to baptize sinners, but looking for the One: is *this* him? Is *this*?
- **The Holy Spirit “like a dove”**
 - 1st century Palestinian Jews: strongest connotation for dove: “Israel” – so the meaning to a Jew at the Jordan might be: here is the true Israel
 - However, a few early Rabbinic traditions also connect the dove directly with the Spirit as He “brooded” over the waters of creation. Rabbi ben Zoma on Gn 1:2: “The Spirit of God was brooding on the face of the waters like a dove which broods over her young but does not touch them.”
 - Here too, obviously is water – a “new creation”!
- **Q: The text also says the Spirit *remained* on him – what do you think the significance of that might be?**
 - Not just temporary but eternal and lasting – in OT, Spirit would fall more specific purposes but then lift. On Christ, the fulfillment, he *remains*.
 - In fact, this remaining of the Spirit on the messiah was already expressly predicted by passages like Isaiah 11.

- **“He who baptizes with the Spirit”**

- We think, of course, of Pentecost
- However, as we will see, in John’s Gospel, in chapter 20, Jesus also “breathes” the Spirit upon his disciples before Pentecost proper, as part of his commissioning of them to forgive sins. This is what the Spirit has come for! (Theologians often call this the “little Pentecost.”)
 - Significantly, the idea of a fresh *breathing* of the Spirit also gives a significant connection to creation, where humanity was first created by having the breath of life breathed into them. Weinrich remarks (236): “The true lamb will be the source of such benefits for the human race because is the giver of the Spirit. The fall and restoration of man concerns the loss and the recovery of the divine Spirit.”
- But both of these are “special events” in salvation history. What about the “regular” reception of the Spirit after that?
 - As we saw this past Fall in our tour of other traditions, one common debate today is whether the regular baptism in the Spirit goes with water baptism, or if instead it is supposed to be a “separate experience” with miraculous signs or effects like speaking in tongues. We hold that the regular means of Spirit-baptism is water-baptism based on multiple passages. Among them:
 - In Acts 2, Peter directly promises that all who are water-baptized will thus be forgiven and receive the Spirit.
 - Likewise, in Acts 19, when the Spirit falls “more miraculously” on some Gentiles as a sign that they are already fully accepted by faith alone with the law, Peter immediately says, “who then can hinder them from being baptized with water?,” showing that the two were thought of as going together.
 - Furthermore, there is no command from either the Lord or his apostles to *seek* some distinctive, “miraculous” experience called Spirit-baptism whereas there are repeated commands to receive the water-baptism with which the Spirit is repeatedly associated.
 - Finally, as we will see especially later in John’s Gospel itself, the major role of the Spirit is not to “do miracles or tongues” but to bring us to faith and lead us into ALL the truth.

- **V.34**

- “I have seen and borne witness” – being an eyewitness grounds John’s authority
- “that *this*” – emphatic in Greek: *this one right here!*
- “is the Son of God” – Jn 11:27 and Jn 20:31 highlight “Christ, the Son of God” as the central confession of John’s Gospel. So John the Baptist here becomes the first receiver of God’s revelation of this truth, and its first public confessor. (Even before Peter, whom we usually think of as ‘first confessor’!)
- **Who is the audience of all this?**
 - Presumably, the crowds who come to hear John preach
 - But maybe also the Jerusalem delegation?
 - If so, how powerful for John, who had just confronted them over the fact that they were *ignorant* of the “one among them” that was pre-eminent to then say, now, “I ALSO didn’t know him at first.”
 - We ALL need the revelation that comes in Christ!
 - And of course, WE are also the audience – we “feel” the BEHOLD!

Read John 1:35-42

v.35-39

- The next day, John is at it again. As Jesus walks past, he repeats the announcement of the day before: “Behold the lamb of God.” Again, John is serving as forerunner and witness, directing attention to Christ.
- This time, two of John’s disciples hear his proclamation and follow Jesus.
- He sees them and asks, “what are you seeking?”
 - That’s a call for deep introspection, isn’t it? What are you really after?
 - But it also has a strong OT background – in Psalms 118 and 119, for example, we are repeatedly told to seek truth and goodness by seeking the Law and commands of God. Psalm 27 tells us to seek the face of the Lord. Jesus is tacitly asking his disciples if they are walking this path...as it brings them now to him. Of course, as in Jeremiah 29, this “seeking” also expressly includes repentance of everything at odds with God and his law, a seeking with one’s “whole heart.”
- Ultimately, what begins here is a process whereby these men are transferred from being disciples of John to being disciples of Jesus.
 - This is already foreshadowed in the phrase “they followed Jesus” in v.37
 - Their answer then begins to claim Jesus as teacher

- Most obviously, they call him Rabbi, which literally means “my great one” and was used in the 1st century as a title for “authoritative teacher”
 - Interestingly, John uses the term Rabbi far more frequently than any other Gospel. This shows he has a strong interest in what Jesus is doing within the standard structure of 1st century Judaism as such—and thus in a Jewish audience.
 - Of course, he has already indicated that Jesus himself IS the word of God in a way unparalleled by anyone else including Moses. And Moses – note! – was understood in rabbinic Judaism to have been the first and premier rabbi. So once more, John is directing us to see that Jesus is fulfilling Israel – but in an all-excelling way.
- But of course, that transition is only gradual, as they learn and confirm who Jesus is. And so next they ask him, “Where are you staying?” – Yes, literally, where are you *residing*. But in context, also “where are you teaching from? What’s ‘home base’?”
 - Jesus then invites them to come with him.
- We should also pause here to note: if you look at the discussion of how these men become Jesus’s disciples in the Synoptics, you will see that it is quite different. Remember? They are fishing, and he calls them to leave their nets and follow.
 - Again, here it is important to remember that each Gospel writer is compressing the narrative – selecting details related to the overall points they want to make and *leaving out others*.
 - Indeed, when you read those Synoptic narratives, it can almost sound like Jesus just shows up one day, says come, and that’s it. That might seem like a very pious interpretation – it shows just how immediately appealing Jesus is. But as we know, in general, the Gospel depicts all Jesus’s hearers NOT as being immediately overwhelmed but as having to wrestle with whether, and how, to follow.
 - Furthermore, wouldn’t it make more sense if the disciples had a more exploratory visit with Jesus *first*, before “leaving their nets to follow” formally?

- In fact, that is what John is offering us here: an account of how the disciples first encountered Jesus while they were yet with John and began to check him out, and his teaching.
 - So we should understand this meeting in John as the “first,” exploratory meeting and the one in the Synoptics as the decision point (and indeed, note the difference in what Jesus says in each: come and see vs come and follow)
- Let’s also pause here to think about exactly what Jesus says, “come and you will see.”
 - Importantly, being the disciple of a Rabbi is not simply about listening to him and learning his oral teaching. Disciples learn by *living with* their rabbi, simply being present with them. He also would often teach them by a kind of “follow-the-leader” in which they learn lessons by watching (and imitating) what the Rabbi does, as well as by serving him (carrying his bags, etc.). Jesus is inviting the men into this. Indeed, the call to this kind of life will be directly given by Jesus in John 12:26: “If anyone serves me, let him follow me; where I am, there shall my servant also be.”
 - Correlatively, we should note that the verb translated here as “staying” (where are you staying?) is *meno*, which is more literally “abide” or “remain.” As we will see, this will be a very important verb in John for abiding and remaining with Christ and his teaching, i.e. with Christ as Rabbi.
- “They stayed with him that day” – the disciples were so drawn in by what they “came and saw” that they continued to “abide” with Jesus for a whole day. Likely, they also stayed with him overnight – “for it was about the 10th hour” (4pm). Customary hospitality of the Jews → stay with your host as evening approaches.
 - It does not say what they were doing during that time. But of course, we are to assume that Jesus was teaching them about himself from the Scriptures. (Obviously, they weren’t just sitting there, and the NT writers tend to omit extra details that they think are either obvious (as here) or not important for the particular angle of the story they are trying to present.
 - As a SIDEBAR: this also points up two important, more general rules for interpretation: 1) you cannot assume from “silence” in the texts that Jesus never did or spoke to something (arguments from silence are almost always bad arguments, and definitely the weakest), 2) vice versa, we should understand that in fact, *all* the NT writers are

constantly selecting details and compressing timelines – this is why some things don't quite seem to line up, Gospel to Gospel...things are omitted and compressed as suits the purposes of each author.)

- Finally, we should also note here that later on in John 15, Jesus will tell his disciples “you did not choose me; I chose you” and in John 6, “no one comes to me unless the Father draws them.” This is important because if we might look at the present text and think that the two men are the originators of their discipleship as they gradually “decide” to move from John to Jesus. But Jesus himself asserts that is not the case. Instead, based on his later teaching, we should understand that the ground of their discipleship is God *drawing* them through the proclamation of the Baptist, “Behold the lamb of God,” and then his further teaching as they “abide” with him. Likewise, we should note that at the very start, it is JESUS who chooses to “come by” as they are there. And of course, they only join him upon his invitation. Both of these too, then, are part of his effective choice of the men as his disciples.

v.40-2

- So one of the disciples is Andrew. Andrew then gets his brother Peter.
 - They are from Bethsaida. As you probably know, they were fishermen, and in fact “Beth-saida” means “house of fishing.” Fishermen from a fishing city.
 - We also know that while predominantly Jewish itself, Bethsaida was in a heavily Greek area – Galilee – so much so that even many of the Jews began giving their kids Greek names – like Andrew, which means, “man/manly.”
 - We talk about Andrew playing second fiddle a bit to Peter, which is true. Not only is Peter “first” among the apostles, but Jesus also had that inner circle of Peter, James, and John – no Andrew.
 - But, Andrew was often added to that group as a fourth. And in various lists of the apostles, he is often given a high status/listing, higher even than John or James.
 - Another interesting tidbit – in the Muratorian Canon, which is the oldest known extant list of New Testament books, written in AD 170-200, it says this: “it was revealed to Andrew, of the apostles, that John should write down all things in his own name while all of them should review it.” Just a tradition, but if right, Andrew is in part responsible at least for encouraging John to write this Gospel; whether he lived to actually review it or not, is another question which we’ll never be able to answer.

- Peter’s given name is of course Simon, though here Jesus prophesies, already at his first recruitment, his eventual name change to “Rock” – that is, to Peter or Kephias (Aramaic version)
 - Meaning of Kephias (and *petra* in Greek) – not a separate stone or pebble but a crag that is on a mountain or part of a generally hilly landscape. Not so distinct as sometimes think – to the contrary, *joined* to Christ the Cornerstone and to all the “living stones” that ultimately would become God’s House (1 Pt 2:5).
 - **Q:** What effect do you think that early prophecy might have had on Peter?
 - Assurance of importance – only important people get name changes.
 - Assurance of strength – rock
- Who is the other, unnamed disciple?
 - Obviously, we don’t “know,” but two options are traditionally suggested.
 - 1) Philip – Philip is often mentioned with Andrew in various apostle lists or stories, and as we’ll see shortly, just after this, Philip performs a parallel “bringing” to Andrew by bringing Nathanel.
 - 2) John – one factor here is that the anonymity of the second disciple would fit well with the way John continually “hides himself” in the narrative; another is that in the Synoptic narratives of the call of the disciples, the call of John and his brother James (the “sons of Zebedee”) follows that of the call of Andrew and Peter; a third is that this would then have three parallels – Andrew brings Peter, John brings James, Philip brings Nathanael – with the first two being a particularly tight parallel of brothers bringing brothers. [I think this is the strongest case.]
- Finally, beyond all these specifics, we should note the importance of a key difference in John from the Synoptics:
 - In the Synoptics, after his baptism, Jesus is driven into the wilderness for temptation and/or then proclaims the kingdom.
 - Here, the first thing John highlights is his calling of the disciples. So for John, the most important thing after introducing Christ himself is to introduce THE CHURCH.
 - As we will see, this continues to be an important theme, so much so that the Gospel of John is sometimes called “the Ecclesial Gospel,” i.e., the Gospel of the Church.