

# THE GOSPEL OF JOHN (A theological and Spiritual Perspective)

Bible Study in Summer Season (June - August 2020)

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Place: St. Barnabas Church Rectory, Long Beach

By: Fr. Bernard Santiago (Associate Pastor)

Assisted by: Fr. Antony Gaspar (Pastor) and the Staff

Day and Time: Every Thursday from 7 -8.30 pm for 10 weeks

Methodology: All the 21 chapters will be read and analyzed in detail with historical and theological background. The important Johannine themes will be elaborated with the help of the parallel texts in the OT and NT in order to find the divinity of Jesus in the gospel.

Purpose of the Study: How we can understand the gospel of John which is read in the entire liturgical season of Easter and other seasons in order to know Christ. We will make attempts to know why the Gospel of John is known as a spiritual Gospel and how can prayerfully read, understand and apply its messages for our spiritual growth.

Study Method: Due to safety concerns of the Covid19, we will continue the virtual Bible study, live streamed through zoom link, from St. Barnabas Church Rectory.

Study Material for the class: Every Tuesday each participant will receive an email with an attachment of the material for the Thursday Bible Study session and everyone is expected to print their own material beforehand and read beforehand for better participation. Every participant is expected to read through the chapters of the gospel before the study for better understanding.

Participation Certificate: At the end of the course, the participants will be awarded with a certificate of participation and excellence. Hence, interest, passion, regularity and continuity are very expected of the participants. Anyone from any parish who desires to learn the Bible is welcome.

Clarification: Interaction during the lesson is not possible because of virtual set up. The last fifteen minutes will be dedicated for clarification.

Zoom application meeting ID: 99174147604 Password: 3955

## What is the value of the group study in the parish?

Group Bible study is not just valuable, it is invaluable. Small group study is so effective that Jesus used it to train his disciples and apostles. He taught them about the kingdom of God...how to pray. How to listen and respond to the word of God. How to be cautious in their ministry. What to carry and what not to carry. How to grow in faith and how to be good stewards....

Small group Bible study moves us from being spectators in a weekly church service to active participants in a like-minded community dedicated to spiritual growth. As we encounter God's Word together, we have an opportunity to share our different perspectives and insights and are broadened because of the interaction. Transformation takes place and our lives are changed. When our lives are changed, the lives of those around us are changed as well.

As we gain in our knowledge of the Bible we deepen our relationship with God and other believers (Colossians 2:7), We become better equipped to live and share the gospel with those in our schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces.

Our commitment to a group Bible study is a model to those around us. It is an evidence that we value our spiritual growth enough. Our children are watching our actions and they gain firsthand knowledge of what it means to be a follower of Christ and honor the Word. They benefit from our commitment because they see us walking our talk, working out our salvation (Philippians 2:12).

The word of God grew and the Christian community grew: Acts 12:24/ /13:49 19:20/. Hence the Bible study is a great opportunity for the spiritual growth of the parish community.

### Opening Prayer before the Bible Study

Heavenly Father, we praise you for all your blessings today and we bless you for bringing us this evening to learn your words of everlasting life. You sent your Son as a light to shine in our darkness. Help us to listen to what Jesus is saying to us and to act on your Word so that rivers of living waters might flow from our hearts. Heavenly Father, by the light of the Holy Spirit, you instructed the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and enjoy his consolations. Lord Jesus, you taught your disciples and the multitudes the love of the Father and the mysteries of His Kingdom through prophecies, laws, words, parables and images. Pour out your wisdom upon us to love you and live your words. You promised to send your Holy Spirit to teach us all things. As we read and study your word today, allow it truly to touch our hearts and to change our lives. Come Holy Spirit, fill our hearts and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit upon us and teach us all the eternal truths that we may follow them and teach one another and bear fruits in our life. (Our Father....Glory....)

### Closing Prayer after the Bible Study

Lord, your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. We thank you for the blessing of reading and learning your word together. We ask that these words of life, truth and hope would continue to impact us in the week ahead. May the things that you have revealed and thoughts that we have shared dwell in our hearts and stir us to action. As we come to an end of the bible study of the day, we thank you for speaking to us through your word. As we depart from this bible study group to our homes and communities, we call upon you to protect and guide us all in your wisdom and love. Blessed Mother, the Seat of Wisdom, intercede for us to your Son that we may learn, live and love His life giving words (Hail Mary...Blessings)

## First and Introductory Lesson

### THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The most popular bible verse in the entire Bible or the entire Bible history in just one verse is found in John's Gospel. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" This verse, the most loveable verse in the entire Bible, so succinctly summarizes God's relationship with humanity and the way of salvation. Some consider John 3:16 as the "theme verse" for the entire Bible. John 3:16 tells us of the love God has for us and the extent of that love—so great that He sacrificed His only Son on our behalf. John 3:16 teaches us that anyone who believes in Jesus Christ, God's Son, will be saved. John 3:16 gives us the glorious hope of eternal life in heaven through the love of God and death of Jesus Christ.

What is John's Gospel? It is a theological gospel with a clear message that Jesus is God. Jesus' divinity is the central message. The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the King of the Jews. Mark presents Jesus as the suffering servant and Luke presents Jesus as the Savior for all. Generally speaking, the synoptics tell us what Jesus said and did; John tells us who Jesus is. The synoptics focus on the signs and sayings of Christ; John emphasizes the identity of Christ. Early church father Clement of Alexandria called John "the spiritual Gospel" because of its deep insight into Jesus' divinity. The Gospel of John is read throughout Easter, and is used for other liturgical seasons including Advent, Christmas, and Lent where appropriate.

New converts are told to begin reading John because it says who Jesus is and what we have to do for our salvation (belief in him). The divinity of Jesus is treated theologically and logically. It is simple, precise to the point. It helps us to understand the other Gospels. Jesus' discourses with Nicodemus, Samaritan woman, Adulterous woman and blind man, his resurrection appearances to disciples are very helpful to introduce seekers and the lost ones to Christ and the Church.

John and OT: From the very beginning and throughout the prologue of his book, John uses many OT themes, peoples (Abraham, Jacob and Moses) and events which are very open and verifiable in the OT. Jesus is identified as the Christ and Son of God and is set in relation to major figures in Israel's history. John is attractive to the Jews because it spends considerable amount of time relating in one way or another to various Jewish religious festivals. feasts of the Jews mentioned. Unnamed Feast (1) Feast of Passover (2:13) Unnamed Feast (5:2), Feast of Passover (6:4) Feast of Booths (7:2) Feast of the Dedication (10:22) Feast of Passover (12:1).

Symbol for each Gospel: Christian tradition has long connected the authors of the four canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) with the four "living creatures" that surround God's throne, as described in Rev 4:7. St. Jerome then applies the four symbolical figures of Ezekiel 1:1-14 to the Gospels: Man, Lion, Calf and Eagle

The Man's symbol is for Matthew who starts with the genealogy of Jesus, telling Jesus became a human being

The Lion's symbol is for Mark who brings John the Baptist as the powerful messenger and message to prepare the people for Jesus the Messiah

The Calf's symbol is for Luke who starts with Zacharias the temple priest who does sacrifices, presenting Jesus who came to sacrifice

The Eagle's symbol is for John who speaks about descending theology. The Transcending God becoming Immanent God. God becomes Human Being and living in our midst (Immanuel- God (El) with us (Immanu) God with us in the person of Jesus.

What is the meaning of Eagle symbol? It is said that the eagle has penetrating vision, seeing not only telescopically on the earth from the heavens above, but, according to legend, it alone could see into the sun. John, through the lens of the eagle eye, sees Christ's divinity profoundly in His words and deeds: the divine made fully manifest in human form before our very eyes.

### The Literary Style of John

Prologue (1: 1-18) is an introduction to the book

The Book of Signs (2:12- 12:50). In the Gospel of John, "sign" is also used to mean "miracle." Unlike the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke, John does not record very many miracles of Jesus. There are only seven listed in John, but each tells us very special things we need to know about Jesus. The seven signs are:

Changing water into wine at the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-11);  
Healing the royal official's son (Jn 4:46-54);  
Healing the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem (Jn 5:1-15);  
Feeding the 5,000 (Jn 6:5-14);  
Walking on water (Jn 6:16-21);  
Healing the man born blind (Jn 9:1-7); and  
Raising Lazarus from the dead (Jn 11:1-45).

The Book of Glory (Chap 13-20) The Book of Glory tells of Jesus's return to his heavenly father: it tells how he prepares his disciples for their coming lives without his physical presence and his prayer for himself and for them, followed by his betrayal, arrest, trial, crucifixion and post-resurrection appearances.

Epilogue (21) is conclusion to the book.

Who is the author of the Gospel? John 21:20–24 describes the author of the gospel of John as “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” and for both historical and internal reasons this is understood to be John the Apostle, one of the sons of Zebedee (Luke 5:10). John started as an ignorant fisherman (Ac. 4:13), but after spending extended time with Jesus, he transformed into a man on a mission to tell the world about the Godman he met on the shores of Galilee. C. S. Lewis said it well, “The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.”

When was it written? 85-90 AD is a more accepted time for the writing of the gospel of John.

What is the Purpose of Writing? The author cites the purpose of the gospel of John as follows: “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31). Unlike the three Synoptic Gospels, John’s purpose is not to present a chronological narrative of the life of Christ but to display His deity.

To whom it was written? It was written to new Christians and searching non-Christians

Who are the Key people in the gospel of John? Jesus, John the Baptist, Peter, John, Blessed Mother, Martha, Mary, Lazarus, Samaritan woman, Nicodemus, Mary Magdalene, In addition to Peter and John the Beloved Disciple, John's Gospel names several disciples specifically: Andrew, Nathanael, Phillip, and Thomas.

What are the mega themes in John? Jesus Christ as the Son of God, Eternal Life, Belief, Holy Spirit and Resurrection

Special features in the gospel of John

I am sayings: The gospel of John introduces Jesus Christ, not from his birth, but from ‘the beginning’ before creation. He portrays Jesus as the God of the Old Testament emphatically inserting seven “I am” sayings. In John’s writings, we find a direct connection between God who revealed his name as I AM to Moses, and Jesus who said I AM in the New Testament. When Moses asked God what His name was at the burning bush, “God said to Moses, I AM WHO I AM. Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you” (Ex. 3:14). I AM means the self-existent One, the Eternal One and expresses the unchangeableness of God’s character. He transcends the past, the present and the future—He always has been, He always is, and He always will be God.

The seven “I AM” statements of Jesus:

1. I AM the Bread of Life/Living Bread—Jn. 6:35, 48, 51.
2. I AM the Light of the World—Jn. 8:12; 9:5.
3. I AM the Door of the sheep—Jn. 10:7, 9.
4. I AM the Good Shepherd—Jn. 10:11, 14.
5. I AM the Resurrection and the Life—Jn. 11:25.
6. I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life—Jn. 14:6.
7. I AM the True Vine—Jn. 15:1, 5.

John continues this theme of I AM in the Book of Revelation

1. I AM the Alpha and Omega—1:8, 11; 22:13.
2. I AM the Beginning and the End—1:8; 22:13.
3. I AM the First and the Last—1:11; 22:13.
4. I AM He Who Lives and was Dead—1:18.
5. I AM He Who Searches the Reigns and Hearts—2:23.
6. I AM the Root and Offspring of David—22:16.
7. I AM the Bright and Morning Star—22:16.

Theological discourses: Unlike the Synoptic Gospels that include many teaching parables about the Kingdom of God, John's Gospel displays Jesus' teaching in a series of discourses. If we were to number the major discourses in the Book of Signs we could come up with following famous discourses:

- The New Birth (3:1-36)
- The Water of Life (4:1-42)
- The Divine Son (5:19-47)
- The Bread of Life (6:22-66)
- The Life-Giving Spirit (7:1-52)
- The Light of the World (8:12-59)
- The Good Shepherd (10:1-42)
- The Farewell Discourses (13:1-17:26)
- Washing the Disciples' Feet, Love One Another (13:1-38)
- I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:1-14).
- I Will Give You Another Counselor (14:15-31)
- Abiding in the Vine (15:1-17)
- The Spirit of Truth (15:18-16:11)
- The Spirit Will Guide You (16:12-33)
- Jesus' High Priestly Prayer for His Disciples (17:1-26)

What are the main differences between the Synoptic Gospels and John?

Human lineage of Jesus in synoptics and Divine lineage of Jesus in John: In the beginning of the gospel, John 1:1 states, "In the beginning," taking the readers back to the very start of the Genesis 1:1, "in the beginning". By contrast, Mark's Gospel starts with the public ministry of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel opens with a genealogy then moves on to stories surrounding the infancy of Jesus. Luke's Gospel provides unique details of the birth of John the Baptist as well as Jesus, before offering a genealogy (Luke 3:23-38). The Synoptic tradition wrestles early on with the human lineage of Jesus. But John's Gospel goes back to the very beginning, describing Jesus, the Logos ("word"), as both equal to and distinct from the God of the Old Testament ("the Word was with God and the Word was God"). The entire prologue (1:1-18), treats the theological themes in short that will be developed later in the book.

Dualistic Language: Another stylistic difference includes John's dualistic language, demonstrated in contrasts such as: belief/rejection, light/darkness, truth/lie.

Personal experience of John in his writing: John is called “The Revelator” because, among other things, he unveiled the true identity of Christ in greater depth as God than any other Bible author. John drew closer to Jesus than any other disciple and was given deeper insight into His divine nature. According to John, Jesus did not become the Son of God when He was born of a virgin 2,000 years ago. He has always been the eternal, pre-existent Son of God. He merely assumed a human body in Mary’s womb— “The Word became human and lived among us” (Jn. 1:14).

Presentation of Jesus’ ancestry: Matthew traced Jesus’ ancestry back to Abraham (Mt. 1:1), Luke traced it back to Adam (Lk. 3:38), but John traced it back to God the Father in eternity past. Furthermore, he disclosed how Christ predates time and creation and was a co-Creator with His Father “He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (Jn. 1:2-3). Paul agreed with this assertion (Col. 1:14-19).

Why is the Gospel of John so different from the other gospels? Is there a different motivation or historical circumstance?

The short answer is both. The historical situation of the congregation for which the gospel was written was different from that of the first three gospels, and so consequently was the writer’s motivation in writing for the pastoral needs of this particular congregation.

The first three gospels were written probably during and after the Jewish-Roman War of A.D. 66-70, and for the purpose of preserving as much as possible of the actual words and deeds of Jesus’ ministry, by writing them down before those who remembered them might forget them, or be lost, or die. Thus we have a “first draft” in the gospel of Mark, and two similar but different expansions in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

“John” is a different story. The congregation for which it was written lived at the end of the century. The Christians were persecuted, thrown out of the synagogues by the Jews. (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). They had a faith crisis losing the temple of God and started losing their faith. Although they had the first three gospels, they needed a gospel which would speak to their own specific, present pastoral needs. They wanted the message of Jesus according to their need and context. And so the author, writing under the name of the “disciple whom Jesus loved,” composed his gospel in order to speak to this burning question of his congregation. He took certain stories about the ministry of Jesus and retold those stories in a way which would speak directly to the needs of his congregation.

John’s motivation: He is trying to make an apology, a convincing apology for his view of who Jesus was -and still is- for his community. John, therefore, was possessed by a holy focus. This is not an autobiography, or even a biography of Jesus. Rather, John’s Gospel is an aid to personal faith. John’s gospel is not a life of Christ; it is a powerful argument for the incarnation and a very conclusive demonstration that Jesus was and is the son of God and the only source of eternal life. In every chapter, Jesus’ divinity is revealed through titles - Word, the One and Only, Lamb of God, True Bread, Life, Resurrection, Vine. John the devoted follower of Christ, has given us a personal and powerful look at Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God.

## Prologue (Jn 1:1-18)

While the synoptics speak about the birth and infancies of Jesus in the first chapter, John makes the most dramatic use of the prologue form to emphasize Jesus' divinity. What is Prologue? Prologue is pronounced Pro-log. It comes from a Greek word ( *πρόλογος* *prologos*, *πρό* means before and *λόγος* means word). Literally it means before a word. In the context of a book, it is a short introductory section that sets the stage for the story to come. The prologue is usually pretty short, maybe a few pages. But it may be the most important section of the story, and if readers skip it they may be lost for the entire story. In order to understand John's gospel and the sequence of themes in the gospel, it is important that we know the content of prologue because the themes of the prologue are treated in detail from the 2<sup>a</sup> chapter to 20<sup>th</sup>. In the prologue, we find Christological titles and the divinity of Jesus. In a very real sense, the prologue provides a profound and highly developed theological summary.

In prologue, we could easily notice the relationship of the Prologue to the rest of the Gospel. A number of Johannine terms are being introduced here ("life," "light," 1:5; "believe," 1:7; "world," 1:9; "children of God," 1:12; "flesh," 1:14; "truth," 1:14). The Prologue also introduces the figure of John the Baptist (1:6). He is apparently known to the Johannine community.

### Analysis

1. The Word in the Beginning (1:1-3). There are three 'in the beginnings' in the Bible (Gen1:1/John1:1/1 John1:1)

1:1-2 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God". In the first chapter of Gen 1: 1-3 we read "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters. Then *God said*: Let there be light, and there was light". In "God said", we find both "God and Word". God is the Creator and Word is the Creator as well.

The Word already existed even before the world was made. St. Paul highlights the supremacy of Christ in Col 1:15-17 "*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*" What we learn from John is that the Word (Jesus) is identified as being equal in divine status to that of God and is fully God. The Word is an agent of creation and a source of God's message to his people through the prophets. In Hebrew thought, the Word was another expression of God. The Word in the fullest sense is God.

The Word and Creation (1:3-5) "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it". When God created,

he created everything out of nothing. We are only God's creation and there is no basis for pride. Refer Psalm 8. We need to remember that we exist only because we were created by God. Only fools will say that there is no God (Psalm 14). We are very unique and valuable because God created us. Apart from God, we are nothing. God created the entire universe and nothing is too difficult for him. He is the creator and He is alive today and his love and grace is bigger than any problem we may face.

In him was life. Jesus Christ is the Creator of Life and his life brings light to humanity. He is the light of the world and when we follow him, we have eternal life. When we follow him, he removes the darkness of our sins. He lights the path ahead of us so that we can see how to live. The word "life" is known as *zoe* in Greek.

John the Baptist (1:6-8) Jesus Christ is the true light and John the Baptist only reflected the light of Christ. John was a witness to Christ. Like John, we merely reflect the light of Christ who helps us to see our way to God and shows us how to walk along that way.

1:10-11 "He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him" Although God created the world, the people he created didn't recognize him (10) and even the people chosen by God to prepare the rest of the world for the Messiah rejected him (11) although the entire OT pointed to his coming. John picks up the theme of rejection from the book of Isaiah 1:2-3 "Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth, for the LORD speaks: *Sons have I raised and reared, but they have rebelled against me. An ox knows its owner, and an ass, its master's manger; But Israel does not know, my people has not understood.*

New Life in Christ (1:12-13) All who welcome Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives are reborn spiritually, receiving new life from God. Through faith in Christ, we are born anew in Christ. Being born of parents makes us physically alive and places us in our parents' family (13). Being born of God makes us spiritually alive and puts us in God's family (12)

The Word became flesh (1:14): God becomes a human being. The Transcendent God (OT) became an Immanent God (NT). St. Paul teaches this in Galatians 4:4. The book of Hebrews confirms this truth in 1:1-2. God is accessible to us. He is with us. Deut 4:7-8 "For what great nation is there that has gods *so close to it as the LORD, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him?* Or what great nation has statutes and ordinances that are as just as this whole law which I am setting before you today?"

The One and Only means Jesus is God's only and unique Son. He is the One and Only Way to the Father. He is the only Savior. Before Christ came, people could know God partially. After Christ came, people could know God fully because He became visible and tangible in Christ. Christ is the perfect expression of God in human form. Jesus is both God and man.

Law and Grace (1:17) Law and Grace are both aspects of God's nature that he uses in dealing with us. Moses emphasized God's law and justice while Jesus emphasized God's mercy, love and forgiveness. Moses could only be the giver of the law but Christ came to fulfill the law (Mt 5:17). In the OT, the nature and will of God were revealed in the law but in the NT, the nature and will of God are revealed in Jesus.