

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Why Did John Write The Fourth Gospel? John 20:30-31

Last week we discovered that the Apostle John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, a member of Christ's inner circle, wrote the fourth gospel. This week I would like to continue to lay the foundation for our study of this wonderful gospel

I believe most of you have heard about “*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*” written by J.K. Rowling. This is her fifth book in the Harry Potter series. The publisher initially ordered a printing of 8.5 million copies. But this number has proven woefully inadequate to keep up with the demand for the book.

The excitement about this book should not surprise us considering that the first four books in the Harry Potter series have sold an estimated 192 million copies worldwide and have been published in at least 55 different languages and distributed in more than 200 countries.

This phenomenon becomes all the more impressive when you consider the background of the author, J.K. Rowling. She was 26 years old when she first conceived the idea for her book series. This was a year after the birth of her daughter and a year before her divorce from a Portuguese journalist. You might think that this would have derailed her but rather than derailing her the difficult circumstances pushed her forward with even greater determination to see her idea become reality. So over a period of seven years she worked on this particular series of books while caring for her daughter and at times being supported by public assistance. What drove her forward toward her goal? She said it was her desire to “accomplish something” with her life.

I don't know specifically what she had in mind when she talked about accomplishing something but I think we can take a reasonable guess. I would think that she would have wanted to be taken seriously as a writer. I would think that she would have wanted to support herself and her daughter financially through the proceeds generated by the sale of her books. And I would think that she would have wanted her writings to be a source of entertainment to as many people as possible. In spite of your particular view of her fictional book series about witches and wizards I don't believe anyone can say that she has failed to accomplish some pretty significant things in the eyes of the world.

Certainly she has received all kinds of awards for her Harry Potter series and is presently being taken very seriously as a writer. Certainly she has generated enough money through her books to take care of the financial needs of herself and her daughter. In fact she has become the richest woman in England surpassing even the queen. And of course it is very obvious that she has entertained far more people than she could have ever imagined through her writings.

J.K. Rowling certainly has accomplished something with her life. But now we come to the question at hand. Though J.K. Rowling may have accomplished far more than she ever dreamed of accomplishing when set out to write the Harry Potter series, “How does this compare with what has been accomplished by the Apostle John through the fourth gospel?”

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

In answering this question I would hope that we would once again be personally reminded about what is truly most important in life. In answering this question I would hope that we would once again be reminded about what our greatest ambition needs to be.

What is the question that we are seeking to answer this weekend? The question that we will be seeking to answer is, “Why did John write the fourth gospel?” I believe that there are a number of right answers to this question. But even though there are a number of right answers I also believe that there is only one best answer. And this morning I will seek to highlight that answer for you.

There are those who say John wrote this fourth gospel to complement Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Certainly I believe that we can understand why people might suggest that John was written to complement these earlier gospels since Matthew, Mark and Luke are so similar to one another and so dissimilar to John. In fact Matthew, Mark and Luke are so similar theologians have called these three gospels the Synoptic Gospels. This of course makes the Gospel of John a non-synoptic gospel.

Why did they choose the word “synoptic” to describe these three gospels? The word “synoptic” comes from the combination of two Greek words which literally translated means “a seeing together.”

In other words, when Matthew, Mark and Luke were led to write their gospels they viewed the material that they wanted to include in their gospels in a similar way. However when John chose to write his gospel he viewed the material that he wanted to include much differently from the earlier gospels. How dissimilar was John from the synoptic gospels? Only about 10% of the material included in John can be found in the other three gospels.

What material does the Gospel of John leave out that synoptic gospels include? There are no narrative parables in John. There is no account of the transfiguration. There is no record of the institution of the Lord’s Supper. There is no report of Jesus casting out a demon. There is no mention of Jesus’ temptations. There are fewer brief, pithy utterances. Although Jesus’ baptism and the calling of the Twelve are doubtless presupposed, they are not actually described. Even themes central to the Synoptics have almost disappeared: in particular, the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, so much a part of the preaching of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels and the central theme of his narrative parables, is scarcely mentioned as such in John.

We have considered what John chose not to include in his gospel that was included in the Synoptic gospels but let us go on and ask the next logical question. What does the Gospel of John include that the Synoptic Gospels leave out? I will give you just a sampling of this additional material.

All of the material in John 2-4, for instance, including his transformation of water into wine, his encounter with Nicodemus and his ministry in Samaria, find no Synoptic counterpart. Further, the resurrection of Lazarus, Jesus’ frequent visits to Jerusalem, and his extended dialogues and discourses in the temple and in various synagogues, not to mention much of his private instruction to his disciples, are all exclusive to the Fourth Gospel.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

One thing is very clear the Gospel of John gives us much valuable and important information about the life and ministry of Christ that was not contained in the synoptic gospels.

Because of the dramatic difference in content between the Gospel of John and the synoptic gospels it certainly is not surprising that someone might suggest that the reason why John wrote this gospel was to complement Matthew, Mark and Luke. Though this is of course true and certainly could be listed as one of the reasons why John wrote this gospel it was not the reason why John wrote this gospel. What might be another reason why John wrote this gospel?

There are those who say that John wrote his gospel to combat gnosticism. If you have been a student of the bible for a while you might be somewhat familiar with the term gnosticism. In fact the book of Colossians as well as the pastoral epistles were greatly influenced by the threat of gnosticism. In addition to these books there are those who also believe that other books were influenced as well by this threat, one of those books some have suggested was the gospel of John.

What exactly is gnosticism? Gnosticism was a philosophical and religious movement, started in pre-Christian times that threatened to corrupt the biblical view of the person and work of Christ.

What exactly did the Gnostics believe? They believed that God, or better said, the supreme God, was distant from human affairs and unknowable. They also believed that he had created a series of supernatural but finite beings called Aeons. One of these aeons, named Sophia, gave birth to a defective creator God known as the Demiurge. And this lower defective God became responsible for the creation of the earth and all of its life forms.

Gnostics looked upon this creation by the demiurge as inherently evil. However they believed that there was a ray of hope for a select few. They believed that trapped within some people's bodies were the sparks of divinity or seeds of light that had been supplied to humanity by Sophia the mother of Demiurge, the lower creator God. And as these individuals became more knowledgeable about their seed of light or their divine spark they would have the opportunity to escape the prison of their bodies at death so that they could be reunited with the Supreme God who had been distant and unknowable to them until this event takes place.

You might be asking yourself how did Christ fit into all of this? He became very important to the Gnostics in the time of the early church but not as a redeemer or savior in the sense that conservative evangelical Christians would view him but rather as a redeemer or savior in a totally different sense.

Conservative, evangelical Christianity views Christ as the Redeemer because He made it possible for them through His death on the cross to be set free from sin. This is not how the Gnostics viewed Christ at all. For them, Christ was their redeemer because He had been sent from the spiritual world with secret knowledge about their inner divine spark or their seed of light that would make it possible for them to escape their bondage to the demiurge.

And in order to promote Christ as having been sent from the spirit world with this special or deeper knowledge potentially knowable only by those who possessed this so-called divine spark some

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Gnostic groups found it necessary to promote the docetic belief that Christ was not human but was rather pure spirit possessing only a phantom body or in other words Jesus only appeared to be human to his followers.

Certainly if you are familiar with the Gospel of John you can see how this gospel very forcefully could be used to counter this Gnostic claims. Let us consider for a moment just a couple of verses from the very first chapter of John's gospel. Let's begin with **John 1:14**, "Shortly after the beginning a spirit being who was with God but who was not God came down to earth and fooled us into thinking that he shared with us the same the evil fleshly body that we share but all the while was simply a phantom."

Is this what John said in these two verses? Of course not! What did He say? This is what he said, **And the word (which was in the beginning with God and was God according to John 1:1) became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."**

One thing is very clear, the Gospel of John gave valuable and important information that proved very helpful in the battle against Gnosticism and I am sure that the material that we find in John was used for this very purpose. But this is not the primary reason why John wrote this gospel.

If John was not specifically written to give us a more complete picture of Jesus, if John was not specially written to combat Gnosticism why was the gospel of John written?

The fourth gospel, according to John 20:30-31, was written in order that people might believe and be saved. Let me read for you **John 20:30-31** "**Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book. (31) but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.**" Now you can better understand why many evangelistic ministries often choose to pass out the Gospel of John in their evangelistic efforts. Why do they do this? Because the Gospel of John was written to bring people to faith.

This weekend I am not going to break these two verses down word for word. I will wait to do that when we come to these two verses in the course of our study. But even without this careful examination it should be abundantly clear to us that though the gospel of John serves many wonderful and worthwhile purposes the author of this gospel chose to identify one singular purpose for writing this gospel. What did he say, "**..... These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.**" I would like to now read you a statement made by a man named Gordon Keddie in commenting on these two verses. A statement that I believe in our future study will prove itself extremely accurate.

This is what he says in commenting on **John 21:30-31**, "Jesus here calls us to believe in him as Saviour and Lord, personally and from the heart. The Jesus in whom we are to believe is no mere man, not simply the son of Mary, but the divine Son, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, the suffering Servant of Jehovah, the Redeemer that Job knew was alive and would stand in the latter days upon the earth, the Deliverer promised in all the foreshadowing of Old Testament ceremonial sacrifice and prophetic prediction.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

To believe in any other ‘Jesus’ - truly human, but not God in the flesh; a great and controversial teacher, but not the Word who is God; an influential moralist but no sinless servant of Jehovah; dying on a cross, but no substitute sin bearer; somehow ‘alive in his followers minds, but not bodily risen from the dead; a symbol of hope, but not coming again to judge the living and the dead - is to trust a ‘Jesus’ that never existed, and one who, even if he had existed, would be powerless to save a soul, even his own.”

What is his point? We cannot be saved unless we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Isn't this what John is saying. He did not simply say, “**These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ; and that believing you may have life in His name.**” He did not simply say, “**These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.**” What did He say? He said, “**These things 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.**”

Believing in Jesus as the Christ and therefore our redeemer is important. But it is also important that we understand that the Christ of the Bible is not a mere mortal but rather the only begotten Son of God. For us to deny the deity of Christ is to deny the gospel.

CONCLUSION

The Apostle John did not write this gospel simply to provide us a more complete picture of the life and ministry of Jesus. The Apostle John did not write this gospel simply to provide us with additional inspired writings to combat false teachers. John wrote the things he included in this gospel so that we and others “**may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing (we) may have life in His name.**”

Is this a good reason for us to study this gospel? I would hope that all of us would answer the same way, “Absolutely!” Perhaps other things may at times be more important to you. Perhaps being recognized as successful in your chosen field of endeavor might be important to you. Perhaps earning enough money to supply for yourself and your family enough to “enjoy the good life” might be important to you. Perhaps bringing a little cheer into the difficult and dreary lives of as many people as you possibly can might be important to you and I hope it is. But there is nothing more important for us to know than this; that we are saved, or our spouse is saved, or our children are saved, or our parents are saved. There is nothing more valuable for us or others to possess than salvation.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Isn't this what the Scriptures teach us, **“What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and lose his own soul.”** John would agree with this. J.K. Rowling has accomplished a lot through her writings. John has accomplished more. What was the primary reason why John wrote the fourth gospel? The Apostle John wrote the fourth gospel in order that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and be saved.

We may not be recognized as successful in our particular chosen field of endeavor, we may not be particularly successful financially, we may be particularly well known and applauded by the masses but if we by God's grace have chosen to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and have received the gift of life what does all the rest of this really matter?