BACKGROUND

The author of the Gospel according to John repeatedly refers to himself as the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (see 13:23; 21:20, 24). This disciple is believed to be John, one of three fishermen who formed Jesus’ inner circle. John and his brother, James, the sons of Zebedee and Salome, were called the “sons of thunder” (Mk 3:17) by Jesus because of their fiery temperaments. Having been an ardent follower of John the Baptist, John was among Jesus’ original disciples. As he died Jesus entrusted his own mother to John’s care. John played a prominent role in the early church, as evidenced in the Acts of the Apostles and in the writing of his Epistles and visionary book of Revelation.

MESSAGE

It seems John addresses the Gospel to a wide audience, both Jewish and Gentile. Whereas the first three Gospels focus on events in the life of Jesus, John emphasizes the meaning behind those events. John’s Gospel is not so much biographical as it is a theological argument; John uses every event, miracle, and title to show that Jesus is God. Before Jesus took on flesh, he was “with God” and “was God” from “the beginning” (1:1). John does not relate Jesus’ parables as much as extended accounts of his encounters: a miracle at a wedding, Nicodemus coming by night, the conversion of the Samaritan woman, and the raising of Lazarus. John shows Jesus giving metaphorical discourses: “I am the bread of life” (6:35); “I am the light of the world” (8:12); “I am the good shepherd” (10:11). Jesus’ discourses to and prayer for his disciples have edified and heartened the church of Christ throughout the ages. Toward the end of the book, John reveals his purpose for writing: “These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (20:31).

TIME

The probable range for the writing of this Gospel is A.D. 60–90. It was written after the Synoptic Gospels, but before John’s three Epistles and Revelation. John was one of the last surviving eyewitnesses of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Tradition says that John wrote this Gospel in Ephesus.

OUTLINE

I. The Son of God Arrives
   A. A prologue 1:1–18
   B. Early ministry 1:19–2:25

II. The Son of God Ministers
   A. A Pharisee, a Samaritan woman 3:1–4:42
   B. Healings, teachings, miracles 4:43–10:42
   C. Raising Lazarus 11:1–57

III. The Son of God Dies to Save
   A. The final week 12:1–50
   B. The Last Supper 13:1–17:26
   C. Jesus’ arrest and trial 18:1–19:16
   D. The crucifixion and burial 19:17–42

IV. The Son of God Rises Again
   A. Jesus is alive 20:1–31
   B. Breakfast on the beach 21:1–25
On Scripture

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. — John 1:1

An intelligent, plain man, untaught in the truths of Christianity, coming upon this text, would likely conclude that John meant to teach that it is the nature of God to speak, to communicate His thoughts to others. And he would be right. A word is a medium by which thoughts are expressed, and the application of the term to the eternal Son leads us to believe that self-expression is inherent in the Godhead, that God is forever seeking to speak Himself out to His creation. The whole Bible supports this idea. God is speaking. Not God spoke, but God is speaking. He is, by His nature, continuously articulate. He fills the world with His speaking voice.

One of the great realities with which we have to deal is the voice of God in His world. The shortest and only satisfying cosmogony is this: "He spake, and it was done" (Psalm 33:9). The reason of natural law is the loving voice of God immanent in His creation. And this word of God which brought all worlds into being cannot be understood to mean the Bible, for it is not a written or printed word at all, but the expression of the will of God is the breath of God filling the world with living potentiality. The voice of God is the most powerful force in nature, indeed the only force in nature, for all energy is here only because the power-filled Word is being spoken.

—The Pursuit of God
24 And they which were sent were of the Pharisees.
25 And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?
26 John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not;
27 He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.
28 These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

JOHN’S WITNESS TO JESUS
29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.
30 This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.
31 And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.
32 And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.
33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining upon him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.
34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

ANDREW AND PETER FOLLOW JESUS
35 Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples;
36 And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!
37 And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.
38 Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?
39 He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.
40 One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.
41 He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.
42 And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.

PHILIP AND NATHANAEL FOLLOW JESUS
43 The day following Jesus went forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.
44 Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.
45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.
46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

CHALLENGES
And then the heavenly mindedness of Jesus, oh think of that! He was with the Father, in the bosom of the Father while He was on earth. He said, “The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18). Notice it says, is, not was—He never left the bosom of the Father while He was on earth. The only time He left it was in that awful wrenching agony when God turned away from Him on the cross that He might die for mankind. But never at any other time.

He talked about the other world: “I am from above” (John 8:23); “I came down from heaven” (6:38). He lived in the heart of God and the other world and the world above was the world which He inhabited. And think how earthly His people are and how worldly. They talk of furniture, TV sets, baseball, football, automobiles, picture windows, split-level houses, politics—anything but heaven and God.

Then we want to pray, “Draw me nearer, nearer.” You’re as near as you can get as far as distance is concerned. But He can’t manifest Himself because there is a dissimilarity of nature. You have enough of His nature that you’re justified and regenerated, but you haven’t enough to perfect the fellowship. The perfection of the fellowship—this is what we need so desperately.

—The Attributes of God

1:29 Or, heareth 1:38 dOr, abidest 1:39 tthat was two hours before night

1:41 fOr, the Anointed 1:42 gOr, Peter

26 Mt 3:1; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Acts 1:5
27 Mt 3:11; Mk 1:7; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:15, 19
28 Jn 10:40
29 Lk 3:17; Jn 1:1-19; Rev 5:6
30 Jn 1:15, 27
31 Lk 1:17
32 Mt 3:16; Mk 1:10; Lk 3:22
33 Mt 3:31; Lk 3:16; Jn 3:5; Acts 6:15
34 Mt 4:2; Jn 1:49
35 Jn 12:9
36 Jn 1:49; 3:2, 26; 6:23; 18:4
41 Jn 4:25
42 Mt 16:17-18; Jn 21:14-17; 1 Cor 12:2; 3:22
44 Mt 10:3; 11:21; Jn 12:21
45 Mt 22:2-3; Lk 22:2-3; 24:27; Jn 21:2
46 Jn 7:41; 42, 52
Believing, then, is directing the heart's attention to Jesus. It is lifting the mind to "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1:29), and never ceasing that beholding for the rest of our lives. At first this may be difficult, but it becomes easier as we look steadily at His wondrous person, quietly and without strain. Distractions may hinder, but once the heart is committed to Him, after each brief excursion away from Him, the attention will return again and rest upon Him like a wandering bird coming back to its window.

I would emphasize this one committal, this one great volitional act which establishes the heart's intention to gaze forever upon Jesus. God takes this intention for our choice and makes what allowances He must for the thousand distractions which beset us in this evil world. He knows that we have set the direction of our hearts toward Jesus, and we can know it too, and comfort ourselves with the knowledge that a habit of soul is forming which will become, after a while, a sort of spiritual reflex requiring no more conscious effort on our part.

—The Pursuit of God
17 And his disciples remembered that it was written, 'The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.'

18 Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?

19 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

20 Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?

21 But he spake of the temple of his body.

22 When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.

23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.

24 But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men,

25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

NICODEMUS VISITS JESUS

3 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can these things be?

5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

17 Ps 69:9
18 Jn 6:30
19 Mt 27:40; Mk 14:58; Lk 23:29
21 Jn 1:14; 1 Cor 6:19; Col 2:9
22 Lk 24:48; Jn 21:7; 12:16; 14:26
23 Jn 3:2
24 Mt 9:4; Jn 5:42; 6:44, 64

CHAPTER 3

1 Jn 19:39
2 Mk 22:16; Jn 1:38; 3:26; Acts 2:22; 10:38
3 Is 11:1; 3:1-6; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15
4 Ez 36:25-27; Mk 16:16; Jn 3:2; Acts 2:28; Eph 5:26
5 Gn 6:12; Jb 14:4
7 Jn 3:3; 5:28
8 Ex 37:9; 1 Cor 2:11; 12:11
9 Jn 6:52, 60
11 Jn 1:18; 2:12, 14:24

ON SCRIPTURE

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. —John 3:3

The great God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, said, “This is My name throughout all generations, My memorial forever: I AM THAT I AM. I never was created; I was not made, I AM. I made you for My love. I made you to worship, honor, and glorify Me. I made you to love you and hold you and give Myself to you. But you turned away from Me. And you made yourself god and you put yourself on that throne.” That is sin.

That’s why the Scripture says, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” What does “born again” mean? Among other things, it means a renewal, a rebirth, but it also means getting off the throne and putting God on it. It means that the self-existent One is recognized for who He is.

Reverently and humbly, I kneel before His Son, who died and rose and lives and pleads, and I say, “Oh, Lord Jesus, I give up. I’m no longer going to sit on the throne and run my own life. I’m no longer going to trust in my own righteousness, which is only a filthy rag. I’m no longer going to believe in my good works or in my religious activities. I’m going to trust Thee, the God of grace, the God who gave Thy Son to die.” And so the new birth takes place and I trust the Lord Jesus Christ, the Man in the glory, my Savior and Lord. And thus I am saved.

—The Attributes of God II
When John 3:16–17 speaks of the world, it does not mean that God just loved our geography. It does not mean that God so loved the snow-capped mountains or the sun-kissed meadows or the flowing streams or the great peaks of the north.

God may love all of these. I think He does. You cannot read the book of Job or the Psalms without knowing that God is in love with the world He made.

—The Radical Cross

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God may love all of these. I think He does. You cannot read the book of Job or the Psalms without knowing that God is in love with the world He made.

—The Radical Cross

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

—John 3:16

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

—John 3:17

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

—John 3:18

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

—John 3:19

For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

—John 3:20

But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

—John 3:21

After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judæa; and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

—John 3:22

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

—John 3:14

That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

—John 3:15

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.