

The Person, Poetry, and Passion of John

John 20:30–31

DESCRIPTION: John's Gospel is unlike the other three—it is more intimate, relational, and passionate. John longs to his readers to believe and experience the life, love, and light of Christ. In this overview of John's Gospel, Nathan discusses the life of John the Apostle, his poetic style of writing, and his purpose for writing the book. Ultimately, John's Gospel invites us to believe, seek greater intimacy, and hold fast to the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus.

The Person

Though often debated, I believe the Apostle John, son of Zebedee is the author.

Early Church Fathers, several who knew John personally, attest to his authorship of his writings: Eusebius, Polycarp, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, and Tertullian.

Short Bio of John

The apostle John was the brother of James, the son of Zebedee, and is often considered the youngest of the twelve disciples. Living in Bethsaida, he was a fisherman along with his brother and father on the Sea of Galilee. His mother was Salome who was present at the crucifixion. Jesus called John and James the "Sons of Thunder" (Boanerges) in Mark 3:17—likely because of their zealous and fiery personalities (see Mark 9:38–41 and Luke 9:51–56) ... though one scholar (Culpepper) sees the name as a sign of what they could become: "mighty witnesses and voices from heaven."* He was a pillar in the early church and mentioned several times (often with Peter) in the book of Acts. Tradition says he spent time in Ephesus (and likely looked after Mary the mother of Jesus in Ephesus). He was thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil and suffered no harm; eventually being exiled for a time to the island of Patmos and later returned and died in Ephesus.

**Dan Nässelqvist, "John the Apostle," ed. John D. Barry et al., The Lexham Bible Dictionary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).*

- in the “inner 3” of the apostles (Peter, James, John) and had several unique times with Jesus (Mount of Transfiguration)
- was called the “beloved disciple” (John 21:20) and “other disciple” (John 18:15; 20:2)
- He leans on Jesus’ chest at the Last Supper (John 13:23)
- He acts as an intermediary between Peter and Jesus (John 13:24–25)
- He is entrusted with the care of Jesus’ mother (John 19:26–27)
- He reaches the empty tomb before any other disciple (John 20:4)
- He is the first to believe in the resurrection (John 20:8)
- He recognizes the risen Lord first on the Sea of Galilee (John 21:7)

The Poetry: John’s Writing Style

Leon Morris – It has been well said that John’s Gospel is like “a pool in which a child may wade and an elephant can swim.” // Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 7.

Charles Spurgeon – You are aware, dear friends, that there are very few commentaries upon the Epistles of John. Where we find fifty commentaries upon any book of St. Paul, you will hardly find one upon John. Why is that? Is the book too difficult? The words are very simple; there is hardly a word of four syllables anywhere in John's Epistles. Ah! but they are so saturated through and through with the spirit of love, ... that those who are not taught in the school of communion, cry out, "We cannot read it, for it is sealed." // C.H. Spurgeon (Sermon#558 SS1:13)

Earl F. Palmer – Whereas Paul writes in the tradition of Greek rhetoric and argument-building—a Pauline letter is really one continuous sentence—John on the other hand writes more like the psalmist or the writer of Proverbs. He repeats; he writes with the use of parallelism and repetition of ideas. We who are the children of Greek thought and method of argument are more acquainted with the intellectual style of Paul, but the poet and the musician is more acquainted with the

style of John. Like the poet or artist, John spends much time on one detail; repetition is welcomed and embraced. We notice this attention to detail in the Gospel of John, especially in the dialogue narratives; for instance, John devotes a whole chapter to one blind youth and his encounter with Jesus (ch. 9). This is the way a poet watches a historical event unfold. This is the approach of the psalmist more than of the philosopher. John is repetitious ... great themes are repeated by the writer at various places within the book. But then, that is the way the wisdom literature of the Old Testament is written, too. Through Psalms and Proverbs great central themes are brought up over and over again. ... He knows very well what he is doing, and if we watch closely and accept this way of expression, we will be deeply challenged intellectually and also poetically moved by the sheer buildup of intensity and overall design. // Earl F. Palmer and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, 1, 2 & 3 John / Revelation, vol. 35, The Preacher's Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1982), 15.

Ancient Biography

chronology doesn't matter (certainly seems that way in John)

- cleansing the temple at the beginning of His ministry (John 2:14–22)
- length of ministry (3 Passovers mentioned)

When

There have been several theories concerning when the book was written. The best guess is between 60–90 AD, after the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) were written. According to tradition, this Gospel was written from Ephesus (though some argue that it was written from Patmos) and was the first of John's writings (Revelation and his epistles written later).

To Whom

Because John clarifies, defines, and explains many Jewish terms (see John 1:38, 41–42; 5:2; 9:7; 19:13, 17; 20:16), it seems John was writing foremost to the Gentiles. Since his Gospel was the last written, and many years after the death of Christ as Christianity was growing, it would make sense that he was writing his account to

the world inviting hearers to decide whether or not they were going to believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

» **Other concerns: gnosticism, divinity of Jesus, to encourage believers, etc.**

Roger L. Fredrikson – This Gospel is first and foremost a message of **evangelism**, carefully and creatively written, that men may come to have life in the name of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. This is John's declared purpose (John 20:31), so the constant question throughout is the identity of the man Jesus. // Roger L. Fredrikson and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, John, vol. 27, The Preacher's Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1985), 15–16.

John Balchin – We are not just dealing with a biography here. It is more like a carefully prepared Gospel tract. He tells us that he has specially selected the evidence. He includes only seven of Jesus' miracles, and he usually follows them up with discourses which give us the inner meaning of what Jesus was doing. John brings forward his witnesses one by one, and the reader must make some decision about Jesus Christ by the end. // John Balchin, The Compact Survey of the Bible (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1985).

The Purpose: BELIEVE!

92% of the Gospel is unique (not a part of the synoptics)

- 4 camp ***faces and focuses***

Matthew: Kingly Messiah (Lion)

Mark: Humble Servant (Ox)

Luke: Son of Man (Man)

John: Highly Exalted Son of God (Eagle)

Decades of pondering the richness of Jesus

– **Light, Life, and Love of Christ**

– **Jesus, Yahweh in the flesh, has come to dwell amongst His people!**

– **Relationship, Intimacy, and “new birth” are available!**

John 21:25 – And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written one after the other, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

John 20:30–31 – Therefore many other signs Jesus also did in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written **so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.**

1 John 4:9 – By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

Believe!

» **Believe: 98 (101?) times in 86 verses of John's Gospel**

- believe: verb

- faith: noun

* **complete trust that is put into action and obedience**

* **airplane illustration**

Lawyer + Court Case

Like a lawyer presenting a court case, John presents his Gospel by building evidence upon evidence. He gives:

7 witnesses

7 signs (miracles)

7 "I Am" statements

Warren W. Wiersbe – Whereas the first three Gospels major on describing events in the life of Christ, John emphasized the meaning of these events. For example, all four Gospels record the feeding of the 5,000 but only John records Jesus' sermon on "The Bread of Life" which followed that miracle when He interpreted it for the people. But there is one major theme that runs throughout John's Gospel: Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and if you commit yourself to Him, He will give you eternal

life (John 20:31). // Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 284.

» *John is answering the question: Who is Jesus? (Yahweh in the flesh)*

OT Types

John also connects the life and ministry of Jesus to the Old Testament—showing that He not only fulfilled the prophecies, but also the types:

- He is the Lamb of God (John 1:29)
- He is the Ladder from heaven to earth (John 1:51; Genesis 28)
- He is the New Temple/Tabernacle (John 1:14, 2:19–21)
- He gives new birth (John 3)
- He is life itself (John 1:4, 3:15–16, 14:6, etc.; Genesis 2:9, 3:24)
- He is the serpent lifted up (John 3:14; Numbers 21)
- He is the bread that came down from heaven (John 6:35ff)
- Etc.

The Practical Application

1. Do I truly believe? Do I fully put my trust, hope, and faith in Jesus, the Messiah?

2. Will I be another “beloved disciple” ... one to whom intimacy and relationship is offered?

John 3:16 (personalized) – “For God so loved you, that He gave His only begotten Son, that if you believe in Him, you shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

John 14:23 – Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him.”

John 15:9 – “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.”

John 15:15 – “No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; **but I have called you friends**, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.”

John 17:3 – “And this is eternal life, that they may **know [ginōskō] You**, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

3. Will I focus on Jesus and finish my race well (like John) ... not being pulled away from the simplicity of Christ?

2 Corinthians 11:3 – But I fear that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be corrupted from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

Hebrews 12:1-2 – Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, laying aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Will I continually believe, abide, obey, and pursue Christ? Will I live from Him, through Him, and to Him for His glory (see Romans 11:36)?

1 John 4:9 – By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.