

Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

Week 44: John, *Jesus, the Word, the Light, the Life*

Welcome to Week 44 of the Bible reading coach podcast. My name is Karl Vaters and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks.

This week has a bit of a shift going on. Unless it's pointed out for you, most readers don't understand unless it's pointed out for me as well, not putting that all on you, there's a significant shift. You don't necessarily recognize it, because we're still in the Gospels.

Okay. We've just gone through three weeks of the gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And now we're going to read another gospel, another account of Jesus' life. But this week is going to be a very different read through the life of Jesus. And here's why. So far, we've been reading what scholars call the Synoptic Gospels. Synoptic is a word that puts two words together "syn" S-Y-N, from which we get the word like syncopation and synonymous, which means things that are together. And "optic", which we use for the eyes. So what it basically means is these three gospels, synoptic, are seen together. For instance, while 90% of Mark is found in Matthew, or Luke 90%, of the book of John is only found in the book of John, okay, it's it's, it matches up really, really well. But it matches up perfectly, in fact, because they're all accurate accounts with the life of Jesus. But John takes a look at the stuff that the other ones didn't, pay a lot of attention to, for the most part.

A really great example of that is in something called The Harmony of the Gospels, if you've never had one before, Harmony of the Gospels is a really helpful tool. I use it on a regular basis. And it's one of those tools that has kind of been forgotten about in the last couple of decades. And sadly, so if you are interested in the life of Jesus, if you're interested in studying the Gospels, I strongly encourage you to get a hold of a Harmony of the Gospels. What it does is it lays all four gospels side by side on each page. And it shows you as it goes through each gospel without commentary, where they match up and where they stand separate. We'll put into the shownotes, a link to how you can take a look at that online. And we'll also put a link where you can find several different editions of Harmony of the Gospels, that you can order and have a print edition of and I really strongly encourage any serious Bible student to have a Harmony of the Gospels on hand, it's really helpful for you to understand the chronology of the life of Jesus and how each of the Gospels shows you different pieces of the life of Jesus.

And as indicated in the title Harmony of the Gospel, how they harmonize how they come together, and how they don't contradict at all, but in fact, blend into a full story of the life of Jesus, a really helpful tool, Harmony of the Gospels, right. But let's get to the book we'll be looking at this week, the book of John, John was written by the disciple, John, the youngest of the disciples. It mentions the word love more than any other of the Gospels. And in fact, if you take all of the writings of John, the Gospel of John, first, second, and third John, in Revelation, you have a ridiculous number of mentions of the word love, especially in the book, first, John, John even refers to himself not as John but as the disciple that Jesus loved. So this is the same John who wrote for a second and third John, and the same John, who eventually will write the book of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, which we'll get to in week 52.

Okay. Now, some stories that we're going to read in the book of John, that we see for the first time because they're different from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are the turning of water into wine. We haven't seen that yet. The conversation with Nicodemus from which we get perhaps

the most memorized verse in the New Testament, which we'll get to in a minute or two, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, or there's a whole bunch of John that we haven't seen in the life of Jesus yet, so you're gonna get a really a new fresh picture of the life of Jesus, which again, all matches up with everything else we've seen so far.

You also know that John was far more interested in Jesus' teachings than in his miracles. There are very few miracles. Most of them are unique to the book of John. But mostly what we're going to see in the book of John is long segments of teaching. And you might even call it philosophizing, both by John and by Jesus' big long sections of teaching. One of the reasons why John is taught from by pastors, more than the other three gospels typically, is because of these long teachings that are really interesting to dig in to find the depths of and to teach on because their teachings themselves already.

Okay, so that's the overall look of the Gospels and of the book of John. Now let's take a look at, piece by piece, what we're going to walk through this week. First of all, we're going to start with John chapter one. And John one starts again very differently than the other three gospels. It starts, well let me just read it for you John, chapter 1 verses 1 through 5, read like this. "In the beginning was the Word..." does that sound familiar? Yeah, all the way back to week one, the first books in the Bible, first verse in the Bible is in the beginning, right? So in Genesis 1:1 we read, "In the beginning, God created..." Here we read, "In the beginning was the Word," okay? And let me continue on, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." So just like Genesis 1:1 says, In the beginning, God, this is saying in the beginning God, but in this, this place is calling God the Word or the Greek word as the *logos*, okay?

Verse 2, "He was with God in the beginning." So who is this word? Well, he was God. He was with God. He was in the beginning, through him all things were made. So the word is the one through whom everything was made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made in Him was life and that life was the light of all mankind. So who is this word we're talking about? He was with God, he was in the beginning. He is God, he is life. He is the light of all mankind. Are you getting an idea of who this word might be? Verse 5, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." And then John one continues on to describe who this word is, until finally it says, "And then the Word became flesh." So we're obviously talking about Jesus. He's described as the word He's described as light. He's described as the life He's described as the Lamb. He's described in so many different metaphors so beautifully in John chapter one.

So this is an intentional, calling back to creation. John is telling us here, Jesus was not an afterthought. Jesus didn't come later. Jesus wasn't born from God, the Trinity Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always been there, and were there at creation. And Jesus participated in the act of creation, just as God the Father and God the Spirit did. He is not a come after thing, okay. He has equal God to God, the Father and God, the Son, this is a, a foundational premise of Christianity is that Jesus did not come later, he has been there all along. And John one lays that out, not just strongly but beautifully and poetically, to us.

Okay. Now, we then get to John chapter 2, where we have the first of Jesus' miracles, the turning of water into wine is the only gospel to mention Jesus turning water into wine. And in chapter 2, verse 11, it specifically tells us, this is the first miracle that Jesus performed. So we know which was the first because the Bible tells us, this is the first miracle. And then we have

the turning of the tables, which is a little confusing, because if you've been paying attention going through Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we've had him turning over the tables in the temple, but it happens much later in the other gospels, that happens during his final week of ministry. But John places it right after his first miracle.

So the question is, did John get it out of order? Did they get it out of order? Or Did Jesus actually do it twice. And the general consensus among Bible scholars is, Jesus actually turned over the money and changed the tables of the many changes in the temple two times, once at the very beginning of his ministry. And once in the last days of his ministry. John only mentions the first, Matthew, Mark, and Luke only mentioned the second one.

We then go to John chapter 3, where we have one of the most important conversations in the entire Bible. John, John tells us about a conversation that Jesus had with the rabbi and scholar Nicodemus, Nicodemus has been seeing what Jesus has been doing has been thinking, he seems like Messiah, but there are some things that he does and says, that don't seem Messiah like I need to talk to him. The Bible says he came to him in the dead of night, we assumed because he didn't want others to see him because Jesus was such a scandal at the time. And this is where we get that famous verse, John 3:16, where Jesus looks at Nicodemus and says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." It's one of those pivotal moments in the entire Bible.

We then go to John chapters 4 and 5, where Jesus has conversations with some outcasts. He has a conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. He heals the man at Bethesda, he is criticized by the Pharisees for healing someone in the Sabbath and creates a big route. And very quickly, John gets into the conflict that Jesus creates with the religious leaders. He moves that part of the story along really, really quickly.

We then get to John chapter 6, where we see Jesus feeding the 5000, Jesus walking in the water, and Jesus teaching about how he's the bread of life. And while these three stories seem disconnected, and they're usually taught separately from each other, there's actually a real flow of what happens here. Jesus feeds bread to the 5000 people. Why? Because he's been trying to get away from the crowds to get a break and the crowds follow him and they end up in a desert without any food because they didn't think ahead about if we followed Jesus into the desert. There's no 711's out there, right? So Jesus has to feed them the bread.

And then he walks on water again to get away from them. And they show up again. And then he turns around and he basically says, are you following me? Because of the bread? Are you following me? Because of miracles? Or are you following me because you really believe I'm Messiah. And then he talks about how that's the whole point of it. And he says, "You have to eat my body and drink my blood if you want to be a part of this because they're chasing him for food and drink, right? This sounds like cannibalism to them, it's not he's talking about instituting the Lord's Supper. But it is such scandalous teaching that a whole bunch of people leave.

It's really interesting, as you read through John 6, while we often point to it for the big crowd, it actually happens because he's trying to get away from crowds. And in fact, by the end of John chapter 6, he thins the crowd of followers substantially to only those who are really, really serious about it very different from the way we tend to approach things today, right? We then go to John chapters 7 through 10, where we have a whole bunch of conflicts with Jesus and the Pharisees, the Pharisees were a group of Rabbi rabbis who were very strict about the

law and who were really upset about a lot of what Jesus taught and did in this segment of John chapters 7 through 10, everything Jesus does seems to bother the other rabbis, and here's why. He claims, Jesus claims, not just to be the Messiah, but he does things that you would only do if you believed you were God, come to Earth. And of course, the things that he did were things that they believed God would never do.

And in fact, they believe God would never put on flesh bodily form, because they believe that being in bodily form in itself was inherently sinful. This is why John starts with the word put on flesh, right, because he's coming back into dispute directly against that false theology, that flesh is itself sinful, and is not God Himself, put on flesh. But this is something that the religious leaders at the time cannot take in, they won't allow themselves to go to that place. And so Jesus has a push back against them.

Jesus, even he was a man born blind during this period of time. And they are so upset about this, that they put the man on trial and bring his parents in for the trial. And in fact, the Bible tells us, this is a man who was born blind, like he was from that area. So he wasn't like, you know, we've got the pictures of the Wild West when the snake oil salesman comes in and brings along a shill who pretends to get healed. There's no pretending here, this guy was born in the area they knew him from from birth, that he was born blind, so they knew he was healed. And the Pharisees get mad at that, because he healed the man on the Sabbath. So the Pharisees have their priorities completely out of whack.

We then move to John chapter 11. When Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, in fact, he raises Lazarus from the dead after three days. So many days, he was dead, that rot was beginning to set into the body. So you could not doubt this was actually a resurrection. It wasn't just a resuscitation. This miracle causes Jesus such notoriety and such fame that the Pharisees cannot deal with it anymore. And this is when they seriously start the plot, they are going to kill Jesus, the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead is a serious point of no return. Before he raises Lazarus from the dead in the town right next to Jerusalem, so the famous spreads Jerusalem instantly, before that Jesus could have if he had wanted to decide, you know, I'm not going to push this, I'm going to back off, and everything would have been okay, he hadn't caused quite enough trouble to have made his death inevitable. After this, his death is inevitable, they will kill him. It's the point of no return.

We then moved to John chapter 12. And Jesus' last week begins this is maybe the biggest difference between John and the other gospels, is the amount of time that John spends on Jesus final week, Matthew and Mark spend about a third of their time on Jesus final week, Luke spends about a quarter of its pages on Jesus final week, John spends almost half of his pages on Jesus final week, 10 of the 21 chapters of John are just on Jesus final week alone. And in fact, the bulk of those chapters are spent on Jesus' final night, Thursday night, that's really where it's spent, which we get in John chapter 13, through 18, which is all on Jesus' final night, six full chapters. The Last Supper, and then what's called the Olivet Discourse, which is Jesus giving the final instructions to the disciples about what they're to do after he has gone and he's no longer with them. It is one of the most studied passages of the Bible, because it's Jesus' final instructions to His disciples. How are we, His disciples, supposed to act when Jesus is not physically here with us? And it tells us a whole bunch about how we as Christians are to behave. So pay real attention to this really rich passage in John chapter 13 through 18 when

you get to it this week. If you're reading through a Red Letter Bible, where the words of Jesus are in red, you're gonna see a whole bunch of red in that passage there.

All right. We then conclude with John chapters 19, through 21, where John covers the crucifixion of Jesus to about the same degree as the others do. But then his account of the resurrection of Jesus, and Jesus' post resurrection appearances, he gives a much more thorough look to those than the other three gospels do. So this is where we get most of the information we have about what Jesus' resurrection was like. When we read stories at Easter, we're typically reading out of the book of John because of how thorough it is, and what happened when Jesus walked on the earth. For those days after he resurrected before He ascended into heaven, John covers that in more detail than the others do. So that gets us through John this week. As we get to the end of John this week, we will also end, of course, our reading through the Gospels. But the life, the death, the resurrection of Jesus is so important that while we are done reading through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, everything after this everything after John is a look back at the life, death, resurrection of Jesus and how that changes the world.

So from this point on, it's all about Jesus, the Old Testament points toward a Messiah who would come to deliver us, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, show us, the Messiah, that he's Jesus. And everything after that is completely about this gospel of Jesus that we've just read about now, for four weeks. Okay, so as you read this week, the book of John, take a look for a handful of things. First of all, look at Jesus' teachings, they are very long, they are very reflective, they are stunningly easy to understand. Some of us teachers, we get really lost in the weeds, and it's hard. I mean, how many times have you sat during the sermon and you're, you know, you've got five minutes, and you haven't heard a word because it's just as boring. Nobody fell asleep while Jesus was teaching, even when he went long, because even today, when we read it, he is so compelling in the way he teaches. So take a look at Jesus' teaching.

Secondly, take a look at what Jesus says about love and how you live a life of love, which is one of the big emphases that John makes in this gospel. And then notice the beautiful final two verses, take a look at the last two verses of the book of John chapters, chapter 21, verses 24, through 25, read like this. This is the disciple who testifies to these things. So there's just after there's a story where John is talking to Jesus, He says, Yeah, that's me. I'm that guy. This is the disciple who testifies to these things and wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. He's certifying the truth of his own testimony. He's saying, I was an eyewitness to this, I am this guy who saw all these things, and was this close to Jesus. And then the last verse of John says this, Jesus did many other things as well, like, this isn't everything.

This isn't exhaustive. Why? Because, quote, "If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." You know, so John says, Jesus did so much. And he's so important that you could write forever, and try to fill the world with the books that will be written, and it wouldn't be enough. And of course, that's true, more has been and more continues to be written about Jesus than anyone else in history. And there's not even a close second place. I think, in the Library of Congress, I think, like Abraham Lincoln might be second place. But the volume of books on Abraham Lincoln is so minuscule compared to the books written about Jesus. And of course, that's just in the US, when you look at it globally, it's not even close. For 2000 years and counting, he is the most fascinating figure in human history. He has been talked about, written about, debated over,

and of course, worshiped by us Christians in to a degree that nobody else in world history comes close to having his impact. So that's how we'll finish John this week.

The next two weeks, we're going to spend some time in Acts and we'll get into Romans as well. But next week is really going to be great because we'll get into the book of Acts. This is where we start reading about how the early Christians tried to live in the light of what we just read in the light of the life of Jesus, the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus and what He taught them. So we got a lot of really great stuff coming up. But this week, don't shortchange this week, go slow, go thorough, spend time in this amazing portrait of the life of Jesus to the Gospel of John, have a great time this week. We'll see you next week.

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