

That You May Believe

³⁰ And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ 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 20:30–31)

If you call yourself a *Christian*, then by using the word Christian you are making a claim about the world, about world history, and even about humanity. The word Christian is a form of the word Christ – a Christ-one, a Christ-follower. The word Christ, in turn, is a word that means anointed one, chosen one. It's just the Greek word for the Hebrew word Messiah. To call yourself a Christian is to call yourself a Messiah-follower, a Messianic. You're saying, I believe the world has always needed, and still needs, a Messiah, a chosen One who rescues and delivers us from evil.

Now, of course, not everyone believes that. Many people don't think that the world needs rescuing or saving. They think humans are fundamentally good, kind, loving beings. They think we will rescue ourselves through technology, education, medicine, and science. If you don't think that the great problem of life is evil, then you won't be looking for a saviour.

But in fact, through most of human history, most human cultures have been looking for some kind of saviour or mediator. One of the greatest historians of the 20th century, Christopher Dawson, did a mammoth study of world religions and found that most cultures throughout the globe had developed some form of three chosen religious figures: the prophet, the priest, and the king. The prophet is a saviour because he tells us what we could not otherwise know: the will of God, the future, the revelation of God. The priest is a saviour because he atones for us, and takes care of justice. The king is a saviour because he governs according to divine law and protects true worship, defends the faith, punishes evil. And until you reach the non-culture of secular modernity, every culture had 1/3, 2/3 or 3/3 of messiah: prophet, priest and king.

Indeed, non-Christian religions have forms of the idea of Messiah. Buddhism believes in a coming Messiah called Lord of mercy. Daoism believes in a coming Messiah named Li Hong who will rescue the chosen people. Islam believes in the Mahdi. In fact, missionaries have found in far flung tribes varying strands of ancient traditions of a messenger who will bring truth.

But the idea of Messiah reaches its clearest explanation in the Hebrew Scriptures. There, in the writings of the chosen seed of Abraham, we have it steadily revealed that there will be One, who will be prophet, priest, and king. He will be the deliverer, the saviour, the mediator by being the ultimate prophet, priest and king. He will stand between us and our Creator, and bridge the gap, and so fix the world. He will solve the problem of evil.

Now it makes a big difference whether you believe in a Messiah or not. Because if the world really is just a random collection of atoms, then evil is an illusion, and you should just try to make the most of your material existence with money or pleasure, or fame or whatever floats your boat. But if the world really has been made by God, and if God is good and just, then it is obvious even to small children that we need saving, delivering, rescuing, mediation. And then the question becomes, who is that mediator?

Christians believe that the man Jesus of Nazareth is that mediator. The Gospel of John is a 21-chapter explanation of why Christians believe Jesus is the Messiah, what it means to believe, and what the result is of that believing.

The Gospel of John is for many people, their favourite book of the Bible, or at least contains some

of their favourite verses. It is a marvellous collection of some of the longest statements by Jesus, some of the most powerful signs performed by Jesus. It contains the clearest explanations of the doctrine of the Trinity, proofs of the deity of Christ, teachings about the Holy Spirit. It is some of the clearest teaching on how the Christian life is to be lived.

When reading a book, it is wise to do what Mortimer Adler describes in his book “How to Read a Book”. He talks about X-Raying a book: doing a flyover of the whole, before you begin to take apart the parts. He encourages you to look at the title, the subtitle, read the back cover description, look the contents page and chapter headings, see if there is a brief summary in the opening pages, and do a skim of the introduction and conclusion. We're going to do something of that so that we take in the glory of this whole book, as you study it on your own at home or with others in church.

So to do that, we'll consider the Person behind the book, the Purpose of the book, and the Path of the book, and the Promise of the book. Who wrote it, for what reason, how is it structured, and what it will do. First, we find out who wrote the book not at the beginning of the book, as in Paul's epistles, but at the very end.

I. The Person Behind the Book

²⁰ Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, “Lord, who is the one who betrays You?” ²¹ Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, “But Lord, what *about* this man?” ²² Jesus said to him, “If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me.” ²³ Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you?” ²⁴ This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. ²⁵ And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen. (John 21:20–25)

The author of the Gospel of John identifies himself in verse 24. This is the disciple writing these things. Who is he? He is the disciple who was leaning on Jesus at the Last Supper. He refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” or “another disciple”. He refers to himself that way six times in this Gospel: at the Last Supper; in the High Priest's courtyard at the trial of Jesus, at the Cross, standing next to Mary, the mother of Jesus; at the tomb of Jesus, where he ran with Peter; on the boat fishing when the Lord appeared to them after the Resurrection, and here again.

We believe this is John, the son of Zebedee, brother of James. He is the same John who was part of the inner three: Peter, James, and John, who witnessed the Transfiguration, saw the raising of Jairus' daughter, went with him further into Gethsemane.

Why didn't he just call himself John? Well, first, because in this book, he reserves the name John for John the Baptist, and likely to avoid confusion, he doesn't use his first name. Second, this is a kind of authorial modesty. He deflects attention off himself and back to Jesus even when referring to himself. Who am I? A disciple Jesus loved. He doesn't mean, as some mistakenly take it, that Jesus loved him more than the others, or that Jesus didn't love the others. It is John's way of saying, when you were around Jesus as His disciple, the first and primary thing you knew was that Jesus loved you.

John mentions by name Peter, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Judas son of Alphaeus, and Judas Iscariot.

Now why this is highly significant is that it means this book is an eyewitness account of the man he is claiming is the Messiah. If you read a book on a president written by a good researcher, that is valuable. But when you read a book written by that president's chief of staff, or chief advisor, or

closest confidante, you would be all the more interested.

In the Gospel of John you have a front row seat written by a man who was there. He writes this book in his old age, probably around the year 85. After the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70, the twelve apostles were scattered around the Roman empire, and John, tradition tells us, ended up in modern day Turkey, in the city of Ephesus. After years of preaching both to the Gentiles and to Jews in the synagogues around that great city, he composed this book, drawing on the memories that he had reinforced through countless hours of teaching and relating the words and works of Jesus. So why did he write the book? He tells us in chapter 20.

II. The Purpose of the Book

³⁰ And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ 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 20:30–31)

Here John summarises his purpose. He wants us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God.

In fact, the syntax of the original language is more emphatic. He writes to show that the Messiah, Son of God is Jesus. That shows us many of his original readers were undoubtedly Jewish people. The church and the synagogue were often in debate and dialogue in those days, and John no doubt wanted to convince his countrymen that Jesus is the Messiah. As we'll see, much in the book is obviously Jewish, and some of it is implicitly Jewish and would only have been recognised by a Jewish audience. But yet, it is all for all people, of all nations. As we said, most people in history have been looking for a mediator, a chosen one, one who can speak to us from God as a prophet, speak to God for us as a priest, and speak as God to us as a king.

This means the book is evangelistic in one way, because it argues and proves that Jesus is the Messiah. But as John does that, he also teaches us what it means to believe and to keep believing. In other words, how to become a Christian, and what it means to keep living as a Christian.

Some people have the idea that believing on Jesus as Messiah is changing your opinion about Jesus. But through several incidents, John shows us through the very words of Jesus, what it is like to believe on Him.

¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:13–14)

³⁷ On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." (John 7:37–38)

Believing on Jesus is like imbibing a liquid which quenches a deep inner thirst, and keeps satisfying you.

³⁵ And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. (John 6:35)

⁵³ Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:53–54)

Believing on Jesus is like taking in food for your sustenance and life, eating, chewing, digesting,

swallowing, making the food part of you. So believing is a complete embrace of Jesus into your inner man, taking Him for all He is.

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." (Jn 8:12)

³⁸ Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped Him. ³⁹ And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind." (John 9:38–39)

Believing on Jesus is like light being switched on in complete darkness, and being able to see clearly for the first time.

²⁴ "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. ²⁵ Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. (John 5:24–25)

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25–26)

Believing on Jesus is like life from death, being woken up from the sleep of non-consciousness, being raised from the comatose paralysis of utter weakness, sickness, corruption into life.

Take those four images: drinking, eating, seeing, and waking and put them together. What does it mean to believe that Jesus is the Messiah? It is both something you do, and something done to you. You must absolutely, unreservedly, completely embrace Jesus as your life, as your sustenance, as your very sight, as your means of living now and forever. And you will know that you do believe because you have the experience of inner satisfaction, of spiritual understanding, of meaning and purpose.

This is why John has written. That this would be your experience, and your continued experience. That you would become a Christian, a Messianic, and know that experience.

So how does John do this?

III. The Path of the Book

John's Gospel is carefully and cleverly structured. It is made up of two parts, bracketed by a prologue and an epilogue.

The prologue is the famous 1:1-18 where Jesus is introduced as the Word who became flesh for us. Right there in chapter 1 John uses seven titles of Jesus: Lamb of God, Son of God, Rabbi, Son of Man, Messiah, King of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth.

That takes us into the first part which runs to the end of chapter 12. Many have called this the Book of Signs. In this first part, John carefully selects seven signs that Jesus did that prove He is the Messiah.

- 1) Changing water into wine at the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-11);
- 2) Healing the royal official's son (Jn 4:46-54);
- 3) Healing the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem (Jn 5:1-15);
- 4) Feeding the 5,000 (Jn 6:5-14);
- 5) Walking on water (Jn 6:16-21);

- 6) Healing the man born blind (Jn 9:1-7)
- 7) Raising Lazarus from the dead (Jn 11:1-45).

In almost every case, after Jesus performs the sign, there is misunderstanding and controversy, forcing people to make a choice about Jesus. Jesus deliberately uses the sign to challenge Jewish notions about Messiah, to force them to see that Messiah is not just a deliverer, He certainly isn't going to be part of the rabbinic guild. Messiah is God's Son. Messiah is not to be used. He is to be worshipped, received, submitted to, embraced as the way, the truth, the life. To see Him is to see the Father; to hear Him is to hear the Father's words, to accept Him is to accept the Father's gift.

That's why through the book, Jesus has seven I AM statements. I Am 1) the Bread of Life, 2) Light of the World, 3) Gate, 4) Good Shepherd, 5) Resurrection, 6) Way Truth life, 7) True Vine. But even more emphatically than that, John records exactly seven statements where Jesus simply says "I AM" (4:26; 6:20; 8:24; 8:28; 8:58; 13:19; 18:5). Here Jesus is showing that Messiah is also God, the true God of Israel.

Now within this Book of Signs, John has also cleverly planted several stories that will grab the Jewish reader of this book. In chapters 2-4, he uses four Jewish institutions, and in chapter 5-10, four Jewish feasts. The four institutions precious to the Jews were a wedding, in chapter 2; the Temple itself in chapter 2, a rabbi in chapter 3, and a sacred well in chapter 4. In each case, He shows He is the fulfilment.

The four feasts are the Sabbath, in chapter 5 where He heals a man, showing that He and His Father are working on the Sabbath; Passover in chapter 6, where He feeds the 5000 and shows He is the living Bread; The Feast of Tabernacles in 7-10a, where He shows He is the light and the water, and the Feast of Hanukkah in chapter 10 – where He shows He and the Father are one.

But the healing of Lazarus is where everything comes to a head, and the leaders of Israel conspire to kill Jesus before everyone believes in Him.

In many ways, part 1 of the book illustrates 1:11: ¹¹ "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. (John 1:11)

Part 2 begins in chapter 13 and goes to the end of chapter 20. This is sometimes called the Book of Glory, because now the Son is glorified as He teaches His own disciples, and dies and rises. From 13-17 Jesus teaches the disciples, first by washing their feet, then by instruction, what the Christian life is to be, now that He is going away.

Chapters 18 through 20 details Christ's betrayal, arrest, trial, crucifixion and resurrection. Finally, Jesus commissions His disciples at the end of 20. Part 2 can be summarised with 1:12: ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: (John 1:12)

Finally, the book closes with an epilogue, where Peter gets to undo his three denials of Jesus with three affirmations of love for Jesus, and John corrects what had become an erroneous oral tradition: that the apostle John would live to the return of Christ.

So this is a carefully crafted book, filled with the number seven, carefully arranged to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, and what it is like then to believe on Him and follow Him.

IV. The Promise of the Book

and that believing you may have life in His name.

¹⁰ The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly. (John 10:10)

John writes that everyone who believes in Messiah gets true life. Life through His name: through His Person and authority. This life is not just having a heartbeat, and being conscious. As we have already seen in the illustrations of faith, it is being satisfied, having thirst quenched, having inner desires met, gaining clarity and sight and direction where there was darkness, feeling full and satisfied where there was the gnawing hunger of fear and emptiness and discontent, having direction where there was aimlessness, having the energy and zeal of new life where there was the declining life of corruption and sin.

So as we approach this book, you should ask yourself every time we study it: Do I believe, the way Jesus means believe, in Jesus? Have I accepted, embraced, imbibed, absorbed, taken Him as my Lord and Life and Light? Or am I like many of the debaters in this book, who are impressed with Jesus, interested in Jesus, even approving of Jesus, but not submitted to Him?

The way I will know is if I have life the way Jesus describes it. Not riches, not health, not approval of others: but deep internal joy, meaning, understanding, purpose, hope, and love.

If that is not you, I hope you will do so even today. I hope you will turn from self-life, to life in Christ. I hope you will turn from all other saviours and messiahs to the only true Messiah, Jesus the Son of God.