

The Purpose of the Gospel of John

Introduction

Of the four gospels, John's gospel presents Jesus as God most forcefully. John explicitly declared Jesus to be God (John 1.1) who brought all things into existence (John 1.3). John's gospel confirmed that Jesus was YHVH of the Jews (John 8.57-58). He is light (John 1.4, 8.12) and life (John 1.4, 5.26, 14.6). As a vehicle to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of God, John crafted his gospel with eight signs—seven pre-resurrection and one post-resurrection and seven "I Ams." They are the following:

Chiastic Structure of the Eight Signs of John's Gospel	
A	The Marriage at Cana (John 2.1-11)
B	Healing an official's son (John 4.46-50)
C	Healing a paralyzed man (John 5.1-15)
D	Feeding 5,000 (John 6.1-14)
D'	Walking on the sea (John 6.15-21)
C'	Healing a man born blind (John 9.1-12)
B'	Raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11.1-44)
A'	The draught of fishes (John 21.1-14)

Seven signs were prior to Christ's resurrection. The eighth is after His resurrection. Seven in Scripture is the number of completion or perfection. Eight indicates a new beginning. Note also the relationship between the signs, i.e., the 1st and the 8th, 2nd and 7th, etc.

The Seven "I Ams" in Which Jesus Declared that He is Almighty God

1. I am the Bread (John 6.35-51)

2. I am the Light (John 8.12, 9.12)
3. I am the Door (John 10.7)
4. I am the Good Shepherd (John 10.11)
5. I am the Resurrection and the Life (John 11.25)
6. I am the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14.6)
7. I am the True Vine (John 15.1)

In Revelation, Jesus declared, "I am the Alpha and the Omega" (Revelation 1.8, 21.6) and "I am the root and descendant of David, the bright morning star" (Revelation 22.16). Revelation points to new beginnings: the Millennial Kingdom and Eternity.

The Kingdom Program

The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), present Jesus as the King of the Jews who proclaimed the kingdom of God (Matthew 4.17, 9.35). John the Baptist and the Twelve also proclaimed this kingdom message. But in John's gospel, the King and His kingdom are practically absent. Consider the following:

The phrase "kingdom of God" is found in the following passages:

- Matthew 6.33, 12.28, 19.24, 21.31, 43
- Mark 1.14-15, 4.11, 26, 30, 9.1, 47, 10.14-15, 23-25, 12.34, 14.25, 15.43
- Luke 4.43, 6.20, 7.28, 8.1, 10, 9.2, 11, 27, 60, 62, 10.9, 11, 11.20, 12.31, 13.18, 20, 28-29, 14.15, 16.16, 17.20-21, 18.16-17, 24-25, 29, 19.11, 21.31, 22.16, 18, 23.51
- John 3.3, 5

The phrase "kingdom of heaven" is found in the following passages:

Matthew 3.2, 4.17, 5.3, 10, 19-20, 7.21, 8.11, 10.7, 11.11-12, 13.11, 24, 31, 33, 44-45, 47, 52, 16.19, 18.1, 3-4, 23, 19.12, 14, 23, 20.1, 22.2, 23.13, 25.1, 25.14.

This phrase is unique to Matthew. Is there a difference between the “kingdom of God” and the “kingdom of heaven?” There can be. Probably the best analysis of this was by E. W. Bullinger. See Appendix 114, [The “Kingdom of Heaven” and the “Kingdom of God”](#) from The Companion Bible.

The phrase “gospel of the kingdom” is found in the following passages:

- Matthew 4.23, 9.35, 24.14
- Mark 1.14

The synoptic gospels provide a much greater emphasis on Jesus’ kingship and kingdom than John. Except for two passages in John 3, the king and His kingdom are not mentioned (except for Jesus’ trial before Pilate, John 18.33-19.22). Why is this? The most logical reason is John wanted to focus his message primarily on Christ’s deity, not on His kingship and kingdom. When he mentioned His kingship, it was to emphasize the fact his own people, the Jews, were the ones primarily guilty of murdering their Messiah and rejecting their King and His kingdom. Peter made this fact abundantly clear in his post-resurrection messages to the Jews (Acts 2.26, 3.10-15, 4.10-11).

The Purpose of John’s Gospel

Why did John write his gospel? John provided the answer to this question in John 20.30-31. He wrote:

³⁰ Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ 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.

The faith necessary for salvation during Jesus’ ministry was to believe Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. John declared

Jesus performed many signs ([σημείον](#)) that he did not record in his gospel. The eight signs he recorded were to prove that Jesus was the Christ and that his readers might have life through Him. The signs were miracles. All signs are miracles but not all miracles are signs. The signs had special significance in John's gospel for national Israel: they proclaimed Who He was.

To whom did John write? He wrote to Jews. His gospel was written to prove to Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. The information he provided was that they might "believe that Jesus is the Christ; and that believing you might have life in His name." What did this mean?

Believing in Jesus' Name

What did the Jews believe in order to have eternal life during Jesus' day? We have examples to show what they believed. Below are accounts from John's gospel, Matthew's gospel, and Acts:

1. Nathanael's Faith

⁴⁹ *Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel."* ⁵⁰ *Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these."* ⁵¹ *And He *said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (John 1.49-51).*

2. Martha's Faith

²⁵ *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"* ²⁷ *She *said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that*

You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world” (John 11.25-27).

3. Peter’s Faith

¹⁴ *And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.”* ¹⁵ *He *said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”* ¹⁶ *Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16.14-16)*

4. The Ethiopian Eunuch’s Faith

³⁴ *The eunuch answered Philip and said, “Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?”* ³⁵ *Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.* ³⁶ *As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?”* ³⁷ *[And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”]*¹

5. Saul’s Faith

¹⁹ *Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus,* ²⁰ *and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”* ²¹ *All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, “Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?”* ²² *But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by*

proving that this Jesus is the Christ (Acts 9.19-22).

The above testimonies have a common thread. What one believed for salvation during Jesus' earthly ministry and shortly afterwards, what "believing in Christ" meant during this time was believing Jesus was Israel's Messiah and the Son of God.

When when we read the following passage we must understand what it meant at the time. John wrote:

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. ¹⁸ He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3.16-18).

This passage is probably familiar to more people than any other passage in Scripture. Most misunderstand it, however. The gospels reveal that Jesus ministered to Jews only (Matthew 10.5-6; John 12.20-26) with two exceptions (Matthew 15.21-28; 8.5-13; cf. Luke 7.1-10). In context, this passage has to do with Jewish salvation, the gospel of the kingdom, not Gentile salvation. Interpretatively, John 3.16 has *nothing* to say for salvation today. It becomes meaningful today in light of Paul's gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4).

In His conversation with the Pharisee Nicodemus Jesus told him that "whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." What did Jesus expect Nicodemus to believe? He expected him to believe He was the Christ, the Son of God. On the basis of this faith one obtained salvation.

This was the crux of the objection the chief priests made

against Jesus. This was why they arrested Him. They refused to believe He was the Messiah, the Son of God. Thus, John recorded:

*⁶ So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate *said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him." ⁷ The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God" (John 19.6-7).*

The Cross

What is missing in all of the salvation messages above? The cross. The blood of Christ. The resurrection of Christ. None of these exist. How do we learn about the cross, Jesus' shed blood, and the resurrection? We learn them from Paul.

Paul was the first to declare the significance and meaning of Christ's death and resurrection. The first place we read about the significance of Jesus' death for salvation is in Romans 3. Paul wrote:

²¹ But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; ²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶ for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just

and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3.21-26).

No one wrote about the significance of the death of Christ for salvation until Paul. Christ's death and resurrection was Paul's gospel. Paul declared:

¹ Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15.1-4, emphasis mine).

No one preached this gospel until Paul. Paul declared it to be "my gospel" (Romans 2.16; 16.25). The gospel before Paul was the "gospel of the kingdom," believing that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Son of God. As we have seen above, this was the gospel Paul preached immediately following his own conversion. However, later, probably during the three years Paul recounted that he was in Arabia (Galatians 1.17-18), the glorified Lord revealed the significance of His death and resurrection as a redemptive and propitiatory work for the sins of mankind.

Someone may object that Peter preached Christ's death and resurrection in Acts 2. Luke recorded Peter's sermon:

²² "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— ²³ this Man, delivered

over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.²⁴ But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

I urge the reader to read carefully Peter's message. Let him ask the question, "What message was Peter conveying?" Was Peter's message good news? Hardly. Peter accused his audience (all Jews) of murdering their Messiah and declared God had raised Him from the dead. Did Peter tell them Christ had died for their sins and rose from the dead? No. Peter declared:

Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2.36).

What was their reaction? Did they say, "Praise God! Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead so I might have eternal life." No. They were convicted. The death of Christ for them was a *sin* they had committed. Peter presented Christ's death, not as a victory, but as a matter of national repentance. Thus, Peter told them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2.38). Again, this was the gospel of the kingdom, not the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20.24) the gospel of Paul (Romans 2.15, 16.25, 1 Corinthians 15.1-4). What's different? Everything!

After God saved Saul of Tarsus, all this changed. God began a new salvific paradigm with Paul. For Paul, the cross was glorious. He preached "Christ crucified." Read and consider what Paul wrote the Corinthians in light of the gospel message during Jesus' earthly ministry and the ministry of the Twelve following Jesus' resurrection:

¹⁸ *For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are*

perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE." ²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Conclusion

What we find in John, the rest of the gospels, and early Acts is that believing in Jesus meant believing that Jesus was the Christ, Israel's Messiah, the Son of God. This was a *Jewish* message. No mention is made of the cross, his shed blood, or glorious resurrection in the gospels or early Acts. Jews were saved during Jesus' ministry and the ministry of the Twelve by believing in Christ as the Messiah and Son of God. This is what believing in Jesus meant. No one is saved today by believing that Christ is Israel's Messiah or that He is God.² A passage such as John 3.16 has nothing to do with the gospel today. The gospel for today is 1 Corinthians 15.1-4. Strictly speaking, John 3.16 is *interpretively invalid* for us today. However, it can be *applicationaly valid* when conveyed under the context of Paul's gospel of grace (Acts 20.24).

¹ While verse 37 is not in some early manuscripts it is

consistent with the other passages.

² The gospel of the kingdom, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God will be reprised before the Lord returns (see Matthew 24.14).

©2011 Don Samdahl. Anyone is free to reproduce this material and distribute it, but it may not be sold.

Updated, March 1, 2016.