

St John's Richmond
Parish Bible Studies Sept - Dec 2024
John's Gospel

Questions taken from *Search the Scriptures: A Three-Year Daily Devotional Guide to the Whole Bible* by Alan M. Stibbs and aligned to the Word One-to-One materials and our fall sermon series.

Introduction

The author of this Gospel claims to have been an eye-witness of the scenes that he records (1.14; 19.35; cf. 1Jn. 1.1-3), and in 21.24 his identity as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' is asserted. Among the many reasons for identifying this disciple with John the son of Zebedee, one of the most striking is the Evangelist's habit of referring to the Baptist as 'John' only, and never mentioning the son of Zebedee by (his own) name.

The other three Gospels are chiefly concerned with our Lord's ministry in Galilee - a bare hint is all that they give that He so much as visited Jerusalem between His baptism and the final Passover (Mt. 23.37; Lk. 13.34; and Lk. 4.44). John, on the other hand, has little to say about our Lord's work in Galilee (2.1-12; 4.43-54; 6). For the most part the scene of his narrative is Judea, and especially Jerusalem, where almost from the first the Lord was rejected (1.11; 4.43,44; 5; etc.).

It is important to observe that in the record of Jesus' ministry up to His death, seven miracles are emphasized in this Gospel. These are (1) the turning of water into wine (2.1-11); (2) the healing of the nobleman's son (4.46-54); (3) the healing of the impotent man (5.2-9); (4) the feeding of the five thousand (6.4-13); (5) walking on the water (6.16-21); (6) the healing of the man born blind (9.1-7); and (7) the raising of Lazarus from the dead (11.1-44). John calls these miracles 'signs', by which he means that they have a meaning beyond themselves, and point (a) to the identity of Jesus as the Christ, and (b) to His corresponding works in the spiritual realm, such as the raising of the spiritually dead, the opening of the eyes of the spiritually blind, etc.

The purpose of the Gospel, and particularly of the signs recorded in it, is clearly stated, 'that you may believe the Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name' (20.31). It shows the divine Word coming to His own people, revealing the Father to them both by teaching and by 'signs', and yet rejected and persecuted to the death. To the world this Gospel reveals the tremendous claims of the Lord Jesus and the awfulness of rejecting Him. To the disciple it reveals the implications of accepting Him, showing the interdependence of love and obedience, of life and feeding upon the Lord, of fruit-bearing and abiding in Him.

The section 7.53-8.11 is omitted by all the oldest Greek manuscripts now existing, with one exception, and its style and vocabulary are more like those of Luke (in whose Gospel four manuscripts insert it) than those of John. But though this section was probably not written by John, it bears every evidence of truth, and we may thankfully accept it as part of the inspired Word of God.

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Part One: Twelve Weeks: John 1-5

STUDY 1 John 1.1-18

1 Why is Jesus here called 'the Word'? What is His relation to God; to the world; to men? See the whole passage.

2 Who does not, and who does become a child of God? By what means is one brought into this new status?

3 Note all the allusions to 'light' and associated ideas (e.g., 'glory') in this passage. How much of the purpose of Jesus' coming does this explain?

Note. Verse 16. 'Grace upon grace': *i.e.*, one grace succeeding another.

STUDY 2 John 1.19-34

1 What do we learn here about (a) the character, and (b) the work, of John the Baptist? See also verses 6-8 and 3.28-30.

2 Verses 26-34. What testimony does John the Baptist here bear to Jesus? How much of this did John learn about Him through his experience at Christ's baptism? Do these truths mean something to you?

Note. Verse 29. 'He saw Jesus coming': probably after the forty days in the wilderness, when He was tempted by Satan. That Jesus' baptism had already taken place is shown by verse 32. *Cf.* Lk 3.21,22.

STUDY 3 John 1.35-51

1 Describe what it was that brought each of these five men to Jesus. How far did they understand who Jesus was? What account of Him can you give to others?

2 Verses 48, 49. Why did Jesus' answer elicit the response of Nathaniel? See 2.25. What do verses 47-50 reveal of Nathaniel's character?

Notes

1 Verse 42. Cephas = Peter = Rock.

2 Verses 47, 51. An allusion to the story of Jacob in Gn. 32.24-29 and 28.12,23.

3 Verse 51. This word, as shown by the plural 'you', was spoken not about Nathaniel only, but also about all the other disciples. Jesus would be revealed to them as the true and final Mediator between God and man.

STUDY 4 John 2.1-12

1 Verses 1-11 present the first of the seven 'signs' (see Introduction), which reveal the identity of Jesus and stimulate faith (verse 11). What particular aspect of Jesus' glory does this miracle display?

2 What change in our life does turning the water into wine represent? Cf. 2 Cor, 5.17. What can we learn from Mary's response to Jesus?

STUDY 5 John 2.13-22

1 The idea of the 'Temple' unites verses 13-17 with 18-22. How does Jesus appear in each incident? By what authority does He drive out the traders? Cf. Mal. 3.1-3. What crisis does this incident foreshadow in the mind of Jesus? What did He foresee concerning the cost and character of His mission?

Notes

1 Verse 4. The English, in ESV, makes Jesus' words seem disrespectful, but in the Greek the form of address is perfectly courteous. Jesus makes it clear that He depends upon no human instructions, even from His mother, but only upon that which God appoints. He is awaiting His Father's instructions.

2 Verses 14-16. See Commentaries for discussions on whether there were two cleanings of the Temple, one at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, as here, and one at the end, as recorded in the Synoptics, or whether the chronology has been adapted by the Evangelists.

STUDY 6 John 2.23 - 3.15

1 Why was Jesus not satisfied with the faith spoken of in 2.23? Cf. 4.48; 6.26, 30; Mt. 13.14. What kind of faith is it, which pleases God?

2 What was right, and what was lacking, in Nicodemus' assessment of Jesus? How did Jesus' answer correct him? What is involved in being 'born of the Spirit', and why is this needed? Cf. Mt. 18. 3; Jn. 1.12,13; 2 Cor. 5.17; Rom. 8.8,9.

3 Why was the lifting up of the Son of man necessary? (Note 'must' in verse 14). On what ground are men judged and condemned? Where is it best to stand in relation to these truths?

Notes

1 Verse 5. 'Born of water' probably refers to John's baptism.

2 Verse 8. As with the wind, so with the movement of the Spirit, the effect is both real and recognizable, although the process remains hidden.

3 Verse 12, 13. The Gospel speaks of heavenly things, of which Christ is the sole revealer. Cf. 3.31, 32; Mt. 11.27.

STUDY 7 John 3.16 - 36

- 1 How might one have expected John to have replied to the statement of verse 26? Consider the quality of character and the principles brought out in his answer. How far ought we to share his attitude to Christ? How could this apply to our situation?
- 2 What is said about Jesus in verses 31, 31, 34, 35, which set Him apart from, and above, all others?
- 3 'Receives his testimony'; 'believes in the Son'; 'does not obey the Son' (verses 33, 36). What kinds of response to Jesus Christ do these phrases describe? To what consequences do they lead?

Notes

- 1 Verse 32. 'No one': *i.e.*, generally speaking; it is qualified in verse 33.
- 2 Verse 33. 'Sets his seal': he both confirms his acceptance of the truth of God's Word and his consequent experience proves the truth of it. *Cf.* 7.17.

STUDY 8 John 4.1-26

- 1 What did our Lord mean by 'living water' (verse 10)? Why, when He had awakened in the woman a desire for it, did He not at once grant her request? What was necessary before He could do so?
- 2 Trace the successive steps by which Jesus brought the woman to feel her need of salvation, and pointed her to Himself. What can we learn from this to help us as we seek to lead others to Him?
- 3 In verses 19 & 20, was the woman evading the demand for a personal response? How does Jesus' answer meet the need of those today who evade the claims of God by professing to follow a correct form of worship? Where must we look for salvation?

Note. Verse 20. 'This mountain': *i.e.* Mount Gerazim, where the Samaritans had built a temple. The temple had been destroyed, but the Samaritans still regarded the place as holy.

STUDY 9 John 4.27-42

- 1 How do the previous verses 7-26 explain, and verses 35-38 develop, the truth which Jesus expresses in verse 34? What brings you the most satisfaction in life?
- 2 Two groups of Samaritans believed in Jesus, but through different means. What was the particular truth about Him which brought each of them to faith? Are both valid today?

Note. Verse 35-38. In the natural world there were yet four months until harvest, but in the spiritual sphere in this instance reaping was possible at once. Someone else had done the sowing.

STUDY 10 John 4.43-54

- 1 What was the particular truth about Jesus which brought the Capernaum official to faith? To what did 'the second sign' (verse 54) point? What aspect of Jesus' character, or power, led you to Him?
- 2 Verse 48 seems to be a test of the man's sincerity. How would you explain Jesus' words here?

STUDY 11 John 5.1-29

- 1 Verses 2-9, the 'third sign'. What features of Jesus' power does it reveal? What did He do *for* the man, and demand *from* the man, apart from making him walk? See verses 6 and 14.
- 2 Verses 17-29. In what terms is Jesus' relationship with God described? What functions concerning judgement has God given to Jesus, and why? How do these truths concern us today?
- 3 Verses 16-18. What connection has Jesus' statement in verse 17 with His healing on the sabbath? How does it agree with Gn. 2.2, 3, and how does it answer the Jews' criticism of His action?

Note. Verse 25. What is meant here is spiritual resurrection from the death of sin. Contrast verses 28, 29.

STUDY 12 John 5.30-47

- 1 To what four different testimonies to Himself does Jesus appeal? Which does He Himself regard as of least importance, and why?
- 2 Verses 39, 40. Is it still possible to study the Bible without finding life? If so, what is lacking? What reasons does Jesus give for the Jews' failure? Cf. 2 Cor. 3.14-16.

Note. Verse 31. 'Not deemed true': in the sense of not being 'accepted' as true. Cf. Dt. 19.15; Mt. 18.16; Jn. 8.13,14.

STUDY 13 John 6:1-71

- 1 Taking this 'fourth sign' in the context of the verses 1-13, note what it reveals concerning (a) why the people were attracted to Jesus; (b) His own attitude to the people; (c) His testing of His disciples faith; (d) His use of their co-operation; (e) the source of the answer to people's need. What over-all lesson was this miracle intended to convey.
2. Verse 15. Why did Jesus not wish to be made king by these people? What may we learn from His withdrawing from the place of success to be by Himself?
3. The people saw the outward form of the miracle, but failed to discern what it signified spiritually (verse 26). Why? From what motives did they seek Jesus? Are you more concerned about spiritual development than material prosperity (verse 27).
4. How do verses 35-40 present God's anger to man's hunger?

5. Comparing verses 36, 37 with 43-45, why do you think some people will not accept Jesus words? By what steps do others come to experience salvation?

6. The closing verses 60-71 make it clear that what Jesus offers to people is not fleshly or material gain, but spiritual life through union with Himself. What three reasons does Peter give why he and his fellow disciples remain faithful when many others went back?

7. How did Jesus give His flesh for the life of the world? What is meant by eating His flesh and drinking His blood?

Notes.

1. Verse 7. A denarius may be valued as a day's wage for a labourer. Cf. Mt. 20.2.

2. Verse 14. 'The prophet who is to come'; Cf. Dt.18.15; Mt 11.3; He is here identified by the people with the Messiah, as verse 15 shows.

3. Verses 22-25 explain the astonishment of the crowds at finding Jesus the next day on the Capernaum side of the lake. They had noticed that He had not gone with the disciples.

4. Verse 62. The return of the Son of man to heave (c.f. 3:13) will be a greater wonder than the words just spoken. It will confirm the divine character of Jesus and His words.

5. The approaching Passover Feast was clearly in our Lord's thoughts as He spoke, and there may be anticipating allusions to the Lord's Supper; but Jesus is speaking in this discourse, not of the sacrament itself, but of the truths of which the sacrament is only one expression. Not the manner of true participation (verses 35, 63, 68, 69)