

BGM BIBLE COLLEGE

New testament Survey ;

Lecture 12

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The Gospel According to St. John

Constantine Campbell has described the Gospel of John with a beautiful riddle: *What is so shallow that a child may walk in it, and yet so deep that an elephant may swim in it?* The answer is the Gospel of John.

Authorship

The Gospel of John itself does not state the name of its author, yet the prevailing belief is that **it was written by St. John the Apostle**. Before considering the Gospel itself, we may note several matters concerning the author:

1. **A Jew by birth** – St. John was a Jew, well acquainted with Jewish customs and traditions, which he records in detail (**John 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 10:22; 13:1**).
2. **A resident of Palestine** – He was familiar with Jerusalem and the regions round about (**John 5:2; 11:18**).
3. **The son of Zebedee** – He was the son of Zebedee, a prosperous fisherman, possessing boats and hiring servants (**Mark 1:19–20**).
4. **His mother Salome** – Tradition holds that Salome was either the sister or a close relative of the Blessed Virgin Mary (**Mt. 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25**). She was a woman of means, and among those who supported the ministry of Christ (**Mark 15:40–41; Luke 8:3**).
5. **A prosperous family** – John's household was financially secure, for he is the only Apostle of whom it is written that he had a home of his own (**John 19:27**).
6. **Disciple of John the Baptist** – Before following Christ, John was a disciple of John the Baptist (**John 1:35–40**).
7. **Called by Christ** – He was called by the Lord while fishing with his father (**Mark 1:19–20**).
8. **Son of Thunder** – Together with his brother James, he was named by the Lord "a Son of Thunder" (**Mark 3:17**), a title reflecting their zeal (Luke 9:51–56).
9. **One of the inner circle** – John was counted among the inner circle of Christ's disciples (**Mark 5:37; 9:2; 14:33**).

10. **His request with James and Salome** – Together with his brother and mother, he once asked the Lord that they might sit at His right hand and His left in His kingdom (**Matthew 20:20–28**).
11. **The disciple whom Jesus loved** – In the Gospel itself he is portrayed as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (**John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20**). This is understood as a modest way of referring to himself without naming himself directly, in keeping with ancient literary custom.
12. **Entrusted by Christ** – At the cross, the Lord entrusted His mother into John’s care (**John 19:25–27**), showing His confidence in him.
13. **An eyewitness** – John speaks of himself as an eyewitness of the Lord’s glory and ministry (**John 1:14**).

Although John did not name himself in this Gospel, the other Gospels mention him about **twenty times**. In his letters, he speaks of love nearly eighty times, and hence he has been called the **Apostle of Love**.

The Character of the Gospel

This Gospel has been called the **Holy of Holies**. Just as under the Old Covenant none could enter the Most Holy Place, so John unveils to us that through Christ all may now enter into the very Presence of God.

While the **Synoptic Gospels** (Matthew, Mark, Luke) emphasize the earthly life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ—thus called **Biographical Gospels**—the Gospel of John sets forth His heavenly life and divine nature, often referred to as *Theography of Jesus*.

Ninety percent of the content of John’s Gospel is distinct from the Synoptic Gospels.

The Purpose of the Gospel of John

This Gospel was written with many purposes in mind. Among them, it served to present the true testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ against the heresies of **Gnosticism**, which opposed the truth of Christ and His work.

The Gnostic Sect

Although they called themselves Christians, their doctrine concerning the Lord Jesus Christ was not true. They regarded Him merely as a divine revealer of knowledge—someone who taught men so that they might find salvation by enlightenment. But they did not believe in salvation through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the Cross.

Their teaching was that the Lord Jesus Christ did not truly possess a physical body; rather, His body was only an appearance, a mere show. Thus, they denied the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason, **St. John the Apostle** carefully expounded upon the reality of the Lord’s body.

The Doctrine of the Incarnation

The term **Incarnation** means "to be in the state of flesh"—God becoming man, the embodiment of God. St. John the Apostle proclaimed this doctrine in great power. And why did he use the word **Word (Logos)** instead of writing directly that "In the beginning was Christ, and Christ was with God, and Christ was God"?

It was because this term was of great significance both to the Jews and to the Gentiles. In Greek it is called **Logos**.

The Meaning of Logos

The word *Logos* has many shades of meaning: "word," "speech," "matter," "thing," "command," "reason," "account," "reckoning," and even "message" or "cause." In the New Testament, this word appears **331 times**.

There was no need for explanation in those days, for all understood its meaning. To the Greeks, *Logos* was a creative force, the power that had made the worlds. They thought of it as the mightiest force in existence, holding the universe together.

But **St. John the Apostle** declared to them: That *Logos* which you regard as a mere force or principle is in truth **God Himself**—and He became flesh.

The Word Made Flesh

To become flesh means to take on a real human body. Among men, the term "to be born" usually refers to a child who had no prior existence but comes into being at birth.

Yet concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, St. John uses not "born," but "was made flesh." This means that Christ is not one who began to exist when He was born, but One who already existed before His Incarnation. His Person pre-existed, but in the fullness of time, He took on human flesh.

The Testimony of Scripture

The Holy Scriptures, even the Old Testament, bear witness that the Son was not made, nor was He a created being. Rather, He is Himself the **Creator**. For all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.

The Life in Christ

Therefore, Saint John the Apostle declares concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, saying that *in Him was life*. This life was not borrowed nor received from another, but it existed in Him inherently. For this life, the Greek word **Zōē** is used, which means **Eternal Life**—a life

without end. It has neither beginning nor end; **He is the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega.**

The Rise of Gnosticism

After the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ into heaven, a heresy arose with great strength, which was called **Gnosticism**. These heretics confessed the Lord Jesus Christ as divine, yet they denied His true humanity. They asserted that though He was a divine figure, His body was not real. They claimed that matter is inherently evil, while spirit is pure; therefore, they could not accept that Christ took upon Himself a real body. According to them, He only appeared as though He had a body, and before the crucifixion He abandoned that body.

The Denial of the Atonement

This teaching is not only a denial of the true humanity of Christ but also a denial of His atoning work. According to such a belief, the Lord Jesus Christ did not offer Himself as atonement for mankind. Yet the Word of God guides us otherwise: that the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, buried, and on the third day rose again from the dead (**Hebrews 2:14–17**).

The Incarnation of the Son

This Son, even before His fleshly appearing, manifested Himself many times in the Old Testament. All other children who are born into the world are a **creation**, but their existence begins after their birth. Yet the coming of Christ was not mere birth, but **Incarnation**. In the language of Theology, *Incarnation* means that He who already existed took upon Himself flesh. He was God before, and by being born of the Virgin, He became Man also. **Thus, He is both God and Man. He is not created, but the Creator.**

As the Lord Himself declared in His sacred words (**John 8:56–59**), He existed even before Abraham. The Scripture testifies again: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... and the Word became flesh* (**John 1:1–2, 14**). Therefore, the Blessed Virgin Mary did not bring Him into being; rather, she submitted herself in the presence of God, that He might take flesh through her.

The Gnostic Error of Salvation by Knowledge

The Gnostics placed their emphasis upon knowledge, teaching that man attains salvation through secret wisdom. Yet the Word of God reveals that salvation is not through knowledge, but through the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the Cross.