

Session 1
Gospel of John Class
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Review:
How to Read the Bible with
Understanding

Six Guiding Principles

6 Principles of Right Interpretation*

- Stick with the plain and obvious meaning of a text
- Scripture interprets Scripture
- Pay attention to the context
- Rather than highlight “contradictions” in the Scriptures, we endeavor to note the depth of God’s Word with an emphasis on the rule of faith (cf. Matthew 10:34 and John 14:27)
- The entire Scriptures should be understood in light of God’s redeeming activity in Jesus Christ.
- We must properly divide “Law” and “Gospel” in interpreting the Scriptures.

Review:
Helpful Approaches for
Understanding the Gospel
according to St. John

Motif of Misunderstanding, Irony,
Symbols

Gospel of John's Recurring Motif of Misunderstanding

- Misunderstandings of Jesus and who He is occur throughout this Gospel
- Incorrect understandings of Jesus “teach” the reader correct understandings of His person

Gospel of John's Irony

- Definition of irony:
 - Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, page 31: “An ironic passage is one where on the surface level something appears to be true, but in reality the opposite is true.”
- The effect of irony in the text often “works” because the reader knows more about Jesus than the people in the narrative do (who “should” know better!)

Gospel's Use of Symbols to Teach Who God Is...Who We Are

- This is how the ancients of Jesus' day taught "theology"
- See Psalm 42:1..."As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." What two symbols do you see here? What do they say about God? About the writer/humanity?

Symbols, continued

- “A symbol is an image, an action, or a person that is understood to have transcendent significance.” (Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*). It has both meaning “from above” and “from below” (John 3:12).
- During our time together, we will seek to understand the Word of God through John’s Gospel using 7 symbols: the Word, the Bridegroom, the Giver of Living Water, the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, the Passover Lamb

How to approach symbols in the Gospel of John today

- Religious or ethnic heritage of 1st Century
 - As best we can determine, according to the Jewish Scriptures
 - As best we can determine, according to Greco-Roman classic literature
- Context of the gospel itself
- Life experience: how do we understand “the Word,” “the bridegroom,” “light of the world,” “giver of living water,” etc. today?

The Word

John 1:1-5, 14-18

John 1:1–18 (esp. 1:1–5, 9–14, 16–18)



Understanding “the Word” (λογος), Part 1

- What would “the Word” have signified about “God/the gods” to a Greco-Roman of Jesus’ day?
 - Heraclitus: λογος = principle of order and knowledge, connecting people to one another and to the universe
 - Zeno: λογος = active human reason/ability to think that animates the universe, *often equated with God*
 - Aristotle: λογος = the meaning of what is said

Understanding “the Word” (λογος), Part 1

- What would “the Word” have signified about God according to the Jewish Scriptures?
 - As “the Word” of God has/is truth (2 Sam 7:28, Ps 119:160) so must also the word of man be (Gen 42:20, 1 Kings 10:6)
 - “The Word” of God is revealed through prophetic oracles (any of the prophets)
 - “The Word” of God is active in creation (Genesis 1:3, Is. 40:26, etc.)

Understanding “the Word” (λογος), Part 2

- What would “the Word” have signified about God according to the context of the Gospel of John?
 - Refers usually to the spoken word (2:22, 4:37, 5:24)
 - In John’s Gospel, God communicates three ways:
 - Through the Scriptures of Israel (presupposed by the Gospel writer; compare Gen 1:1-3 with John 1:1)
 - Through Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:18; Koester: “God speaks to the world through the words Jesus utters, the actions he performs, and the death he dies” *The Word of Life*, 27.)
 - Through the Holy Spirit (cf. John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7)

Understanding “the Word” (λογος), Part 3

- Today, “God’s Word” more frequently refers to the written Word than it would have in Jesus’ day.
- What purpose do words serve for you? How would your life be different if there were no words?
- What appears to be God’s purpose for you in sending Jesus, “the Word” (see John 1:14, 18)?

Contrast between Moses the Law-bringer and Jesus, the Word-made-flesh

- God reveals himself (Luther: his “backside”) to Moses on Mount Sinai, with Exodus 34:6... “The Lord, the Lord, abounding in grace and truth (רַב-חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת)
- The Gospel of John appears to be correcting a misunderstanding of Jesus that sees Him as a kind of new Moses. Jesus is NOT a new Moses, conveying God’s Law/Word...Jesus is *Himself* God’s Word, “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, 17)!

Jesus, the Word, in Action (Jn 4:46–54)



“The Word” in Action

- Did you notice how the film turned from color to black and white at John 4:53? Why do you think the filmmaker did this?
- What special quality did Jesus’ Word at 4:50 have for the royal official?
- What special quality does “the Word” have for *us*, today?

For Next Sunday Read John 2:1-12



The Bridegroom