

Sermon Audio Input

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Message Outline

Rightly Interpreting the Gospel of John

How to Understand What John Meant by What He Said

What We Must Consider Beyond Simply Reading of the Words on the Page

- I. We Must Consider the Historical Context**
- II. We Must Consider the Salvation-Historical Context**
- III. We Must Consider the Structure & Themes -- How John Organized What He Wrote**

Please See

Pastor Kit Culver's sermon and study notes for his message John 002, "Interpretive Issues" from 7/12/15.

Examine the Scriptures (Be Berean!)

- Gen 1, 3:15, 12:1-3
- 2 Sam 7 (esp. vv.12-16)
- Isaiah 11 (esp. vv 6-11); 49 (esp. v. 6), 53
- Mark 1 (esp. v.15)
- John 1 (esp. vv. 1-18); 20:30-31
- Rev 21 (esp. vv.1-7)

Consider & Discuss (Be Transformed!)

Community Group Discussion: What are some practical things you must do in order to 1) approach the Gospel of John so as to first get over the hurdle of disinterest in Bible study and then 2) understand what John meant by what he wrote and finally 3) let that meaning sink in and transform you in the hands of the Spirit as God intends the Scriptures to function?

Memory & Meditation Verse

"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." John 20:31

Community Life

- **Looking Ahead: Goal for Fall 2015:** That we (each and together) would be the members of the body of Christ God intends, being "transformed by the renewing of our minds", ministering and being ministered to as He has gifted.
Means: While actively and thoughtfully listening to what God has given us in the Gospel of John, I encourage everyone to either participate in one or more of the Community Groups available at SHC, or come up with your own God honoring "Body Life Plan."

Next Sunday

John 1:1-18, "In the beginning was the Word..."

Rightly Interpreting the Gospel of John

How to Understand What John Meant by What He Said

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Introduction

Effective communication doesn't happen by default; it is the result of a hard fought battle; it takes active intentional listening.

Effective communication is realized when both parties get what the other party is trying to convey -- when both parties have not only heard the words spoken but have understood the meaning the speaker intended to convey.

We are familiar with the difficulties of effective communication in simply talking with each other face to face. I can't tell you how many times I have heard someone say something and trying my best to practice good listening skills I have restated to them what I understand them to have said, only to find disagreement with my recap. So what you are saying is... No, not really...

But the good news about face to face communication is that you can go back and forth like this and you can "read" the nonverbal input offered by the person you are talking to. Confusion is communicated in our culture without a word by a tilted head and a furrowed brow and a facial grimace. Clarity likewise doesn't need the words, "I understand"; rather the same can be conveyed by a thoughtful nodding of the coupled with a tightening of the lips.

When it comes to our reading the Bible (in the case at hand, our effective communication with the man who wrote the Gospel of John) many of the same communication skills and strategies for effective oral communication still apply but more must be added to make up for all that is not available from the face-to-face conversation.

We have our work cut out for us when it comes to reading what has been written in our Bibles because we are reading what was written in a different time in a different culture by men who think differently and have a different frame of reference and often different goals. Add to that the fact that what the Bible talks about ("says") requires us to believe what God has done and to understand a reality expressed by way of revelation from Him and not what we have seen with our own eyes and heard with our own ears. Really when the Bible speaks we must take it at its word and not hear what we might want it to say or require it to think like us. The way we think and what we know are flawed. We must not force the Bible to say what we want it to say or what makes sense to us. We must listen across time and culture to what it says about the things it is talking about the way it says it in the language that means what the original writer meant even when it is not how we currently think about those things.

Effective communication, understanding the Bible requires interpretation. Interpretation is no small task. If we are to rightly understand the Gospel of John we must not read casually but carefully.

Towards the end of understanding what John meant by what he said when we sit down to read our Bibles I want to mention three things we must consider following the format laid out by Pastor Kit Culver in his second message in his series on the Gospel of John.

If we are to rightly interpret our Bibles, we must consider several things beyond simply reading the words on the page. First...

I. We Must Consider the Historical Context

A. What do I mean by historical context?

- 1. What was going on in the time and place of the Gospel of John**
- 2. How John and the people he was writing to thought about things**
 - a) Especially about the things that John was writing about**
 - (1) God & His Purposes and Works**
 - (2) His Kingdom**
 - (3) His People**
 - (4) His Love and Our Love**
 - (5) Faith/Belief**
 - b) They thought about different things and they did so differently**
 - (1) It should come as no surprise that 21st century Americans living in California think about different things differently than first century Jews and Gentiles living in and around Jerusalem.

B. Some Historical Context

- 1. John was a Jew with Jewish upbringing, Jewish expectations, Jewish worldview and way of thinking...** (See pp. 6, Potter, John 001, "About John...")
2. He most likely wrote at the close of the 1 century to Jewish and Gentile Christians possibly in Ephesus
3. Kit on Historical Circumstance: "The era immediately following the Christ event -- His incarnation, birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit."
- 4. NT Wright's Perfect Storm from "Simply Jesus", HarperOne 2011**
 - a) The Roman Storm** Ch 4, p.28ff -- Go ahead and picture the movie Gladiator. Rome was a political and military superpower that ruled over Jerusalem and the land in which the Jews lived (far beyond as well), including John the Gospel writer in the time of Jesus Christ. It had been a republic up to 30 years before Jesus, ruled by a Senate with check and balances to regulate who had the power. But the republic gave way to a system of government ruled by one man. First it was Julius Caesar. He was a military leader who "brought his army back to Rome itself and established his own power and prestige there." Wright p. 29. But he did not represent himself only as a great military leader, he "allowed people to think he was divine" (ibid). He also took to himself the role of Chief Priest. Assassinated by those trying to hold on to the republic. Succeeded by his adopted son Octavian. He took the title, "Augustus" which means "majestic" or "worthy of honor". With Julius claiming to be divine, Octavian Augustus Caesar became known as "son of god". His successor was Tiberius who took on the same divine titles. Coinage from his reign still exists inscribed on one side, "Augustus Tiberius Caesar Son of the Divine Augustus" and on the other "Pontifex Maximus = Chief Priest." Tiberius was emperor at the time of Jesus birth. Considering the reality of who we

know Jesus to be, Rome was poised to collide with Jesus. Why was Rome interested in the Middle East? Well not much has changed? Resources. Not oil but grain. Roman government in Jerusalem and the region existed to “keep the peace, to administer justice, to collect taxes, and particularly to suppress unrest.”

- b) **The Jewish Storm** Ch 4, p. 31ff -- “The Story of Israel.” The Jews of Jesus’ and John’s day saw themselves as living in an “ongoing drama” one in which God had a goal for them and He would make that goal come to pass. Read Wright p. 32. at highlight.
- (1) Much of Israel’s national story, the story that informed their hope for the future, was shaped by the Exodus. Wright says, “Understand the Exodus, and you understand a good deal about Judaism” p.33. The Jewish people of Jesus’ and John’s day lived with a hope that God would do in their day what he had done in Moses day. As God had delivered their ancestors from the oppression of Egypt using Moses’ leadership bringing them out and into the promised land... so He would do in a their own day. “The Jews lived on the hope that it would happen again.” The Exodus that shaped their hope found its own basis in Israel’s earlier history:
 - in God’s calling of their national fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob out of their existing situations into a better promised state; and most seminally
 - in creation itself where God had brought order out of chaos.
 - (2) The story that shaped their hope had been told again when the nation of Israel had gone into exile in Babylon from which God had (like in the Exodus from Egypt) brought them out of exile and back into the promised land. The people of Israel of Jesus’ and John’s day lived with a hope that God would deliver them from the then ruling evil ruling power under whose oppression they lived.
 - (3) The story had other elements that we integral and filled out the hope they held
 - (a) King David was remembered for the victories the nation had under his leadership. Also remembered were the prophecies that God would seat another from his family on the throne and he would bring justice and peace...
 - (b) King Solomon was remembered for his building of the Temple in Jerusalem. A temple which had been rebuilt and still held a place of central importance to them
 - (4) In the time of Jesus and John the Jewish people held the hope that God would bring about a “new exodus” from the evil empire that ruled them. God would bring about a new return from exile that would be the real deal, like but more complete than the Exodus and the return from Babylon.
 - (5) The Jewish expectation was informed by their history. A history we have record of in the “Old Testament” section of our Bibles. It was informed by, but not one in the same with, all that God had promised and done in their history. Not all of the things promised by God seemed to find their way into their collective hope. God was going to deliver using a Moses like figure who would set up a David

like kingdom and a Solomon like temple. But what this coming kingdom and what the coming king looked like in their expectations seemed to be formed in part by the kingdom and kings seen in the world, those formed by men with armies and national agendas of self-rule. The immediate hope of deliverance from Roman occupation unto self-rule seems to have come forward in their expectations; while other Scripturally based aspects of God's plan for them and for the world were less prominent even eclipsed.

- c) Note here at least the tension between Rome's rule and Israel's hope. As Wright points out they were like two storm system coming together at the time of Jesus and John. There is yet another storm system to consider as well. Wright calls the third storm a hurricane. And in his analogy it was headed towards the other two, the Roman wind from the west and the storm of Israel's "aspirations." These three storm systems coming together made for the Perfect Storm in the time of Jesus and John. We will talk about this hurricane next under the heading of Salvation-History the second point on your outline.

Quick review and refocus. We are preparing to carefully consider the Gospel of John because we believe that it records the good news of what God has brought about in and through Jesus Christ -- the good news that God would have us know and live in light of. Why these preparatory messages before we even tackle the first verse of the first chapter? Because effective communication doesn't happen by default.

We will understand what we read in our Bibles better if we understand the HISTORICAL CONTEXT of the time and place of the passage we are reading. Additionally, if we are to rightly interpret the Gospel of John (or any passage of Scripture)...

II. We Must Consider the Salvation-Historical Context

I understand "Salvation History" to be what God has actually purposed and done. The record of Salvation-History is found in the our Bible's and it was found in John's day in the Hebrew Scriptures. It overlaps Israel's hope (2nd storm) but is not one in the same. At the time of John, the time we are trying to get our head around if we are to understand the Gospel of John, the collective Jewish understanding of what God had done and their expectation of what He meant by what He had promised carried with it some points of difference with what God actually did promise and what God actually did do. They expected what they expected but what they expected was not exactly what God had promised -- or perhaps more graciously, their expectations for how God would fulfill His promises differed from how God actually was going to fulfill those promises.

I am empathetic with the Jews of John's day's imperfect understanding of salvation-history. And certainly we must never be so arrogant as to think that our understanding of salvation-history is perfect. But, with humility and the resources God has given us in His indwelling Spirit and the apostolic Gospel, we must try our best to understand what God has in fact promised and done as seen in the light provided us in Christ Jesus.

I may be mixing my terms up somewhat, but "Salvation-History" and "the Gospel" are largely one in the same. The Creator God is also the Redeemer God who not only **created** all things out of nothing and ordered chaos into a Kingdom where He was king and His image bearing

sons would rule over the rest of creation as his representatives living in intimate communion with Him; but He also **redeemed** fallen creation after humanity failed to be what He had created them to be. He is Creator and Redeemer. And all that He has purposed and done, especially as His purposes and actions culminate in the person of Jesus Christ, comprise the content of Salvation-History. It is what some have called the meta-story or the biggest picture. It is the forest in which the trees of the individual events of history stand. It is the record of what God has purposed, promised and done in history to restore fallen creation to the order of His ultimate intention. And lest this seem like some academic history lesson, do remember that He has included us in His purposes, promises and saving actions thereby giving us **LIFE!**

If we are to understand the Jesus of whom John writes in the Gospel of John the most significant context we must understand is the salvation-historical context concerning what God was actually doing in the person and time of Jesus. Salvation-History, as you might expect, is a bigger story that can be expressed in any one sermon on a given Sunday. But let me sketch a few of the important elements and events using N.T. Wright's sketch and his analogy of ...

A. "The Hurricane" (The Wind of God) from Wright's Ch 5, p.37

1. God had promised Israel that He would live in their midst in the Temple in Jerusalem
2. God had abandoned the temple at the time of Babylonian exile (Ezek 10-11)
3. God had promised to **return**. Mal 3:1: "The Lord whom you seek will suddenly return to His temple" (see also Is 40:5; 52:8)
4. God (YHWH) would be **king** (See Psalm 10:16-18; 47:1-9; 95:3-7; 96:10-13; 145:1, 10-13.) and rule in His Temple bringing justice and the "removal of all corruption and oppression" (Wright p. 45).
5. God the King was also referred to as "**shepherd**" (See Ps 23:1-3; 80:1-2; Isa 40:10-11; Jer 31:10-12; Ez 34:2-6; 11-12 (where Ezekiel testifies that God will be the Shepherd Israel's shepherd failed to be)
6. Somehow the kingship of God and the kingship of David would be merged -- See Ezek 34:23-24
7. Psalm 2 God will be Israel's king from Zion but through one he calls His **Son**
8. Ezek 43 holds out expectation that YHWH's glory would return to "the newly rebuilt temple" See also Zech 8:3, 7-8 and Mal 3:1-3, 5.
9. Zech 9:9-11 shows that "the divine king might after all come in the form of a human king.

A) Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
 Shout *in triumph*, O daughter of Jerusalem!
 Behold, your (B)king is coming to you;
 He is (C)just and (D)endowed with salvation,
 (E)Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
 Even on a (F)colt, the foal of a donkey.
 10 I will (G)cut off the chariot from Ephraim
 And the (H)horse from Jerusalem;
 And the (I)bow of war will be cut off.
 And He will speak (J)peace to the nations;
 And His (K)dominion will be from sea to sea,
 And from the River to the ends of the earth.

Remember Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem which is recorded in all the Gospels

John 12

12 On the next day (P) the large crowd who had come to (Q) the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, 13 took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and *began* to shout, "(R) Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, even the (S) King of Israel." 14 Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, 15 "(T) FEAR NOT, DAUGHTER OF ZION; BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING, SEATED ON A DONKEY'S COLT." 16 (U) These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus (V) was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him.

These are but a sampling of salvation-history that captures some of the big story as N.T. Wright chronicled them in "Simply Jesus." We will continue to speak of these things and continue to build our understanding of them. Let's be on the lookout for them, for knowing them will go a long way to rightly interpreting the Gospel of John.

We will understand what we read in our Bibles better if we understand not only the HISTORICAL CONTEXT of the time and place of the passage we are reading; but also the SALVATION-HISTORICAL CONTEXT which provides the greater meaning from the perspective of what God is accomplishing in the historical events we are considering. If we are to rightly interpret the Gospel of John (or any passage of Scripture), additionally...

III. We Must Consider the Structure & Themes -- How John Organized What He Wrote

Pastor Kit gives us the following structure and goes much farther than I will in this message.

Structure -- 7 Things We Can Say About the Structure of the Gospel of John

- 1. Prologue (1:1-18) -- Very intentional. The first things that need to be said**
- 2. Public Presentation (1:19 - 1:34)**
- 3. The Calling of the Disciples (the principle of the calling out of His disciples) (1:35-51/end)**
- 4. Public Ministry of Jesus (John 2:1ff)**
- 5. The Upper Room (13-17)**
- 6. Jesus' Death and Resurrection (18-20)**
- 7. Epilogue¹ (21:24-25) [JP: Looks like some regard whole chapter 21 as an epilogue]**

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¹ **Epilogue** -- An **epilogue** or **epilog** (from Greek ἐπίλογος *epílogos*, "conclusion" from a "in addition" and λέγειν *légein*, "to say") is a piece of writing at the end of a work of literature, usually used to bring closure to the work. It is presented from the perspective of within the story.

Scriptures, we must consider the structure and themes utilized by John so that we can listen to him, his words, his story, as he told it; hearing him, not hearing what we want to hear. These three things will help us have a successful communication event, i.e. will help us understand what John meant by what he wrote in his Gospel.

None of these things will soon become our possessions in total. We will not be in a week or a month master historians or intimates with John and his gospel account. We must be learners delighting in understanding these things more fully; and delighting all the more in coming to know our Lord Jesus Himself with increasing completeness. We can say over time, we have come to know Him as John has written of Him.

Know too that we are not alone in our pursuit of knowing Him as the Gospel of John reveals Him. We have His Spirit -- the Holy Spirit; and we have His people -- each other, fellow members of the body of Christ. God's inspired Word, His Spirit and His people -- We are resource rich, we are able with these which God has provided. We must only add our willingness to walk so provisioned in a manner worthy of the calling by which we have been called (Eph 4:1).

Let's pray.