



Introducing the New Testament

Week 8

1



Overview of this week

- ❖ The letters of John
- ❖ John's Gospel
- ❖ Jesus -- Stories of the Kingdom (from N.T. Wright)
 - Invitation
 - Welcome
 - Challenge
 - Summons

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John's Letters

- ❖ The "Johannine" community
 - Probably centered in Ephesus
- ❖ Probably written late in the 1st century
- ❖ Probably written by John the Apostle – is the Apostle, the Elder?
 - Irenaeus, a student of one of John's students, wrote that John lived until the reign of Trajan (98–117AD).
- ❖ The three letters were probably written as a set.
 - 1 John is the extended instruction to the churches.
 - 2 John is a brief cover letter, accompanying 1 John, to "the elect lady and her children".
 - 3 John is a cover letter sent to Gaius, accompanying 1 John and 2 John.
- ❖ Thrust of these letters – combating false teaching about the nature of the Christian life (we are to live holy lives!) and the nature of Jesus Christ (God made flesh!)

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1 John (Achte-meier et al)

- ❖ "The fundamental contours of the Christian faith" (1:5 – 2:27)
 - Forgive sins, obey God, don't love the world, avoid false prophets, rely on the Holy Spirit
- ❖ The family of God (2:28 – 3:24)
 - Our privileges; calls for righteousness and unit; living together in love and faith
- ❖ The fundamental commands: believe and love! (4:1 – 5:12)
 - The Holy Spirit testifies to the incarnation of Christ; the people of God are characterized by their love for each other; John issues a call to obedience; John delivers a testimony to Jesus as the incarnate Son of God
- ❖ Docetism (from the Gk. word *dokein*, "to seem") and John's gospel and letters

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2 & 3 John

- ❖ 2 John
 - Mutual love among Christians
 - The dangers of false teachers
 - “Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching.” (v.10)!!
- ❖ 3 John
 - Gaius – a Christian friend
 - Faithful to the truth (v.3-4) and faithful in his love for the brothers and sisters (v.5-8)
 - Diotrophes – a Christian fraud (“who likes to put himself first”)
 - Opposes “the Elder,” John
- ❖ The Apostles never wanted peace at any price. They fought long and hard for the truth of the Christians’ claims about Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God.

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John’s Gospel – Background

- ❖ Probably written by John the Apostle – but in the Johannine community. Probably around 90AD. Probably from Ephesus.
- ❖ Comparison to the synoptic gospels
 - Focused more on Judea than Galilee, emphasizing Jewish festivals
 - Little is said about the kingdom of God
 - Only a few parables, many long discourses
 - Shaped similarly to Mark – begins with the baptism; nearly half the book is devoted to the passion story
- ❖ Why did John write this gospel?
 - “. . . so that you might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” (20:31)

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John – Key Themes

- ❖ Jesus as God made flesh; God incarnate
 - The Word made flesh makes it inevitable that Jesus' revelation and will rejected and opposed.
- ❖ Jesus as the agent of God's salvation
 - "I am the bread of life . . . the light of the world . . . the gate for the sheep . . . the good shepherd . . . the resurrection and life . . . the way, the truth, and the life . . . the true vine."
 - There is no neutral ground between belief and unbelief, light and darkness, judgment and acquittal. Those who have seen Jesus, have seen the Father. Those who reject Jesus, reject God.
- ❖ John clusters images that help us see his themes
 - Life, death, light, darkness, bread, water, nurture, healing, birth, cleansing, and growth

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John – an outline (from Raymond Brown, NT Intro)

- ❖ The Prologue (1:1-18)
 - Jesus, the incarnate Word (Proverbs 8:22-31 for parallels to the personification of Wisdom)
- ❖ Part One: The Book of Signs (1:19-12:50)
 - Jesus, the Word, reveals himself to the world and to his own followers, but they do not recognize him.
 - Miracles are "signs" that should point his followers to Jesus as God incarnate. There are seven signs!
- ❖ Part Two: The Book of Glory (13:1-20:31)
 - To those who accept him, the Word shows his glory by returning to the Father in death, resurrection, and ascension. Fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life.
- ❖ Epilogue (21:1-25)
 - Resurrection appearances in Galilee

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Jesus' Invitation

The Call to Repent and Believe

- ❖ Mark 1:15: "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is near; repent and believe in the Good News."
 - The call to repent is a call to return to God and give up our own agendas! Just as it was a call for Israel to return to Yahweh, to give up its revolutionary zeal, and to embrace a new way of being God's people.
 - See Luke 13 for examples of the destiny of those who fail to repent!
- ❖ Matthew 4:19: "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."
 - A good 1st (or 21st!) century Jew would have found it scandalous that Jesus would say "follow me" rather than "follow God" or "follow Torah."
 - Jesus' invitation is focused on Jesus!

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Jesus' Welcome

Sinners and Forgiveness

- ❖ Why did Jesus eat with "sinners?"
 - *All are welcome in this arrival of God's kingdom*, this return from exile and the forgiveness of sins – but, to the Pharisees, this is a scandalous offering to the wrong people! No longer is it about allegiance to Torah, but to Jesus!
- ❖ Matthew 21:28-32
 - The parable of the two sons . . . Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you."
- ❖ "Forgiveness was to be the central character of the life of those loyal to Jesus. Thus were they to show their belief that the kingdom of YHWH was indeed dawning." (N.T. Wright, *Jesus & the Victory of God*)

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Jesus' Challenge

The Call to Live as the New Covenant People

- ❖ Living as the renewed Israel, the renewed people of God, in a renewed covenant
 - Jesus did not want to found a new church, he wanted to reform and renew the people of God!
- ❖ The renewed covenant and the renewed heart!
 - Jeremiah 31:33 -- But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
 - Mark 10:5 – But Jesus said this to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you.”
 - John Wesley’s heart was strangely warmed!

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Jesus' Summons

The Call to be Jesus' Helpers & Associates

- ❖ The invitation “to follow” is a summons to follow Jesus!
 - Being willing to abandon everything, even family, and follow Jesus
 - The parable of the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-22). The young man is to give up all his idols (\$\$\$!) and follow Jesus!
 - Matthew 10: “and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”
- ❖ “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The last verse of Matthew’s Gospel.

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