

“In Order that You May Believe”: Johannine Theology

A while ago, I talked about a map of the Diaspora, that is, the Jewish population around the Mediterranean world, and you’ll remember that there are points that go all the way to Rome and even beyond Rome and come all the way via Greece into Asia Minor and certainly Palestine, obviously, but into Babylon as well and on through to Egypt and into the areas that we would associate with Libya today. So if you think of the entire Mediterranean, it was ringed by a population of Jewish people and on into Babylon in the Mesopotamian area.

In light of this, when you come to Acts 2, you find Jewish people coming from every nation under heaven. Acts 2:5 says that “there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven.” And then the writer goes on to list them in verses 9 and following, you have “Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia”—that is all that area heading out to what we would have once called Babylon—“Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia”—he is coming across Asia Minor now—“Phrygia and Pamphilia”—and then he goes south—“Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs. We hear them in our own tongue, speaking of the mighty deeds of God.” That is a list of the people, and they are hearing the apostles speaking in all these different languages. He explicitly says “Jews and proselytes,” so you have the Jewish Diaspora and also the people who, because of the Jewish Diaspora, had been convinced that the Jewish religion was the right religion. So there are Gentiles who had converted to Judaism and likely even just God-fearers there as well. And these people raise the question, “Are these people drunk?” because what’s going on is just so incredibly strange.

Peter’s approach in his response is to quote the Old Testament, and especially to quote three main passages of the Old Testament. This parallels various sermon forms that are known in ancient Judaism. It is not identical in all respects, but it parallels them. Peter starts off with a prophetic text, and there is some evidence from fairly early on that Jewish sermons would often start with a prophetic reading. There would be a set reading for every day of the year, much like if you are in an Episcopalian or other high-church tradition that uses a lectionary, they have a regular set of readings every day of the year. That is possibly what was going on at this point in Judaism. They would often start off with a reading from the prophets and eventually get to a reading from the Law, and in the process they might very well go through the Psalter. Now what we have going on here is something similar to that, except that Peter does not actually end on a reading from the Pentateuch, but he starts with a reading from the book of Joel, and he reads through the book of Joel.

Now again, I want to highlight some of the theological themes that are going on here for Luke in Luke-Acts. Now that is not to say that this is not what was going on for Peter; certainly, historically, this is what Peter is conveying. But Luke is also necessarily telling about 20 years of church history in 28 chapters. He has to focus on certain particular events, and in focusing on those he draws out themes that are consummate with his emphases.

The passage of Joel quoted at the beginning of Acts 2 is fairly surprising, because there are parts of it that are clearly tied into the phenomenon that is taking place in front of them—that is, the Holy Spirit giving utterance to God’s people—but then Peter does not stop quoting the rest of the passage. You might ask, “Peter, why did you not just quote the one verse that was clearly connected? Why do you keep talking?” Let me read it. The quote starts in chapter 2, verse 17: “‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘that I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all mankind,’”—and we have seen that—“‘and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall

dream dreams.” Now it is a little unclear whether visions and dreams and prophecy are specifically taking place in the utterances in foreign languages that the apostles and disciples are giving, although there are certainly points of contact. Basically, the idea is that the Holy Spirit comes upon people and they start talking. So you see that connection, so thus far everything is fine. “Even upon my bondslaves,”—that is, slaves—“both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.” We are doing fine up to that point, but then he goes on, because this is how Joel goes on: “And I will grant wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth beneath, blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come.” Now, wait a second! I am trying to remember just where exactly in Acts 2 the moon turned to blood and the sun to darkness. That did not happen, did it? But then afterward, of course, we can affirm this—“...and it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Well, he is proclaiming salvation, and that is where he is going, so maybe those two verses in between about the wonders in the sky and such are a little off the point. He wanted to go from the Spirit’s outpouring to salvation being offered to all mankind. Does that make sense to you? It makes me a little uncomfortable.

I think we actually have a bit of a clue here in two respects: first, if we look at the very first clause in this quotation, and second, if we realize we are not just dealing with the book of Acts here, but we are dealing with Luke-Acts. The very first clause of the quotation says this: “‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says.” By invoking that clause, Peter is effectively saying, “Right now, here at Pentecost, you are in the *eschaton*. The *eschaton* has started. You are in the last days.” Now, if you have read through Ladd, that should not come as much of a surprise to you, because Ladd stakes out a mediating position between the idea that eschatology is a wholly future event and the idea that eschatology is wholly a present event in the early church, the idea of realized eschatology—“We are in the last days and everything is happening now, Christ is returning, it is going to happen any second, so just wait for a few days and then we will be with the Lord in glory.” That is the view of a realized eschatological position. Ladd stakes out a position that is known, as you may know, as “inaugurated eschatology,” where the last days have begun, but they have yet to reach their consummation. Now I want to say that if you take that view—and I think that is a consistent view throughout Luke and Acts as well and works very well for this material—then when Peter proclaims that we are in the last days, he is effectively saying, as I had mentioned before, that the last days have begun. They have been initiated, they have been inaugurated, and we await a future consummation.

Now if you start with that and then go back to this idea of the sun being turned to darkness and wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth beneath, and you think of the Gospel of Luke, is there any place this happens in the Gospel of Luke? Yes, at the crucifixion, where the sun is actually turned to darkness. And in that respect, I want to say that what goes on, then, in the whole flow of Luke-Acts is that Jesus’ death and resurrection inaugurate the *eschaton*. The sun did turn to darkness as a kind of preliminary foretaste of the events that will lead up to the consummation of the *eschaton* when Christ comes back to judge all people of the nations. If you see it in those terms, then, and you start looking at the rest of the events in this passage of Joel, then I would argue, and I admit that not everyone would agree, that this outpouring of the Spirit upon mankind is evidence that the *eschaton* has been inaugurated—people are prophesying, and so forth—but the fullness of the Spirit has yet to come, in the sense that everyone will partake of the Spirit, and it will be as if God’s community is a spirit-encamped community in a fuller sense than we can expect even now.

Finally, the other aspect of this inaugurated eschatology is in verse 21, “...and it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Salvation is now and future. Again, this is fairly consistent with what happens in Luke. Salvation means that right now I am brought into a new relational

status before God, and yet the full evidence of salvation has to do with one's eternal state and the eternal state of all of God's people. So I want to view this whole Joel passage in the context of inaugurated eschatology—"The last days have begun." Again, not everyone would agree, but I think that is a helpful way to view the beginning of Peter's sermon.

Now, having said that, and having thus given a rationale for the phenomenon that people are seeing in front of them—that the last days have come, the Spirit is being poured out, so now is the time to hear the call to salvation—Peter then goes on, "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs, which God performed through him in your midst, just as you yourselves know..." Each clause in this sermon is so extremely well-constructed. He basically connects his words with the very recent experience of these people, who within less than 60 days have actually known and experienced Jesus in their midst. He reminds them of the fact that, as we know from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus was attested by God through the miracles, wonders, and signs, which God performed through Him in your midst. Peter is saying, "You know this." He continues, saying, "This Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." We looked at this last time, noting the indictment therein, primarily of the Jewish people, because those are the people to whom Peter is speaking, but also bringing in the Gentiles as responsible and ultimately God Himself as having foreordained all of this.

Another thing I want you to note is this, and I would encourage you to look through all the speeches of Acts and try to find common elements. One of the elements you will find is the death of Jesus. The other element you will find is here in verse 24: "And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power." The resurrection of Jesus is something you will find in all the speeches in Acts. Peter spends the bulk of the rest of the sermon arguing for the resurrection. This sermon is not primarily about the death of Jesus, which everyone would have admitted to immediately, because they had just witnessed it. This sermon is primarily about Jesus' resurrection, and that is actually fairly consistently true throughout the book of Acts. I am reading now from verses 25 to 28: "For David says of Him, 'I was always beholding the Lord in my presence; For he is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted; Moreover, my flesh also will abide in hope; Because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; Thou wilt make me full of gladness with Thy presence.'"

Now here comes his argument, in verse 29 and following: "Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon his throne,"—there is a very quick citation of the Old Testament—"he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay." There he goes back to verse 27, where he quotes from the Psalter there. So he is saying, "How could this be true of David? God will not abandon his soul to Hades or allow His Holy One to undergo decay?" How could that be true? It cannot be, because David is buried to this day, so this must refer to great David's greater Son. We worked through some of the Old Testament passages quite a few number of lessons ago and saw how frequently this theme occurs, that what David says he actually says of the whole Davidic line culminating in the Messiah, who is great David's greater Son. Reading on, it says, "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses." Notice, in that context, that Peter is not just telling them to take it on his authority. He then points outward to the whole community of people who have been speaking in tongues and says, "We are all witnesses of this. If you want to check the facts, come to us. We are eyewitnesses." There is this recognition in the sermon, and throughout the

book of Acts, that the resurrection needs evidence, and it needs evidence primarily from people who have actually witnessed Jesus risen from the dead. Peter asserts that; he does not urge them just to accept this on the word of one or two people, but he urges them to recognize that there is evidence for this resurrection claim. “Therefore, having been exalted to the right hand of God”—and of course, that ties in to the ascension theme in Luke and Acts—“and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured forth this which you both see and hear.” And that goes back to the promise Jesus makes in Acts 1. “For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make thine enemies a footstool for thy feet.”’” This is another passage that Jesus himself quoted earlier in the Gospel of Luke to show that there are two lords. There is the Lord God Almighty, and there also is this other lord whom David also calls “Lord,” who will have everything under his feet. Everything is going to be in subordination to Him. “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

My translation puts a subtitle in right there as if that were more or less the end of the sermon. It is the end of the prolonged quotation from Peter, but it was natural in synagogues and in Jewish contexts for people to respond by asking questions. They did that all the time with Jesus’ ministry. So we are not really at the end of what Peter has to say. “Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’”

Then Peter gets back into the fray. He says, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to himself.” Now what is very interesting in that phraseology is “you and your children.” Where did he get this promise of the Holy Spirit for “you and your children”? Well, Joel chapter 2, which he quoted at the very beginning, says, “I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all mankind, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.” And Peter draws the conclusion from that that the promise is for “you and your children”—Joel says “your sons and your daughters”—and “all who are far off”—Joel says “all mankind, as many as the Lord our God shall call to himself.” What is so interesting about that is that Peter is effectively acknowledging the universal extent of the Gospel, even though the church did not truly recognize that until about halfway through the book of Acts, when Gentiles begin to be brought in to the fold. But Peter recognizes the universal extent of the Gospel here. “And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’” And the result is that about 3000 souls came to the Lord on that day.

I want to say that we have to recognize two things in this. The first is that this is a culturally appropriate sermon. Peter is addressing an audience largely composed of Jewish people, with some proselytes, who are in Jerusalem shortly after the death of Jesus. Therefore, Peter did not have to emphasize the death of Jesus as much, because they recognized that. He did need to emphasize the resurrection. So what he says is culturally appropriate. However, there are also some elements that are common throughout the speeches of Acts, namely, the elements of acknowledging Jesus’ death as part of the plan of God in Scripture and of emphasizing the resurrection of Jesus. If you go through and study the sermons in Acts, that is true of almost every one. The major exception is Acts chapter 17. Paul, in Athens, does not quote Scripture as much there, because he is dealing with a Gentile philosopher group that does not understand Scripture very well, so he starts in some other places. But even there he emphasizes the death and resurrection of Jesus, and you will know from our discussions at the very beginnings of this course that the Stoic and Epicurian philosophers naturally responded to the teaching of the resurrection of Jesus with laughter. However, it was so important to the proclamation of the Gospel that Paul could not back

down from that. So I remind us again that the resurrection is very much integral to our proclamation of the Gospel.

The other aspect of the proclamation of the Gospel is this call to repentance, baptism, and forgiveness. That is part of the proclamation of the early church, and that is something that we need to recognize as well: repentance, baptism, and forgiveness are offered in the Gospel.

I want to use Acts 2 as a kind of paradigm for the rest of the sermons in Acts. I have already alluded to Acts 17 in Athens. You could not find two cultural contexts that were any more different in the ancient world—Jewish people in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and Greek philosophers in Athens. Thus it is particularly illuminating to study how the two sermons are crafted so that they are appropriate to the culture of the audience, but also how they contain certain common elements, including the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. I would submit to you that that is a great model for our spreading of the Gospel: culturally appropriate communication, so that people hear what we have to say, and yet staying true to the core of the Gospel—Jesus' death and resurrection, the call to repentance, faith in Him, forgiveness of sins, and ultimately bringing people into the church through baptism if they have not been baptized before.

That is kind of a homily, but that also finishes up our Luke-Acts lessons before we pray. Let us talk about one last thing before we move on to discuss the Johannine corpus.

Someone might ask, since we have been talking about prophecy in Joel, what the relation of prophecy is to the church today. There are a range of views on prophecy today. There are some who would argue that prophecy continues, in the full sense that you find in the New Testament, and by that they mean foretelling, predictive utterances that are in some sense binding on the church because they clearly come from the Holy Spirit. The other side would argue for a full cessation of prophecy, because, for instance, in the book of Ephesians we read that the church is founded on the apostles and prophets. In other words, the apostles and prophets were necessary for the foundation of the church, but once that foundation was laid, then one could build an edifice on top of that through the other gifts for the church, which in the context in Ephesians would include evangelists, pastors, and teachers. That is the other end of the spectrum.

The in-between positions consider prophecy in different ways. For instance, one could hold that prophecy was more important in the early church than it would ever be for us today, because they simply did not have the New Testament canon. Today we have a fuller Scripture, because we have the Scripture that has been produced by the apostles and the apostolic band through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Because we have a fuller revelation, some would argue, we do not need another revelatory experience that is viewed as revelation *per se*. But in saying that, one could also hold that it is possible that God through his Holy Spirit can produce prophecy in the form of foretelling in his church, as long as we do not consider that to be something on par with Scripture and therefore that Christians ought to obey. It would not be binding, but there might be information that would come to the church in that way. So that is another position.

A final position, which is similar to the one that Wayne Grudem holds, for instance, in his book on prophecy, is to argue that the definition of prophecy needs more nuance than that—that prophecy is not just foretelling, but prophecy is any kind of inspired utterance given by the Holy Spirit. And that could be a word of encouragement or it could be the Holy Spirit simply bringing to mind a particular Scripture in a particular context in a way that cannot truly be humanly explained otherwise. Wayne Grudem would argue that that is the definition of prophecy.

There are some problems with Grudem's work, but my position is closer to that in that I want to understand prophecy as having a broader set of aims than mere foretelling. I would say that based on what prophecy looks like in the Old Testament. Principally, prophecy in the Old Testament, though it does have foretelling aims, is clearly produced by the Holy Spirit, but it is often directed to the historical circumstances of the people right then and there. The prophet is speaking to the circumstances and really just correctly apprising the circumstances in light of the Holy Spirit. If that is the case, then I am inclined to allow the definition of prophecy to be much more broad than just foretelling. However, I do have colleagues within the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), for instance, who would argue a very strong cessationist position.

I also want to say that we do need to take into account the change in the history of redemption between the first-century church and the church we have today. There is a sense in which we already do have a foundation; it is primarily an apostolic foundation, and it is primarily found in the revelation of Scripture. So I very much do not want to say that there is revelation today. I would not want to use that term, because as soon as I say "revelation," then I am saying that something is an authoritative word from the Holy Spirit that has to be obeyed by all of God's people, or by all of the people that it impinges upon. I do not think that we can give anything today that kind of authority because of the change in the history of redemption from the early church to today.

I think we have to recognize also, in order to understand this part of the book of Acts when Peter quotes Joel, that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is much broader than mere prophecy in the rest of the New Testament canon—and in the Old Testament as well, but especially in the New Testament canon. To focus on prophecy, then, only because Joel focuses on it, is not to do justice to all of what the Holy Spirit does in gifting people in a variety of callings within the church, including such seemingly mundane tasks as administration, which is one of the tasks that is specifically mentioned in one of the spiritual gifts lists in the New Testament. So we have to say the Holy Spirit is working in the church, but perhaps we look too often to the extraordinary things that the Holy Spirit can do instead of acknowledging the Holy Spirit working through the most mundane aspects of the church to bring it in unity, as the body of Christ, to the Lord for His glory. I want to affirm that as well.

So I think there are imbalances that could happen. I am going to phrase this a bit strongly, for me. One imbalance is to deny the work of the Holy Spirit that is actually happening in certain congregations even in the giving of utterances that come from the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, another imbalance is to seek after the more supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit as if that is the measure of true spirituality. I think we have to recognize that when we look at the New Testament, we do see the more supernatural things throughout the book of Acts, but when we read through the epistles of Paul, it is a lot more mundane. I think we have to keep that balance of allowing God the Holy Spirit to be free to act in miraculous ways and yet to also recognize that the vast majority of what He does is through day-to-day interaction between Spirit-gifted people encouraging one another in the body of Christ.

I am going to pray for us, since we have not done that yet. We are almost halfway through this lesson, but I gave a long introduction.

Father, we do thank You that there is a new age and that we are part of that new age. We thank You that the last days have dawned and that they have dawned through the death and resurrection of our Lord, and that we stand at a privileged position in the history of redemption to know who our Redeemer is, to know what He has done, to know the basis for our salvation, for the forgiveness of sins, in a way that even those in the Old Testament could only see glimpses of. We thank You that we also have an assured hope in the eternal gift of the resurrection, which vouchsafes our own resurrection before the Lord. In

all of these things we give You thanks. We are also thankful that You have sent the Holy Spirit into our midst, that we would be gifted for Your service in the variety of callings that You have given us. And Father, we would ask that through Your Holy Spirit that You would unite Your body, which at times in our world today is so separated, that You would use us to that end, that You would use us to encourage one another and ultimately to spread abroad Your Gospel of repentance and faith and forgiveness in our Lord Jesus Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.

Our next topic and our main topic for the day is Johannine theology. What I have set out for myself is a virtually impossible task, and I am not sure we can do it, but I have 30 minutes to cover five books in the New Testament. And the books are the Gospel of John, 1, 2, and 3 John, and the book of Revelation. All of these are traditionally held to have been authored by one person, namely John the apostle. When I say that, I will note that that is not the position of many modern scholars—although many modern scholars would assent to that—and it is also not the position of even a few members of the earliest church, and so I want to interact briefly with the authorship issues here before we move into some of the purposes of Johannine literature.

First of all, we should acknowledge that these books do not explicitly say that John the apostle wrote them, so unlike Paul's letters, which are signed by him as "Paul the apostle" or "Paul the slave of Christ Jesus" or something like that, these books are not explicitly signed by John except in a few respects. I do want to note that 2 John and 3 John both say "the elder." Let me give you the explicit quotes here so you will understand that. Turning to 2 John, we read, "The elder to the chosen lady and her children." Or in 3 John, "The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth." So 2 and 3 John explicitly say they are written by the elder, but they do not say which elder, and they do not really define what is meant by "the elder" there.

Second, the book of Revelation, at the beginning, in three different verses of chapter 1, and at the end, in chapter 22, both say that it is written by "John." So I will just take Revelation 1:4, which says, "John, to the seven churches that are in Asia." This is the only one of all the works that is associated with the name "John" to explicitly say that it is written by a man named John. It does not say "John the apostle," so we have not yet established his apostolic credentials, but we know that he calls himself John. The Gospel of John and 1 John are anonymous. They neither mention the name of the author nor give his technical status as elder; they simply are anonymous. However, the Gospel does have a number of references to "the disciple whom Jesus loved." The one that I especially want to highlight for you is John 21:24. Here is the context: Peter looks back, and he sees the disciple whom Jesus loved following them—that is in John 21:20—and this is the very person who leaned back on the breast of the Lord at Supper. Of course when you ate in the ancient world, you ate in a reclining position. The traditional Greek form that was used by the Romans as well as others was the *triclinium*, where you had three couches lined up in a "U" shape, and these couches were quite long, and three or more people could sometimes sit at one of these couches. So by "reclining on Jesus' breast," it probably just means that they were on the same couch lying down eating in a reclining position, because that is how you ate in the ancient world. You did not eat sitting down at a table with a knife and fork. This disciple was the person who was closest to Jesus at the Supper, and that certainly does entail a certain intimacy, but it is a very common intimacy in the first century. Peter looks at this person and says to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" And Jesus' response leads to a rumor, and then in verse 24 it says, "This is the disciple who bears witness to these things, and wrote these things, and we know that his witness is true."

So the "beloved disciple" is the one to whom the authorship is attributed in the Gospel itself, but again, he is not explicitly named in the Gospel, so we are left to infer that he is John, and of course that has been inferred throughout church history. The connection of the Gospel itself with the apostle John was

fairly universally recognized in the early church. And again, correlating that series of verses helps in making that identification, although John's name is not explicitly mentioned.

The other thing that can be said about this literature is that there are strong stylistic similarities between the Gospel and certainly the epistles and, I would argue, the book of Revelation as well. The book of Revelation does depart in some ways from traditional Johannine terminology that you find in the Gospel and the three letters, especially 1 John, but not in any ways that are that remarkable. So for instance, love is a major theme in the Gospel and in 1 John. Well, of course, Revelation talks about what is wrong with the church when they do not follow their first love, so love is mentioned again in the book of Revelation. There is a lot of extra terminology in the book of Revelation, but I would note that this has to do with the kinds of visions that the author sees. You do not have dragons showing up very much in the Gospel of John. So when you start bringing in that and the list of stones that he gives and things like that, the vocabulary in the book of Revelation is much more extensive than that in the Gospel and in 1 and 2 John, but the core terminology in the Gospel you will also find in Revelation.

In addition, there are striking structural similarities in the kinds of sentences that are used. The Greek in the Gospel and in the rest of the Johannine literature, including Revelation, is very simple. Evidence of this can be found in the comparison, say, to one of Paul's letters. I am teaching through Ephesians in my Sunday school class, and we got through the first chapter of Ephesians and halfway into the second chapter, and then there was a break because of the structure of the Sunday school, and I told my class, "Tell everybody else in the church that we have been studying now for four or five weeks and we have only made it through three sentences." That is true. In Ephesians 1:3-14 is one sentence. Verse 15 through the end of chapter 1 is the second sentence. Chapter 2:1-10 is the third sentence. So Greek sentences can be very long and obviously very complex, so complex that you simply cannot render them that way in English. You have to insert some periods and give us a breath, because we are simply not used to that kind of sentence in English. Greek can be very complex, but in the Greek sentence structure in the Gospel of John and the rest of the Johannine literature, the sentences are quite short. Usually a sentence equals a verse; often a verse will have two or more sentences in it. So the sentence structure in the Gospel and the rest of the Johannine literature, including Revelation, is very simple in comparison to the rest of the New Testament.

Just a quick aside on that: you know how people can say very profound things in a simple sentence? I mean, the book of Proverbs does this everywhere. That is how I view the Gospel of John. He speaks in very simple words, but the wisdom and the understanding of the Gospel are so immense that in that simple terminology, there is great complexity. I think that is very important to understanding the Gospel of John. It seems very simple. That is one of the reasons why our typical advice to a young Christian is to read the Gospel of John. And I want to say that there is some good to that advice, but the Gospel of John is a lot more complex than that would make us think. I hope we will have a chance to talk about some of that. It is not complex because the sentences are hard; it is complex because the concepts are extremely deep, and I think that is how we should view the whole of Johannine literature.

So I want to argue on a variety of grounds that the Johannine literature presents itself as a unified corpus, including the Gospel, the three epistles, and the book of Revelation. And that is natural, especially understanding the book of Revelation, which explicitly says it is written by John—and the book of Revelation, as we will see in a moment, is the hardest one of these five books to demonstrate that all of it was written by John. However, as we will note in just a moment, there were some doubts about this in the ancient church.

Now, this is where we go to external evidence, that is, evidence that early church fathers give us about who they thought wrote what books. One of our earliest mentions of the Gospel of John in the church fathers occurs in Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, where he explicitly says that "Lastly, John, the disciple of the Lord, who had leaned back on his breast, once more set forth the Gospel while residing at Ephesus in Asia." Now this is in a section where Irenaeus is telling us about the different authors of the Gospels so that we will know what was written by the apostles as opposed to what was written by Gnostic heretics. He wrote in the middle of the second century, and he explicitly shows that he understood the Gospel to be written by John. If you go through canonical lists, including the Muratorian Canon, the Gospel is associated with John. So there is a fairly universal agreement that the Gospel was written by John.

However, the issue comes up primarily with the book of Revelation. And here we have a citation from Eusebius. The first paragraph of this citation is actually Eusebius quoting Papias. Papias was an early- to mid-second-century church father, whom unfortunately we only know from fragments, because his original extant works have been lost, but he is quoted by many other church fathers, including Eusebius. So the first paragraph is what Papias said, as quoted by Eusebius; the second paragraph is how Eusebius interprets that.

What Papias said is the following: "I shall not hesitate to furnish you, along with the interpretations, with all that in days gone by I carefully learned from the presbyters"—"presbyter," by the way, is a Greek term, *presbyteros*, which means, "elder," and obviously, then, that would be similar to the term "the elder" in 2 and 3 John—"and have carefully recalled, for I can guarantee its truth. Unlike most people, I felt at home not with those who had a great deal to say"—in other words, "I did not listen to those who were just clamoring about"—"but with those who taught the truth, not with those who appealed to commandments from other sources, but with those who appealed to the commandments given by the Lord, to faith, and coming to us from truth itself." So he is saying, "I did not just listen to every voice; I listened to the true voices," and we ask, "Well, specifically which voices did you listen to, Papias?" He lists them for us: "And whenever anyone came who had been a follower of the presbyters, I inquired into the words of the presbyters: what Andrew or Peter had said, or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew or any other disciple of the Lord." Let us stop reading for a second. Whom did he just list? Whose were those names? The disciples, or the apostles. We are talking about the twelve apostles. So Papias continues, "And what Aristion and the presbyter John, disciples of the Lord, were still saying, for I did not imagine that things out of books would help as much as the utterances of a living and abiding voice." Now let us note that the name John shows up in two places in that quotation. First of all, it is in that list of "Andrew, Peter, Philip, Thomas, James, or John," and then second, it is in the second list, "and what Aristion and the presbyter John, disciples of the Lord, were still saying."

Eusebius' interpretation of this is as follows: "Here it should be observed that he twice includes the name 'John.' The first John he puts in the same list as Peter, James, Matthew, and the rest of the apostles, obviously with the evangelist in mind." Now there he is using a technical term, "evangelist," which means "the Gospel-writer." The evangelist is the writer of the Gospel of John. Eusebius continues, "The second use of the word John, with a changed form of expression, he places in a second group, outside of the number of the apostles, giving precedence to Aristion"—because he names him first—"and clearly calling John a presbyter"—thus, an elder. "He thus confirms the truth of the story that two men in Asia had the same name, and that there were two tombs in Ephesus, each of which is still called John's. This is highly significant, for it is likely that the second, if we cannot accept the first, saw the revelation which bears the name of John." So what Eusebius is claiming based on the citation from Papias is that John the apostle wrote the Gospel, and a different John, John the elder, wrote the book of Revelation. What I want to say, then, coming back to this, is that Papias lived in the second century. In fact, Papias lived in Asia Minor, so he is from the very region where, historically, John the

apostle ended up. You know that John the apostle ended up on Patmos, but he is especially associated with the church in Ephesus, and historically, he is said to have been buried at Ephesus. I have been to the church that was built over the site, or at least claims to be built over the site, where John's grave is. That is in Asia Minor, and Papias was from that region. Eusebius was writing in Caesarea, which was back in Palestine, and Eusebius was writing at the beginning of the fourth century. So we have a fourth-century church father arguing, based on the writings of a second-century church father, that there were two different Johns and we need to divide up the Johannine corpus.

Here is what I want to say about that: I think Eusebius misread Papias, and this is fairly important, because modern scholars continue to say that Eusebius tells us that Papias listed two different authors and therefore the book of Revelation was not written by the same man who wrote the Gospel. You will see that in especially those sources that want to call into question the apostolic authorship of the book of Revelation. Here is how Eusebius misread Papias: he claims that there is a different expression that is used—a “changed form of expression”—when he refers to the second John. Well, in point of fact, note what the apostles are called here by Papias—“presbyters.” He calls them elders. Now that seems a little striking to us, because in our current church structure and certainly actually very early in the church, churches were established to have their own elders leading each individual church. We have evidence of this in the book of Acts, where there are the elders from Ephesus who meet with Paul the apostle. And so you have an elder-rule in the church. However, I would note that the apostles themselves identify themselves, at times, as elders. In 1 Peter 5, Peter says, “Therefore I exhort the elders among you”—and I would argue that in that context he is not talking about older people, but he is talking about a group of leaders in the church, because he is going to go on to talk about the character attributes of leaders in the church—“I exhort the elders among you, *as your fellow elder*, and witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker of the glory that is to be revealed...” He witnessed the sufferings of Christ—this is the apostle Peter, after all—but he calls himself a fellow elder. So the apostles themselves would refer to themselves as “elders.” However, by the time of Eusebius, the term *presbyteros* had become the term for “priest,” as opposed to “bishop.” By that time, there was a much more defined church hierarchy, and priests, or presbyters, were fairly low on that hierarchy. Because of that, it is hard for Eusebius to imagine a presbyter named John as being the same man as John the apostle. But Papias himself calls all of the apostles “presbyters,” or elders, so when he comes back and refers to the second John as the presbyter John, he is just calling him the same name that he called him earlier.

Second, I would note that there is a distinction between the two lists, starting with the presbyters—Andrew and Peter, etc.—and then going back to Aristion. If you read that sentence carefully, and this is borne out in the Greek of Eusebius' citation of Papias, he inquired whenever anyone came who had been a follower of the presbyters. In other words, whenever anyone came who had been a disciple of one of the apostles, he inquired as to what the apostles taught their followers. So in the first list, he is not claiming that he met Andrew and Peter and John and so forth, but he is claiming that he met people who followed them (and so therefore he could carefully investigate what they said). The second list, with Aristion and the presbyter John, reads as “and what Aristion and the presbyter John, disciples of the Lord, *were still saying*.” In other words, by Papias' time, most of the apostles had met their demise, but there were still living voices in Aristion and in the presbyter John. Aristion was a mere disciple of the Lord, not one of the apostles, but Papias singles out the John with the title “presbyter” and thus equates him with the presbyter John before. So I do not think we are dealing with two different Johns here; I think we are dealing with one John. On the one hand, Papias is saying, “I listened to the disciples of the apostles,” but then he also had access to the apostle John, because Papias lived early enough at the beginning of the second century to hear what John was still saying.

Here is why this is significant. Aside from now establishing that Eusebius was wrong when he said that there were two different Johns in the early church, Eusebius also had a second motive here. There is a term that you should know, and it is “chiliasm.” This word comes from the Greek word *chilia*, which means “one thousand.” And it has to do with the thousand years that are mentioned in the book of Revelation, the “millennium” in Revelation 20. In the early centuries of the church, there was a significant debate between the chiliasts and the anti-chiliasts. The chiliasts were the people who believed that the thousand years in the book of Revelation constituted a real earthly reign of Jesus for a thousand-year period of time before the final judgment. (Today we would call that position the premillennial position.) The debate was between that position and the anti-chiliasm position, which said that that thousand years was a symbol and did not stand for a literal thousand-year earthly reign of Jesus. Eusebius was an anti-chiliasm. Papias was a chiliast. Eusebius has this kind of “love-hate” relationship throughout his *Church History* with the book of Revelation, because it is the book that proclaims the position that he opposes. Therefore, by associating that book not with the apostle but with John the elder, it serves some of Eusebius’ other motives by somewhat downgrading the book of Revelation. He still does not throw it out of the canon, although you will remember from his discussion of the canon that he says that there are some who do, and he almost implies that he would go there. However, the issue really has to do with this theological debate that was going on, and it was fairly divisive in the ancient church, so much so that Eusebius, when he talks about Papias shortly after this part, basically calls him a bit of a backwoods fool. He kind of denigrates his intelligence, and again, I think that has to do with Eusebius being opposed to the chiliast position that Papias supported.

One of the issues that comes out of that, you see, is that if Papias has a claim to have actually heard from John himself, what John was still saying, then Papias’ claim to a literal thousand-year reign might have a stronger historical precedent than Eusebius’ own position, which cannot be associated with specific teaching of the apostle John. Actually, the striking thing, in my mind, is that if you correlate Papias’ position with the position of some of the others in the early church, namely Polycarp and also Irenaeus, who were also from Asia Minor, they all held the chiliast position. Polycarp clearly knew John the apostle, Papias possibly knew John the apostle, Irenaeus did not, but all of them worked in Asia Minor where John the apostle was from. They all held to a literal thousand-year reign, whereas it is the people outside that region who held to what today we would call a more amillennial position. So I think there were theological motives in Eusebius’ misinterpretation of Papias’ words here.

What I am essentially trying to do, then, is argue that the Gospel of John, 1, 2, and 3 John, and the book of Revelation were all written by the same person—namely, the apostle John—and that the main evidence to the contrary, which can even be found in the early church, is dubious, because it involves the misreading of Papias, who would have actually known the author of the Gospel. So I see no strong grounds, then, for separating the books in the Johannine corpus from one another. I think they were all basically written by the same person.

A final thought on this is that one issue with the multiple burial sites for John, which Eusebius mentions, is that there are multiple burial sites for most of the apostles. There are debates over where Peter was buried, etc. There is usually stronger tradition for one site as opposed to another, but there are usually multiple traditions, so that could be what is going on here as well.

Let us talk now about the purposes of the Johannine literature. What I want to say is that here the Gospel of John and the first epistle of John have explicit stated purposes, and if you read John 20:31, this is very important in understanding what is going on in the Gospel, and we will come back to this next time when we talk about keys to interpreting this Gospel. John 20:31 says this: “but these have been written”—namely, these signs and these things that Jesus performed and did—“that you may believe

that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name.” So what is the purpose of this Gospel? It is so that you may believe.

Now I want to say one thing just as a quick aside here, and I will expand on this further next time. We, then, immediately think, “Oh, good, this is the perfect text to hand to an unbeliever so that they may believe. This is the great evangelistic tract. If we are going to publish one Gospel, attach a little evangelistic tract to it and distribute it, we are going to distribute the Gospel of John.” And that is certainly true. The downside of that is then, once you have believed, you kind of move beyond the Gospel of John, because you already believe. You have already accomplished his purpose. I want to say that that is a serious misreading of the Gospel of John, because the Gospel of John does not view belief as a light switch—you are off and then you are on. But it views it more like a knob that you turn and it can go gradually from lower levels to higher levels. The Gospel of John speaks to us in our unbelief, wherever we are, whether we are people who have never considered following Christ or people who are followers of Christ who still have some level of doubt, like Thomas or Peter or Martha and Mary did. Even though we are believers, there is a sense in which there is unbelief in us, and John is trying to move everyone to a position where they wholly believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. So, then, the Gospel of John is very pertinent to us today, and I will try to develop that next time.

The second purpose statement that I want to look at is in the first epistle of John, in 1 John 5:13, and you will note that a lot of the language, like belief and so forth, is very evident in 1 John as well as in the Gospel. But in 1 John 5:13, he says, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.” So there is a sense in which he wants to increase our confidence in our walk in Christ and in the eternal life we have in him. And so these become explicit purpose-statements for what he wants to accomplish. Now I would argue that this is not all that he is trying to accomplish in 1 John, but it is the explicitly stated purpose.

Next time we will move into some keys to understanding Johannine literature, and then we will move on to the apostle Paul.