

An overview of the Gosple of John

Part 1

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[00:00:01] What I'd like to do, with the Lord's help, is give perhaps a little overview over the Gospel of John.

Now, Brother Goodwin did mention to me that this meeting is meant to finish at five o'clock. So, perhaps we should focus on parts of that Gospel and look at some passages in chapters one to twelve, just for reasons of time and perhaps other constraints. You may say this is a very large area to cover and we will of course only be able to look at what we feel is the main thought in each chapter. [00:01:01] Perhaps if I could use this as an illustration, some of you know anyway that from time to time I have to travel a little bit and sometimes the trip is long but the stay is short and there is no time to go and do what you would like to do if you were a tourist in such a place and could spend some time sightseeing. So, for example, a few weeks ago I found myself going just to attend a meeting in Tokyo and after the meeting I had to go straight back to the airport, so there was not that much time to see the city. But the meeting took place on the, I think it was the 43rd floor of a building and when we had finished the client said, well, just look over there. [00:02:04] This is the Palace of the Emperor and if you look in that direction you can see the city and yet a slightly different direction and you can see the harbour and the sea. Now, this was not detailed sightseeing but it gave me some idea of what was what and what was where. And I must say that recently I have been impressed by the way this Gospel has been written and by the way in which the different chapters build on each other and each time you go from one chapter to the next you can discover new glories of the Lord Jesus. Now, in the first chapter some have counted as many as seven names that speak of the glories of the Lord Jesus [00:03:03] but I will not speak about all of them, just a few. The first one, of course, is the one we have seen in verse one. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

Perhaps every Bible reader has realised that the Gospel of John is somehow different. If you read the first three Gospels there are many stories covered in all three of them. Many reports are similar and then you come to John's Gospel and it is just completely different. Perhaps fewer readers have realised why this is the case.

But a simple answer that might be given is this.

[00:04:01] In the other Gospels the question is, how can man come to God?

And this is how the Good News is brought. The way is shown how sins can be forgiven and how man can come to God. In John's Gospel it is, in a way, the opposite. It is still the Good News, but it is God coming down and being presented to man. And that is exactly the opening line of the Gospel. In the beginning was the Word. Go back in your mind as long as you like, thousands of years, and as large a number as you can think of, and the Word was already there.

Now the Word, of course, is a name that has not been chosen randomly to speak about the Lord Jesus. But there is a thought behind it. [00:05:01] The Word is the expression, the full revelation of God.

Whatever God ever had to say has been said in the person of the Lord Jesus.

Now He existed eternally, but He was a separate identity or person.

He was with God.

And for the avoidance of doubt, this does not mean that He was not God Himself. Still in verse 1, and the Word was God.

This is the great subject of this Gospel, God being presented to man. You find in verse 4, verse 3, that He is the Creator, another glory of His.

And then in verse 4, that in Him there was life, and the life was the light of men. [00:06:05] And yet, it continues to say that the light shone in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. When you switch the light on in a room, the darkness goes. That's natural darkness and natural light. With moral darkness, it's different. The moral darkness that was there when the Lord came was so great that it remained in vast parts, even though the Lord Jesus was there as the perfect light. If you read on, you get a bit more detail of what the reception was. And that's another feature of John's Gospel that is special. If you read Matthew, you find that the Lord is rejected only as time goes by. [00:07:04] And when you come to chapter 12, you realise He's fully rejected. In John's Gospel, the word appears, the life and light, and there is immediate rejection. It says that there were two parts. One is called the world, the other is called His own. The world that was made by Him knew Him not, and His own, His people who should have known Him, they received Him not. Rejection from the outset. And yet, although it was widespread rejection, it was not without exception. If you look at verse 14, And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, [00:08:01] the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. In general, the darkness was there and remained.

But there were exceptions, individuals whose eyes were opened, and they looked at the Lord Jesus, and they saw His glories. Now this, of course, could only happen after a very important event. And that event is when the Word became flesh, the Incarnation, God being present among us as man.

And then the eyes of some were opened. Now what was this glory which they saw?

It says here, that they beheld the glory of the Only Begotten with the Father, full of grace and truth.

[00:09:06] That title, of course, is an important one, which occurs here and in other places five times in

John's writings, I think. And perhaps it's good to contrast it with the Firstborn. The Lord Jesus is the Firstborn, and when He is called the Firstborn, the thought is that you have a group of persons. And within that group, the Lord Jesus has the highest place. The Firstborn among many brethren.

The Firstborn of all creation. The Firstborn from among the dead. The highest place in a group of many. The Only Begotten, on the other hand, is one who is unique. There is no group in which He has the first place. [00:10:03] He is the only one. And this is because the Only Begotten speaks of the Lord Jesus and His eternal relationship which He has had with the Father. He is the one who was loved by the Father before the foundation of the world. He is the one who has known that relationship in the whole of the past eternity. And He is the one who was, let me use this word, who was uniquely qualified to come and speak to us and tell us who God is and who the Father is.

Just look at another reference to this term in verse 18. No man has seen God at any time.

The Only Begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. [00:11:06] You see, the Only Begotten Son, this term, has to do with the relationship which He has had and still has with the Father. In the bosom, in the nearness of the Father. And He is the one who could make God known. Now let me just ask this question. Have your eyes been opened? Are you among those who can say, and we beheld His glory?

The next verse we read, verse 29. The next day, John sees Jesus coming unto him and says, Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. If you just take what we had before us so far, I think we will understand why John needs to speak about the Lamb. [00:12:04] You see, the Word has come, and there was life in the Word, and this life was the light.

And the light shows what man is like. And there was rejection.

Now, how can this problem be solved? The Word shows us who God is.

The light shows us who man is.

And you see this big discrepancy, this rejection. But then there is the answer, Behold the Lamb of God.

A way has been found in order to address this problem of sin.

Now perhaps there are one or two here who are surprised that when sin has to be addressed, that mention is not made of a goat, but of a lamb. [00:13:04] For a sin offering, you would have brought a goat, wouldn't you? But it speaks here of the lamb. And again, that's another nice feature of John's Gospel. Even when the problem of sin is considered, the main question is not our need. The main question is, how can God be honoured and glorified with respect to this question of sin? Well, because there is the lamb, the animal for the burnt offering. And because of him, the one who takes away the sin of the world, God and his honour. God is fully honoured, his honour is fully restored. You note in passing that it does not say he takes away our sins. He takes away the root cause, the sin.

[00:14:03] Now has this happened? Well, the Lord has done everything that is necessary. But sin is still there, of course.

And yet, the work which he has accomplished on the cross is sufficient to remove sin completely from the world. In the next chapter, I'd just like to read one verse or two. Chapter 2, verse 9.

When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was, but the servants which drew the water knew, the governor of the feast called the bridegroom and says unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse. [00:15:04] But thou hast kept the good wine until now.

Strictly speaking, the chapter is about the joy which the Lord Jesus will bring in the millennium. But let me just mention this as a practical point.

You all know the story about the wedding in Cana. And you will have heard, and you can check it in references in the Psalms and Judges, that wine speaks of joy. Now you find two principles here.

One principle applies to the joy which you can find in the world. And the other principle applies to the joy which the Lord Jesus gives. With the first type of joy, the one you find in the world, the principle is that the more you have of it, the less it becomes. [00:16:08] That's what the master of the feast says. Normally, you have the good wine first, and as the feast progresses, the wine of lesser quality is offered. On the other hand, you have the joy which the Lord Jesus gives. And with that joy, it's exactly the opposite, it gets better and better.

Now, in chapters 3 to, I would say 12, perhaps even 13, you will note something that is peculiar again to John.

In each chapter, you find a story or an incident, and then you find some doctrine that explains what the incident meant. [00:17:07] Perhaps with one exception, chapter 10, which is illustrated by the incident in chapter 9. Let us just go through those chapters, look at the incident, look at what it means, and look at the particular glory of the Lord Jesus which is shown. Let's just read the first three verses of chapter 3. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The same came to Jesus by night and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God. For no man can do these miracles that thou dost, except God be with him. [00:18:04] Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God. A well-known story. A person comes to the Lord Jesus, and it's not just any person, it is a ruler, a Pharisee, you would say today perhaps a respected professor of law, and I'm sure in the society of the day he had much more respect than a professor of law would have today. He comes to the Lord and addresses him as teacher.

And you might have thought that this is the opportunity for the Lord to give some really good teaching to someone who has open ears. [00:19:02] And yet the Lord does not answer that request in that way.

What he says in a way is, Nicodemus, hang on a moment. What you are really asking me to do is to teach flesh. To teach, give divine teaching to a natural heart. And I can tell you from the outset that won't work, and that's why I won't do it. If you want to know about spiritual things, the first thing that must happen to you is you must have a new nature. You must have a life which is a new life.

There are three terms here used. The first is you must be born again.

The second is you must be born of water and spirit. [00:20:02] And the third is born of the spirit.

Born again, or anew, means it is not about reforming or cultivating what is there. It's a completely new start.

Born of water and spirit shows you how it can happen, what are the means God wants to use in order to bring about new birth. It's by the word of God and the spirit of God. And born of spirit, in contrast to born of flesh, shows the character or the nature of that which is born.

Now this is the occasion to bring out a new glory of the Lord Jesus. If we just read verses 14 to 16, the Lord goes on to say there, [00:21:07] As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. We've got two aspects here. On the one hand, he is the Son of Man. On the other hand, he is the Son of God. As far as man's need goes, the Son of Man has to come and has to be lifted up on the cross. But God's side is even more beautiful.

[00:22:03] God is not primarily occupied here with our needs. God is occupied with his desire to share the best he has with people who were in such darkness.

And what he does in order to do that is to give his only begotten Son.

Again, another reference to this title, and you find here it is the proof of the love of God. It is the heart of Christianity.

And the result is not only that the one who believes in him should not perish, but that he should have everlasting life. You can take this as a different name for that new nature we've been speaking about. The Lord says to Nicodemus, you need a new nature, and this new nature is a new life. [00:23:04] It is the eternal life which belongs to God.

It says in John's first epistle that the eternal life was with the Father. And then when the Lord Jesus came, it was revealed. And now we learn that because God gave his Son, we can have this life.

Chapter 4, in a way, is a contrast to chapter 3 in a number of ways.

Let's just read verses 13 to 15.

Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of the water which I give him shall never thirst. [00:24:05] But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. The woman says unto him, Sir, give me this water that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.

In chapter 3, you have a well-respected leader among the Jews.

In chapter 4, you have an outcast among the Samaritans.

In chapter 3, one who tries to speak to the Lord Jesus as he would speak to a colleague. In chapter 4, you have, I would call her, a woman who was tired of life.

[00:25:02] Just read again the end of verse 15. Her desire is, give me this water that I thirst not, neither

come hither to draw. It is a woman who had spent years in a relentless search for pleasure and satisfaction.

And what she had to notice was that again and again there was this same thirst. Now, with this woman, the Lord Jesus speaks about a different matter. He doesn't speak about the necessity of being born again. Now he speaks about God being a giver. He says, if thou knewest the gift of God.

Let's just read what the Lord Jesus offered.

[00:26:01] Verse 13, whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again. But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give, shall give him, shall never thirst. The Lord Jesus offers a gift universally.

It is not confined to a few. It is whosoever.

And what he offers is perfect satisfaction.

Never thirst again.

And he spoke, of course, about the Spirit of God. And you see the two chapters go together. In chapter 3 you learn that you need a new life to appreciate divine things. In chapter 4, the Lord shows us this great gift, the Spirit, who gives us the power to really enjoy these things.

[00:27:01] It shall become a well of water springing into everlasting life. He then goes on in verse 23, 24, well known to you, to speak about worship. And again, it's not that surprising, because when the Lord Jesus speaks about the gift of God and the Spirit that helps us to enjoy these things, the natural answer of a redeemed heart is to bring worship. And this is what God seeks, such who worship in spirit and in truth. Not in outward ceremonies, but in spirit.

Not on the basis of our ideas, but on the basis of the truth revealed in his word. And then finally, you come to a wonderful title of the Lord Jesus in verse 42. The woman has gone back to her city.

[00:28:05] By the way, I should mention she left the water pot. She was completely delivered of her cares.

She goes back to the city, tells people about the one whom she met, and then they come to the Lord, and their judgment is in verse 42. Now we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world. And you know why?

Because the gift of God, which the Lord was speaking about in this chapter, is simply too great.

It is not a gift that could just be given to one people, but it is a gift that is for the whole world. And so, the Lord Jesus here is presented as the Saviour of the world. [00:29:05] In chapter 5, you have again a different case. Verse 5, a certain man was there which had an infirmity 38 years.

When Jesus saw him lie and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he says unto him, Will thou be made whole?

The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me in the

pool. But while I am coming, another step is down before me. Jesus says unto him, Rise, take thy bed, and walk.

And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed and walked. The Pool of Bethesda [00:30:05] On the one hand, if you went there, you would have met a lot of sad things, many people who were in trouble with bad illnesses. On the other hand, there was still healing. There was clear evidence that God was still working among the people. And yet, there was this man who had a particular problem. When the water was moved, when there was the possibility of healing, someone else got in first.

And this happened again and again. Now the Lord uses this picture to explain what was going on among the people. God was still there. God was still willing to work among them. But they did not even have the power on their side to avail themselves of that help. [00:31:07] They were like this man who had been lame for 38 years, and there was no escape in sight for him. Now the Lord healed him.

What is a little special in this chapter is that the Lord then goes on to speak about the doctrine that is illustrated with this case, and the doctrine goes beyond the story. Because in the story, you have a case of weakness or lameness, paralysis.

In the doctrine, you have a case of death. If you just read verse 20, For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself does.

[00:32:06] And he will show him greater works than these, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises up the dead and quickens them, even so the Son quickens whom he will. For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son.

The first point to note is that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God who has this power to give life.

But then you find that he not only gives life, but he also judges.

You know there was this offer, whosoever, and some accept and they receive that life. The others will meet the Lord Jesus as well, but as judge.

[00:33:05] God really says, the one who has come is my Son.

And I want, and I insist on everyone honouring my Son.

And there are two ways in which he can be honoured. The one is, as a group of people, and they receive life from him, the Son quickens. But there's another group, and that's the group of those who don't receive him. But there will be no exception.

Everyone, even from that second group, will have to honour him as well. If not as the Son of God who quickens, then as the Son of God to whom all judgment has been committed. And there's a reason, of course, why the judgment is given to the Son. [00:34:06] You know, the Father has not been here. The Son is the one who came, and he is the one who walked here as man. He is the one who was rejected and beaten. And therefore, he is the one who will be given that authority. And God will insist, it says here, the Father loves his Son, and he will insist that his Son will be given the honour that is

due to him. But chapter 6 goes a step further.

Verse 4, it was the Passover, a feast of the Jews was nigh. When Jesus then lifted up his eyes and saw a great company come unto him, he says unto Philip, whence shall we buy bread that these may eat? [00:35:02] A story which you can read in each of the four Gospels. Five thousand people, no bread, the Lord feeding them all. But the meaning you only find in the Gospel of John.

And the meaning is given in a large part of that chapter, but let's just read starting from verse 51, where the Lord says, I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat this bread, he shall live forever. And the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, how can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, verily, verily, I say unto you, [00:36:03] except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood has eternal life.

Lord Jesus makes clear, first of all, who that bread is.

Vast multitudes followed, and what they wanted was bread for their stomach. But the Lord Jesus said that they should be more concerned about the spiritual food.

And he says that this bread from heaven which he wants to give, this is himself.

It is the Son of Man who has come from heaven and who is on earth.

But something else was necessary in order for us to receive that new wonderful life.

[00:37:04] It is not sufficient to just know the bread.

And therefore, the Lord goes on to speak about two things. The bread, a picture of his body, his flesh, but he also speaks about his blood.

He says, in other words, it wouldn't work if you just wanted to appreciate the Jesus who became man without appreciating him first in his death.

And you have to do this in a twofold way. The first one is once for all.

If you use a literal translation, you find in verse 51 it says, if anyone shall have eaten of this bread, he shall live forever.

If any person believes in the Lord Jesus as one who had to become man [00:38:07] and die, go into the place of death because of our sins personally, that is eating his flesh and drinking his blood, believing that his death was necessary for me. Then the result is having eternal life. But secondly, and it uses a slightly different expression there, if you look at verse 54, it says, he that eats my flesh and drinks my blood.

This is not a once for all. This is a matter of habitual eating every day. And the question remains for us, are we habitual eaters [00:39:01] of the Lord's flesh and blood? What I mean is, do we habitually

enjoy the Lord Jesus and what he has done in his death for us?

It's not about anything material.

That's why the Lord goes on to say, my words. In verse 63, the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.

This is what they had to believe in. Chapter 7, if you want, completes this series of three chapters. The Son of God, who gives life in chapter 5, the Son of Man, who has to go into death himself, and now in chapter 7, a third aspect.

It says in verse 2, Now the Jewish feast of Tabernacle was at hand. [00:40:03] Verse 37, In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. And he that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the spirit, that they that believe on him should receive. The feast of Tabernacles was one of the highlights in the Jewish year. It was meant to be a feast of joy. It says in Leviticus 23, Thou shalt rejoice before thy God.

And the final day was the climax of that feast. I'm sure at the Lord's time there was also a lot of ceremony.

[00:41:02] It was meant to be that expression of joy with all the trumpets, the enjoyment of the harvest. And everybody was meant to be perfectly happy. And on that last day, the Lord stands up and cries, If any man thirst.

Now how was it possible that a people that was blessed at a time when the harvest was enjoyed, when they had to rejoice before the Lord, that someone could be thirsty?

Well, the Lord Jesus looked through the facade. He knew what was going on in the hearts. And he says, I know that there is thirst, but I offer something that can quench this thirst. And it goes a step further than in chapter 4, [00:42:01] because it says here, He that believes on me, as scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. You see, when he speaks to the woman at the well, he speaks of that water becoming a well of refreshment to that person. Here it becomes a river of water that flows out to others.

A person who believes in the Lord, the spirit in him, becomes a refreshment for other people. And may the Lord give that this might be more the case practically for us as well. That the life which is in us and the spirit which is in us become refreshment for others.

Now what is the Lord's particular glory brought out?

Well, it says in the end of verse 39, for the Holy Ghost was not yet given [00:43:02] because that Jesus was not yet glorified.

And that's the third step. Chapter 5, the Son of God. Chapter 6, the Son of Man going into death. Chapter 7, the Son of Man exalted in the presence of God and giving the spirit.

You might say, wonderful glories of the Lord.

And yet, it only increased the rejection.

We look very briefly at chapters 8 and 9. I just read chapter 8, verse 12.

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world. He that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

[00:44:01] Remember the case. Again, a story illustrating this doctrine. A woman caught in adultery brought to the Lord, put in the middle, and the trap question was asked.

Moses says, she must be stoned, but thou, what sayest thou? Apparently, no way of escape for the Lord if he said, but I say, don't stone her. They would say, well, he speaks against the law of Moses. And if he said, well, stone her, they would say, we thought you were a savior. We thought you were offering this great new life, this salvation.

And yet, what the Lord does surprises everyone. Remember these words, he who is without sin [00:45:02] cast the first stone.

And what happens is, after a while, looking up, everybody from the eldest to the youngest had gone.

This is exactly what the light does.

They were trying to use the law and turn it as a light onto that woman and accuse her. And the Lord says, wait a moment, I am the light of the world. The light shows things how they are, whether they are good or bad. And these men felt exposed and left.

Again, an illustration that shows us, helps us to understand a bit more this glory of the Lord Jesus as the light of the world.

Now, light, of course, is not always welcome. [00:46:03] And if you read on in this chapter, you find how the Lord was rejected. They say to him in verse 25, Who art thou?

Perhaps today you would say, who do you think you are? And they reject him.

In chapter 9, it becomes perhaps even worse.

But let's look at the incident first. In verse 6, When he had thus spoken, he spied on the ground and made clay of this pittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with a clay and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, which is by interpretation sent.

He went his way therefore and washed and came seeing.

[00:47:01] Who of you has ever heard of a medicine like this being used? Dirt and spittle.

Now, another thing to note is that once this clay is applied, nothing happens.

The man is still blind.

But then he follows the Lord's instructions and goes to the pool and washes and then he starts to see.

Now, the earth which the Lord took, I suggest speaks of him as in his manhood.

With the spittle, it was something that of course came from himself. It was something that was related to him. [00:48:01] And yet, when the clay was applied, nothing changed. The blind man remained blind. And you might say the natural effect of this kind of medicine, if it was only possible, would be to make a blind man even blinder. And only when he washes at Siloam, he starts to see.

Now, it's a very striking and fitting illustration. The Lord says, I'm present here as a man among you. Remember the clay.

But the effect of my presence is only that you who are blind become even blinder.

Unless you go to the pool of Siloam.

Now, Siloam of course, it says in the text, means scent. And when through the word of God, the water, [00:49:02] you start to see the Lord Jesus as the scent one and you accept him as the one scent of God, then the blindness goes away. Again, an incident that beautifully illustrates the Lord Jesus as the one who wants to present himself in this chapter as the one scent of God. The man then of course is cast out, but the Lord finds him. And in the end of the chapter, he presents himself to him as the son of God. And the man is found worshipping the son of God. So that's exactly the Lord's mission, taking people out, individuals who believe on him, making them worshippers who believe in him [00:50:02] as the son of God.

You could say the good shepherd now has a sheep and he goes in front of that sheep, that blind man, and leads the blind man out.

And he becomes a worshipper. I think that's all I should say on chapter 10.