



Text: John 20:30-31¹

Series: *Life in His Name* – The Message of John’s Gospel

Title: Part 1 – What to watch for in John’s Gospel

Date: September 12, 2010

Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

Over the next year I’d like us to become very familiar with the message of one book of the Bible in particular, the Gospel of John. My plan is for us to work our way through John’s Gospel, Sunday by Sunday, listening to and learning from this disciple of Jesus. This morning I want to give you an overview of what we can expect as we make our way through John’s book. One of the great gifts John gives us is found toward the end of his Gospel. John tells us why he wrote his Gospel and his declaration of purpose also gives us an outline of what we can expect as we read and study this book together.

As John drew his account of Jesus’ life to a close he wrote...

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:30-31

These two little verses contain the outline of everything that John believes to be of importance in his Gospel and his outline is contained in the words he chooses to use: “signs,” “believe,” “Christ,” “Son of God,” “life.” But there’s a word that John uses that is so common to our ears that it might slide right past without notice and it’s the word, “Jesus.”

John’s Gospel is about Jesus and that’s why I want us to focus our attention on it for the next year. I want us to make this year ahead of us all about Jesus. There’s something I discovered about John’s Gospel that caught my interest as I prepared for this series. I did a simple count of the number of times each Gospel writer used the name “Jesus” in their books. Mark used the name of “Jesus” just under a hundred times, Luke used it just a little more than a hundred times, Matthew refers to Jesus about one hundred and fifty times, but John uses the name of “Jesus” over two hundred and fifty times in his Gospel. His Gospel is all about the name of Jesus.

And please understand that I don’t want the next year to merely be a theological education about Jesus. The goal of knowing Jesus isn’t just filling our minds with truth. John tells us that the whole purpose of the writing of his Gospel was that

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission, All rights reserved.



we might come to believe that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of God” so that as a result of believing, we might have...

“life in his name.”

Life in Jesus is what John’s Gospel is all about. What we’re going to learn about Jesus from John’s Gospel will give us life, if we believe what John tells us about Jesus.

Do you want life?

Do you want to experience the fullness of life?

Do you want to know God’s life in you?

Do you want life after you die?

Do you want a life that will never end?

If you do, I invite you to learn with me about Jesus as we sit John’s feet for the next year. And more than just learn about Jesus, I invite you to believe in him. You might not be ready to do that today but my prayer is that as you encounter what John has to say about Jesus that you will be drawn to believe in him...

“and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Let me give you a broad outline of what to watch for as we make our way through John’s account of Jesus’ life and ministry. First of all...

Watch for Jesus’ “signs”

“Now Jesus did many other signs...” John 20:30

Ruth and I went into Calgary Friday night for supper and I was immediately reminded that Calgary is in the process of electing their mayor and city council because, of course, there were signs everywhere proclaiming the virtues of one candidate or the other. John tells us that Jesus did something similar. Of course he didn’t put up lawn signs but Jesus did things that were intended to get people’s attention and to tell them who he was and what he had come to do.

In the other Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, those writers refer to these same things that Jesus did as “miracles.” They use a specific Greek word that describes the astounding power of the things that Jesus did but not once does John use that word in his Gospel. John uses an entirely different Greek word, a word that means “signs.”

A sign is something that is full of meaning; a sign points to something beyond itself. Jesus’ signs were intended to reveal something about him.



For example, the very first sign that John records is Jesus' turning water into wine at a wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee. A bridegroom, probably a relative of Jesus, had invited him to his wedding. The custom in those days was that the groom would provide food for his guests for several days after the wedding so that they could celebrate with him and his new bride. But at this wedding, the wine was running out. Jesus responded to this couple's need by having the servants in that home fill six large water jars to the brim with water and then he turned the water into wine for the guests. The jars were large; each holding between twenty to thirty gallons and so, when all was said and done, Jesus miraculously produced between 120 and 180 gallons of wine! That's an immense amount of wine!

John concludes his account of this event with these words...

“This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.” John 2:11

I want you to notice two things. First, something about this event was intended by Jesus to be a manifestation of “his glory.” But I will venture a guess, this morning, that most of us will misread this sign because what Jesus was saying in this “sign” requires us to know what the Old Testament has to say about the coming of the Christ, the Messiah. There is a language that we need to know if we're going to read these signs correctly and it's the language of the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. When we see a “sign” in John's Gospel we need to ask ourselves: what Old Testament Scripture is Jesus calling to mind in his sign?

Second, the signs that John has chosen to include in his Gospel are intended to lead us to believe that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of God.” There is something in this sign that Jesus wants us to believe about him. Notice that the disciples “believed in him.”

The signs that Jesus performed pointed people to belief in him but they didn't compel people to believe. Just like signs on the roads on which we travel, we can read them and still turn another way. Signs point us in the right direction but we have to follow their direction if we want to arrive at our destination. Jesus didn't want people to believe in the signs he performed; he wanted people to follow the sign to him.

One of Jesus' signs was his provision of food to a crowd of several thousands of hungry people who had come one day to hear his teaching out in a deserted wilderness area. In the crowd the disciples found a boy who had brought five loaves of barley bread and two dried fish. Jesus took the boy's lunch, blessed it and then broke into pieces and handed them to his disciples so they could pass them out among the crowd. And Jesus kept breaking the loaves and fish and



kept breaking and kept breaking until everyone of those thousands had had enough to eat.

The people were overwhelmed by what Jesus had done and they followed Jesus from that place, seeking him. When they found him he said to them...

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” John 6:26-27

These people had become fixated on the bread that Jesus had used as his sign. The sign pointed to Jesus, but these folks were camped out at the sign. We can misinterpret Jesus’ signs by thinking: If Jesus provided bread for thousands in the wilderness then the signs are his promise to me that I can go to him whenever I need something and he’ll give it to me. But that wasn’t the point of the sign. The sign didn’t say: Go to Jesus because of what the sign says you can get from him. The sign said: Go to Jesus because of what the sign says about who he is; he’s “the bread of life.” Jesus is the bread we need.

As we move through John I want you to watch for Jesus’ signs. Make sure you read them correctly and make sure you follow them to Jesus.

Second,

Watch for Jesus’ witnesses

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written ...” John 20:30-31

Although John doesn’t use the word “witness” in this verse, he’s clearly talking about the fact that Jesus’ disciples witnessed the signs of Jesus. The word “witness” occurs in John’s Gospel more than in all the other three Gospels combined.² John has collected witnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus. Why? Because he wants his readers to know that Jesus was watched. Jesus was observed. He lived his life in the open. He taught in the open. He performed his signs in public.

Jesus was not just an idea that floated through people’s minds. He wasn’t a vision. He was a real human being! John was talking about the reality of Jesus when he wrote in the opening of his First Letter...

² Matthew = 7 times; Mark = 5 times; Luke = 4 times; John = 29 times.



“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life...” 1 John 1:1

And the story that John tells is not just his story. By pointing to other witnesses he is inviting his readers to check his story out. This is John’s take on Jesus but there are others who will back him up with their stories about Jesus. You can check what John wrote about Jesus with Matthew, Mark and Luke. You can cross reference him with Peter and James.

John intentionally omits much of what he knows about Jesus from his Gospel. He tells us at the very end of the Gospel...

“Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” John 21:25

Every Gospel writer made the same choices. They had to leave out great whole chunks of Jesus life and teaching. There was just too much to Jesus! But it didn’t bother them. They didn’t believe they needed to tell us everything. Why?

The New Testament scholar, Karl Heim, made this observation on that editorial activity of the Gospel writers, and of John in particular. He wrote...

“One collects everything possible about a dead prophet. It is all one has of him. But one tells only enough of a living person to introduce one’s hearers to him. For the disciples, and John in particular, Jesus was alive.”³

There were witnesses to Jesus’ “signs,” there were witnesses to Jesus’ teaching and there were witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection. And John writes his witness to Jesus with complete confidence that he’s telling us the truth and that what he’s written will lead us to the living Jesus. John stood at the foot of Jesus’ cross and watch him die and he wrote...

“He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe.” John 19:35

Jesus said of his signs...

“The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me” John 10:25

He said of the Old Testament ...

³ As quoted in Leon Morris, *The Gospel of John*, p. 855, note 80



“the Scriptures ... bear witness about me” John 5:39

Check out the witnesses. Check John’s witness with the testimony of the other witnesses to Jesus. He is confident, and I am confident, that through their testimony you can come to know the living Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Third...

Watch for the invitations to believe

“these are written so that you may believe” John 20:31

They start right at the very beginning of John’s book. Just a couple of verses into the Gospel John speaks of another John, the prophet who is known as John the Baptist. In this passage, John refers to Jesus as “the light.” He wrote...

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.” John 1:6-7

And just a few verses later, John speaks of Jesus rejection by many of his own people. John wrote...

“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” John 1:11-12

And the call to believe continues to be sounded again and again and again. In fact, there are nearly 100 references to belief in John’s Gospel. He is passionate about belief in Jesus. The reason he wrote this Gospel was to lead us to believe in Jesus so that we might have “life in his name.”

John focuses the last third of his Gospel on Jesus’ death and resurrection. Many of the disciples had seen the risen Jesus but there was one disciple who hadn’t yet seen him. His name was Thomas. Although the other disciples had had shared their experience with Thomas he said...

**“Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”
John 20:25**

A few days later, Thomas was gathered with several other disciples when the risen Jesus came into their locked room and stood among them. He said to Thomas...



“Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” John 20:27

But in the presence of the risen Jesus Thomas didn't need to touch Jesus to believe. He simply said...

“‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’” John 20:28-29

Now who was Jesus talking about when he spoke about “those who have not seen and yet have believed”? Well, for one, he was talking about me. I've never seen him, but I believe in him. And he was referring to every one else here this morning who has believed in Jesus. And to everyone else down through history who has come to faith in Jesus Christ. And maybe to you, too. If you haven't yet believed, maybe as you read John's Gospel with us over the next months you'll come to believe that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of God” who is alive and Jesus' blessing will be upon you.

Watch for John's invitations to believe in Jesus.

And fourthly,

Watch for the claims about Jesus

“these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” John 20:31

First of all, John claims that Jesus is...

“the Christ”

The word “Christ” is a Greek word which means “**anointed one**.” The Hebrew word for “anointed one” is “**Messiah**,” and early in the Gospel these two words occur together in reference to Jesus. Andrew, one of Jesus' first disciples, seeks to recruit his brother Peter to become a follower of Jesus by telling him...

“‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ).” John 1:41

In the ancient world, anointing was used to identify people for special purposes. Kings were anointed to mark the beginning of their reign and to set God's authority upon their kingship. (cf. Saul, 2 Samuel 1:14; David, 1 Samuel 16:1-13) King David wrote of God's faithful love to him and to his royal descendants who would occupy his throne. He wrote of God's salvation...



“Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever.” Psalm 18:50

So calling Jesus the Christ, or Messiah, or “the anointed one,” means that John was claiming that Jesus was a king. In fact, he was claiming that Jesus was a descendant of King David.

God had promised King David that his throne would last forever. God had promised David...

“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom ... Your throne shall be established forever” 2 Samuel 7:12, 16

But for centuries David’s throne had been vacant. The Jewish people waited. They longed for a new king. They waited for the Christ to appear and save his people. They waited for Messiah. **Was Jesus sent from God to fulfill God’s promise to David? Was he the Christ?** Watch how John builds the case to support his claim that Jesus is Messiah, the Christ.

The answer to this question is more than just historical curiosity. Jesus said...

“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” John 17:3

If Jesus is not the Christ then there is no life in his name!

The **second** claim that John makes about Jesus is that he is...

“the Son of God”

John opens his book with one of the most breathtaking statements about the relationship between Jesus and God that you will find anywhere in the Bible.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:1, 14

Jesus, the Word, was “with God” and he “was God.” In just a few simple words we are drawn into one of the most important but also one of the most contested discussions about Jesus: Was the Son of God God? What is the relationship of the Son to his Father?



Jesus claim about his relationship with his Father is what got him into trouble with the religious leaders of his day.

**“This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because ...he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”
John 5:18**

There is no other book in the Bible that discusses the relationship between the Son and the Father more thoroughly than John’s Gospel. And in studying what John tells us about the Son we learn about the Father. God is called “Father” only 15 times in the Old Testament. He’s called “Father” about 250 times in the New Testament, and 100 of those references occur in John’s Gospel.⁴ If you want to know about the Father, study the Son.

And belief in the Son of God is also tied to the promise of life. John wrote...

“The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” John 3:35-36

If Jesus is not the Son of God then there is no life in his name! But if Jesus is the Son of God there is no life in any other name!

As we study John’s book together watch how John builds his case for his claim that Jesus is the Son of God.

Finally,

Watch for the promises of life

“that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:31

“Life” is one of John’s favorite words. You find it almost 50 times in the Gospel, and that’s more than all the other three Gospels put together. There are so many examples I could quote but this morning I’m only going to quote one. It’s a passage I’ve used at almost every funeral I’ve ever conducted. It’s Jesus’ promise of resurrection life.

Jesus said...

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live ... Do you believe this?” John 11:25, 26

⁴ Thomas Smail, *The Forgotten Father*, p. 49



I asked you at the beginning of the message: Do you want life? Let me remind you of something. There isn't a person here this morning that isn't going to die. Every one of us, one day, will face death. What will be your answer to my question on that day?

Philip Yancey had a friend by the name of Bob McQuilkin. Bob was a nature photographer who was, as Yancey recounts, "as fully 'alive'" as anyone he had ever known. And so, Yancey wrote,

when I heard [in the fall of 2000] that Bob had died on a scuba-diving assignment in Lake Michigan, I could hardly absorb the news. Bob, dead? It was inconceivable. I could picture Bob doing anything at all—anything but lying still. But that is my last image of him: a 36-year-old body in a blue-plaid flannel shirt lying in a casket. ... I would never ski with Bob again, never sit with him for hours viewing slides, never again eat rattlesnake meat or buffalo burgers at his house.

Bob's widow asked Yancey to speak at Bob's memorial service and Yancey groped for what to say. He began by telling the crowd what he had been doing when he heard of Bob's death. He had been in a coffee shop reading a book about a man's lifelong search for beauty. Part of this author's search had led him to Greece where he stumbled upon an Easter service. The priest who led the service called out to the congregation: "Christ is risen!" and everyone responded, "He is risen, indeed!"

The author of the book wrote: "*I was seized then by a moment of spiritual reality: what would it mean for our world if he had truly risen?*"

That was the question swirling in Yancey's mind as he heard of Bob's death.

What did it mean for our world that Christ had risen? ... The early Christians had staked everything on the Resurrection, so much so that the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." [1 Cor 15:14]

In the cloud of grief over Bob's death, I began to see the meaning of Easter in a new light. ...

On Friday Jesus' closest friends had let the relentless crush of history snuff out all their dreams. Two days later, when the crazy rumors about Jesus' missing body shot through Jerusalem, they couldn't dare to believe. ... Only personal appearances by Jesus convinced them that something new, absolutely new, had broken out on earth. When that sank in, those same men who had slunk away in fear at Calvary were soon preaching to large crowds in the streets of Jerusalem.

At Bob McQuilkin's funeral, I rephrased [the author's] question in the terms of our own grief. What would it mean for us if Bob rose again? We were sitting in a



chapel, numbed by three days of grief and sadness, the weight of death bearing down upon us. What would it be like to walk outside to the parking lot and there, to our utter astonishment, find Bob. Bob! With his bounding walk, his crooked grin, and clear, grey eyes.

That image gave me a hint of what Jesus' disciples felt on the first Easter. They, too, had grieved for three days. But on Sunday they caught a glimpse of something else, a startling clue to the riddle of the universe. Easter hits a new note, a note of hope and faith that what God did once in a graveyard in Jerusalem, he can and will repeat on a grand scale, for the world. For Bob. For us.⁵

For you and me, if we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God!

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live ... Do you believe this?” John 11:25, 26

- **Invitation to Prayer Ministry**
- **Final Song:** In Christ Alone
- **Benediction**

⁵ Philip Yancey, "The Great Reversal," *Christianity Today* (April 2000)