



Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Distinctives of John's 'Maverick' Gospel

Bible Reading: John 20:30-31

[Watch LIVESTREAM at 10am](#)

SUMMARY:

The first 3 'Synoptic' Gospels adopt a common viewpoint. The 4th Gospel—John—is 'maverick,' unconventional, not repeating, but breaking new ground. Importantly, John emphasizes individualism. Contrary to the collective culture of his day, Jesus repeatedly calls for decisive individual belief. Statements like, '*the one who believes...*,' abound; response to Jesus has to be personal to be real. Here, Jesus engages in extended conversations with individuals. The term 'church' (*ekklesia*) never appears in John; his corporate symbols—the Flock & the Vine—prioritize the individual's relation—as 'sheep' or 'branch' to Jesus—over intra-community relationships. For John, the Church is vacuous without the believer's personal relationship with Christ. Let's use this study of John to cultivate our personal, intimate relationships with Christ.

The Purpose of John's Gospel (20:30-31)

- "A Summons to Believe:...John never uses the word 'faith' [noun]. But he uses the verb 'believe' far more often than any other NT writer...His summons to believe is more insistent than any other NT Evangelist." —James Dunn

John: the 'Maverick' Gospel

- "The first three Gospels...are called the Synoptic Gospels...they have a common point of view...The 4th Gospel [John] is not synoptic...[it] is a maverick among the Gospels"—Robert Kysar

John's Gospel versus the Synoptic Gospels

Omissions indicate John's Distinctives

- A. "In the Synoptics Jesus is...presented as an exorcist [casting out demons, evil spirits]...That element...has been omitted altogether from John"
- B. "The Synoptics [have] Jesus...teaching the crowds...through parables...There are no parables in the 4th Gospel..."
- C. "In the Synoptics, the ministry of Jesus lasts...[up] to a year. In John...[it] spans 3 Passovers...around 2 years..."
- D. "The public ministry of Jesus in the Synoptics begins with his being baptized by John the Baptist. In the 4th Gospel... Jesus is not baptized by John...[&] there's a conscious attempt to distance Jesus from...John."
- E. In "the Synoptics Jesus...performs 'miracles' or 'deeds of power.' In John...these are... 'signs'...[&] there are 7..."
- F. "The Synoptics [have]...Jesus appointing the 12 disciples [apostles] all at one time...In the 4th Gospel there's no [such] episode where Jesus calls the Twelve."
- G. "Each Synoptic has the Passover meal [with the] specific institution of the Eucharist...The 4th Gospel [replaces this with foot-washing]."—Christopher Skinner

The Testimony of the 'Beloved Disciple', rather than of Peter (21:20-24)

- o *This Gospel's distinctive contribution derives not from Peter's testimony, but from the Beloved Disciple's witness.* -Richard Bauckham

John's Distinct Individualism (e.g. 3:36; 14:21)

A. John's Individualism versus First-century Collectivism

- *"First-century Palestine was a society based on collectivism rather than individualism."*—Melanie Baffes

B. Jesus' Call for Individual Response (e.g. 6:35, 54; 7:38; 11:25; 12:25)

- *"I offer 2 main types of evidence...the first is [short] sayings about the individual's relationship with Jesus... I list 67 sayings...[which] quite explicitly about the individual's relationship to Jesus."*—Richard Bauckham

C. John's Striking Individualism

1. "The 4th Gospel is *one of the most strongly individualistic* of all the NT writings."—C.F.D. Moule
2. "The *individualism* of the 4th Gospel is a key to its interpretation..."—Raymond Collins
3. "The *individualism* of the 4th Gospel is *one of the most striking features* of this remarkable document."—James Dunn

D. Jesus' Extended Conversations with Individuals

1. "A prominent feature of John's narrative is the extended conversations that Jesus has with individuals:
2. Nathaniel (1:47-51)
3. Nicodemus (3:1-21)
4. Samaritan Woman (4:7-26)
5. Martha (11:20-27)
6. Pilate (18:33-19:12)
7. Mary Magdalene (20:14-17)
8. Peter (21:15-22)

E. Christian Community based on Individual, Personal Relationship with Jesus

- Individualism not cancelled by the Community

F. Corporate Symbols—the Flock & the Vine—still stress personal/individual relation to Christ (Jn. 10, 15)

- In John "the primary concern is the *relation of each individual to Christ*: it is *the sheep to the Shepherd, branch to vine, not sheep to sheep or branch to branch*. Eternal life is for anyone...in real contact with Christ."—C.F.D. Moule
- "At first glance...the Flock might appear to be an image of the church, but...the parable *concerns a personal & individual relationship with Jesus*...For this Gospel a community exists only because individual believers unite with Jesus by faith"—John O'Grady

- “Without this fundamental personal relationship to Jesus nothing else can make sense. People may...even be involved in... the church, but unless each individual has personal faith, all else has little value.” –John O’Grady o

QUESTIONS:

- o Read John 20:30-31 regarding the purpose of John’s writing. Note that there’s some variation across Greek manuscripts in the tense of the verb ‘believe.’ Some suggest it could mean either [1.] ‘*Begin* to believe’ or [2.] ‘*Continue* to believe.’
- A. What sections (cases) in John’s Gospel do you consider most useful in helping people to ‘*begin to believe*’? (Discuss)
- B. What sections (cases) in John’s Gospel do you consider most useful in helping people to ‘*continue to believe*’? (Discuss)
- C. Read Luke 1:57-63 concerning the naming of John the Baptist. How does this show the ‘collectivist’ culture of the time?
- D. The message & material points out the ‘individualism’ of John’s Gospel versus the ‘collectivist’ culture of the time.
 1. Where do we see ‘individualism’ in John’s Gospel?
 2. Where does Jesus call for a personal/individual response? (Give examples)
 3. What ‘collectivist’ obstacles to a personal/individual response to Jesus’ call do you think might have been present?
- E. The message claims that even John’s corporate symbols of the Church community—the Flock & the Vine—prioritize the individual’s relation—as ‘sheep’ or ‘branch’ to Jesus—over intra-community relations (sheep to sheep & branch to branch) (On the ‘Flock’ read John 10:3-4. On the ‘Vine & branches’ read John 15:5-6, 10)
 1. Do you agree (or disagree) that these ‘symbols’ prioritize the individual’s relation to Jesus? (Discuss)
 2. In this context, how can the Church-community be strengthened? (Discuss)