



Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: John 20:30-31

“Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written *so that you may believe* that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, & that by believing you may have life in his name” (v 30-1)

“John 20:31 is one of those rare verses in the NT where the actual Greek text is not completely clear in one key place...the phrase [rendered 'that you may *believe*' CSB].” [Mark D. Roberts, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* 117]

“There are notable variant readings in 20:31, [across manuscripts for] the word 'believe'...One variant [1.] uses the aorist subj. while the other [2.] has the present...It's been argued that [1.] denotes *initial belief*, whereas [2.] denotes *ongoing belief*. If this distinction is accepted [1.] would support an evangelistic purpose for the Gospel (i.e., to bring about *initial belief*), while

[2.] would indicate an edificatory purpose (i.e., to urge people to *continue to believe*).” [Colin G. Kruse, *John*, p. 21]

SUMMARY:

The first three '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.

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

- "The writer himself states plainly his purpose when he says [20:31]...He prepared this Gospel to persuade his audience that Jesus is God's Anointed, the Messiah & thereby [they'd]...have eternal life." [L. Gugliotto, *Handbook for Bible Study*, p. 370]
- "John 20:30-31 is certainly the most explicit statement of purpose anywhere in the Gospel of John, & also it probably captures the...concerns of all...involved in composing this Gospel...This statement likely represents the core faith commitment of...the Johannine circles for the earliest moments of their existence...The first thing to note is...the two...titles ...'Messiah' & 'Son of God' ...[reflecting] Jewish Christian circles of the early first century...From the opening lines onward, John's Gospel overtly makes the messianic claim central [e.g. 1:19-28]." [Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 358]
- "A Summons to Believe: Curiously, John never uses the word 'faith' [noun]. But he uses the verb 'believe' far more often than any other NT writer (John 98x vs. Matt. 11x; Mark 14x; Luke 9x; Acts 37x; Paul 54x). His summons to believe is more insistent than any other NT Evangelist." [James D. G. Dunn, *Neither Jew Nor Greek*, p. 356]
- "It is noticeable that the call to believe is the only demand that John makes, the only response his Gospel calls for. A call to 'repent' or for 'repentance' never crosses his lips..." [James D. G. Dunn, *Neither Jew Nor Greek*, p. 358]
- "That you may have life" (20:31b) "As John summed up his challenge in terms of 'belief,' so he sums up the promise of the Gospel in terms of 'life'...Belief in Jesus...gives eternal life now. 'Eternal life' for John is not typically something still awaited for & to be inherited in the future...It is something which the believer already has—John's typical way of speaking on the subject." [James D. G. Dunn, *Neither Jew Nor Greek*, pp. 359-60]

2. John: the 'Maverick' Gospel {"Maverick": an unorthodox or independently-minded person, a non-conformist}

a. The 4th Gospel is *Not* Synoptic

- "The first three Gospels...are called the Synoptic Gospels...they have a common point of view, they see their subject in a similar fashion. *The 4th Gospel* [John] *is not synoptic*...[it] sees its subject in a way that stands quite apart from its three colleagues in the Christian canon...The 4th Gospel is a maverick among the Gospels" [R. Kysar, *John, Maverick Gospel*, 2]
- "*The Fourth Gospel is...a 'maverick' among the Gospels*. It overlaps with the Synoptics in only about 10% of its material, runs free of the perspective presented in Matthew, Mark, & Luke...[it's] the 'nonconformist Gospel' of the bunch...John represents an 'adventurous Christianity' that...explores new avenues of expression,' without seeking consistency with any other form of early Christian thought." [Melanie Ross, *Evangelical Versus Liturgical?*, 91]
- "John's distinctive portrait of Jesus contains 93% *original material* in comparison to the Synoptics" [John Walvoord, Roy Zuck, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p.]

b. The 4th Gospel foundational for the Trinity & Creeds

- "The Christology & theology of this gospel [4th Gospel of John] *provided the raw material* out of which the great Christian doctrines were forged...It took almost 400 years before the great [Church] Councils of Ephesus (431 CE) & Chalcedon (451 CE) formulated the [Creeds]...It was the 4th Gospel that provided the language..." [Francis J. Moloney, *John*,]
- "The 4th Gospel...contributed the most to...the development of the theology of Christ, articulating...the highest Christology' in the NT. The description of the Second Person of the Trinity in the Nicene Creed as the one 'eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light' reflects language found in John." [Gail Ramshaw, *Word of God, Word of Life*, 37]

- "More than any other NT writer [John] lays the foundation for a doctrine of a co-equal Trinity." [C. K. Barrett, *John*, 78]

3. John's Gospel versus the Synoptic Gospels

a. John's Gospel is *Not* a Synoptic Gospel

- The distinctiveness of John...should not be diminished or ignored...John was...*not* attempting to do the same things as the Synoptic Evangelists [authors]...[This implies] that to read & interpret John's Gospel as though John was trying to do the same as the Synoptics is to misread & misinterpret his Gospel... *The truth of Jesus, the story of his mission & its significance, was not expressed in only one way.*" [James D. G. Dunn, *Neither Jew Nor Greek*, p. 369]
- "The Synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark, & Luke] generally present a similar sequence of events (... 'synoptic' means 'seeing together'). By contrast...John's [material] is often very different in style, content & the perspective in which the person & work of Jesus are presented. For example, John's Gospel uses miracles (which it calls 'signs') & lengthy discourses, rather than parables to lead its readers to belief & obedience to Jesus." [Zondervan, *Asia Bible Commentary*, p. 1386]

b. Factors behind John's Distinctives

- "The distinctiveness of John's portrayal of Jesus is...the product & expression of *many years of reflection* on the significance of what Jesus had taught & done, & on the significance of the revelation he had brought and constituted in his life and mission." [James D. G. Dunn, *Neither Jew Nor Greek*, p. 370]
- "Throughout John...the ultimate significance of Jesus dominates the narrative...emphasized by the presentation of theological interpretation as part & parcel of the story...The early church...consider[ed] John as a 'spiritual gospel' [after] the 'bodily facts' had been made plain [in the other Gospels]...In contrast to the Synoptic [Gospels, in John] much of Jesus' teaching has *to do with himself*. The Synoptic's proclaim-er of the kingdom has, in John, become the proclaimed. This... hint[s] that the *Gospel of John*, far more than the Synoptics, is a *deliberately retrospective Gospel*, telling the story again with the advantages of [post-resurrection] hindsight." [Donald A. Hagner, *New Testament... Introduction*, p.]
- "The Gospel of John has far *more to say about the Holy Spirit* than do the Synoptic Gospels, just as it is more explicitly... concerned with...*who Jesus is*. These *two distinctive things...the person of Jesus and...the giving of the Holy Spirit* are intensified & deepened by John. He omits...many Synoptic events (birth stories, temptations, transfiguration, institution of the Eucharist [Last Supper], ascensions) in order to...concentrate...on who Jesus is." [David F. Ford, *Gospel of John*, p. 49]

4. Omissions indicate John's Distinctives

- "In the Synoptics Jesus is...presented as an exorcist [casting out demons, evil spirits]...That element of Jesus' ministry has been omitted altogether from John..."
- "...The Synoptics [have] Jesus...teaching the crowds...through parables...There are no parables in the 4th Gospel..."
- "In the Synoptics, the ministry of Jesus lasts...[up] to a year. In John, however [it] spans 3 Passovers...around 2 years..."
- "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 [being] subservient to John..."
- In "the Synoptics Jesus...performs 'miracles' or 'deeds of power.' In John...these are... 'signs'...[&] there are seven..."
- "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." ['the Twelve': John: 4x (Jn. 6:67-71; 20:24) cf. Mark: 11x]
- "Each Synoptic has the Passover meal [with the] specific institution of the Eucharist...The 4th Gospel [replaces this with foot-washing]." [Christopher W. Skinner, "*Gospel...John*," S Barton (ed.) *Cambridge Companion to the Gospels*, pp 200-1]
- "Other Synoptic events...of key importance in the Synoptic narratives...are notable by their absence [in John]...The baptism of Jesus [by John the Baptist is] not narrated [but] presupposed...in John's narrative (1:32)...The Twelve appear...at John 6:67, without explanation & with no account of their appointment...by Jesus." [Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, p. 190]

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

- a. "Peter turned around & saw *the disciple Jesus loved* following them... *This is the disciple who testifies to these things & who wrote them down.* We know that his testimony is true." (21:20, 24)
- b. "This Gospel's distinctive contribution derives not from Peter's testimony, but from the Beloved Disciple's witness." [Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the Eyewitnesses*, 128-9]
- c. "We may...infer...that this version of the gospel of Jesus Christ was put forth somewhat deliberately as an *alternative or even to counter to...version(s)* whose source & authority were traced back primarily to Peter" [Dunn, *Neither Jew Nor Greek*, p 77]

6. John's Distinct Individualism (e.g. 3:36; 12:44-5; 14:21)

- o "The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but *the one who* rejects the Son will not see life..." (3:36)
 - o "Jesus cried out, '*The one who* believes in me believes not in me, but in him who sent me.'" (12:44)
 - o "*The one who* has my commands & keeps them is *the one who* loves me. And *the one who* loves me will be loved by my Father. I also will love him/her & will reveal myself to him/her." (14:21)
- a. John's Individualism versus First-century Collectivism
- "*First-century Palestine was a society based on collectivism rather than individualism*; persons living in the culture were embedded in groups & their individual concerns were oriented toward the concerns of the group...[There was] the need to maintain the honor & status for the group by living out the expectations of other persons, & individuals' self-image derived from what others both inside & outside the group thought of them...Neither the [author] nor his audience would...concern... themselves with one individual person's development." [Melanie Baffes, *Love, Loss, & Abjection...in John*, 53 #25]
 - "Ancient societies had conceptions of the human person that differ from the notions of the autonomous self that developed in the West...The differences are often understood in terms of...'individualism-collectivism'...Collectivistic cultures emphasize values that subordinate personal goals to the values of the group." [D. Aune, *Jesus, Gospel Tradition...*, p. 525]
 - "The vast majority of people described in the Bible represent *collectivist personality types*. Individualistic personality types are rather rare in the Bible & the Mediterranean culture in general." [J. J. Pilch, *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, 171]
- 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 *aphoristic* [short] *sayings about the individual's relationship with Jesus*...I list 67 sayings in 5 different grammatical forms...These sayings are quite *explicitly about the individual's relationship to Jesus* ...We clearly have here a type of saying, prolific in the [4th] Gospel, whose specific function is to speak of the individual's relationship with Jesus." [Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, pp. 4-5]
 - "*The one who believes* in me, as the Scripture...said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him." (7:38)
 - "...I am the resurrection & the life. *The one who believes* in me, even if he dies, will live." (11:25)
 - "*The one who loves his life* will lose it, & *the one who hates his life* in this world will keep it for eternal life." (12:25)
 - "I am the bread of life," Jesus told them. "*No one who comes* to me will ever be hungry, & *no one who believes* in me will ever be thirsty again." (6:35)
 - "*The one who eats my flesh & drinks my blood* has eternal life, & I will raise him up on the last day" (6:54) Note: Here "the benefits of the Eucharist [communion] are promised *to each individual* who 'eats my flesh & drinks my blood'." [Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: A Systematic Theology*, p. 142]
 - Bauckham "tabulat[es]...67 [short] sayings that are unrelenting in not allowing readers or hearers 'to forget that *response to Jesus has to be individual to be real*'" [A. Caneday, Review of Bauckham 'Gospel...']
 - John's "Gospel does appeal to the rational choice of the individual: he or she is invited to believe in Jesus & so have life (20:31) & light (8:12); the alternative is darkness & death (3:19; 12:35)—spare logic indeed! The 'costs & benefits' involved in believing or refusing to believe in Jesus is certainly made

clear." [Ruth Sheridan, "Johannine Sectarianism," in Stanley E. Porter (ed.) *Origins of John's Gospel*, 157]

c. John's Striking Individualism

- "The 4th Gospel is *one of the most strongly individualistic* of all the NT writings." [C.F.D. Moule, "Individualism of the Fourth Gospel," in D. E. Orton (ed.) *Composition of John's Gospel*, 22]
- John offers "an unparalleled concentration on the *relation of the individual believer to Jesus*." [Raymond E. Brown, *Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, p. 85]
- "The *individualism* of the 4th Gospel is a key to its interpretation...it provides a basic insight into the meaning of the Gospel" [Raymond E. Collins, *These Things Have Been Written: Studies in the 4th Gospel*, p. 4]
- "The *individualism* of the 4th Gospel is *one of the most striking features* of this remarkable document." [James Dunn, *Unity & Diversity in the NT*, p. 118]
- John's "Gospel lays considerable emphasis on the *relationship of the individual believer to Jesus Christ*, by contrast with the more corporate understanding of the Christian community...found in [Paul]." [R. Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, pp. 1-2]
- "Throughout [of 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 who is in real contact with Christ." [C.F.D.Moule, *Origin of Christology*, p. 66]

d. Jesus' Extended Conversations with Individuals

- "While John joins the rest of the NT in communicating within community, *the Gospel of John stands out in the NT as also emphasizing individualism*. This...is not...modern Western individualism...but rather that an individual believer is in relationship to Christ among the community of believers...The evidence of this individual relationship with Jesus presents itself in [Jesus'] relationship...& dialogue with individuals. For example, *more than any other NT author John presents*
- *Jesus in extended conversations with individuals* (Nathaniel (1:47-51), Nicodemus (3:1-21), a Samaritan woman (4:7-26), Martha (11:20-27), Mary (11:32-33), Pilate (18:33-38), Mary Magdalene (20:14-17), Peter (21:15-22) & several shorter conversations ...) These conversations...accentuate the individual's role in choosing to believe in Jesus' claims & act on them." [Douglas W. Kennard, *Epistemology & Logic in the NT*, p. 165]
- "A prominent feature of John's narrative is the...extended conversations that Jesus has with individuals...[e.g.] seven:
 - a. Nathaniel (1:47-51)
 - b. Nicodemus (3:1-21)
 - c. Samaritan Woman (4:7-26)
 - d. Martha (11:20-27)
 - e. Pilate (18:33-19:12)
 - f. Mary Magdalene (20:14-17)
 - g. Peter (21:15-22)
- "The Synoptic Gospels also feature many encounters between Jesus & individuals, but the [reported] conversations are usually much briefer, &...almost never private...The *extended private conversations are a distinctive feature* of John's Gospel, one of the many differences with the Synoptics." [Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, pp. 13-14]
- "The climax of the 'Gospel of Signs' (Jn. 1-12) is the resurrection of a single individual [Lazarus Jn. 11] rather than the general resurrection of the dead. Jesus prays for the unity of believers [Jn. 17], but even here the unity John has in mind is comparable to the unity of the Father & the Son & is both rooted & *dependent on the individual believer's union with Jesus* (17:20-23)." [James D. G. Dunn, *Unity & Diversity in the NT*, p. 118]

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

a. Individualism not cancelled by the Community

- "It is important to appreciate the prominence of 'individualism' [in John] & not allow it to be cancelled or obscured by the material on community. The emphasis on the faith & discipleship of the individual is a distinctive feature of this Gospel that has not been given its due." [Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, p. 17]

- "The...new command is...love one another (15:12)...The life of the community...stems from the relationship between each individual & Jesus...The community...subsists only through individual relationship with Jesus." [Bauckham, *Gospel...*, p. 9]
 - "Focus is placed *not on the importance of individuals exclusive of the communal interest* but on the responsibility of each individual in response to the divine invitation to have a personal & intimate relationship with Christ...Unfortunately, NT scholarship has largely ignored that grain of truth." [M. Ahn, "Review... *Bauckham's 'Gospel of Glory'*," JETS, V. 59, #2, p. 397]
- b. "mutual belonging..., but not a mutual interdependence" –James Dunn
- "A peculiarity of John...is...its lack of [teaching about the church]...It's...more appropriate to speak of *the 'individualism' of John*. For John the 'vertical' relationship with God is essentially an individual affair. There's a *mutual belonging to Christ, but not a mutual interdependence*...each sheep hears the shepherd's voice for him/herself (10:3-4, 16); each branch is rooted directly in the vine (15:4-7); Each munches Jesus' flesh & drinks his blood for her/himself (6:53-58); each drinks the water from his side as an individual (7:37-38)...Even the thought of the believers being 'one'...[is] by believers each abiding in Christ." [James D. G. Dunn, *Neither Jew Nor Greek*, pp. 366-7]
- f. Corporate Symbols – the Flock & the Vine—still stress personal/individual relation to Christ
- "The Fourth Gospel presents an *unparalleled concentration on the relationship of the individual believer to Jesus*, beautifully illustrated [by]...the Good Shepherd and the Vine & Branches...Unique to John is the reciprocal relationship between Jesus & the individual sheep..." [Melanie Ross, *Evangelical Versus Liturgical?* 92]
 - "In Jn. 10, Jesus speaks of himself as the shepherd of a flock...This image is also found in the Synoptics (Mk. 14; Matt. 18; Luke 12 & 15). However, unique to John is the reciprocal *relationship between Jesus & the individual sheep*, grounded on the union & relationship between Jesus & his Father. The relation between Jesus & the sheep is described as a mutual '*gnoskein*' [Gk. 'knowing'] – a relationship [of]...two partners...by nature joined together. The point...is *the emphasis on the personal knowledge & adherence to Jesus & not on the flock as a community*...[The] '*flock*' is made possible only in & through the response of faith made by the individual..." [Melanie Ross, *Evangelical Versus Liturgical?*, 93]
 - "The importance of a personal relationship...[with] Jesus remains paramount...At first glance the image of the shepherd & flock might appear to be an image of the church, but [that]...needs careful nuancing. The parable *concerns a personal and individual relationship with Jesus*...Any reference to a community is made only implicitly. For this Gospel a community exists only because individual believers unite with Jesus by faith..." [John F. O'Grady, *According to John*, 48]
 - "Throughout [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, *Origin of Christology*, p. 66]
 - "There are just 2 passages in [John's] Gospel in which [brief] sayings [relate] to the Christian community, but...the *stress is still on the individual's relation to Jesus*.
 - a. In the Good Shepherd discourse...the sheep certainly belong to a flock, but [it's] remarkable...that the shepherd calls each sheep by name (10:3). ["The sheep hear [the shepherd's] voice. *He calls his own sheep by name* & leads them out ...The sheep follow him because *they know his voice*." (10:3-4)]
 - b. In the parable of the vine it's each branch's relationship to Jesus that determines whether it remains in the vine or is removed (15:1-6)...[Here] the stress on the individual...serves to ground the community since it's by keeping Jesus' commands that the individual remains in relation to him (15:10)... ["I am the vine; you are the branches. *The one who remains* [abides] *in me & I in him* produces much fruit...⁶ *If anyone does not remain in me*, he is thrown aside like a branch & he withers. (15:5-6)"] [Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, p.]
- c. Individual relationship with Jesus has priority over the community
- "Faith in Jesus is the beginning of the Christian life. *Without this fundamental personal relationship to Jesus nothing else can make sense*. People may...even be involved in...[the] community called the church, but unless each individual has personal faith, all else has little value." [John F. O'Grady, *Preaching the Gospel of John*, 123]
 - In John, "the life of the community, the disciples' mutual love, *stems from the relationship between each individual & Jesus*. The latter entails the former, but *individual relationship to Jesus has priority*. The community is *constituted by individual relationship with Jesus and subsists only through individual relationship with Jesus*." [R. Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, p.]
 - "In...Christian history, there's nothing strange about a focus on the individual's intimacy with the living Jesus. This need not be 'individualistic'...but it does mean that *there's individual experience that is not*

reducible to the corporate. Among the NT documents, it is in John's Gospel that this individual experience [of] Jesus is most clearly & frequently evoked & we should not be tempted...to flatten the contours of the [NT] canon to the detriment of this specially Johannine emphasis." [Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, p. 19] o R. Bauckham argues that the [4th Gospel] does *prioritize the individual above the community in a way that differs from the collectivist culture of his time.* He [notes] that, 'readers or hearers are simply not allowed to forget that response to Jesus has to be individual to be real.' Thus...whilst John provides a vision of a new social reality in Christ [the Church], this *never erases the priority of individuals...The life of the community...stems from the relationship between each individual & Jesus.* The latter entails the former, but the *individual relationship to Jesus has priority.*" [Joshua Cockayne, *Explorations in Analytic Ecclesiology*, p. 5]

QUESTIONS:

- 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.'
1. What sections (cases) in John's Gospel do you consider most useful in helping people to '*begin to believe*'? (Discuss)
 2. What sections (cases) in John's Gospel do you consider most useful in helping people to '*continue to believe*'? (Discuss)
 3. Read Luke 1:57-63 concerning the naming of John the Baptist. How does this show the 'collectivist' culture of the time?
 4. The message & material points out the 'individualism' of John's Gospel versus the 'collectivist' culture of the time.
 - a. Where do we see 'individualism' in John's Gospel?
 - b. Where does Jesus call for a personal/individual response? (Give examples)
 - c. What 'collectivist' obstacles to a personal/individual response to Jesus' call do you think might have been present?
 5. 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)
 - a. Do you agree (or disagree) that these 'symbols' prioritize the individual's relation to Jesus? (Discuss)
 - b. In this context, how can the Church-community be strengthened? (Discuss)