

The Gospel of John

Phillip Cornwell

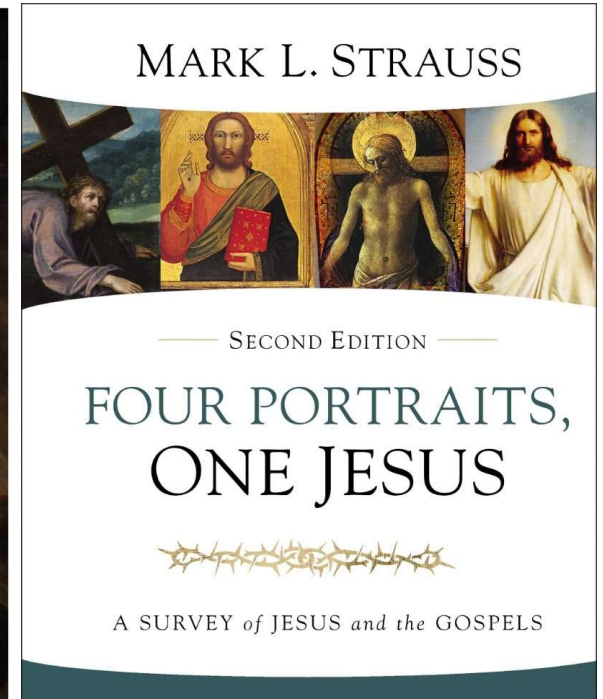
Eastside Church of Christ

What do you remember from
the class on Mark?

Matthew?

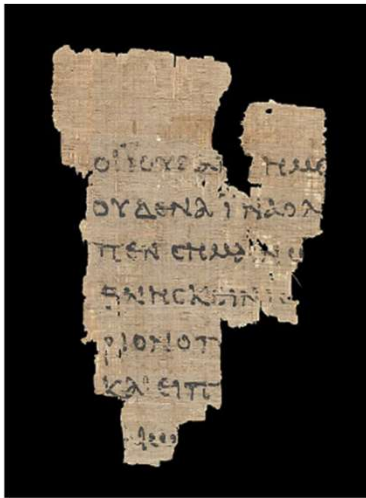
Luke?

What comes to mind when you
think of the Gospel of John?

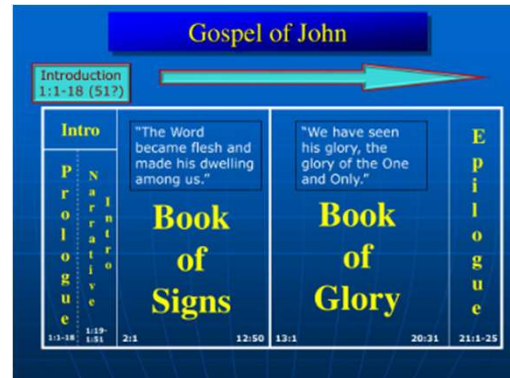


John is not primarily about movement, teaching blocks, or compassion on the road. It's about identity, revelation, and belief.

This evening, I will present an overview of the Gospel of John



Background



Literary characteristics



Overview and application


Note: I cannot do justice to this book in just one lesson!

Let's look at the Gospel of John

Who is the author? ^(most likely)  John, the son of Zebedee, the “beloved disciple”

When was it written? ^(most likely)  AD 80 – 95

Who was it written to?  Most likely believers (and seekers) in Asia Minor

What is the book's main purpose? 

- Stated purpose: “that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31)
- To present Jesus with a strong emphasis on his divine identity

Who wrote the Gospel of John? (options + best case)

The Gospel is anonymous, but early Christian tradition consistently attributes it to John.

Main options

- 1. Traditional view: John the Apostle (son of Zebedee) wrote the Gospel (perhaps with later minor editing).**
- 2. Johannine community view: the Gospel reflects a Johannine circle and was finalized by editors, rooted in testimony from the “Beloved Disciple.”**
- 3. Minor alternatives: “John the Elder” or another disciple (suggested by some, but with less support).**

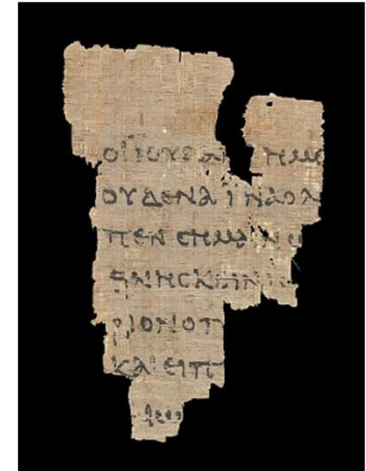
The traditional view is probably the strongest

- **Earliest external testimony is consistent:**
 - 2nd-century church writers (especially Irenaeus) attribute the Gospel to John
 - This became the dominant and nearly universal view in the early church.
- **Eyewitness grounding is claimed inside the book:**
 - The Gospel emphasizes firsthand testimony (19:35) and links the writing to the “Beloved Disciple” (21:24).
- **The “Beloved Disciple” fits an inner-circle follower:**
 - Present at the Last Supper, cross, empty tomb, and resurrection appearances.
- **Strong Jerusalem and Jewish-festival detail: fits someone with deep familiarity with Judea and early eyewitness tradition.**
- **Reasons many still debate it:**
 - The Gospel never names the author explicitly.
 - John 21:24 (“²⁴This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.”) may reflect an editorial voice.

There are several very old fragments from the Gospel of John

Rylands Library Papyrus P52 is widely considered the earliest known fragment of the New Testament

- Dated between 125 and 150 CE
- It contains verses from the Gospel of John 18:31–33 and 37–38 in Greek



P66 (Bodmer II)

- A near-complete codex of the Gospel of John
- Typically dated between 150 and 200 CE



Here is some trivia about the book

- **The vocabulary and sentence structure is generally simpler than in the Synoptic Gospels**
- **John does not use parables the way the Synoptics do. Instead, he highlights signs (miracles with interpretive meaning) that point to Jesus' identity**
- **John's prologue ("In the beginning...") echoes Genesis**
- **John contains many of Jesus' most famous one-on-one encounters (Nicodemus, Samaritan woman, man born blind, Mary and Martha, Peter's restoration)**
- **John includes no exorcisms**
- **John includes several major events not in the Synoptics (wedding at Cana, raising of Lazarus, feet washing, long upper room discourse, "I am" sayings in their fullest form)**

John likes the number seven

Seven names or title in chapter 1

1. Lamb of God — John 1:29, 36
2. Rabbi — John 1:38
3. Messiah — John 1:41
4. Jesus of Nazareth — John 1:45
5. Son of God — John 1:49
6. King of Israel — John 1:49
7. Son of Man — John 1:51

Seven Signs



Seven metaphorical “I am” statements



Seven identity “I am” statements

John: Signs → Glory → Belief

John is structured theologically, not geographically. Most scholars recognize a two-part structure with a prologue and epilogue.

- I. Prologue: The Word Made Flesh (1:1–18)**
- II. The Book of Signs (1:19–12:50)**
- III. The Book of Glory (13:1–20:31)**
- IV. Epilogue (21)**

Many scholars see a chiastic or carefully symmetrical structure in the prologue (John 1:1–18)

- 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the **Word was with God, and the Word was God.** 2 He was with God in the beginning.
- 3 **Through him all things were made;** without him nothing was made that has been made.
- 4 **In him was life,** and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
- 6 There was a man sent from God whose name was **John.** 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.
- 9 **The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.** 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.
- 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, **he gave the right to become children of God**— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.
- 14 **The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.** We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- 15 (**John** testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'")
- 16 **Out of his fullness we have all received grace** in place of grace already given.
- 17 For the law was given through Moses; **grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.**
- 18 No one has ever seen God, but the one and **only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father,** has made him known.

There are several key themes in the Gospel of John



“Book of Signs” (John 1-12)

- Signs reveal Jesus’ glory
- People respond with belief or unbelief



“I am” statements



“Book of Glory” (John 13-20)

John 1-12 is often called “the book of signs”



Significance: Jesus brings the “new wine” of the new age; joy and abundance; transformation

In John, a miracle isn’t mainly a display of power—it’s a pointer or “sign”: it *reveals* who Jesus is and invites belief (or exposes unbelief).

1. Water into wine (John 2:1–11)

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

John 1-12 is often called “the book of signs”

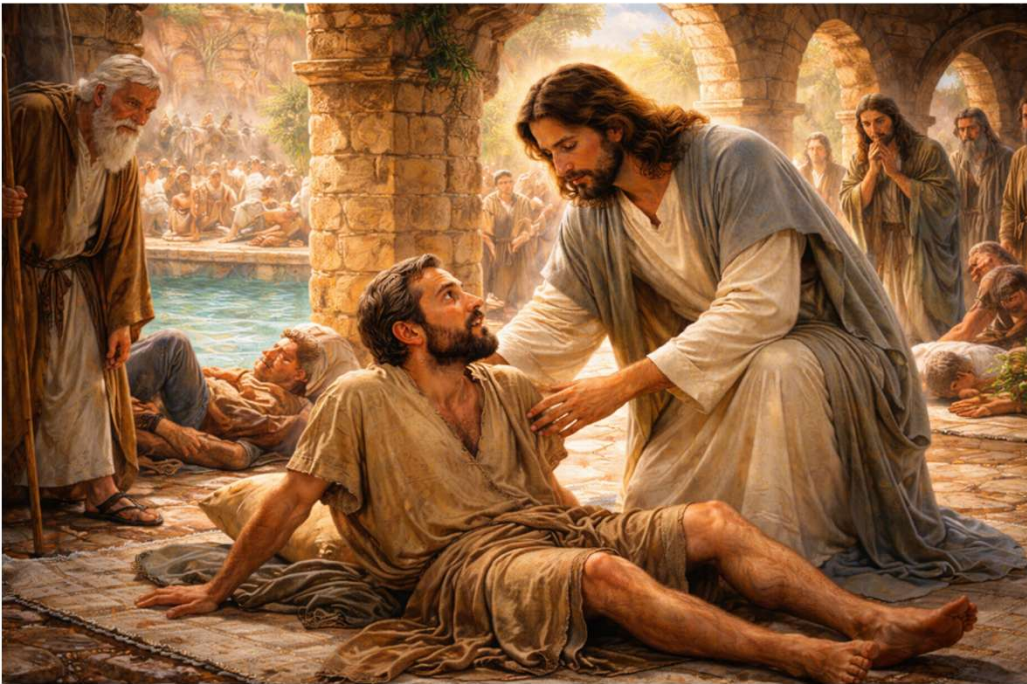


Significance: Jesus demonstrates His life-giving authority and shows that faith can rest in His word alone, even without visible proof.

2. Healing the official's son (John 4:46–54)

John 4:48 ⁴⁸ So Jesus said to him, “Unless you see **signs** and wonders you will not believe.”

John 1-12 is often called “the book of signs”



Significance: Jesus demonstrates authority to restore, and his claim to equality with the Father becomes a point of controversy

3. Healing the paralytic at Bethesda (John 5:1–15)

Not explicitly called a “sign” in the immediate passage, but it clearly functions as one because it leads to a long discourse revealing Jesus’ identity

John 1-12 is often called “the book of signs”



Significance: Jesus as the true provider; leads into “Bread of Life” discourse.

“I am the bread of life” (6:35)

4. Feeding the 5,000 (John 6:1–15)

John 6:14 ¹⁴ When the people saw the **sign** that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”

John 1-12 is often called “the book of signs”



Significance: Jesus reveals himself as more than a miracle worker—he comes with divine authority and calls his fearful disciples to trust him.

5 (maybe). Walking on water (John 6:16–21)

Not explicitly called a sign in the passage. Some scholars include it among John’s seven signs; others do not. Those who do not often treat the **resurrection as the climactic seventh sign.**

John 1-12 is often called “the book of signs”



Significance: Light vs. darkness; spiritual sight vs. spiritual blindness; Jesus’ revelation exposes the hearts of those who respond to him.

“I am the light of the world” (8:12)

6. Healing the man born blind (John 9:1–7)

John 9:16 ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such **signs**?” And there was a division among them.

John 1-12 is often called “the book of signs”



7. Raising Lazarus (John 11:1–44)

John 11:47 ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many **signs**.”

Significance: Jesus as the resurrection and the life; this sign precipitates the decision to kill Him.

“I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25)

John 12:37 ³⁷ Though he had done so many **signs** before them, they still did not believe in him.

In John, signs are not just miracles—they are works that reveal Jesus and provoke belief or unbelief.

John 2:18 — people demand for a sign

John 2:23 — many believed in him when they saw the signs

John 3:2 — Nicodemus: “No one can do the signs you do unless God is with them”

John 6:2 — crowds follow because “they saw the signs that he was doing”

John 6:30 — the crowds demand a sign

John 7:31 — people compare Jesus’ signs to what Messiah would do

John 9:16 — signs become a point of debate (“How can a sinner do such signs?”)

John 11:47 — leaders fear the effect of Jesus’ signs

John 12:37 — people did not believe despite them seeing many signs

John 20:30–31 — ³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John is known for Jesus' "I am" statements. There are two main kinds of them in John.

Metaphorical or picture "I am" sayings, such as "I am the light of the world"

Absolute/identity "I am" sayings, that is, "I am" (ἐγώ εἰμι) without a predicate—often with strong theological weight

John includes both the picture "I am" sayings and the identity "I am" sayings, and together they answer the question: *Who is Jesus?*

What "I am" statements can you think of?

Let's look at the seven metaphorical "I am ..." sayings

1. "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35, 48, 51)



Jesus says this after feeding the 5,000.

Jesus is saying that He alone satisfies the deepest hunger of the human heart and gives life that never ends.

Let's look at the seven metaphorical "I am ..." sayings

2. "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12, 9:5)



The setting is the Feast of Tabernacles.

This feast included dramatic nightly ceremonies in the Temple where huge lamps were lit.

Jesus is claiming to be God's revealing presence who brings truth, life, and guidance to a darkened world—and only those who follow Him truly see.

Let's look at the seven metaphorical "I am ..." sayings

3. "I am the door (gate) for the sheep" (John 10:7, 9)



This statement flows directly out of the healing of the man born blind in John 9.

Jesus is picturing Himself as the shepherd who personally becomes the entrance—giving access to life and standing between His sheep and harm.

Let's look at the seven metaphorical "I am ..." sayings

4. "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11, 14)



This statement flows directly out of the healing of the man born blind in John 9.

Jesus claims to be the true and faithful leader who knows His people, protects them, and willingly lays down His life for them.

Let's look at the seven metaphorical "I am ..." sayings

5. "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25)



Jesus speaks these words to Martha after Lazarus has died.

Jesus declares that life and victory over death are not found in an event or doctrine, but in relationship with Him, both now and forever.

Let's look at the seven metaphorical "I am ..." sayings

6. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6)



Jesus says this in the Upper Room Discourse, comforting His disciples as He prepares them for His departure.

Jesus declares that access to the Father, ultimate truth, and true life are found exclusively in relationship with Him—not in a path, principle, or system.

Let's look at the seven metaphorical "I am ..." sayings

7. "I am the true vine" (John 15:1, 5)



At the end of John 14, Jesus says, 'Rise, let us go from here,' which suggests movement. It's possible—though not certain—that as they walked, seeing vines helped shape Jesus' teaching in John 15.

Jesus declares that He is the sole source of spiritual life and fruitfulness, and that lasting growth comes only through an ongoing, dependent relationship with Him.

Which of the “I am” statements means the most to you and why?

Bread of life



Light of the world



The door (gate)



Good shepherd



The resurrection and the life



The way, and the truth, and the life



The vine



**Which “I am”
saying speaks
most powerfully
to you, and why?**

John also uses seven “I am” (ἐγώ εἰμι) statements with no predicate. “I am he” would be ἐγώ εἰμι αὐτός.

1. John 4:26 — To the Samaritan woman: “I, the one speaking to you—I am [he].” – “he” is not in the original Greek.
2. John 6:20 — Walking on the water: “It is I (literally “I am” in Greek); do not be afraid.”
3. John 8:24 — “Unless you believe that I am [he], you will die in your sins.”
4. John 8:28 — “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [he]...”
5. John 8:58 — “Before Abraham was, I am.” (the most striking one)
6. John 13:19 — “I am telling you... so that... you may believe that I am [he].”
7. John 18:5–6 — In the arrest scene: “When Jesus said, ‘I am [he],’ they drew back and fell to the ground.”

John 13–20 is often called “the book of glory”

In John, “glory” (Greek *doxa*) is tied to Jesus’ “hour”—the decisive moment when His identity is most fully revealed.

“Not yet come” (or “not yet fully come”)	“Has come” (the turning point)
John 2:4 — “My hour has not yet come. ”	John 13:1 — “Jesus knew that the hour had
John 7:6 — “My time has not yet come... ”	come for him to leave this
John 7:8 — “...my time has not yet fully	world...”
come. ”	John 16:32 — “ An hour is coming, and has
John 7:30 — “...because his hour had not yet	already come... ”
come. ”	John 17:1 — “Father, the hour has come... ”
John 8:20 — “...because his hour had not yet	
come. ”	

If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, how would you spend tonight?

Here is how this section is organized

John 13: Foot washing and betrayal announced

John 14: Comfort and promise of the Spirit

John 15: Abiding, love, and fruit

John 16: Persecution, Spirit's work, and victory

John 17: Jesus' prayer



I'm going to focus on this section (commonly called the Upper Room Discourse)

John 18:1–19:15: Arrest and trial

John 19:16–42: The crucifixion and burial

John 20: The resurrection

Chapter 13 opens during Jesus' final meal with the disciples



John has no explicit institution of the Lord's Supper



John includes washing the disciples' feet

- **John 13:34-35** “A new command I give you: Love one another.” This is one of the major themes in the Upper Room Discourse.
- John includes a long “farewell discourse” (John 14-16) flowing out of the supper.
- The betrayal scene is told with different details than the other Gospels.

Chapters 14–16 are sometimes called the “Farewell Discourse” – remember that this is the last time Jesus will be with his disciples before his death

Key themes

- **Jesus comforts them**
 - John 14:1 “Let not your hearts be troubled.”
 - John 14:18 “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”
 - John 14:27 “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.”
 - John 16:20 “...You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.”
 - John 16:33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace.”
- **Jesus is the exclusive revelation of God and access to God**
 - “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (14:6)
 - “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (14:9)
- **Jesus promises the presence of the Holy Spirit (Paraclete)**
 - The Spirit will teach, remind, and guide (14:26; 16:13)
 - The Spirit will bear witness to Jesus (15:26)
 - The Spirit will convict the world (16:8–11)

Chapters 14–16 are sometimes called the “Farewell Discourse”

- **Bearing fruit is discussed**

- John 15:5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will **bear much fruit**; apart from me you can do nothing.”
- John 15:8 “By this my Father is glorified, that you **bear much fruit** and so prove to be my disciples.”
- John 15:16 “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and **bear fruit**—fruit that will last”

- **The disciples are told that they can ask for anything in his name**

- John 14:13-14 “¹³ And I will do **whatever you ask in my name**, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ You may **ask me for anything in my name**, and I will do it.”
- John 15:7 ⁷ “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, **ask whatever you wish**, and it will be done for you.”
- John 15:16 ¹⁶ ... “**whatever you ask in my name** the Father will give you.”
- John 16:23 ²³ “In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you **whatever you ask in my name.**”

Chapters 14–16 are sometimes called the “Farewell Discourse”

- **Jesus talks a lot about how love is keeping his commands**
 - John 14:15 “If you love me, **keep my commands.**”
 - John 14:21 “Whoever **has my commands and keeps them** is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”
 - John 14:23 “Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me **will obey my teaching.** My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”
 - John 15:10-12 ¹⁰ “If you **keep my commands**, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love.” ... ¹² “**My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.**”
- **Jesus also discusses conflict with the world**
 - John 15:18–25 “If the world hates you...”
 - John 16:1-4 Persecution and exclusion are to be expected

Chapters 14–16 are sometimes called the “Farewell Discourse”

- **Jesus discusses how his departure is necessary and a good thing**
 - John 14:3 “ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”
 - John 16:7 “But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”
- **Jesus also discusses mutual indwelling (“I in you, and you in me”)**
 - John 14:11 “Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”
 - John 14:20 “On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”
 - John 15:4 “Remain in me, as I also remain in you.”
 - John 15:7 “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

Chapter 17 is Jesus' longest prayer recorded in the Gospels

John 17 is distinctive because Jesus prays for:

Himself (17:1–5)

- That the Father would glorify Him
- Completion of His mission

His disciples (17:6–19)

- Their protection
- Their unity
- Their sanctification

Future believers—including us (17:20–26)

- “Those who will believe in me through their word”
- Unity of all believers
- That they would see His glory

The prayer has several key themes

1. Glory — The revelation of God through Jesus

- 17:1 — “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you ...”
- 17:4 — “I glorified you on earth...”
- 17:5 — “Glorify me in your own presence...”
- 17:22, 24 — Jesus’ followers see and share his glory.

2. Unity — Oneness reflecting the Trinity

- 17:11 — “**That they may be one**, even as we are one.”
- 17:21 — “**That they may all be one**... so that the world may believe...”
- 17:22–23 — “..., **that they may be one** even as we are one, I in them and you in me, **that they may become perfectly one**, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

3. Protection and Sanctification — Being kept safe in the world

- 17:11 — “Keep them in your name...”
- 17:15 — “I do not ask that you take them out of the world...”
- 17:17 — “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”
- 17:18 — “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them.”

How do we live the message of John today?

Abide in Jesus daily.

- Stay connected to Christ through his words, prayer, and obedience—apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:4–5).

Walk in love and truth.

- Let love for Jesus show itself in obedience and love one another as He has loved us (John 14:15; 15:12).

Receive peace in a troubled world.

- Bring anxiety, fear, and sorrow to Jesus, who gives a peace the world cannot give (John 14:27; 16:33).

Depend on the Holy Spirit.

- Rely on the Spirit to teach, remind, guide, and strengthen you to bear witness to Jesus (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13).

Bear fruit and bear witness.

- Let your life point to Jesus through lasting fruit, faithful testimony, and love-shaped mission (John 15:8, 16; 20:21).

Live with resurrection hope.

- Face suffering and death with confidence that Jesus is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25–26).

John 20:24-29 – Thomas' confession (unique to John)

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸ Thomas said to him, "**My Lord and my God!**" ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

John paints a portrait of Jesus as the Son who reveals the Father. He is not afraid of sincere questions; He reveals Himself so that doubters may become worshipers.



Let's look at one takeaway from each Gospel

I ended Mark with Jesus touching the untouchable.

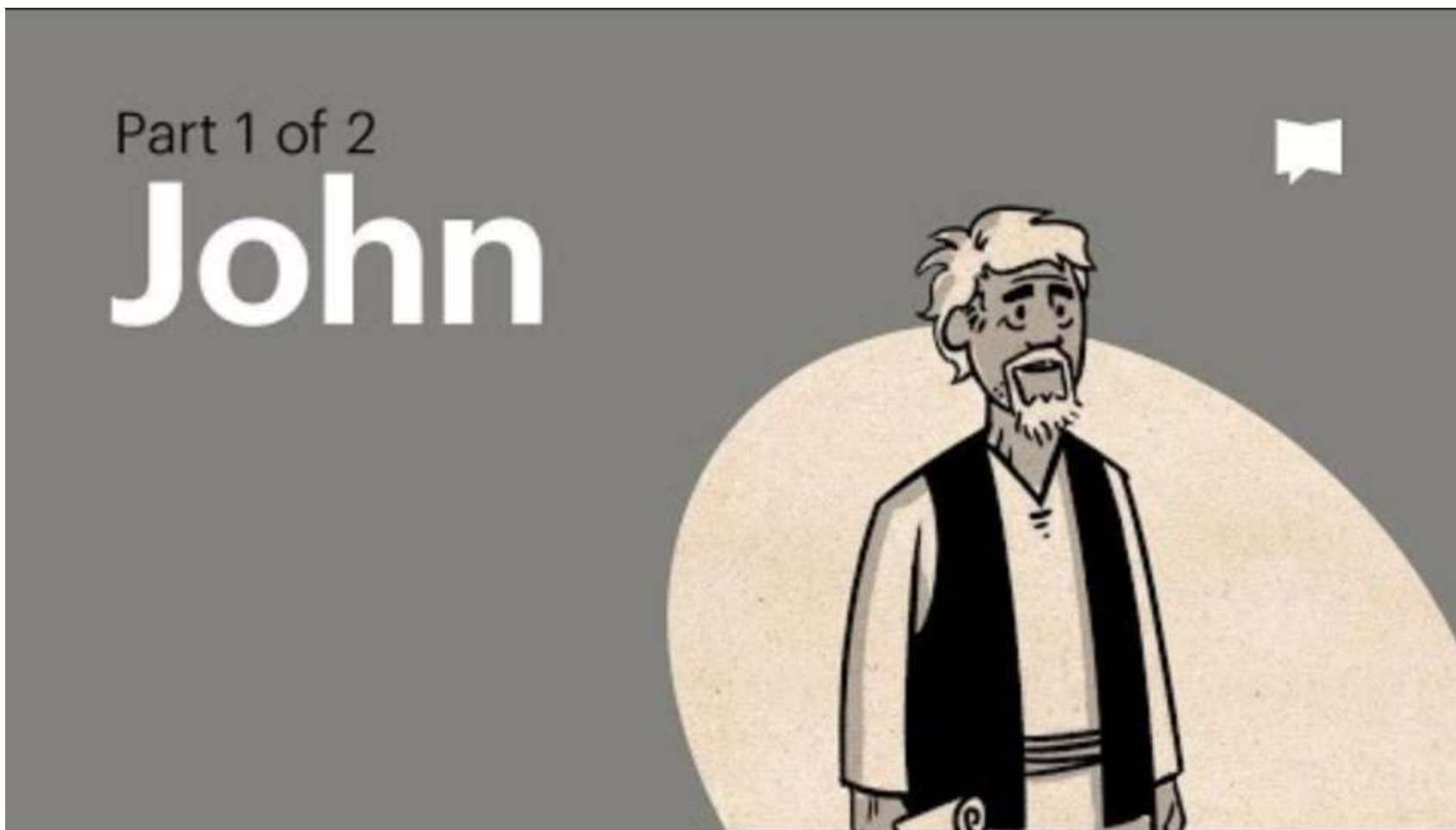
I ended Matthew with Jesus calling us to come to him.

I ended Luke with the image of God (Jesus) running towards the lost to welcome us home.

Let's end John with a declaration of faith, "My Lord and my God!"

Each of us needs to make this same declaration of faith!

Bible Project (if there is time)



8:46

Bible Project (if there is time)



Homework

Email me questions you have about the Gospels and the differences we find between them (phil@eastidesprings.com)

Week 6 – Gospel comparison

Questions?