

Text: John 20:30-31

Title: "Accomplishing the purpose of the Gospel of John"

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Introduction: It is one thing to have a purpose and another to accomplish it. When writing an essay, for instance, experts tell us that it helps to have a purpose statement. The purpose statement tells the reader the answer to the question, "Why read this?" An effective purpose statement will motivate others to read the essay.

On the topic of purposeless reading, I read a book recently that challenged me to think about my consumption of daily news. Have you ever thought about what the purpose of a 24-hour news cycle is? Have you asked yourself why you read or watch the daily news?

This author pointed out that no one likes to read a newspaper that is a week old. And then he simply asks, if there is no reason to read week-old news, why was it important a week ago? He was encouraging spending more time reading and studying history and less time with the 24-hour news cycle. News that makes history has more purpose than most of the news that will happen today.

We have before us this morning the purpose of the Gospel of John. It tells us John's reason why he believed it is important to read his Gospel, even though he wrote this Gospel nearly 2000 years ago. It is John's answer to the question, "Why read my Gospel?"

Very simply, John writes so that his readers would know the identity of the Christ, the Son of God, believe on Him, and live. This purpose is similar to Peter's famous confes-

sion at Caesarea Philippi in Matthew 16. When Jesus asked, "Who do men say that I am?", Peter responded, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said that Peter learned that from heaven, and that He would build His church on this rock, the apostles' revelation from heaven.

John focuses His readers on this same heaven-sent truth. Good scholarship on the Gospel has concluded that John wrote the Gospel for this purpose, targeting Jewish proselytes who had become a problem for even Gentile churches.

Jesus mentions what some of these Jews eventually became in the letters He gave to the Apostle John on the isle of Patmos in Revelation. In 2:9, He told the church at Smyrna, a coastal town in western Asia Minor (Turkey), which John's good friend Polycarp pastored: "I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." In Rev. 3:9, He told the church of Philadelphia, "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."

Smyrna and Philadelphia were sister churches of the church at Ephesus, where the Apostle John was known as Elder John. Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, was executed around A.D. 65 according to tradition. It may have been true that, with this Gospel, John was stepping into the vacancy Peter had left behind. He wrote his Gospel prior to authoring the Book of Revelation, and he felt the necessity of helping lost Jews see that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus.

Now as bad as the problem of lost Judaism was for the early church, our problem today is in some respects more

severe. John's purpose depended on some important truths he knew his readers would understand, but these are truths no longer believed by those we wish would read his Gospel today. John's starting point was better than ours.

In the first century world, it mattered to the Jew who the Christ was. The Christ was their hope of national restoration. The Christ was their liberation from oppression. The Christ would crush their enemies and bring them peace. But does it matter to us and our neighbors here in New Boston who the Christ is? Why should we read the Gospel of John? We hardly know what the word *Christ* means.

In the first century world, Scriptures were revered by the Jews as written revelation from God. John does not need a YouTube video that goes viral to get his message across. His scriptural Gospel would be read. But does it matter to us and our neighbors that God reveals Himself in Scripture or that John claims to be writing Scripture? Since the Enlightenment, modern man has pronounced God dead and Scripture obsolete. Why read the Gospel of John today?

Finally, in the first century world, Jews understood that God is the source of spiritual life. Because Abraham was their father, they thought they had it and Gentiles did not, and they were wrong. But at least they knew they needed it. Do we and our neighbors know we need the life John speaks of in this verse? Why should we read the Gospel of John? Our material life is great. Who needs a spiritual one?

Unless we understand that it matters who the Christ is, and that it matters what Scriptures says as God's written revelation, and that it matters whether we are spiritually dead or alive, the purpose of the Gospel of John will be meaningless to us.

So this morning as we begin our study of the Gospel of John together, I want to focus on the assumptions of John's purpose statement. This is why we must read this Gospel. Until we understand how these things matter, we will not understand our need to read on.

I. Read John's Gospel because it matters who the Christ, the Son of God is (v. 31).

Illustration: One thing Democrats and Republicans agree on in this country is that it matters who the President of the United States is. Why does that matter? It matters because of the nature of that office's responsibilities and powers. Those powers are outlined in the U.S. Constitution. He is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces; he can make treaties and appoint federal officers and judges with the advice and consent of the Senate; and he functions as the nation's executive, making sure that the Laws of the nation are executed and enforced.

To have a President who abuses these powers and neglects these responsibilities is to be in a lot of trouble as a country.

Application: When we ask the question, "Why does it matter who the Christ is?", our Old Testament gives us a similar answer: it matters because of the nature of that office's responsibilities and powers.

*Christ* is the Greek word for the Hebrew word *Messiah*. These words mean *Anointed One*, and they refer to one promised by God to mankind first in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15). This seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent became known as the Anointed One. He would hold the offices that required their occupants to be anointed with oil: the prophet, the priest, and the king.

The prophet was an anointed one. The OT promised the Messianic Prophet, who would speak to man the true words of the God, who cannot lie. His credibility would be equal to the Word of God itself. God said He would be a new Moses. Deut. 18:17-19, "And the Lord said unto me [Moses], 'They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.'"

To fail to listen to the prophetic word of the Christ is to believe a lie and come under the judgment of God. Because men need Someone who tells them the truth of God, they need to know who the Christ is. It matters who the Christ is because it matters from where you are getting your truth. Do you know from Whom to find the truth of God, who cannot lie?

The priest was also an anointed one. The promise of the Messianic Priest, who would offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of His people, came to Israel in passages like Isaiah 53. Because men need Someone who loves them as sinners and atones for their sinfulness as their substitute before a holy God, they must know who the Christ is. It matters who He is. Do you know the One who died for your sins?

The king was also an anointed one. The promise of the Messianic King, who created all things and shall rule and reign forever and ever, came to Israel in passages like 2 Sam. 7:12-17. Because the future of everyone and everything shall be ruled by the King of Glory, we need to know who the Christ is. Do you know who your King is? Have you been an obedient subject to the right person?

Again, the Jews would have said, "Our Prophet, our Priest, and our King is the Christ." They would not have said, "The Christ is Jesus." But do we even get as far as the Jews when it comes to these truths? John tells us to read His Gospel because it matters who the Christ, the Son of God is.

II. Read John's Gospel because it matters that Scripture is God's written revelation (vv. 30-31).

Illustration: The editors of the Bible I use to preach from have included paragraph headings to let readers of the Gospel of John know what it is they are going to read about in each section of a chapter. Our passage this morning is part of a section that begins in verse 24 in my edition, where I find the helpful title, "Thomas's doubt and belief."

Application: As we transition from verse 29 to verse 30 in our text, there is in the Greek a conjunction at the beginning of verse 30 that is normally translated *therefore* (*oun*). Our King James translators translate that word with the word *truly*. What John is saying in verse 30, in other words, is truly important as a logical conclusion drawn from what Jesus said in verse 29: "blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

John's Gospel refers to many signs that were done in the presence of the disciples like Thomas (v. 30), but they were not done in your presence or in my presence, were they? No, they were not. Neither you nor I have had the opportunity to see what Thomas saw with his own two eyes. We could not reach into the risen Lord's side or put our finger into his pierced hands. But Jesus said we are more blessed than Thomas, because we can believe without seeing. Thomas had to see in order to believe. John, knowing we cannot see, wants us to read and thereby believe.

It is for the cause of that blessedness that John writes: believing without seeing the signs. John emphasizes the reliability and authority of what he has written in the last two verses of his Gospel (21:24-25). He knows the Spirit has inspired him to author Scripture. Do we value the Scriptures and study them in faith, seeking the blessing of those who believe without seeing? Or must we, like Thomas, see before we will believe? In the view of the Apostle and His Lord, what is written deserves our trust and faith.

III. Read John's Gospel because it matters that we are spiritually dead and need spiritual life (v. 31).

Illustration: I have a neighbor who, after receiving my invitation to church, said something about how he was a good enough person to not need church. I told him that our church was for sinners who needed forgiveness, not for good people who do not. He realized the truth of what I was saying and immediately responded, "Well then everyone should be going to your church."

Application: The Gospel of John is like our church that way. John wrote it not so that spiritually healthy people can get a few pointers on morality, nor to contribute to one of many worthy religions. He wrote it so that spiritually dead people might live in the name of Christ. If you think you have spiritual life through your own name this morning, you are going to miss the importance of reading the Gospel of John. John tells us that we can only have spiritual life through the name of the Christ, the Son of God. Do you know who He is? Has He given you spiritual life?

Conclusion: John knew exactly who the Christ, the Son of God is, and he writes to tell us. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He is Jesus because

- Jesus is the Word who became flesh (1:1-28),
- Jesus was Spirit-anointed (1:29-34),
- Jesus's disciples followed Him (1:35-51),
- Jesus turned water into wine (2:1-11),
- Jesus was zealous for His Father's house (2:12-25),
- Jesus is the gift of God's love (3:1-21).

And those are only the first 2.5 chapters! John will go on to give us 21 chapters of reasons why we should believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that believing we should have life through His name.

Chapter 3 contains what may be the most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Everlasting life is why John wrote. Everlasting life is why we must read and believe.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*