

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

(Study Notes)

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By

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INDRODUCTION: General traits

The fourth gospel is the most recent and **very different** in character from the three synoptic gospels: it appears as the “spiritual gospel” and the gospel of mystagogy: symbols and sacraments (how to live out the new life given by the Risen Jesus by means of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist), the Gospel of mature Christians. In it Jesus gives long speeches where he shows very striking definition of self, as we will see later, and explains the symbolic meaning of the miracles or signs which he performs.

All the same, the Gospel of John is reliable in the information it gives: that the public life of Jesus covers three Passover Feasts (during the first one in Chapter 2, he purifies the temple; during the second one in chapter 6, he gives the Eucharistic discourse at Capernaum; and the third one, in chapter 13, where there is the Washing of the feet, consists in the week of Jesus’ Passion and death) and consequently we can say that Jesus’ public life lasted three years.

John is the evangelist who tells us that Jesus was crucified on Preparation Day (Friday) and was taken down from the cross because of the Passover meal which was the beginning of the Great Sabbath.

It is in John that we have the most precise date which consent us to know the time of Jesus’ public life: it is in the episode of the cleansing of the temple: “The Jews then said: It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” (2:20). Since we know for certain from another source that King Herod had started to rebuild the temple in the year 19 BC then the first Passover of the public life of Jesus should be put in the year AD 27 (Luke tells us that Jesus was 30 when he started his ministry), so he would be 33 on the year AD 30, time of his death.

These historical details prove that the Gospel of John was written by an eyewitness as the tradition tells us, although dressed in a highly sophisticated theological garments which in any case enrich the figure and message of Jesus for a believer.

1. It is different, yet the **essential elements of the story of Jesus are present:**

he is born of his mother (John doesn’t name the mother of Jesus, we know that her name is Mary from the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke) (2:1) by a miraculous conception (1:12-13 refers to Jesus’ divine origin but can be also

intended as of a virgin birth); he is born in Bethlehem (7:42); he grew up in Nazareth (1:45); his public ministry was prepared by the preaching of John the Baptist; he called the Twelve (6:70); he was opposed by the Jews authorities, he performed miracles, he was tried, condemned under Pontius Pilate, killed, buried and rose on the third day, appeared to the women and the disciples and called over them the Holy Spirit and sent them to forgive the sins of humanity.

2. Moreover, we have a **series of “Indirect Narrations”**

which seem to point to different episodes present in the Synoptic Gospels and absent in John: **Jesus’ Baptism** (1:32 “And John bore witness: I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven and it remained on him”); **the Agony in the Garden** (12:27 “Now, my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name”. See also 18:11); **the Transfiguration** (12:28-33 “Then a voice came from heaven: I have glorified it and I will glorify it again. The crowd standing by heard it and said that it had thundered. Others said: An angel has spoken to him. Jesus answered: This voice has come for your sake, not for mine....”); **the Confession of Peter** (6:66-69 “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life and we have believed, and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God”); **the Institution of the Eucharist** (6:53-59 “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you...”); **the Ascension and Pentecost** (20:22-23 “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said: Receive the Holy Spirit....”).

Serious biblical scholars have examined the text of John’s Gospel looking for terminology and images that are related to the Synoptic Gospels and can bring us to the original words of Jesus (*Ipsissima verba Jesu*) and have found more than seventy of them: an example is the passage in 12:23-26 as related to Matthew 10:39, Mark 8:35 and Luke 9:24 “He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life”.

The Gospel of John represents **an advanced stage in the understanding of the Mystery of Christ**: the historical facts and Jesus’ sayings are undoubtedly at the base of the narration but the theological interpretation of the facts prevails as if

everything is viewed from the fact of the Resurrection which proves Christ's divinity.

3. The seven signs

The Gospel of John begins with a **magnificent prologue, which states many of the major themes and motifs** of the gospel. The prologue proclaims Jesus as the pre-existent and incarnate Word of God who has revealed the Father to us. The rest of the first chapter forms the introduction to the gospel proper and consists in the Baptist's testimony about Jesus as the Lamb of God, followed by the stories of the call of the first disciples, in which various titles predicated of Jesus in the early church are presented.

The gospel narrative contains a series of "signs", the gospel word for the wondrous deeds, miracles of Jesus. The author is primarily interested in the significance of these deeds, and so interprets them for the reader by various reflections, narratives and discourses.

The first sign is the transformation of the water into wine at Cana (2:1-11); this symbolizes the entire creative and transforming work of Jesus.

The second sign, the cure of the royal official's son (4:46-54) simply by the word of Jesus at a distance, signifies the power of Jesus' life-giving word. The same theme is further developed by other signs, probably for a total of seven.

The third sign, the cure of the paralytic at the pool with five porticoes in chapter 5, continues the theme of water offering newness of life. In the preceding chapter, to the woman at the well in Samaria, Jesus had offered living water springing up to eternal life, a symbol of the revelation that Jesus brings; here Jesus' life-giving word replaces the water of the pool that failed to bring life.

Chapter 6 contains two signs (4th and 5th), the multiplication of the loaves and the walking on the water of the Sea of Galilee. These signs are very much connected as the manna and the crossing of the Red Sea are in the Passover narrative and symbolize a new Exodus. The multiplication of the loaves is interpreted for the reader by the discourse that follows, where the Bread of Life is used first as a figure for the revelation of God in Jesus and then for the Eucharist. A series of

dialogues reflecting Jesus' debates with the Jewish authorities at the feast of the Tabernacles are developed in Chapter 7 and 8.

The six sign is presented in chapter 9, the sign of a young man born blind. This is a narrative illustration of the theme of conflict in the preceding two chapters; it proclaims the triumph of light over darkness, as Jesus is presented as the Light of the world. This is interpreted by a narrative of controversy between the Pharisees and the young man who had been given his sight by Jesus, ending with a discussion on spiritual blindness and spelling out the symbolic meaning of the cure.

And **finally the seventh sign**, the raising of Lazarus in chapter 11, is the climax of signs. Lazarus is presented as a token of the real life that Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, who will now absurdly be put to death because of his gift of life to Lazarus, will give to all who believe in him once he has been raised from the dead.

After the account of the seven signs, the "hour" of Jesus arrives and the author passes from signs to reality, as he moves into the discourses in the Upper Room that interpret the meaning of the passion, death and resurrection narratives that follow.

The whole Gospel of John is the progressive revelation of the glory of God' only Son, who comes to reveal the Father and then returns in glory to the Father. (New American Bible)

A clear concept of "Gospel"

The author's purpose is clearly expressed in the first conclusion at the end of chapter 20: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name".

4. Jesus' self-definitions:

This is a very distinct feature in the Gospel of John. Seven times Jesus defines himself as: the Light, the Bread of life, the Gate to the sheepfold, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life, the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Vine.

The clear message which is implied is that Jesus is God, something which is very evident also from the way Jesus relates to God, the Father. This is the point of arrival also of the Synoptic Gospels, but in them it is Jesus who asks his disciples to identify him and praises Peter for doing so (Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21).

5. Eschatology of the present:

“In the Synoptic Gospels, the revelation of Christ’s glory is associated primarily with his eschatological “coming”, his return at the end of time (Matthew 16:27 “For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each man for what he has done”).

The basic elements of the traditional eschatology: the expectation of the Last Day (6:39-40; 11:24-25; 12:48), the Coming of Jesus (14:3; 21:22-23), the expectation of the Resurrection of the dead (5:28-29; 11:24) and the Last Judgment (3:36; 5:29) all are found in the 4th Gospel, but **the eschatology receives a new and double emphasis: not only in the end but here and now; it is also an inner happening and not only a future, external event.** In this way, the “coming” of the Son of Man is interpreted primarily as the coming of Jesus to this world through the Incarnation, his “lifting up” on the cross and his return to his disciples through the Holy Spirit.

In the same way, the Judgment is presented as something already taking place in the human heart and eternal life (John’s counterpart of the synoptic “Kingdom”) is made to be something actually present, already in the possession of those who have faith. That these “last things” should be seen as present should be not surprising, since salvation throughout history centers on Christ’s historical life, death and resurrection. God’s victory over evil, his salvation of the world is already guaranteed by Christ’s Resurrection in glory. The return of Jesus in the Last Day will be nothing but its confirmation”. (Jerusalem Bible)

6. Authorship, place and time

The Fourth Gospel is the only one that has the name of the author in it: 21:24 “This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things: and we know that his testimony is true”. These words are written by

John's disciples who added the epilogue (Chapter 21). The disciple is "The disciple whom Jesus loved" i.e. John, as it was constantly believed by the tradition, he is obviously the disciple of John the Baptist who followed Jesus together with Andrew and the writer of the piercing of Jesus side in Chapter 19:35 "He who saw it has borne witness – his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth – that you also may believe". This is confirmed by 15:27 "And you also are witnesses, because you have been with me since the beginning".

The place was probably Ephesus and the date from 90 to 100.

Division:

Prologue (1:1-18): "In the beginning..."

The Book of Signs (1:18-12:50): Jesus' Ministry

1. Proclamation of the New Order (1:19-4:54) the inaugural week and the events of the first Passover
2. The second feast (5:1-47) a Sabbath in Jerusalem; the first opposition
3. The second Passover (6:1-71) in Galilee; new opposition
4. The feast of Shelters (7:1-10:21) the great messianic revelation; the great rejection
5. The feast of Dedication (10:22-42) the decision to kill Jesus
6. Jesus moves towards his death (11:1-12:50)

The Book of Glory (13:1-20:31) Jesus' Hour: The Passover of the Lamb of God

1. Jesus' last meal with his disciples (13:1-17:26)
2. The Passion 18, 19
3. The Resurrection; commissioning of the disciples (20:1-29)
4. First ending of the Gospel (20:30-31)

Epilogue: The Resurrection Appearance in Galilee (21:1-25) The Risen Jesus teaches the Church.

PROLOGUE (1:1-18) In the beginning...

The concept of WORD is traditional in the Old testament (*Davar*) and the Greek term correspondent “*Logos*” doesn’t need to derive from philosophy. The Word in John is with God and is God; everything is created through him.

This reminds us of the concept of WISDOM in the O.T. Wisdom was active in the whole work of creation (Proverbs 8:22-31). And wisdom carries history to its goal: in the book of Wisdom, the qualities attributed to Wisdom are, from chapter 11 onwards, attributed to God himself, but this is because Wisdom and God, in his function of world-ruler, are the same reality.

Wisdom however is “an emanation of the glory of the Almighty...a reflection of the eternal light...an image of his goodness (7:25-26) and it is therefore distinguished from God, but at the same time is the radiance of God’s nature.

The author here, it seems, goes no further than the other wisdom writers: it doesn’t appear that he gives Wisdom an existence of its own, but the whole passage on the nature of Wisdom (7:22-8:8) is a step forwards in the expression of the traditional ideas and a deeper perception of them.

So, the teaching of the book of Wisdom represents the Jewish tradition of the Scriptures, but also the influence of the Greek philosophy, in the overcoming of a dead point: death, with the doctrine of life after death: the concept of “soul” i.e. what in man doesn’t die. Wisdom is not only an attribute of God, but almost a Person, very close to God with whom she collaborates. The relation between Wisdom and the Word of God or the Law is already stated clearly by Sirach 24:23-34 and meditated upon in countless ways in Psalm 119.

In the New Testament, Wisdom is the WORD i.e. Jesus, not only here in John 1:1-18, but in 1 Corinthians 2:7, Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 1:1-3.

1:14 “**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us**” The Incarnation of the Word makes God personally and visibly present. It is no longer a presence un-seen and awe-inspiring as in the Tent or Temple, nor merely the presence of divine Wisdom enshrined in Israel Mosaic Law (Sirach 24). The human nature of the Word now screens his glory as the cloud once did yet at times it pierces the veil as in the Transfiguration.

1:17 **“Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”**: Grace stands for “favor” and “mercy”, it is the emotional, visceral love HESED and represents the feminine aspect of the love of God (God as Mother); Truth, EMET represents something steady and unchanging: God’s faithfulness. It is the masculine aspect of God’s love (God as Father). Here, in Saint John’s Gospel, Truth is the divinely revealed reality of God manifested in the words and person of Jesus Christ: this is the ultimate and supreme truth.

THE BOOK OF SIGNS (1:19-12:50) Jesus’ Ministry

1. Proclamation of the New Order (1:19-4:54): the inaugural week and the events of the first Passover

1:29 “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”: The description of John the Baptist by John the evangelist is very original and nuanced as it befits a former disciple as John was. John the Baptist announces Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, a unique title which contains already what will come at the end.

In this Gospel, John the Baptist states clearly and emphatically that he is not the Messiah. Then we have the deep spiritual self-presentation of John as the Bridegroom’s friend who says: He must grow bigger, I must grow smaller (3:30).

Going back to the title “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”: it is one of the most significant symbols of Christ. It is developed in the book of Revelation (5:6, 12) where it appears as “slain” and receives “honor and glory”.

Here, in John’s Gospel it blends the idea of “Servant of Yahweh” who takes all sins on himself (Isaiah 53) and offers himself as a “Lamb of expiation” (Leviticus 14) with that of the Passover (Exodus 12) in the ritual that symbolizes Israel’s redemption (Acts 8:31-35; 1 Corinthians 5:8; 1 Peter 1:18-20).

In the Gospel of John, the symbol of the Lamb comes during the passion, since John makes Jesus to be condemned exactly at 12 noon on the Preparation Day, which is the hour when the paschal lambs are slaughtered (19:14). Moreover, when the soldier pierces Jesus’ side, the writer who is eyewitness associates the pierced

Jesus with the prophecy “None of his bones shall be broken” which refers to the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:46). The same sentence is in Psalm 34:30 and it means the protection of the Lord on the just man (19:35-36).

1:35-51 The Call of the first disciples: the titles of Jesus are already present in the passage: Messiah, Son of God, King of Israel.

1:51 “The sky opened and the Angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man”: Jacob’s staircase (ladder) in Genesis 28:12.

Chapter 2:1-12 The Miracle in Cana in Galilee.

2:4 Another translation : “Has not my hour now come?”. The “hour” is that of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection. The miracle of the changing the water into wine is symbol of the new reality of the coming of Jesus: the new wine (life), symbol of the Messianic times: the beginning of Christ’s signs/miracles which manifest his glory (Divinity). Mary’s intercession is powerful: she speaks with the authority of Love.

Chapter 2:13-25 The first Passover at Jerusalem. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (2:19). Jesus meant the temple of his body (2:21). Jesus, in the 4th Gospel, frequently uses terms which, in addition to their obvious meaning, possess a metaphorical, higher sense (2:20 temple; 3:4 new birth; 4:15 living water; 6:34 bread of life; 7:33-36 to depart; 11:11 to awaken; 12:32-34 to lift up; 13:9 to wash).

The body of the risen Jesus is to be the new temple (of the New Testament) : “And I saw no temple in the city (the new Jerusalem) for its temple is the Lord, the Almighty and the Lamb” (Revelation 21:22). The body of the Risen Jesus is to be the focus of “worship in spirit and in truth” (4:21-24), the shrine of God’s presence (1:14), the spiritual temple from which living water flow (7:37-39; 19:34).

Eventually, our body will be the temple of the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:19). The words of Jesus tell that the traditional temple is now obsolete. The destruction of the temple of Jerusalem by the Romans (AD 70) was final.

Chapter 3:1-21 Nicodemus and Baptism: the new Birth. The text shifts from Dialogue (1-10) to Monologue (11-15) and reflection of the evangelist (16-21).

3:14 “Lifted up” this is the way in John’s Gospel the death of Jesus by crucifixion becomes also symbol of glorification.

3:15 “Eternal Life” means God’s life in us, the quality of life which starts in the world but blossoms in eternity. Here, it takes the place of “the kingdom of God”

Chapter 4:4-42 Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Jesus’ self revelation continues with his second discourse to the Samaritan woman and the theme of replacing the worship in the temple with the worship “in spirit and the truth”. Water is again as at Cana and with Nicodemus, the symbol of new life.

Meeting at the well is a feature of the story of the Patriarchs: *Genesis* 24:10-27 Abraham’s servant (Eliezer?15:2) looks for a wife for Isaac, Rebekah; *Exodus* 2:11-22 Moses at the well and Jethro’s daughters. Wells and springs play a significant part in the life and religion of the patriarchal era (*Genesis* 26:14-22 Isaac re-opens the wells of Abraham; *Exodus* 15:22-27 Mara, the bitter water and the wood; *Exodus* 17:1-7 the waters at Meriba from the rock , spring water symbolizes the life that God gives, especially that of the messianic age: *Psalms* 36:8-9 water, light, life (Christ), *Zechariah* 14:8 it symbolizes also the life imparted by the divine Wisdom and by the Law (*Psalms* 13:14; *Sirach* 15:3; 24:23-34).

In the New Testament, this symbolism is carried forward in the Gospel narrative: living water is the symbol of the Spirit (*John* 7:37-39: the water flows from the heart of Jesus). In *Revelation* 7:13-17, The Lamb will guide the Saints to the springs of water; and at the conclusion: *Revelation* 22:17 “The Spirit and the Bride say: Come! And let him who hears say: Come! And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price”.

The Spirit who makes a person a new creature (3:5) is also the inspiring principle of the new worship of God. The worship is “in Truth” because it is the only worship that meets the conditions revealed by God through Jesus who is the Truth.

Jesus is sent by the Father: this is a topic of primary importance in the Gospel of John.

4:11 “Kyrios”: Sir/Mister but also translation of ADONAI which stood for Yahweh: this is post-resurrection title for Jesus.

4:20 Mountain GERIZIM: where the Samaritans had erected their temple.

4:43-54 Second sign: the healing of the son of the royal official in Capernaum by means of the living word of Jesus. The order is given from a distance.

2. The second feast (5:1-47) a Sabbath in Jerusalem; the first opposition.

Jesus' self-revelation continues with the third sign: the cure of the paralytic by Jesus' life-giving word. The reality signified by the symbol of the water prevail here over and above the symbol.

5:14 Jesus never drew a one-to-one connection between sin and suffering (John 9:3; Luke 12:1-5); but Jesus exhorts people to be good (John 8:11) because bad people may expect God's punishment as it is in the tradition of Wisdom literature.

5:18 Hostility of the Jewish leaders because of the words of Jesus who puts himself on the same level as Yahweh (5:17) not minding about the Sabbath rest. Jesus justifies at length his position= he acts and does what traditionally is attributed to God: to give life and to judge. Those who believe in Jesus have eternal life: present, realized eschatology. Responsibility of those who refuse to believe.

5:39 "Search the scriptures, even they testify on my behalf"

5:46 "If you had believed in Moses, you would have believed in me, because he wrote about me"

3. The second Passover (6:1-71) in Galilee; new opposition

6:1-15 The 4th sign: the multiplication of the loaves: this is the only miracle present in all 4 Gospels and it has a precedent in Elijah multiplying the barley loaves (2 Kings 4:42-44).

6:16-21 the 5th Sign: Jesus walks on the waters of the lake. The God of creation: "It is I" reminds us of "I am", the name of God. This we will find repeatedly in John's Gospel.

6:22-71 The Eucharistic Discourse in Capernaum: the Bread of Life, replacement of the manna. Up to verse 50, the "Bread of Life" is symbol of God's revelation in Jesus; 51-59: it is the Eucharist.

4. The feast of Shelters (7:1-10:21) the great messianic revelation; the great rejection

Chapter 7 and 8: the Feast of the Tabernacles (Shelters) and seven controversies and dialogues. The tension between Jesus and his enemies is high: many times he states or it is stated that they wanted to kill him.

1. For healing on the Sabbath
2. “Come to me and drink”
3. About the origin of the Messiah
4. The forgiving of the woman caught in adultery (8:11)
5. Jesus proclaim: “I am the Light of the world” (8:12); he also present himself with the words of God’s name (8:24; 8:28; 8:58; 13:19; 18:5-8). Jesus also states: “Abraham, your father, rejoiced to see my day: he saw it and was glad” (8:56). Let us remember: “For if you have believed in Moses, you would have believed in me, because, he wrote about me” (5:44). Jesus claims the support of the Scriptures since the most important patriarchs and fathers of the faith testify on his behalf.
6. Jesus, ambassador of the Father (8:31-39);
7. Jesus and Abraham (8:39-59).

Chapter 9: The cure of the man born blind on a Sabbath. Jesus is the Light of the world (8:12; 9:5)

9:2 Jesus deny the automatic relationship between sickness and sin (Cf. Luke 12:1-7).

9:39-41 These words spell out the symbolic meaning of the cure.

Chapter 10 Jesus is the Good Shepherd. The words of Jesus are a commentary of the lack of faith of the Pharisees “the hired hands”. Another symbol to identify Jesus. It states the Jesus is God because it takes over the most important image of Yahweh in the O.T.: shepherd: *Psalms* 23; 80:1; *Genesis* 48:15; 49:14; *Micah* 7:14.

10:17-18 The sacrifice of Jesus is free and voluntary: he is in perfect control of his life and death.

5. The feast of Dedication (10:22-42) and the decision to kill Jesus

10:22 Feast of the Dedication of the Temple after the restoration of the Maccabees AD 164. Jesus' body takes the place of the temple (10:36 "consecrated" like the new temple).

6. Jesus moves towards his death (11:1-12:50)

The 7th sign, the greatest, the resurrection of Lazarus. Jesus is "The Resurrection and Life". This story is only in John. In Luke (*Luke* 16:19-31), we have the parable of the rich man and Lazarus where Lazarus is asked to come back to earth but it is impossible.

11:49-53 The official decision to kill Jesus and the unwanted prophecy of Caiaphas.

11:55 The last Passover during which Jesus' "hour" will come and the Paschal Mystery will be accomplished.

12:1-11 the Anointing at Bethany. The identity of Mary, here she is the sister of Martha and Lazarus. But in *Matthew* 26:6-13 and *Mark* 14:3-9, the woman is unknown, in the house of Simon the Leper, town the same, time the same, framework of the story the same. In *Luke* 7:36-48, the episode is apparently different, but house of Simon, the Pharisee and the gestures of the woman are the same. Personally, I like to follow John and see in Mary's gesture a continuation of her reverence for Jesus person (love) which is witnessed by Luke in *Luke* 10:38-42.

12:12-16 Solemn entrance of Jesus in Jerusalem: it is the crowd and not the disciples who prepared it (12:6).

12:20 "Greeks": they are non Jews, Gentiles, but proselytes to Judaism, some with circumcision others only with interest and appreciation for the Jewish monotheism.

12:23-36 The "Hour" of Jesus, of his Passion, Death and Resurrection. The image (parable) of the grain of wheat introduces the axiomatic sentence which goes with it: "Whoever loves his life loses it and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life". This sentence is the same as in the Synoptic Gospels (*Matthew* 10:39, *Mark* 8:35, *Luke* 9:24). John adds the how: in eternal life.

12:27-33 The agony in the garden in John and perhaps the transfiguration (Indirect narrative).

12:34-43 The unbelief of the Jews is paralleled to the unbelief of the crowd to the words of Isaiah. 41 As for Abraham and Moses, “Isaiah saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him”. This is a commentary by the evangelist. The others concerning Abraham and Moses are said by Jesus himself.

12:44-50 Jesus shouts to challenge to believe and explains the unbelief: a spiritual blindness, a choice not to see. Jesus did not come to condemn (12:47 and 3:16-17).

The Book of Glory (13:1-20:31) Jesus’ Hour: The Passover of the Lamb of God

1. Jesus’ last meal with his disciples (13:1-17:26)

13:1...Solemn beginning of the Book of Glory (13-20): Jesus will love humanity to the end, fulfilling the task the Father has entrusted to him, before going back to the Father. The washing of the feet and the discourses precede the account of the passion to interpret them for the Christian reader. This is the only extended example of esoteric (i.e. reserved for a small group) teaching of disciples in John’s Gospel.

13:1-20 The Washing of the Feet: it takes place during the Last Supper. In John, it takes the place of the Institution of the Eucharist. It is presented as a “pattern” (model) of the Crucifixion: it symbolizes cleansing from sin by sacrificial death. It is like a dramatization by Jesus himself of the passage in Luke 22:27-30 where there is also the image of sitting at table in the kingdom: connection between Eucharist and Washing of feet.

13:17 it contains the first Beatitude in John’s Gospel: the Beatitude of active love. The second we will find in the episode Thomas, after the resurrection: the Beatitude of Faith (20:29).

13:23 “One of his disciples, the one whom Jesus loved was reclining at Jesus’ side (close to Jesus’ breast)”. The disciple is not given a name but is understood as John, the writer of the Gospel (21:24). He is present in 18:15; 19:26; 19:35; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20.

13:31-38 Introduction to the two Farewell Discourses and Priestly Prayer of Jesus. These seem to be Johannine compositions including saying of Jesus at the Last Supper or on other occasions, modeled on the similar farewell discourses in the O.T. (Moses, Joshua, David) and N.T. like Peter's and Paul's in the Acts. The introduction speaks of Jesus' departure (13:1 and 13:33 and 36) and return (14:3 a rare reference to the second coming of Jesus (*parousia*) in John's Gospel).

14:8 "Show us the Father" is Philip's request: pathetic if we think of God's prohibition of images which prompts the Gentiles to challenge the Jews in exile: "Where is your God?" as in *Psalms* 42:3 and 10. Here, Jesus is the "image of the invisible God" (*Colossians* 1:15). The uniqueness and vital importance of the Incarnation.

14:16 "Another Advocate" Jesus is the first advocate

14:31 This seems to end the discourses, but then Jesus continues.

15:1-16:4 *Discourse of the union of Jesus with his disciples*. His words become a monologue and goes beyond the immediate crisis of the departure of Jesus.

15:1-17 The symbol of the vine is present in the O.T., usually it represents Israel: Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:8-17 (in 80:15 Call to Yahweh to visit this vine...); Wisdom describes himself as a vine (*Sirah* 24:17).

16:13 "the things that are coming" meaning the Passion and Death of Jesus.

17:1-26 *The Priestly Prayer of Jesus*: Jesus prays to the Father for himself (1-5), then he intercedes for the disciples who are there, at that moment (6-19) and for those in the future (20-21). Pope Benedict XVI, in his book "Jesus of Nazareth", writes that the Priestly Prayer is modeled on the Day of Atonement (Expiation), Leviticus 16: first Jesus prays for himself, like the High Priest does, then for the disciples. He "consecrates" himself for them so that they on their turn may be "consecrated in truth" (17-19). Consecration=to be totally set apart for God, also sacrificed.

17:3 Only here Jesus calls himself: Jesus Christ, may be catechetical addition.

2. The Passion 18, 19

In John's Passion, Judas doesn't kiss Jesus and there is no account of the question of the High Priest to Jesus about his divinity, but the reason of Jesus' death is the same as from the words of the Jews to Pontius Pilate in 19:7.

18:28 The Jews take Jesus to the Praetorium in the morning of Friday (Preparation Day 19:31). They do not enter "in order not to be defiled so that they could eat the Passover": in the evening it would be the Great Sabbath already. The Synoptic Gospels give the impression that the Thursday Night supper was the Passover meal (Mark 14:12). John's chronology is more accurate. Maybe Jesus anticipated his Passover Meal with his disciples when he instituted the Eucharist.

18:28-19:16 Jesus in front of Pontius Pilate. The trial with Pontius Pilate is much developed in John's Gospel. The trial in front of Herod is missing. The dealing of Pontius Pilate with Jesus is like a play/drama with seven scenes. The division in scenes is given by the movements of Pilate going out to speak with the Jews and coming in to speak with Jesus.

19:5-14 Jesus is presented to the crowd as king and made sit on the chair of judgment in the *Lithostrotos* (stone pavement). By the way, archeologists have unearthed such a pavement in the fortress Antonia in Jerusalem. John tells us that it was noon on *Parasceve*/Preparation Day for the Passover (verse 14). This was the hour when the priests began to slaughter the lambs in the temple (Cf. Jesus, the Lamb of God 1:29). This is the hour of Jesus' death sentence. He will actually die at 3pm as in all the Gospels (In Mark Jesus is crucified at noon but dies at 3pm). The way John describes the conclusion of the trial shows that Jesus is the true King (King of love) and judge of the world.

In John we have the last words of Jesus to Mary and John, then "I thirst" and the last "It is finished". In Matthew and Mark, we have only the cry of Jesus. "My God, why have you abandoned me". In Luke the other last words: "Father, forgive them...", "Today, you will be with me..." and "Father, into your hands..." These are the 7 words of Jesus on the cross.

19:31-37 The piercing of Jesus' side (Cf. What we wrote for John the Baptist crying: Behold the Lamb of God...).

19:30 “He handed over his spirit”: double nuance of dying and passing on the Holy Spirit (Cf. 7:39 “There was of course no spirit yet, because Jesus had not been glorified”). Typical of John: “he handed over..”. In Matthew: “He gave up his spirit”: Jesus is in control (Matthew 27:50). In Luke and Mark: “He breathed his last”.

19:38-41 In John, Nicodemus brings the spices and they bind the body of Jesus with the burial cloths and the spices according to the Jewish burial customs. In the other gospels, the spices are prepared but they bury provisionally without. We can assume that even in John the burial was hurried and not definitive. On Sunday morning, this is what the women intended to do: to wash, to anoint and to wrap the body of Jesus for good.

3. The Resurrection; commissioning of the disciples (20:1-29)

In John, the sign of the empty tomb is developed from Luke 24:12 and it is already a proof of the resurrection in the faith of John, the beloved disciple. The apparitions are also more developed in line with Luke.

20:17 “Stop holding on me” Jesus is going to the Father for his glorification (Ascension) and to start giving the Holy Spirit and sending the apostles in mission (20:21). In John, everything happened in the first Sunday evening.

Moreover, the apparitions have 5 characteristics: 1. They are unexpected; 2. The initiative belongs to Jesus; 3. Jesus identifies himself; 4. The disciples are happy to see the Lord and now they understand. 5. He sends them to mission.

The understanding of the disciples at the resurrection is a quality leap: for the two of Emmaus, they see the full *kegygma*; Mary Magdalene is invited to pass from simple human love to supernatural love in recognizing in Jesus the redeemer, the Lord; Thomas is called to faith and Peter to pastoral love.

Epilogue: The Resurrection Appearance in Galilee (21:1-25) The Risen Jesus teaches the Church.

Chapter 21 is an addition by John’s disciples, but it is present in all manuscripts.

