

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John

(SB_JN21_John's Purpose Statement and Conclusion)

John's Purpose Statement (20.30-31)

In 20.30-31, John declares the purpose for his Gospel – “these [signs – v. 30] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (v. 31). So, John clearly associates “believing” with “life in His [Jesus'] name.” So, a couple of significant questions emerge from this passage.

- ✓ Does this purpose statement indicate that John's Gospel was primarily meant for the unbeliever, i.e. the person who had not accepted Jesus as the Messiah?
- ✓ Or, does this purpose statement indicate that John's Gospel was primarily meant for the believer in order to bolster the believer's faith?
- ✓ Or, is it possible that John's purpose statement encompasses the needs of both groups?

Before I address these questions, let us first take a look at some of the key phrases and terms in these two verses. We'll thereby follow the basic hermeneutical approach of 1) observation of the passage; 2) interpretation; and 3) application. First, some observations:

- ✓ The word for signs is the neuter, plural, accusative of semeion. Note that John indicates that Jesus performed these “signs” in the presence of His disciples in addition to many other signs that were not recorded.
- ✓ The phrase “in the presence of” is derived from the Greek word enopion which can be translated in various ways – “before,” “in the sight of,” “in the opinion of,” or “on behalf of.”
- ✓ The phrase “that you may believe” is translated from the 2nd person plural, aorist, active, subjunctive of pisteuo.
- ✓ The phrase “that believing you may have life in His name” is translated from the Greek.
- ✓ This phrase includes the present, active, participle, masculine, plural, nominative of pisteuo - believe + the 2nd person plural, present, active, subjunctive of echo – have, possess.
- ✓ There is no qualifying adjective associated with the word “life.”

Based upon these observations, we can interpret the passage. Some points of interpretation:

- ✓ Thirty-five different miracles are recorded in the four Gospels and John selected seven for special consideration – that his readers might “believe.”¹
- ✓ The Greek construction of John's statement in verse 31 – “that you may believe” helps translate his statement in verse 30 from the Greek word enopion with an emphasis toward the phrase “on behalf of.”
- ✓ In other words, we might translate that portion of verse 30 as “on behalf of His disciples.”
- ✓ The combination of the present, active, participle, masculine, plural, nominative of pisteuo + the 2nd person plural, present, active, subjunctive of echo which is translated “that believing you may have life in His name” (the Greek phrase – effectively connects the act of believing and the possession of “life” zoe as simultaneous actions.
- ✓ The use of the word “believe” or derivatives thereof are used prolifically John's Gospel as we have seen on previous occasions.
- ✓ On many occasions, “believing” in Jesus is the subject of Jesus' instructions to His own disciples (e.g. Jn 14.1, 10, 11, 29) and is closely associated with “keeping His commands” (i.e. 13.34; 14.15, 21; 15.14) and “abiding” in Him (i.e. 15.1-10).
- ✓ While some of the early sections of John's Gospel do have a justification focus (e.g. Jn 1.11-13), much of the narrative of Jesus contained in John's Gospel is directed towards

¹ Edwin A. Blum, “John,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 344.

His disciples, i.e. many of whom were already believers – specifically the eleven (excluding Judas of course).

- ✓ Jesus was on many occasions not explaining how to get eternal life, but He was explaining what they were receiving, i.e. the nature and temporal experience of that eternal life.
- ✓ Therefore, a major portion of the message of John's Gospel is not directed towards justification or positional sanctification (i.e. phase 1) truths; rather, the major portion of John's Gospel is directed towards experiential sanctification (i.e. phase 2) truths.
- ✓ The lack of the qualifying adjective "eternal" with the word "life" is most likely John's way of emphasizing the qualitative (vs. the quantitative) aspect of zoe. Consider the following.

"Eternal life" (zoe aionios), occurs forty-three times in the New Testament, with twenty-three of those in either John's Gospel or epistles. Additionally, "life" (zoe) is used ninety-two times without "eternal" (aionios), including forty-four occurrences in Johannine literature. It has both quantitative and qualitative aspects to its meaning which are recognized by all. The quantitative aspect of eternal life focuses on it as something possessed and as life enduring without end. Its qualitative aspect has experience and expression in daily life in view. It is entered into at regeneration and is experienced in the present.²

- ✓ Therefore, even though John did not qualify the word "life" with the adjective "eternal," he is still referring to the qualitative aspect of eternal life that is the experience of the believer who "abides" (Jn 15.1-10) with Christ because that believer practices belief as a way of life.
- ✓ John combines a focus upon the singular action of "belief" (i.e. the aorist tense of - pisteuo) in the phrase "these are written that you may believe" (v. 30) with the expected continuing activity of "believing" (i.e. the present tense o - pisteuo in participial form) in the phrase "that believing you may have life in His name" (v. 31).
- ✓ In so doing, John seems to capture the essence of both phase 1 and phase 2 truths that God desires for each believer.

Therefore, the eternal life John is talking about in this purpose statement means more than "salvation" in the sense of regeneration or future existence. It is the life of God experienced in the life of the believer. It is as much sanctification truth as justification truth.³

John's purpose statement therefore seems to encompass a two-fold objective that is present in the whole of his Gospel. For unbelievers, John has included enough material to give evidence to the fact that Jesus was indeed the divine Son of God so that justification faith might result. For believers, John includes much material in His Gospel that clearly indicates God the Father's and Jesus' desire that believers exercise a continuous faith so that they might experience a quality of life that is associated with Him and eternity.

John's Concluding Chapter (Chap. 21)

John's major purpose in this final chapter seems to be two-fold: 1) to document Jesus' restoration of Peter and 2) to correct an erroneous idea about Jesus' return. In addition, the chapter provides additional information about the identity of the author which is important since some have argued that the chapter's anti-climatic nature seems to indicate that perhaps it was

² Gary Derickson and Earl Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker, What Matters Most to Jesus* (Salem, Oregon: Charis Press, 2001), 302-303.

³ *Ibid.*, 331.

written by another person. However, the linguistics of the chapter are consistent with the previous chapters of the book, thus pointing to the same author.⁴

Peter Goes Fishing (vv. 1-14) – This is a very touching narrative. Peter, discouraged and spiritually defeated after his denial of the Lord, decides to go fishing to sort it all out. Peter just wanted to get back to some routine and restore normalcy to his life. The disciples had just gone through an upsetting series of events, e.g. the Triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem with the expectation of the kingdom's inauguration, Judas' betrayal, their own near arrest in the Garden with Jesus, Peter's denial, their own flight from the authorities, and Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. They were so confused at this point. So, Peter takes six other disciples including John with him to fish.

An angel had promised that Jesus would meet the disciples in Galilee (Matt 28.7). John was the first to recognize Jesus and said to Peter "It is the Lord" (v. 7). John had also been the first to observe the significance of the grave clothes (20.8). Peter didn't try to walk on the water this time. He just swam the 100 yards or so to shore where Jesus already had grilled fish and bread prepared for them. In addition, they had 153 fish of their own that they had caught.

This meal was a memorable event for all of them. Years later Peter would use the event to validate the fact that his witness of the resurrection was reliable (Acts 10.41).

Peter is restored (vv. 15-19) – Jesus asks Peter if he loved Him more than "these." Most likely, Jesus was referring to the other disciples. Jesus was giving Peter a chance to express his love for Jesus since Peter had denied Jesus three times. Peter had previously made a statement that was laced with some arrogance – "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble" and "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You" (Matt 26.33, 35). Jesus spends the time to restore Peter to a position of prominence not because he would be the head of the Church, the Body of Christ as the Roman Catholic Church interprets this passage, but because Peter was to be very significant in leading the Jerusalem "assembly" or "church." Paul would later assume the more prominent role in laying the foundation for the body of Christ in this age.

⁴ Blum, "John" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, 344.