

## Study Guide for the Gospel of John

### *Approaching the Gospel of John: Initial Reflections*

**Assigned Reading:** Gospel of John, Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, chapter 9.

After you listened to the lecture, and have done the reading in Powell, the study guide has a twofold purpose:

- 1) To facilitate continued reflection and integration of the material by appropriating in the reading of select themes and passages in the Gospel of John.
- 2) To provide focus questions for group discussion of the Gospel of John in the light of the lecture and the reading.

Before you work through the study guide do the following:

- Make a brief list of the ideas and insights you encountered in the lecture and the textbook that challenged your working assumptions about the Gospel of John.
- Make a list of questions you would like to investigate further or discuss with others engaged in the class.

Read through the Gospel of John again in one sitting and do the following:

- Summarize in your own words what you think John's story of Jesus is about.
- Make a list of important themes and some of the ways your own understanding of John is different from what you heard in the lecture and read in Powell. Identify important questions the lecture and reading raised for you, and select key ideas and passages you would like to revisit.

### *Deeper Engagement with the Gospel of John*

The lecture and the chapter on John in Powell emphasized the differences between the Gospel of John and the Synoptic Gospels. One of the key differences is that the main theme in Mark, Matthew and Luke is Jesus' proclamation and enactment of the "kingdom of God". In John the phrase "kingdom of God" only occurs in John 3:3-5 and Jesus uses the term "kingdom" only once in replying to Pilate: "My kingdom is not from this world." Instead of a singular focus on the "kingdom of God", John uses a variety of themes, metaphors and symbols to tell the story of Jesus from a distinctive perspective.

An important key to understanding the Gospel of John is the opening prologue in John 1:1-14. The prologue is a poetic summary of the plot, point of view, and core concepts of the ensuing narrative. It is a hymn that draws on the Jewish Wisdom tradition to depict Jesus as the personification of preexistent Divine Wisdom who took up residence in the person of Jesus. John tells the story of Jesus as a cosmic tale of the "man from heaven" who came to reveal God. Two important and related images in the prologue that are employed throughout the Gospel of John to describe the purpose and work of Jesus are "life" and "light":

“All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”  
John 1:3-5

The lecture suggested that if there is one theme around which all the others revolve or converge it is this theme of “life”.

### *An Exercise in the Practice of Interpretation*

The following exercise is designed to help you explore in more depth the theme of “life” in the Gospel of John. Do the following work on your own, and then you will discuss what you have learned with others.

- Use a concordance to look up all the passages in the Gospel of John that use “life”. Summarize in your own words how Jesus brings “life” to the world (*cosmos*) in the narrative. Discuss the character and quality of this “life”.
- Read the article “The Promise of Life in the Gospel of John” by Paul Minear, which can be found online at: <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/jan1993/v49-4-article4.htm>. Briefly summarize the thesis of the article. In the article how is the Johannine theme of “life” illuminated by the creation story in Genesis? Do you find this helpful? How does the article describe the relationship between “life” and “belief” in John?
- A turning point in the Gospel of John is the raising of the Lazarus. It is because of this restoration of Lazarus’ life in the middle of the narrative that the Jewish authorities conspire to kill him. Read John 11:1-53 carefully. What does it mean for Jesus to say to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.” (11:25)? What are some other episodes and passages in John that illustrate what it means to believe that Jesus is “the resurrection and the life”?

### **Discussion Question**

In the Gospel of John Jesus is the “Man from heaven” who has come to reveal God and offer “life” to the world.

- In John 5:24 Jesus says, “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.” Read this verse in its context in John 5. In the light of the work you have done on the theme of “life” in John, what does this passage mean in the context of the narrative? Give some examples from the Gospel of people who believe in Jesus and have “passed from death to life”.
- What is the significance of the claim in John that Jesus has come that we might have life for your own life and ministry? In particular, what are the signs of life for those who trust and “remain” in Jesus? What would the “eternal life” that Jesus offers look like in the context of your own life and ministry?