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Session 11 John and Parables

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All right. Ready to go deep. Today, it's the Gospel of John.

And you know, it might sound familiar- oh, another gospel- but John, oh, he's got a different vibe going on. Yeah. It's like he took those Jesus stories and just, like, infused them with this mystery.

It's the one they called, even way back then, the spiritual gospel. They knew it. And get this, John, he knows the other gospels are out there.

Right. Like, he's aware. He's read them, but he still does his own thing.

Why? That's what we're going to get into. That's the big question. So, what's so different about John's voice? What makes it stand out? Well, John's just up front, right from the start.

Jesus is God. No beating around the bush. He uses titles like Logos, Word.

And if you think about the time, like, Jewish and Greco-Roman ideas, it's a bold move. He's speaking to people who know these concepts, and he's saying, yep, this is him. It makes you wonder who he was talking to, their lives, what was going on that made this click with them.

It's like a puzzle, the whole context. And speaking of context, John, he's big on eternal life. It's everywhere.

Where others might say, Kingdom of God, John's talking about life beyond, something that keeps going. It makes sense if his people were facing tough times, you know, maybe persecution. Eternal life, that's hope, something to hang on to when things are rough.

Exactly. He goes back to that Old Testament idea: new creation, a world made new, no more suffering, no death. John's saying Jesus isn't just a teacher.

He's fulfilling that promise. He's the link to that life that never ends. And talk about John's stories, some wild ones you only find in his gospel.

Nicodemus, this Pharisee, sneaking off to see Jesus at night- come on, secret nighttime meetings. There's got to be some drama there. Yeah, total drama.

You wonder what Nicodemus was so afraid of, right? His reputation. Or was he really searching but scared to go all in? And we can't forget that's where we get John 3.1 Seath, one of the most famous verses in the whole Bible. For God so loved the world.

Everyone knows that one. Classic. Okay, what else does John have that's unique? Well, the Samaritan woman, well, that's a big one.

Not just a woman, which was already pushing it for a rabbi to be teaching, but a Samaritan. John's breaking all the rules here, social and religious. Like he's saying, look, Jesus doesn't discriminate in his message.

It's for everyone, no matter who you are, where you come from. He's not just talking the talk. He's showing it through these stories.

Jesus sees her, not as some outsider, but as someone worthy of his time, his teaching. He offers her living water, that symbol of eternal life. Okay, and then there's that final discourse, chapters 14 to 17, like a crash course in John's theology, all about love, unity, the Holy Spirit.

It's intense. It is. Jesus is preparing them, his disciples, for when he's gone physically.

The Spirit's coming. It's personal, reassuring them: hey, I'm still with you, even when you can't see me. Comfort for them, comfort for us.

And those I am sayings, John loves those. It's like each one is a power-up, unlocking a deeper level of Jesus. I am the bread of life.

I'm the light of the world. I'm the good shepherd. He's not holding back.

They're powerful because they're not just metaphors. They tie into God in the Old Testament. When he says, I am the bread of life, it's like the manna, you know, sustaining the Israelites in the desert.

John's making a big statement. Jesus is the sustainer, the true source. And those images, they stick with you.

It's not a lecture. It's like, experience this, feel it. And John's not done.

The way he describes the world, it's so stark: dualism, light and dark, above and below, life and death. It's like this constant battle playing out. You feel the urgency, like, pick a side.

Are you with Jesus, with the light, or are you holding on to the darkness? And if his community was facing persecution, will that kind of black-and-white thinking make sense? Yeah, their reality is right there in the way he tells the story. All right, so, John, he's definitely the mystic, the theologian of the Gospels. His take on Jesus is unique, full of these amazing insights.

But let's switch gears now and talk about Jesus's teachings, specifically parables. We'll see how one scholar back in the 19th century kind of flipped the script on how we understand them. And it's more exciting than it sounds, trust me.

Oh, for centuries, people saw parables as these giant allegories. Every detail had some hidden spiritual meaning, like they were trying to crack a code. I can picture them hunched over their scrolls, debating the meaning of a fig tree or, I don't know, a mustard seed.

Right. And a guy pretty wild sometimes, like St. Augustine, he has some interesting thoughts about the Good Samaritan. Oh, the Good Samaritan, that's a good one.

The guy who helps the injured man when everyone else just walks on by. What did Augustine see in that? Well, get ready for this. He saw Adam, the devil, and Christ all in that story.

The traveler, that's Adam. Jerusalem, that's the city of peace. Jericho, Adam's mortality.

Thieves, the devil and his demons. And of course, the Samaritan, that's Christ. Adam, the devil, A-N-D, Christ.

Wow, that's some interpretation. Imaginative, sure, but maybe reading a little too much into it, finding symbols where there aren't any. And that's what this scholar, Adolf Jülicher, comes along in the 19th century and basically says, hold on, it's not that complicated.

One main point per parable. That's it. No more chasing rabbits down holes.

So zoom out, big picture, what was Jesus trying to say? Exactly. And today it's kind of a mix of the two. Parables are allegorical, but focused.

Main characters, the events, not every little thing. So it's like finding the right level of focus. You want the whole picture, not to get lost in the pixels.

Right. And a perfect example: the prodigal son. Classic story, forgiveness, redemption.

Each character has a meaning tied to Jesus's message. All right, let's hear it. Who's who in this symbolic drama? The father, he's God, pure and simple.

That limitless love, forgiveness, no matter what. The younger son, he's us, the sinner who comes back wanting mercy. Okay, that makes sense.

What about the older son? The one who stayed put, followed the rules? He always seemed a bit bitter. He's interesting, right? He's the ones who struggle with grace, with forgiveness. They think they earned God's favor.

And it's hard to celebrate when others get it freely. Think of the Pharisees, all judgmental of Jesus welcoming sinners. So it's not just about forgiveness.

It's how we treat those who receive it, even if we think, well, they don't deserve it. Exactly. And notice the details: the ring, the robe, the pigs, even.

They're not deep symbols. Part of the story, but not the core message. So we got to be smart about it.

Focus on those main players, what they do, to really get the point of the parable. You got it. It's that balance.

Yeah. Seeing the allegory, but not getting lost in the weeds. Understanding the heart of what Jesus is teaching.

Okay, so we've got John, his unique view of Jesus, all that drama, metaphors galore. And now a new way to look at parables. It's not just about decoding.

It's getting to the heart of it. And with that in mind, you're ready to really dive deep into John. There's some real treasure in there.

It's wild how John's gospel and these parables, you know, written so long ago, still hit home today. It's like something universal about them. Yeah.

The power of a good story. Right. And John, he knew how to tell them.

History, theology, personal stuff all blended together. Timeless. And he wasn't afraid to shake things up a bit.

Those I am sayings, remember? Not just slogans. They're bold statements about who Jesus is and the way John uses them. So clever.

Absolutely. He takes these everyday things, bread, light, a shepherd, and boom, suddenly they mean so much more. It's like he's saying, look around, the divine.

It's right here in the ordinary. It makes me think about how we separate things, sacred and secular. But John's saying it's all connected.

The divine is in everything. Beautiful way to put it. And it's something we can take with us.

Reading John, meeting Jesus through his words, his actions. Speaking of meeting Jesus, those I am sayings- any of them really stick with you? Oh, that's tough. They're all so good.

But maybe I am the vine. You are the branches. John chapter 15.

Oh, yeah. That one. So visual.

That image of connection, dependence. Exactly. It reminds us we're not alone.

We're part of something bigger, connected to Christ, the source of life, and to each other. Like branches need the vine. We need Christ to grow, to flourish.

There's that dependence again. It seems to be a big deal in John's gospel. We're not self-sufficient.

We need something more, something outside ourselves. And that's Christ, eternal life, that living water that satisfies us deep down. Funny how we think of dependence as a bad thing.

But John, he flips it, right? It's a strength admitting we need God. It goes against everything our culture tells us, right? Individualism, self-reliance. But John's saying to embrace that need for God.

That's where you find your true self. It's like a paradox, huh? We find ourselves by letting go, surrendering to something bigger, losing ourselves to find ourselves. Exactly.

You know, talking about all this, it strikes me how John's gospel is multilayered. There's the story and then this deeper meaning underneath symbolism, you know, peeling back the

onion, right? Each layer, there's something new, something surprising. And the more you dig in, the richer it gets.

And like those parables, it's not about cracking every code, every detail. Let the story wash over you. Let those images, those metaphors speak to your heart.

Yeah, come with humility and openness, and let the Holy Spirit do the guiding, you know, show you the meaning. Speaking of the Holy Spirit, John, he's got a lot to say about this mysterious third person in the Trinity. Oh, for sure.

Huge theme in John. Advocate, comforter, the one who's there to lead, to empower believers after Jesus is gone. It's like a handover, right? I'm leaving, but you're not alone.

The Spirit's with you. That's it. The Spirit's how Jesus is still present, empowering, equipping his people.

And that empowerment, it's crucial. Think about John's audience. They needed more than just words.

They needed strength, courage to face what was coming. It wasn't just some idea to them, the Spirit. It was real.

It was life. It's what helped them through those tough times with hope and resilience. Makes you wonder: how does the Spirit empower us today in our everyday lives? What does that look like? Good question.

How do we sense the Spirit? Feel that power. How does the Spirit lead us, comfort us, challenge us, help us live like Jesus here in the 21st century? Something to think about, huh? It's personal, but John's gospel gives us some clues. We're not alone.

There's something bigger at work. And that power's for anyone who believes, not just a select few. Open your heart.

It's there. Okay. So we've covered a lot.

John's take on Jesus, the symbolism, metaphors, the Holy Spirit, how it all connects to his people back then. But there's one more piece, right? John's understanding of love. Ah, love.

The heart and soul of John's gospel. I mean, the word love itself has more appearances in John than in any other gospel. It's like he's saying, want to know Jesus, want to know God, you've got to understand love.

And not just any love. That self-sacrificial kind, unconditional. The kind Jesus lived, the kind he died for.

The kind that's willing to lay it all down, even for people who don't deserve it. Right. And it's not just a feeling; it's action.

It pushes us to reach out, to serve, to care, to forgive. John's gospel. It's full of examples.

Jesus washing feet, healing, raising the dead, and ultimately the cross, giving his life for the world. And he tells us, do the same. Love each other as I've loved you.

Tall order, isn't it? It is. But it's also the best way to live because that kind of love, the kind John talks about, it comes from God. So, wrapping up our deep dive into John, the takeaway is this.

If we want to get Jesus to really experience the life he offers, we've got to dive into love. Couldn't have said it better myself. John's gospel.

It's an invitation, a love that changes us, heals us, sets us free. It really is something how a text from so long ago can still feel so, I don't know, relevant to us today. Like John, he got at these core truths about being human, wanting connection, meaning, you know, purpose.

He shows you the power of the gospel message, right? And John, especially, he gets it across in a way that's deep, but you can still grasp it: the imagery he uses, strong metaphors, personal stories. They pull you in. Who is Jesus? What was his mission? John makes you want to find out.

It's more like a relationship he's offering, not just believe these things. And that relationship, as we've been talking about it all, comes back to love, that kind of love that gives everything no conditions, like how Jesus lived, how he died. Love.

It's the key to unlocking John. It's how you have to read everything he says. Because in the end, it's a love story.

God's love for us is so strong; he sent his own son to die for us. It's kind of mind-blowing when you stop and think about it. And it makes you think, okay, so how do we respond to that? What does it mean to live as people loved like that? That's the question John leaves us with, right? He doesn't spell it all out, but he points the way: the way of love, giving yourself, following Jesus.

Not an easy road, but it's the one that leads to life, the real deal, true joy, the kind that lasts. And we're not alone in it. Remember, we've got the Holy Spirit guiding, giving strength, and comfort along the way.

So as we wrap up our deep dive into John, here's a thought for you. Knowing what we know now about why John wrote this, who he was writing to, and his unique way of showing us Jesus, does it change how you read his gospel? What jumps out at you now that maybe you didn't see before? Go back, read John again, fresh eyes. See if you notice those themes we talked about, the symbolism, those metaphors he loved.

And most importantly, let yourself get caught up in that mystery of God's love. Like you're seeing a familiar place, but suddenly you notice these paths you never walked down, these views you missed the first time. Exactly.

There's always something more to find in John, more to learn, more to experience. It's a journey. And if you let it, it can change you.

So go for it. Take that dive deep into John. You might be surprised what you discover.

Thanks for joining us for another Deep Dive, folks. Until next time.