

Dr. David L. Turner, John, Session 1,

Introduction, Part 1

6-Min. Video Overview

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You know, out of all the books in the New Testament, the Gospel of John is a huge favorite for so many people. It's got some of the most famous verses and just these incredible, soaring ideas. But it's also one of the most unique, and reading it brings up this really fascinating challenge.

And it all kicks off with one tiny, seemingly simple line. Okay, so picture the scene. It's one of the most dramatic moments in the entire story.

Jesus has just pointed out his own betrayer, Judas. And Judas, he just leaves the room to get his dark plan going. The author, John, caps off the scene with this simple, really chilling detail.

And it was night. Now, on the surface, that seems pretty straightforward, right? It's just a historical note. The sun went down.

But here's the thing about John. You always have to ask: is there something deeper going on here? Is this just about what time it was, or is he telling us something way more profound about what's actually happening? And that little puzzle, that one line, it actually cracks open the whole challenge we have to deal with when we read this book. It makes us stop and ask, what kind of book is this, really? And how is it trying to communicate with us? Think about it like a newspaper.

You've got the front page, which is supposed to be all about just the facts, the raw investigation of what happened. But then, you flip to the editorial page, and that's all about interpretation. What do those facts mean? So the big question for us as readers of John is, which one are we reading? Is it a historical report, or is it a theological reflection? Well, as you might have guessed, the answer is, it's both.

The Gospel writers, and John especially, are doing something incredibly sophisticated. They're taking real historical events and arranging them in this really creative way to show us what they believe is the ultimate theological meaning behind it all. Okay, so, to get back to our puzzle, to crack the code of It Was Night, we can't just stare at that one verse all by itself.

We've got to become detectives. We have to look for patterns and see how John uses these ideas of light, darkness, and night all throughout his story. And when we start looking, whoa, a really powerful theme starts to emerge.

Right here, Jesus himself gives us the core metaphor. He says it outright. He is the light, and he sets that light in total opposition to darkness.

This isn't some throwaway line. It's literally a key to understanding the entire book. And once you see this pattern, you start seeing it everywhere.

In the very first lines of the book, Jesus is the light that darkness can't stamp out. When that curious religious leader, Nicodemus, comes to see Jesus, when does he do it? At night. And later, when the disciples are all on their own, they fish all night and get nothing.

Until who shows up? Jesus. Right at dawn. See the pattern? You know, the great theologian St. Augustine saw this crystal clear centuries ago.

When he wrote about this verse, he just nailed it. He said Judas didn't just go out into the night. In that very moment, he was the night.

He became the embodiment of spiritual darkness. So here it is. This is the big aha moment.

That line- and it was night- works on two levels at the exact same time. Was it factually, literally nighttime when Judas left? Yes. But John brilliantly uses that real-world detail to make this devastating theological point about Judas choosing to reject the light of the world and fully embrace the darkness.

And this one example perfectly shows us the method John uses for his entire book. He's not just making things up. He's selecting and arranging real events to point to a deeper reality.

Getting a handle on this symbolic layering, well, that's the key to unlocking the whole gospel. In fact, this is so central that scholars actually have a name for the first half of the book. They call it the Book of Signs.

In these first 12 chapters, Jesus' miracles aren't just, you know, magic tricks or displays of power. John presents every single one as a sign. A public act that's meant to point beyond itself to show you a deeper truth about who Jesus really is.

And this whole section is built around a series of these key signs. And each one gets bigger and more significant. It starts kind of quietly, almost privately, turning water into wine at a wedding.

But then the signs get more and more public, more and more profound. He heals a man who'd been paralyzed for decades. He feeds thousands of people with just a little bit of food.

He even shows power over nature itself by walking on water. It all just keeps building and building until it reaches this incredible climax, raising Lazarus from the dead. I mean, that's a direct challenge to death itself.

Every sign is a deliberate piece of John's argument for who Jesus is. And what's really cool is that John is totally open about his method. He flat-out says he knew tons of other stories about Jesus, enough to fill who knows how many books.

But he didn't include everything. He was carefully picking and choosing his material for a very specific reason. And here it is.

Near the end of the book, he just gives us his purpose statement, plain and simple. He basically says, listen, I chose these specific signs, and I wrote them down for one single reason. So that you, the person reading this right now, might believe and find life.

It's not just history. It's a persuasive invitation. So when we pull it all together, what do we see? We see that John isn't just a reporter jotting down notes.

He's a literary artist. He's a master storyteller who's weaving together history, symbolism, and theology into one incredibly powerful story. So this is John's playbook.

He takes real historical events. Then he arranges them in a very specific creative order to build his case. He soaks the whole story in this rich symbolic language, like light and darkness.

And he does it all with one ultimate goal. To reveal a deeper truth about who Jesus is and what he came to do. I think this quote from the scholar L.T. Johnson just sums it up perfectly.

Stylistically simple, yet symbolically dense. The language in John's gospel can seem so simple on the surface, right? A kid could read it. But just underneath that simple style is this whole world of symbolic meaning that people can and do spend a lifetime exploring.

And that kind of leaves us with a final thought for ourselves. John's method is a great reminder that storytelling is almost never just about the facts, is it? Think about it. When we tell stories about our own lives, about a big success or a failure or some really important moment, how often are we, just like John, carefully choosing and arranging the details to show what we believe is the deeper meaning of it all?