

Introduction to the Gospels – Part 3

The Basic Structure of the Four Gospels

The Structure of Matthew: Recall Matthew was the favorite in the early Church because it was the systematic gospel. The author Matthew was a tax collector, and accountants tend to be neat, orderly and systematic, and that's exactly how Matthew is written. Jesus chose him because Matthew will be able to put an organized catechism together for the Christian faith. There are five major discourses that Jesus gives in the gospel of Matthew.

Matthew's Chiastic Structure:

- a Sermon on Mount (Matt 5-7)**
- b Teaching (only) to the 12 Apostles (Matt 10)**
Authority and mission of the Twelve
- c Seven Parables about the Kingdom of God/Heaven (Matt 13)**
- b' Teaching to the 12 Apostles (Matt 18)**
Authority and discipline in the church
Directed to the Twelve
- a' Sermon on Mount Olives (Matt 23-25)**
Last major discourse, called the Olivet Discourse or The Sermon on the Mount of Olive

Just as Moses wrote the Five Books of Moses, The Torah, Jesus is the new Moses in Matthew and is giving a new teaching in five discourses.

Prologue: Infancy Narrative (Matt 1-2)

- a Narrative: New Moses (Matt 3-4)**
Discourse: Sermon on Mount (Matt 5-7)
- b Narrative: 10 Mighty Deeds with Authority (Matt 8-9)**
Discourse: Teaching with Authority 12 Apostles (Matt 10)
- c Narrative: Rejection by People & Leaders (Matt 11-12)**
Discourse: Seven Parables about the Kingdom of God (Matt 13)
- b' Narrative: Jesus teaching the 12 (Matt 14-17)**
Discourse: Teaching the 12 Apostles about Church Authority (Matt 18)
- a' Narrative: Jesus' Triumphal Entry to Jerusalem & Temple (Matt 19-22)**
Discourse: Sermon on Mount Olives (Matt 23-25)

Epilogue: Passion and Resurrection (Matt 26-28)

Both sermons are given on a mountain (as with Mount Sinai) and they're the two longest sermons in the gospel with many parallels between them. The Sermon on the Mount begins with the blessings or beatitudes and the Olivet Discourse begins with the woes (blessed are you..., woe to you ...).

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, you blind guides, you hypocrites. The woes work in inverse order from the beatitudes. So, the last woe matches the first beatitude, and the second to last woe matches the second beatitude and so forth.

So, for example,

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness ...

Then Jesus talks to the scribes and Pharisees in an opposite way,

Woe to you use scribes and Pharisees, you cleanse the outside of the plate and the cup, but inside you're full of extortion.

So, you have plate and cup, hunger, and thirst.

Again,

Blessed are the pure in heart, they shall see God.

But the scribes and Pharisees are **blind** guides.

The peacemakers are children of God.

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, you make your proselytes twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

There is a discourse that's unrepeatable (c) at the center, and it's the seven parables about the kingdom of heaven.

In Hebrew writing, parallelism and repetition invites to reflect on the relationships between these verses. So, if you read the Sermon on the Mount in light of the Mount of Olives discourse it unlocks some fascinating things.

Beatitudes	Woes
Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (5:3)	But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. (23:13-14)
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (5:4)	Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves. (23:15)
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. (5:5)	Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? And you say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.' You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it. And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it. (23:16-22)
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (5:6)	Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! (23:23-24)
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. (5:7)	Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you

	clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. (23:25-26)
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (5:8)	Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (23:27-28)
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (5:9)	Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. (23:29-36)
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (5:10)	
Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (5:11-12)	

To understand the authority Jesus has given the Twelve in (b), he also gives it in chapter 18 (b'), so these two things (b – b') need to be read together.

In between is the kingdom of heaven (c) because the apostles are a new Israel.

So, in the five discourses there are blessings and curses just as Moses gives in Deuteronomy. So, a and a', the outer frame, is Mosaic. Then authority to the twelve. Finally, there are seven parables about the kingdom of heaven, since all is about the kingdom, a Davidic element that is accentuated.

Further, Matthew has a prologue, the infancy narrative, and an epilogue, the passion/resurrection. So, Jesus' birth and his death are going to be the beginning and ending.

Looking at that first discourse (a), the Sermon on the Mount, it is prepared by a narrative. And so, Matthew catechizes in a two-step method. Before every major teaching of Jesus, he gives you deeds of Jesus that prepare you for those words. It's narrative-discourse, discourse being the speech, the narrative being the actions of Jesus.

For example, in chapters three and four, Jesus is presented as a new Moses. The baptism of Jesus and the test in the wilderness is filled with new Exodus imagery. Jesus is in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights, fasting. Moses fasts for 40 days and 40 nights and then

receives the 10 commandments on Mount Sinai at the end of that time. Jesus gives the sermon on the Mount (on a mountain). Matthew prepares the reader in chapters three and four to see Jesus as a new Moses. Then Jesus acts like a new Moses and gives a new law, the Beatitudes.

Likewise, in the next narrative section, Matthew eight and nine, Matthew eight gives 10 mighty deeds or miracles of Jesus, the point of these mighty deeds is Jesus' **authority**. The first one is the leper who says, "If you will, **you can command** that I will be clean." And Jesus says, "I will. Be clean."

Next is the Centurion who comes to, Jesus says, "I'm a man of **authority**. I say to one 'go' and he goes, I say to another one 'come,' and he comes. The centurion is a man of authority who recognizes Jesus' authority.

Next, Jesus heals the paralytic, and says, "So that you may know that the Son of Man has **authority** on earth, I say to you, rise, take up your mat and go home."

The theme is **authority**. These chapters (8 & 9) are demonstrating that Jesus has authority. Numerically, 10 signifies authority, the 10 authoritative commandments. The dragon in Revelation has 10 heads or 10 diadems, which signifies the dragon has authority.

After Jesus heals the paralytic, Matthew uniquely gives a phrase that summarizes that those healed gave glory to God who had given such **authority** (εξουσία) to *men* (plural). Why plural? In chapter 10, Jesus gives his authority to the Twelve, the authority to exercise demons and to forgive sin. So again, the narrative prepares you for the discourse. Jesus exhibits his authority before he imparts verbally his authority. Jesus acts like a new Moses in chapters three and four before he speaks like a new Moses in five through seven.

Next comes the central narrative of chapters 11 and 12. In 11, the people are not responding to Jesus' proclamation to repent. In chapter 12, not only did the leaders not repent, but they turn on Jesus and reject him, and after this rejection Jesus teaches in parables. Parables are introduced earlier in Luke and Mark, but Matthew saves the parables until after Jesus been rejected by the leadership. Matthew's Jewish understanding of **parables are as dialogues in judgment**. They are ways in which prophets speak to those who are sinners, like Nathan to David (recall Nathan tells a wicked David who has just sinned the parable of a man who has a little ewe lamb). Parables are judgment, and Matthew highlights this to the people do not see and hear.

The next section, the narrative of chapters 14 through 17, Jesus, after the rejection of the leaders and the people and teaching them parables, focuses on the twelve, prepares them to be the leaders of the new people of God.

Then in chapter 18 Jesus tells them how they should exercise authority and discipline within the Church with this new structure and their new leadership.

Chapters 19 through 22 is a narrative of Jesus' entry to Jerusalem and the temple that will prepare us for the eschatological discourse about the end of the temple, the end of the city, and the end of the world in chapters 23 through 25. Again, a narrative always prepares you for discourse.

There are different structures for Mark, Luke and John, and they are much simpler than Matthew.

The Structure of Mark

Dating the gospels is not an easy matter, but July 19, A.D. 64 is a crucial date for Mark's gospel. July 19, A.D. 64 is when ten of the 14 regions of the city of Rome were burned down by Nero with devastating effect. Mark's gospel could have been written before the burning of Rome, though some think it happened shortly afterwards. According to the early sources like Irenaeus (c. A.D. 130 – 202), and as Papius mentions, Mark was Peter's hermenutos, his translator-interpreter. This comes from New Testament evidence, not just tradition. In 2 Peter, Peter mentions that he's in Babylon writing with his son, Mark. So, he talks about Mark, the disciple John Mark, being with Peter in Babylon, which is the code for Rome.

Richard Bauckham, in his excellent book *Eye Witnesses to Jesus*, argues that Mark follows a very ancient Greco Roman Hellenistic style of naming eye witnesses when writing a gospel. Recall when the Greeks write history, one must have either be an eyewitness or else have interrogated and spoken to those who were eyewitnesses.

The tradition says that Mark is giving the eyewitness testimony and preaching of Peter and there is a literary device that Mark uses. When giving an account from an eyewitness, one frames the narrative section of their testimony as in the framing device of an inclusio, In Mark, the first of the apostles named and mentioned is not in chronological order. John gives us the chronological order because he was there and tells us what happened that day. So, in John 1, he gives that with great specificity, but Mark doesn't follow the chronology.

Mark's Order (1:16-20):

Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, John

John's Order: (1:40-45)

Andrew, Simon (Peter), Philip, Nathanael (Bartholomew)

In Mark 1:16-17 the first person named that Jesus encounters of the twelve is Peter. Then, at the end of the gospel of Mark, the last person named and in Mark 16:7 again is Peter, where the angel tells the women go tell Peter and his and the brethren about the empty tomb.

So, Peter is the first and last person named and serves as the framing of Mark's gospel with Peter as his primary eyewitness. The details in Mark's gospel give eyewitness testimony. Mark gives all kinds of specific details that fit the kind of vividness of eyewitness testimony.

The other interesting thing about Mark, even though Mark is shorter than Matthew, is whenever Mark and Matthew cover the same material, Mark is usually more concrete and vivid in his details. It seems that Mark doesn't have time for discourses about the lilies of the field (we already know that from Matthew), so he just lops off the Sermon on the Mount and other large sections. But in the description of what does happen, Mark, interestingly, is usually more vivid in the details. You see that kind of vividness in the multiplication of the loaves and fish. Mark mentions that they sat on green grass. Even with the details of the exorcism of the man who's possessed by the legion of demons there's an incredible amount of detail, giving it the flavor of eyewitness testimony.

Comparing the Gnostic gospels (which were written in the second through fifth centuries) with the four canonical gospels, we find that the Gnostic gospels don't have the flavor of eyewitness testimony. Jesus meets somebody, but they don't have a name. It's not Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, it's usually not at a specific time of day. It's not in a specific place at a specific time. Without all the elements of eyewitness testimony is evidence that the Gnostic gospels are fabricated.

The tradition says Mark's gospel is written by Mark from the preaching of Peter in Rome. Mark's gospel more than all the other gospels combined has more Latin terms for the times a day. He follows the four-fold division used by the Romans for the time of divisions of the four watches the night. He mentions the Praetorium. He uses many more Roman Latin terms than any other gospel. There are other clues as well. For example, in Mark 15:21 in the passion narrative we're told that the Romans take a passerby named Simon of Cyrene and he gives narrative detail about Simon of Cyrene. It tells us how old he is, what his profession was, how devout of a Jew he was, that he's the father of Rufus and Alexander. Why tell such detail? Because we know that Rufus was a very important person in the early church of Rome. In Paul's letter to the Romans 16:13 (written circa A.D. 59), Paul is greeting all the Jews in Rome. But interestingly, Paul has not yet been to Rome, yet he greets somebody that he knows personally and who he's met before. He says, "Greet Rufus, who is eminent in the Lord, and his mother, who was a mother to me as well." There's something significant about Rufus. Rufus' father was Simon of Cyrene. So, if the tradition is correct that this gospel was written by Mark for the community in Rome, Paul writes to the community in Rome and greets somebody who is eminently important there, namely Rufus and his mother, who had been like a mother to him, and who Paul knew beforehand. From where would Paul have known Rufus, a Jew, and his mother? Well, the one place we know Paul spent time was in Jerusalem where he studied with Gamaliel. Later on, after his conversion, Paul he returns to Jerusalem for a brief time and at some point, Paul becomes familiar with Rufus and his mother.

Similarly, Mark tells in the narrative that the blind man, Bartimaeus, had five children. Why give that kind of detail? Mark has the earmarks of giving eyewitness testimony.

So, these are internal clues, not incontrovertible proof, but clues that validates the tradition that this was written by Mark in Rome, and for the community who knew Rufus and Alexander, sons of Simon of Cyrene.

Some think that Mark writes after July 19th, A.D. 64, after Rome is burned, where Nero blames the early Christians resulting in a persecution. There are some things in the tradition that suggest that Mark wrote after Peter died. That is possible, but Mark could be writing before Peter died. In either case, he's writing because the Christians are being persecuted. That's why he puts Jesus in the wilderness with the wild beast. Nero is throwing the Christians to the wild beasts and Mark's giving solace to the Christians to let them know that Jesus has been in the wilderness with wild beasts and that they are being conformed to Christ in their suffering.

The Christians are largely in the Jewish sector of Rome which is across the Tiber which has not burned. Apparently, they escaped the fire but get blamed for it. And then they're literally set ablaze by Nero in his gardens and thrown to the wild beasts. For the early Christians, they are asking "Why are we suffering if we're worshiping Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of the Father, who is the Son of God?" "Why, if Jesus is enthroned at the right hand of the Father, why is he letting us, and our families and our children be thrown to the wild beasts and burned for sport in Nero's gardens? Why would Jesus, if he's the Son of God, whose resurrected victorious, why would he allow us to suffer like this at the hands of pagans and mad men like Nero, who seems crazy and evil and wicked? Why is God allowing Nero reign and destroy the Christians?"

Mark's gospel is assuming the Roman Christians been catechized and is showing that they have to take up the cross, the way of the Lord, That they are baptized into Jesus Christ which means they're baptized into his death and must also take up the cross and follow him. So, Mark is reminding the Roman Christians that yes, Jesus is at the right hand of the Father. He's a crucified and cruciform Lord and Messiah, and discipleship means being a cruciform disciple with him.

One of the key themes of the gospel of Mark is this idea of *the way*. And of course, it'll end up being the way of the cross. He begins his gospel by saying *the beginning*, like John. So, he goes back to and starts with *the beginning*,

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it was written in Isaiah, the prophet ...

Mark identifies the good news with Isaiah in a special way. One must understand Isaiah, especially what is known as deutero-Isaiah, the second half of Isaiah, to understand Mark's gospel.

Behold, I send my messenger before your face (which is actually Exodus 23:20), who shall prepare the way. (Malachi 3:1), and a voice crying out in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, Isaiah 40:3.

The theme of *the way* appears, as mentioned in Exodus 23:20, Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 40:3. Now it's important to note that from Acts of the Apostles the early Christians referred to themselves as *the way*. Mark is going to make that one of his key themes of his gospel. The self-identification was not "Christian". That came from the pagans who called them Christians because they kept talking about Christ.

The gospel of Mark has a simple prologue with the baptism of Jesus which concludes in verse 14:

After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying the time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel.

And then in verse 16 we begin the narrative:

And passing along the Sea of Galilee he saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon.

A break in the narrative occurs for Mark which pick up with Mark 8:22:

And he came to Bethsaida and some of the people brought to him a blind man.

Not a big narrative divide, but we think of breaking things in divisions using chapters and sections. Ancient writers, like Mark, when telling a narrative story, doesn't want to break the narrative, but does want to break certain elements of the narrative into sections.

So, the section begins in 8:22, because you have a blind man who Jesus is going to heal. And then in verse 27, Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and *on the way* he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" So, Jesus heals a blind man and he's walking *on the way*. If we then go to the end of chapter, 10:46 the is idea of *the way*: appears again:

And he came to Jericho, and as he's leaving Jericho there is a blind man, Bartimaeus, sitting by the roadside, and he begs Jesus and cries out, Son of David have mercy on me, and he asked to be healed.

Jesus heals him of his blindness. And then says to him in verse 52:

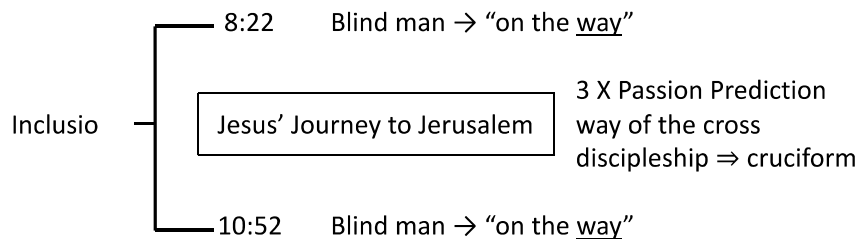
And Jesus said him, *go your way*.

Notice the theme of *way*:

Go your way, your faith has made you well. And immediately he received his sight and followed him on *the way*.

So, the blind man is going on *the way* as in chapter 8:22, and a blind man healed in Bethsaida and going on *the way*. So, this central section of Mark's gospel is framed by the healing of two blind men, the blind man in Bethsaida and the blind man in Jericho. And related to both those, right after each man is healed of the blindness, you have Jesus going on *the way*. And so, *the way* then is a bigger term than just being on the road again. Mark's doing something more than just replaying on the road again, because *the way* means, ὁδος (hodos) in Greek can mean road, path, or way. It's the idea that this *way* is a way of suffering, to the cross. Why?

Because from this section of Mark's gospel, from 8:22 to 10:46-52, you have a blind man and *the way*, and you have a blind man and *the way*. In between these sections in this narrative scene three times, with a threefold pattern, Jesus predicts his passion.



And the threefold pattern is:

Jesus predicts his upcoming passion in Jerusalem (because they are heading to Jerusalem). The disciples reject Jesus's teaching by ignoring it. Jesus tells them that he's going to die, and it's going to be bad. He tells them that he's going to be tortured, handed over the chief priests, and so on. And then he breaks them in a small group discussion after which he gathers back together them and asks, "What did you discuss in your small groups?" And they're quiet because they discussed which of them is the greatest in the kingdom. They're self-absorbed and not worried about Jesus. So, Jesus teaches them about the cross and that discipleship is cruciform.

Every time there's a passion prediction (three times) it follows this threefold pattern:

- Jesus predicts his passion.
- The disciples reject Jesus's teaching by ignoring it.
- Jesus teaches about the cross and discipleship.

Just as with the blind man, right before 8:22, Jesus calls the disciples blind and deaf.

Peter partially sees. Right after the healing of the first blind man, Bartimaeus, in 8:22 and following, Peter says that Jesus is the Messiah, but then rebukes Jesus when Jesus gives the first passion prediction.

So, Peter sees that Jesus is the Messiah, but he doesn't see the nature of his messiahship as one who will atone for Israel's sin. Peter is myopic, just as the blind man from Bethsaida who Jesus heals, but he sees partially, with people looking like walking trees, and must go through a second healing.

So, the man from Bethsaida has only partial vision. Peter has a partial vision of Jesus as the Messiah, but he doesn't understand the cross, and so therefore he doesn't understand discipleship. What Mark is trying to say when Jesus asks the question in 8:22 and following, "Who do people say the son of man is?" isn't just a Christological question. We could pontificate and theologize about who Jesus is, Christology. But at the end of the day, when we define Christology, we're defining who we are as disciples. Mark's reminding us that Jesus was a crucified Lord, so don't be surprised that we're suffering as disciples. Don't be surprised at persecution. Don't be surprised that the world hates you and wants to kill you. The world did the same thing to the one who is the Son of God.

Also, the themes of 1 and 2 Peter to the Church are about not being surprised as if something strange is happening to you when you're persecuted and suffering, and the theme of Peter is the theme of Mark's gospel.

In chapters 11 through 16 Jesus enters into the passion narrative.

There are three simple sections to Mark:

- The Galilean ministry (1-8), and then from 8:22 through 10:52 you have
- *The way* section, on the way to Jerusalem (8:22 – 10:52)
- Jerusalem and the cross.

This is Mark's very simple structure.

Finally, in an early second century writing called *The Acts of Peter and Paul*, it talks about the story called, *Quo Vadis*. *Quo Vadis* was also a novel written by John Paul's favorite Polish writers, Henryk Sienkiewicz.

Quo Vadis is Latin for "Where are you going?" The *Acts of Peter and Paul* mentions that during the persecution of Nero, when Nero is hunting down Christians, the Christians tell Peter, "You have to flee, we don't want to lose you." Peter is an eyewitness and their beloved leader. So, he's smuggled out of Rome, and as he's fleeing, he sees this figure coming, and he gets closer Peter identifies that the figure as Jesus Christ carrying a cross on the same Appian way going into Rome.

And Peter says to Jesus in the text of the *Acts of Peter Paul*, “*Domini, quo vadis*”, “Lord, where are you going?” And Jesus says, “I'm going back to Rome to die. You are abandoning my flock, so I'm going back to die a second time.” Then Peter gets it and goes back to Rome as a good shepherd like Jesus should. Peter will, of course will be martyred, crucified, upside down.

The Structure of Luke

The structure for Luke is very similar to Mark. There is an infancy narrative in chapters one and two, and then in chapter three the Galilean ministry begins, and that Galilean ministry goes all the way to the end of chapter nine. In 9:51, we get a new section, a travel narrative, Jesus's journey to Jerusalem. Mark covered that in 8:22 through 10:52, so in just three short chapters. Luke gives us a much longer version from 9:51 through chapter 19. These chapters contain Luke's unique material.

Again, Richard Bauckham suggests (it can't be proven) that Luke gives special eyewitness accounts. It's not as clean as one would like, but at least for the second half of Luke's gospel, beginning in chapter eight, he mentions several women accompanying Jesus. He mentions them again after the discovery of the empty tomb. Luke begins his gospel saying:

Having followed all things closely and spoken to those who are eyewitnesses from the beginning.

And of course, the first eyewitness from the beginning was Mary herself.

The infancy narrative in Luke gives the eyewitness testimony of Mary. There's the ancient tradition that Luke painted the first icon of Mary (Our Lady of Czestochowa).

In chapter 8, other women are mentioned:

Soon afterwards, he went on through the cities and villages preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him. And also, some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities. Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their means.

The women mentioned are mentioned again at the empty tomb. Also of interest is that Luke tends to be focused on meals and banquets. Luke has more of a focus on meals than any other gospel writer. Much of what Jesus teaches about discipleship happens around meals and women of which Mary and Martha are an example. The infancy narrative begins with Elizabeth. If eyewitnesses testimony comes from Mary Magdalen, Susanna, the Blessed Mother, you can see how Luke can give a different perspective.

These women were eyewitnesses for Luke who tells us he interviewed eyewitnesses. Luke in essence gives us the vision of Jesus through the eyes of these women disciples and is probably why he names them since he's giving their account. Luke has more of a focus on women than any of the gospel writers.

So just as in Mark's gospel, after chapter 19, Luke's gospel follows a three-parts:

- Galilean ministry
- Travel narrative
- Jerusalem.

In Luke 4:16 when Jesus begins his public ministry we read:

He came to Nazareth where he had been brought up and he went to the synagogue as was his custom on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah, and he opened the book and found the place where it is written ...

St. Jerome called Isaiah the fifth gospel since all of Isaiah is predicting the Messiah in Jesus. Here Jesus is in his hometown and this is the inaugural event of his public ministry. The one passage Jesus chooses is the one that speaks about the anointed servant of the Lord announcing the jubilee year. So, Jesus begins the passage from Isaiah 61:

The spirit of Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

“The acceptable year of the Lord” is an idiom for the jubilee year. And of course, to set a release, mentioned twice here, is harkens back to Isaiah. To announce release in Hebrew is to announce the jubilee. Three things are released on the jubilee.

- Slaves are released
- Debts are released,
- Inherited family land that was lost is given back to the family.

One gets your family farm back that your grandfather lost paying off debt, something very important in an agrarian land-based economy. It breaks the cycle of poverty.

The jubilee year is found in Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25. It's what God did for Israel in the Exodus. In the Exodus God saved Israel from slavery in Egypt and forgave them their debt of sin. There's a relationship between sin and debt and slavery throughout scripture.

Thirdly, God gives back their ancient patrimonial land, the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, by bringing them back to the Promised Land.

So, the Exodus is about a Jubilee, and so what Israel is supposed to do every 50 years is to have an internal Jubilee. Just as God had done for Israel, Israel must now do for the poorest of the poor every 50 years, to give the poor an internal Exodus, a release from sins, a release from slavery, and a release of home coming back to land.

Of course, this had not been practiced for a long, long time. Pope Benedict, in his book on the infancy narratives, referring to the French theologian Bertrand de Margerie, S.J. who suggests that in Luke's infancy narrative one can count up the number of days that are mentioned. It comes out to 490, which is the 490 years of exile in the book of Daniel. Now, whether or not you can count the 490 days is a little controversial, but what's not controversial is that it's the angel Gabriel who announces the end of exile in 490 years, which is 10 times the Jubilee. More on this later. So, Jubilee is resonating in the infancy narrative.

Thus, here in Nazareth, Jesus saying he is the anointed one who is declaring a Jubilee of release. This is good news to the poor because it was the poor who are always indebted. It was the poor who, because they couldn't have property to pay their debts, would end up as slaves and lose their land.

King David actually declares a Jubilee expressed using Hebrew idioms. He declares justice and righteousness in 2 Samuel 8 for all of Israel, which is the technical language for declaring a Jubilee. Jesus is the new David, and so he's declaring a release from bondage.

Much of Jesus's ministry relates to the Jubilee, such as the *Our Father* in the gospel of Luke (forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors).

Another example is found in Luke 7:36 where Jesus dines with a Pharisee:

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."

Because she's unclean, a sinner, Jesus shouldn't let her touch him. Jesus said:

"Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both.

When you can't pay a debt, you go to a debtor's prison, and you become property for your debt. So, you could become a slave, your children and your family, your wife could be sold as slaves, and you're not freed from that slavery or from debtors' prison until you've paid it. Now, if you owe 50, your family and friends and your social network might spring you out of debt, but if you owe 500, you're never getting free. It's a story about debt, but it's a Jubilee story, about release from debt. So, Jesus tells a parable here in Luke's gospel that's about the Jubilee. Jesus's public ministry with the story of the Jubilee, announcing it from Isaiah.

Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly."

So, it's a parable, and now he's going to show the woman is loving him more than Pharisee. Now comes the judgment of the parable:

Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman?"

Simon wouldn't even acknowledge her existence.

I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, (Which is customary. You travel on the dusty roads, you given a basin of water for washing of feet.) but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss (a kiss of shalom as welcome), but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

In other words, the lesser to the greater. She has anointed my feet as you should have as a host. You gave no water for foot washing, no kiss of Shalom as a greeting, no oil. The oil was like hand lotion. Jerusalem is a dry and arid climate, and your skin would chap. These were common items that one gave a guest in hospitality before you serve hors d'oeuvres. You give him a basin of water, a kiss of Shalom to show that they're welcome, and oil for anointing their dry skin. The Pharisee did not give any of those things to Jesus, which shows how little love he gave love to Christ. But she, so much more. And so, and then he goes on to say:

Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are *forgiven* ...

The word *afeontai*, ἀφεωνται is the Greek word for the release for the Jubilee. Her sins are released,

– for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little."

The Jubilee runs throughout Luke, who sees Jesus as bringing this release as a Messiah.

Jesus is the King who comes to usher in a Jubilee of a release. Luke is redefining the meaning of Messiah, because for the Jews, when Messiah comes, he would put a yoke upon the Gentiles and crush his enemies and be vindicated and victorious. Luke goes back into the Jewish scriptures to show how Jesus is being royal. He's being kingly in bringing about a Jubilee by releasing debts of sin. Jesus will eventually say to the good thief, *this day you will be with me in paradise*. Jesus is going to give back the ancient patrimonial inheritance that had been lost. In Luke's genealogy he goes all the way back to Adam. Luke, who is a good disciple of Paul, knows about the first Adam and the new Adam, and Luke is going to show that Jesus is restoring the garden of Eden, the paradise that had been lost by Adam. That's the ancient patrimonial inheritance that Jesus wants to restore to us. Much better than just getting the Promised Land freed from the Romans, Jesus is getting the land lost by Adam, Eden, where once again man can be with God. It's all about Jubilee. Jubilee runs throughout Luke's gospel in many interesting and fascinating ways.

As a physician, unlike most professions in the ancient world where men just worked with men, a physician was the one occupation where men worked with women because they need a physician as much as men. Luke is willing to listen to women as eyewitnesses. Luke has a sense of the empathy, mercy, attune-ness to healing and that suffering that comes from being a physician who has to deal with people hurting. This also gives Luke has window into the women as disciples, and into their remembrance of Jesus' witness testimony that they give. Matthew as a tax collector never would have worked with women.

Luke listened and so gives us an insight that Matthew and Mark wouldn't have. Some of the unique material that is told in Luke's gospel that the women remind him of and tell him, whether it's the story of the prodigal son or the road to Emmaus, stories that are unique to Luke.

The Structure of John

The eagle soars to the heights. And John, known as the theologian in the East, John the Mystic, John the Divine, has been given special insight into the meaning of Christ's ministry and his passion and his Pascal mystery.

Saint John Chrysostom (Homilies 1 on John - Preface) writes:

The gospel of John is full of mystery, so great and bringing with it goods so great, that if men were exactly and with ready mind to receive and keep them, they could no longer be mere men nor remain upon the earth, but would take their stand above all the things of this life, and having adapted themselves to the condition of angels, would dwell on earth just as if it were heaven ...

Seeing then it is no longer the fisherman, the son of Zebedee, but He who knows "the deep things of God" (1 Cor 2:10), the Holy Spirit I mean, that strikes this lyre, let us hearken accordingly. For he will say nothing to us as a man, but what he says, he

will say from the depths of the Spirit, from those secret things which before they came to pass the very Angels knew not since they too have learned by the voice of John with us, and by us, the things which we know ...”

Major Themes

Some of the major themes found throughout the fourth gospel include:

- **The Eternality and Divine Sonship of Jesus (John 1:1-3; 5:18; 8:54-59)**
 - The divinity of Christ is emphasized from the very outset of the gospel in the prologue.
- **The Personhood and Divinity of the Spirit (John 14-16)**
 - There is no New Testament work more important than John to understand the personhood and divinity of the Spirit, and since the Bible is the soul of theology there is no writer more important to understanding the Holy Spirit than the fourth gospel.
- **The New Creation (John 1 – 4; etc.)**
 - We see that idea especially in John one and in other passages.
- **Jesus as the Temple (John 2:19-21)**
 - Especially significant is Jesus identifies himself as the temple. The temple is where God dwells. For ancient Jews was, the Temple was the fulcrum of ancient Jewish thought in the first century.
 - Jesus is the new temple. This is a major theme. We have the distinction between the heavenly, often associated with the Spirit, or πνεύμα in Greek, versus the world or the flesh, the σάρκα.

There's also an emphasis on what's known as **realized eschatology**. Eschatology comes from the Greek term ἔσχατος which can mean last or end. In Christian theology eschatology is about the end times of the last things, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the second coming of Jesus.

The term eschatology is a relatively recent term. It was invented by a Lutheran theologian in the 17th century. It's not really a term used by the Church Fathers or Doctors of the Church. It can create a bit of a problem because it makes us think that the ultimate things are chronologically last and we can often fall into this trap of thinking of history as a line, and we're moving along line towards the end of the story. But the examination of biblical revelation shows otherwise. It is not the case that the high point of history simply comes at

the end. Christ's incarnation is the center of history as is the Paschal mystery. One of the problems with eschatology is thinking of it as just future realities. Heaven will be in the future. But in St. Paul's writings, for example, he describes how we are already united to Christ in this life. How we've already been raised with him in baptism.

There was a famous 20th century scholar named C. H. Dodd who wrote a very important book on the interpretation of the fourth gospel as well as important works on parables of Jesus. He emphasized this idea of **realized eschatology**. The ἔσχατος, the last things, are actually breaking into history now. And you especially see this in the gospel of John. In John 5:25-29, Jesus says the

hour is coming and now is.

It's not just in the future. Jesus has already ushered in the new creation.

In John 11:23-26 Jesus talks about the resurrection on the last day. Those in the tombs will hear the voice of the Son of God, the son of man, and they'll rise from the tomb. Yet Jesus raises Lazarus in his ministry. This is not the same thing as the resurrection on the last day, the glorious resurrection of the saints. Lazarus died again. He's not still alive in Jerusalem somewhere.

The point that John really wants to underscore in various ways is that eternal life, the kingdom, isn't just a future reality. It's something that we enter into in the here and now. As Catholics, have fallen into a trap of thinking of salvation and redemption as wonderful mysteries of faith that are purely in the future and we neglect to really pay attention to the way the New Testament helps us realize we're entering into them right now.

This is perhaps why a lot of people fall away from the Church, is because they think of salvation as going to heaven, as something that happens at the end of life, so they postpone getting right with God. Salvation isn't just going to heaven. It's about being united to Christ right now. John's going to especially stress this.

This is not to say that there's no future judgment. There is a future judgment and resurrection of the dead on the last day. All those things are also in John.

Faith. The idea of faith is a dominant theme in John 1 through 12.

- In the synoptic gospels the word faith appears 30 times.
- In the undisputed letters of Paul it appears 54 times.
- In John, the word faith occurs 90 times!

Love The importance of love is also critical in John. God's love for believers. Believers love for God. The command to love others. Love is an important theme in the fourth gospel.

Eternal Life John gives special emphasis to the idea of *eternal life*.

In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus frequently says *the kingdom* is at hand and talks about entering into *the kingdom*.

The idea of entering into eternal life is found in the Synoptics. For example, in the story of the rich young man in Matthew 19. "Lord. What must I do to inherit eternal life?" John emphasizes this idea of eternal life. He essentially what John wants us to help us understand is that the kingdom that Christ proclaims is ultimately about entering into the life of the Father and the Son.

Signs Finally, Jesus refers to his miracles as signs. For example, in John 20.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book. But these 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.

Some Characteristics of John's Gospel

Faith, love, eternal life, and are the major themes. There are interesting stylistic characteristics of John's gospel.

Poetic: The gospel has especially a beautiful, poetic prologue.

Misunderstanding: Another key motif is the idea of misunderstanding. Jesus is talking to someone and uses a word. They think that they understand, and Jesus means something different by the term than they think. Recall Mary Magdalen taking the risen Jesus for the gardener in the garden tomb.

Irony: A speaker will say something that is true without necessarily meaning to say things that it is true. (see John 11:50 – "you do not understand that it is expedient for you tht one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish.") A classic example is the Titulus of Jesus on the cross which said, "King of the Jews." They're mocking him, but he actually is the King of the Jews.

Basic Structure of John's Gospel

- Prologue (1:1-18)
- Book of Signs (1:19-12:50)
- Book of Glory (13:1-20:31)
- Resurrection Epilogue (21:1-25)

Scholars refer to first of the two major middle sections as the book of signs where Jesus is in his public ministry is performing various miracles. The second is the book of glory, which is very closely associated with Jesus's death and resurrection.

Jesus as the Divine Word and New Creation

In chapter one, at the outset, John emphasizes that Jesus is not just the Messiah. He's not just a prophet. He is divine and through him, a new creation is being established.

John 1: *In the beginning*. How does Genesis begin?

In the beginning was the Word.

We have an echo of Genesis. And how does God create in Genesis? He speaks. So, in the beginning, God said, let there be light, and there was light. In the beginning was the Word. So, Christ is the Word through whom the world is created.

And the Word was with God.

We have the idea that the Word is with God from the beginning. The prophet Isaiah speaks about how God was alone in the beginning (see Isaiah 44-49). No one was with him when he laid out the heavens and he created the earth. So, the idea that the Word was with him from the beginning highlights the divinity of the Word. But just in case that's too subtle for you, John is explicit:

And the Word was with God. *And the Word was God.*

It's a shocking declaration, because as we'll see, the Word is Jesus. So, Jesus isn't just the Messiah. Jesus isn't just a divine agent of some sort. Jesus is God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.

There was a dividing line in reality for ancient Jews. On one side of that line is the creator. On the other side of that line is everything else. The God of Israel created everything, and Jesus is on the creator side of that line.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Again, this sounds very much like Genesis. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and God said, let there be light, and God separated the light from the darkness.

And so, in him was life. What does it mean to have life? Real life is found in Christ. So, when Jesus is going to talk about eternal life, eternal life can't be separated from Christ.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

And in verse 14:

And the Word became flesh, and the English translations, as we know, is and *dwelt* among us. But really the Greek word that's used there is ἐσκήνωσεν, and it's a verbal form of a word that's used for the *tabernacle* in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament before the temple was built was the tabernacle. When Moses consecrates the tabernacle in Exodus the cloud of glory comes down. A better way translate this passage is:

And the word became flesh and *tabernacled* among us. We have seen his glory.

So, Christ is the true temple, the true sanctuary.

So much could be said about this prologue. We see the significance of Christ's identity as more than Messiah.

- He is the Word.
- He is divine.
- He is creator.
- He is the one that defines what life means. In him is the life that we are looking for.

There is new creation imagery. Christ is bringing about a new creation.

After the prologue, we're introduced to John the Baptist. John says:

I baptize with water, but among you stands one whom you do not know, even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal, I am not worthy to untie. (1:26-27)

So here John is pointing to the one coming after him as we see in the Synoptics. And after that we read:

The next day he (John the Baptist) saw Jesus coming to him and he said, behold, the Lamb of God.

Jesus is *the lamb* for John. He's not just the Messiah, he's God himself. But he's also the temple. And what do you do at the temple? You offer sacrifice, and Christ is going to be the true sacrifice. He's also the lamb of God, the sacrificial lamb:

Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world! ... And John bore witness and said, I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

It's interesting, John never explicitly describes Jesus' baptism like we've read in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Nonetheless, it's hard not to connect this scene with the imagery of Jesus's

baptism. We never hear, *and John baptized Jesus*, like we read in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but it seems to be implied here.

And notice what happens at Jesus's baptism.

The dove comes down upon him.

This might remind us of something in the Old Testament.

The parallel is of course creation. Many read the gospel of John and hear, *in the beginning, and the Word created, and so forth*, so there's new creation, and think now the new creation imagery is over and now we go onto something else. That's not the case.

New creation imagery is going to run throughout the gospel, and it's in the background of John's language here. What happened at the dawn of creation?

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void and darkness was over the face of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

We have the Spirit over the waters. Here we have the Spirit descending upon Jesus. indicative of new creation imagery.

Jesus as Messiah

So, we have **day one**, John the Baptist says he's not the Messiah. The one coming after him is the Messiah.

On day 2, John 1:29-34, we read ***the next day***.

This is not going to continue throughout the whole gospel. John's not going to give us a blow-by-blow account of Jesus's ministry day-by-day. But when he mentions *the next day* you ought to be paying attention, because it's going to be significant.

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; and he looked at Jesus as he walked, he said, Behold, the lamb of God! The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, 'What do you seek?' And they said to him, "Rabbi," which means teacher, where are you staying? And he said to them, come and see.

Next, in John 1:43, it says ***the next day***. We keep hearing *the next day, the next day, the next day*.

So what day are we up to? We're actually up to day four. The first thing we read about John saying he's not the Messiah, then it says the next day. So implied day one, then day two, then day three. Day four begins in verse 43.

Jesus as the Davidic Messiah

Next, Nathaniel comes to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. The key line Nathaniel says is:

Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel.

This is helpful because it shows us that Jesus' disciples were connecting two ideas; divine sonship, and Jesus' messianic kingship. Where would they get that idea? From the Old Testament.

Although there are lots of different flavors of messianic hopes in Jesus' day, one expression of messianic hope that was especially pervasive was the hope for a Messiah from the line of David. And the hope of a Messiah from the line of David was based on 2 Samuel 7, where God swears an oath to King David and says:

I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. *I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son.* (2 Sam 7:12-14)

So David is given a promise. He's going to have a son, and his son is going to build a house, a temple, for God's name. Solomon fulfills this prophecy.

Obviously within the story of 2 Samuel, Solomon fulfills this, except here's the thing.

I will establish the throne of his kingdom for forever.

But Solomon dies. So, Solomon fulfills this prophecy, but in a partial way, and partial fulfillment implies partial nonfulfillment.

After it looked like the kingdom of David had come to an end due to the exile, ancient Jews were looking forward to the coming of a future son of David, the Davidic King par excellence, the Messiah. And what would that Messiah do? Well, it seems we have good evidence they believed he would establish a house for God's name. He would build a temple.

So, if you look at, for example the Dead Sea Scrolls 4 Q 174, one finds the idea that 2 Samuel 7 will give way to a new temple, it's easy to connect the idea of the son of David and temple. Further, the son of David is identified as the son of God. I will be as father, he will be my son. Nathaniel says, "You are the King of Israel. You are the Son of God."

When we hear Jesus being identified as the Son of God in the gospels, we often immediately just assume that people recognize Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, but that didn't happen. That wasn't immediate. In fact, they didn't even have the term *person*. They had to invent the term *person*, basically, to explain the Trinity, which is also a term that doesn't exist in first century Judaism.

So, when they identified Jesus as the Son of God, this is messianic. This is especially linked to Jesus' identity as the son of David, as the Messiah. So obviously John thinks Jesus is the Son of God, not just in the adopted sense, but he is the Word from the very beginning, the only begotten Son of the Father.

But that's going to take time for the disciples to understand and process, and for the Church develop dogma.

The Wedding at Cana

Next comes the wedding feast of Cana and we read on:

On the third day ...

John is being very deliberate about his calculation of days. He doesn't do this for the rest of the gospel, but he especially does it here.

What is the third day? We obviously think of the resurrection. Ancient Jews might have thought of Sinai, where the Lord revealed his glory on the third day at Sinai. Jesus is going to reveal his glory on the third day here. But within the larger context of the narrative, this isn't just the third day.

The last day we read about was the fourth day. This brings us to the seventh day. There are six days in the creation narrative and God rests on the seventh day. We read:

On the third day, there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there.

Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples.

They go to a wedding and the wine runs out.

And when the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, they have no wine.

Now Mary doesn't say, "Jesus, can you make some more wine?" Thomas Aquinas in his commentary, on John points out that this is the way Mary teaches us to pray. That we don't busy ourselves with *how* God is going to provide for our needs. We just take our needs to the Lord and however God is going to resolve them we trust will be the best way in his Providence for our needs to be resolved.

They have no wine. She just points it out to him. That's all she needs to do. Jesus says,

O woman, what have you to do with me?

Within the creation backdrop, the fact that Jesus calls Mary woman is interesting and furthers the new creation imagery with the new Eve.

O woman, what have you to do with me?

Some people take this as a rebuke, but it's not a rebuke. Again, Aquinas points out that sometimes in our spiritual life, when we go to God and ask for things, the answer may not be what we want to hear.

His mother said to his servants, do whatever he tells you.

By the way, those are the last words of Mary in the New Testament. Her parting words to us. Do whatever he tells you. Whereas Eve was disobedient, the new Eve says, do whatever he tells you.

Now six stone jars were standing there for the Jewish rights of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons.

That's a lot of water. This is not for handwashing. You don't need 30 gallons for handwashing.

Jesus said to them, fill the jars with water. And they fill them up to the brim.

And he said to them,

Now draw some out and take it to the steward of the feast. So, they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine ...

We know the author is John, son of Zebedee. John is telling this story from the perspective of one of the disciples who's there.

Jesus says to his mother:

O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.

Still, Jesus says, go over there, get the water and have the head of the feast, the best man, taste it. Now John adds this detail. He says:

When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine and did not know where it came from, though the servants know.

There's a little bit of humor intended in all of this.

The steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said:

Every man serves the good wine first and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine, but you have kept the good wine until now.

This is *the beginning* (By the way, that word, *the beginning*, the word is ἀρχή. It's the same word that's used at the beginning of the gospel. And it's the same word that's used in Genesis 1 and so forms an *inclusio*.)

John 1 begins, followed by seven days, and at the end John says:

... and this is the beginning.

The beginning of Jesus's signs, his miracles:

... that he did at Cana in Galilee and he manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him. After this, he went down to Capernaum with his mother and his brethren and his disciples, and there he stayed for a few days. (2:1-12)

One thing that really stands out is John's note that it was the case that they took the water from the jars used for Jewish purification. The stone jars, he tells us held 120 to 150 gallons. That's a lot of water. So the purification is involved is not just washing hands, as some commentators suggest. Some think it has to do with bathing. And in fact, Jesus talks about his hour, and in John's gospel, that's especially associated with his death.

We have a description of a bathing purification ritual in the Torah, and this purification involves death. When one comes into contact with death, one must bathe:

He who touches the dead body of any person shall be uncleaned seven days. He shall cleanse himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and so be clean. But if he does not clean themselves on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not become clean. (Numbers 19:11-12)

Notice that here we just happened to have a third day which is also the seventh day. There is no other case where purification is linked to third day and seventh day. This might mean that John intends the third day to actually be the seventh day. If that's the case, it's significant that this is the beginning of Jesus's miracles. There is new creation imagery reaches its climax at Cana after which the ministry of begins.

At Cana Jesus provides the wine. That happens to be the responsibility of the Messiah. In a future day, when the Messiah comes, there was a tradition that there would be something known as the **messianic banquet**. We could call it the **eschatological banquet**, the future banquet when God regathers his people, and this idea of an eschatological banquet is often linked to the Messiah. In Amos 9, we read:

In that day, I will raise up the booth of David that has fallen...

The Dead Sea Scrolls take this as a messianic prophecy. God's going to raise up the hut of David that's fallen. He's going to bring about a new Davidic King. It goes on:

The mountain shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. (Amos 9:11, 13)

The gospel writers did not just draw from the Old Testament. They, along other writers of the New Testament, are steeped in the Jewish thought of the first century, of the second temple Jewish period. It's really helpful when studying the gospels to not just read the Old Testament. That's what you should read first. But we should also study ancient Jewish

thought by looking at other ancient works that circulated in and around the time of Jesus. One of them is a work called 2 Baruch. It's dated at the end of the first century, but nonetheless, its ideas were very much in the air and consistent with what we know about first century Judea in Jesus's day.

We read in 2 Baruch:

The Messiah will begin to be revealed. And on one vine will be a thousand branches and one branch will produce a thousand clusters and one cluster will produce a thousand grapes, and one grape will produce a liter of wine. (2 Baruch 29:1-2)

An abundance of wine will be served in an eschatological feast provided by God. It goes on to talk about this great feast that will happen when God saves his people. In John 2, Jesus is the Messiah and he's providing an abundance of wine. By doing so, Jesus is revealing himself to be the Messiah. But note that this eschatological feast isn't just said to be provided by the Messiah in the various texts. It's God himself who provides the feast.

So, the classic text for describing this future banquet is found in Isaiah 25. There we read:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of fat things, a feast of fine wines, of fat things full of marrow, of fine wines well-refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces and the reproach of his people will he take away from the earth. (Isaiah 25:6-9)

So, the Messiah has come. There is a great feast with an abundance of wine, and Jesus is the one providing it. He does it by changing water into wine which later turned into his blood in the Upper Room. Jesus has power over nature. He's not just the Messiah. He is the son of God, the King of Israel, in an utterly unique way.

Jesus' as the Messianic Temple-Builder

In John 2 and we read the story of Jesus overturning the money changing tables in the temple. This also appears later in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but at the end of Jesus' ministry. How do we explain the difference? Some people suggest that John moved it to the beginning of his narrative because the temple Christology is so important for John. Other people suggest that maybe it really did happen at the beginning of his ministry. Some people have suggested Jesus did it twice. As we saw previously, ancient biographers didn't always tell events in chronological order, so it need not be unsettling to us if the gospels narrate events in different chronological order.

In John's account:

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"

John says:

He was speaking about the temple of his body. 2:19-29

We see very clearly that Jesus is the true temple in John. But what was the Messiah going to do, according to according to Jewish hopes, based on second Samuel 7? He would rebuild the temple. And so Jesus is the son of David, and is going to establish the true temple, which is not a physical building, but ultimately his body.

Jesus as the Bridegroom

Finally, in John 3, John the Baptist says:

No one can receive anything, except what is given him from above. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ ...

John the Baptist continues,

... but I have been sent before him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom: the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly *at the bridegroom's voice*. 3:27-30

John is saying that Jesus is the true bridegroom.

So, as in the story of the wedding that Cana, we never read about who the bride and the bridegroom are.

John wants us to see is that Jesus is the true bridegroom, and in the Old Testament, God is described as the bridegroom of his people.

In Isaiah 61 and Isaiah 62 we read:

For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrong. I will faithfully give them their recompense. I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

So you hear God speaking, and then some other figure begins to talk.

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul shall exalt in my God.

In Isaiah 61, this is referring to the anointed one, a Messiah. Who is it that's talking? Is it God, or is it the Messiah? Notice in Isaiah it's not really clear. But in light of the new covenant, we can look back and say that's because the Messiah is God.

Isaiah 61:8, 62:4-5, 8:

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul will exalt in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness. As a *bridegroom* decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorned herself with her jewels.

So, this messianic figure describes himself as a bridegroom.

For you shall no more be termed forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed desolate, but you shall be called My delight is in her and your land married; for the Lord delights in you. And your land shall be married for as a young man, marries a Virgin, so shall your sons marry you. And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

God is described as rejoicing over the bride, like the bridegroom. So, who is the bridegroom? Is the bridegroom the sons of Israel, or is the bridegroom God? If God becomes a son of Israel, then all of this works.

It goes on to say:

The Lord is sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm, I will not again give your grain to be food for your enemies, and your foreigners shall not drink your wine, but those that garner it shall eat it and praise the Lord and they shall drink it in the courts of my sanctuary.

So, in the future that God is going to marry his people, and this this nuptial union between God and his people is linked with the Messianic Banquet. John 2 is drawing on all of this imagery. And where will they drink the new wine? In the courts of the sanctuary of the **new temple**.

If Jesus is identified with the new temple, the Church is also identified as a temple in John.

Nicodemus, Rebirth, and Baptism (John 3)

John 2 ends like this.

Now, when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did. But Jesus did not trust himself to them because he knew all men and he needed no one to bear witness of man, for he himself knew what was in man.

Why did they believe? They only believe because of his signs or miracles. Jesus knew men. He needed no one to bear witness for man for himself knew what was in man.

John 3:1:

Now there was a man named Nicodemus.

Nicodemus is exhibit A of the kind of men Jesus can't trust himself to. We miss this when we stop with the chapter divisions, which were added later.

Jesus needed no one to tell him what was in man, he knew what was in man, he didn't trust himself to man, "Now there was a man." (This reveals the problem with the somewhat arbitrary chapter/verse division added much later.

Exhibit A: Nicodemus. He's a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night, and he said to him,

Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs.

He loves the signs. He's like the people Jesus spoke about at the end of Chapter 2.

Jesus answered him, "Amen." The English translations usually say "truly, truly. The best translation is, "Amen, amen."

Amen, amen I say to you, unless one is born γεννηθη (again or from above), he cannot see the kingdom of heaven.

Γεννηθη can mean different things, just as the word "hot" can mean different things (What comes to mind when you hear the word "hot"?). Jesus wants Nicodemus to reveal what kind of person he is, because Nicodemus is going to exhibit where his mind is by choosing one of the meanings and infer that meaning in Jesus's teaching.

Nicodemus takes the natural meaning of this word.

How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?

Though γεννηθη can mean "from above", but Nicodemus thinks it means "again."

Nicodemus has the foot-in-mouth syndrome. How can a man be born when he's old? Can he enter a second time? How would that even be possible? Nicodemus is thinking in earthly terms. Jesus uses words and phrases to *expose* the way we think.

Jesus answered:

Amen, amen, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. And that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Being Born of "Water and Spirit"

What does it mean to be born of water and spirit? Some people have advocated a non-sacramental view, and there are different versions of this.

First, some think Jesus is saying, you have to be born of water. It's your natural birth. A woman in labor will say my water broke. And then Spirit means you accept Jesus into your heart. Problem here is:

Nobody in the ancient world connected water with birth. It was blood that people thought of, not water. (Craig Keener)

Number two. Water is an image of the Spirit. Actually, that does hold up, because John 7:39 takes that view. John Calvin, the Protestant reformer, took this view.

Third, there's reason here to think it's not just about the Spirit. There is a sacramental meaning picked up by Augustine and by Aquinas. In fact, the context would favor this interpretation, because right after Jesus has this exchange with Nicodemus we read:

After this Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judea there, he remained with them and baptized.

This is the only time in all the gospels Jesus is present with his disciples as they baptized. John will be clear later that Jesus didn't baptize. It was only the disciples who did.

Water and Spirit: Baptismal Scene

John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there and people came and were baptized.

There is good reason to think when Jesus talks about water and Spirit, he's thinking about Baptism. In fact, earlier John said,

I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven. It remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, he on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Spirit.

Implied here is what happens when John is baptizing with water. Where do we have water and the Spirit in John? In baptism.

So, how do we receive new life? How do we enter into the kingdom? Jesus is the Messiah who is bringing about the restoration of the kingdom. So where do you go to enter the kingdom? Do you go to Jerusalem? The kingdom is a *sacramental kingdom*. One cannot see the kingdom of God unless he's born from above. When does that happen? When one is born of water and Spirit. Augustine and Aquinas think this is a reference to baptism.

Kingdom of Messiah as "Eternal Life"

In John, entering into the kingdom is ultimately about entering into the life seen in John 1, in the Prologue, that is found in Christ.

Elsewhere in synoptic gospels, life and the kingdom are linked. So, for example, Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, Mark chapter 9:43-47:

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you **to enter life** maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better **to enter life** lame than with two feet be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to **enter the kingdom of God**. With one eye then with two eyes be thrown into hell.

Notice **entering the kingdom of God** is the equivalent of **entering into life**.

Eternal Life and the 'Olam Haba — העולם הבא

In Jewish thought, there was an idea that emerged out of the text of the Old Testament talk about a new creation of *the life to come*, or *the age to come*, or *the world to come*, known as the העולם הבא.

The Kingdom of God and the World/Life to Come

The language of the kingdom of God is basically another way of talking about this life to come, this age to come, this new creation. As the Messiah, Jesus is bringing about the kingdom, but the kingdom is something more than what David and Solomon reigned over. We're talking about entering the new creation, the age to come, the life to come, which involves nothing less than entering into communion with Christ, and through this union with Christ entering into the life of the Father and the Spirit.

How this happens in John's gospel is through the sacraments, especially baptism.

The Kingdom and Eternal Life in John as *Sacramental*

In the Davidic kingdom, the way one entered into the kingdom was move to Palestine. But what Jesus is about to bring about is the inbreaking of the heavenly kingdom.

We have highlighted the first three chapters of John because they give you a sense of John's gospel with the Prologue as kind of an overture. You all know what an overture is? In a symphony, it starts with the major musical themes and they are drawn together in the overture This is what the *Prologue* of John's gospel is like. Then as we read through the first few chapters, we start seeing motifs that are going to play out throughout the gospel.

The same idea gets picked up in the story of the woman of Samaria:

There came a woman of Samaria to draw water at a well, and Jesus said to her, give me a drink. And his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. And the Samaritan said to Jesus, how is it that you would you a Jew ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria, for Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

Jesus answered her. If you knew the, the gift of God and who it is saying to you, give me a drink. You would have asked him and he would give you ...

In the Greek it's ζῶν, zoe, water. Ζῶν can mean water that is flowing, as in a river or a stream, as opposed to water from a well, or it can mean *alive*.

And so, the woman says to him, sir, you have nothing to draw with, so Jesus says, he would give you living water. The woman says, you have nothing to draw with. And the well is deep. Where do you get that ...?

Now the English translation says *living water*, but what she means is *flowing water*.

Where are you getting this water? She doesn't mean water that's alive. She means water flowing in the river.

Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself, and his sons and his cattle. And Jesus said to her, everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again. But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. And the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. And the woman said, sir, give me this water that, I may not thirst nor come here to draw, rather have this flowing water than to have to pull up this water from a well.

Jesus said, you're go call your husband, and come here. And the woman answered him, I have no husband. And Jesus said, you're right saying, I have no husband, for you had five husbands. And he whom you now have is not your husband. This, you said truly. And the woman said to him, sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.

I perceive you are a prophet.

Now, Samaritans accepted as authoritative only the five books of Moses. They do not accept Isaiah and Daniel and all these other books as scripture. There no reference to a Messiah, like the Davidic Messiah, in the five books of Moses.

The key text here is in Deuteronomy 18, where Moses talks about a future prophet who will be like himself, and she's identifying Jesus with that figure. I see you're a prophet.

Our fathers worshiped on this mountain (Gerizim, at least they did until the temple was destroyed there.) And you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

When people start talking about theological truths that that make feel uncomfortable (moral theology), they change the subject.

For the woman, the conversation got really close to home. So she changes the subject to a conversation about liturgical rubrics. Let's have a conversation about liturgical niceties, because I'd rather talk about that than talk about the sin in my life.

So the woman at the well is concerned about which mountain that one worship on because Jesus is asking her hard-hitting questions.

Jesus then goes on to address to the woman and says:

You worship what you do not know. We worship, what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

So obviously it's important to know a thing or two about how to worship. Jesus thinks that's important.

But the hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him.

And ultimately worship is meant to draw us into is the invisible mystery of the life of God. This is what we're called to enter.

Jesus, as the Messiah, is going to build the true temple, and that true temple is not going to be a physical structure in Jerusalem. And what we celebrate when we celebrate the Eucharist is not an earthly reality because ultimately what we're entering into is more than being in Jerusalem or being in Gerizim. We're entering into the life of the Father and the Son, and in order to enter into that life, we have to be baptized. We have to be born anew. We have to be born from above. We have to be transformed, and we have to enter into the new creation. That's the only way we're going to enter into the life that is in Christ Jesus. Let us ask the Lord to constantly recreate us so that we can be made worthy to worship in Spirit and truth, and enter into communion with him.