

## The Cleansing of the Temple

In John's Gospel this occurs at the outset of Jesus' ministry not at the end of it as in the Synoptic gospels. This is extremely unlikely for no other reason that it would have led to his immediate arrest. After all Jesus was not yet the person of fame he was to become. In all probability it is placed first as part of the author's structure whereby Jesus announces who he is, and his knowledge of his death and resurrection, at the very outset of his ministry so that all other subsequent events should be interpreted in that light of that sign.



## The Disciple Jesus Loved

There are several passages where a disciple is described as 'the disciple Jesus loved': At the Last Supper (ch.13), after Jesus foretells that one of the disciples will betray him, even Peter is depicted as asking this special disciple to ask Jesus who it will be, implicitly recognising that disciple's 'influence' over Jesus. The same passage describes this beloved disciple as 'reclining next to Jesus'. At the foot of the cross (ch.19) this disciple is given responsibility for Jesus' mother. After the resurrection (ch.20), Peter and this disciple are told by Mary Magdalene about Jesus' absence from the tomb. At Jesus' post resurrection appearance by the Sea of Tiberias (ch.21) the same disciple is told 'to stay behind till I (Jesus) come'.

Given that Jesus loved all his disciples, and was especially close to Peter, this accolade is intriguing. It is usually accepted that it refers to the apostle John himself, as a way of John talking about himself indirectly. This seems to be supported by the Gospel's own statement that the disciple Jesus loved was also its author. But some have argued that Mary Magdalene was this special disciple and was, in fact, the original author of the Gospel, but that there was subsequent rewriting of the above passages to imply a male disciple.

# Jesus in the Gospels

## 3. Introduction to St. John's Gospel



## Questions For Reflection

1. What are the main ways in which St. John's Gospel differs from the other Gospels?
2. Why is there no account of the institution of the Eucharist?
3. Who might be 'the disciple Jesus loved'?

## The Nature of St. John's Gospel

St John's Gospel is significantly different from the Synoptic Gospels. It is generally held to be the last Gospel to be written and maybe because of this it is more reflective in its theology.



It is also noticeably influenced by Greek philosophic thought, with its equation of Jesus to the Word or Logos (ch.1). Unlike the Synoptic gospels, it reveals that Jesus made several visits to Jerusalem during his ministry to honour the Jewish festivals, all portraying the author's concern for worship and the sacraments (e.g. ch.2, 6 and 13 three Passovers, ch.7 The Feast of Shelters, ch.10 The Feast of Dedication).

In particular, the Gospel seeks to explain the **significance** of the events in Jesus' life, much more than in the other Gospels.

Although bearing the name of St. John, it is uncertain who the author was. However, the nature of the Gospel and its theology points to it being used by a community (Johannine) that was greatly influenced by its author's particular beliefs. One aspect that makes it stand out as unique is its emphasis on the importance of knowledge, that the Christian community possessed the key to the way of salvation in the words and actions of Jesus. This is shown in Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus (ch.3), with the Samaritan woman (ch.4), the discourse on the necessity of the Eucharist (ch.6), the discourses about his own nature (e.g. ch.7 and 8). In doing this, dualistic imagery is often used e.g. truth/lies, light/darkness, going up/down, grow greater/less.

For the above reason, John's Gospel is sometimes referred to as Gnostic in content. Gnosticism was a heresy that taught that the way to God and salvation was by a special knowledge that led to the correct interpretation of Jesus' sayings and actions. However, whereas the Gospel certainly follows that route, it differs from Gnosticism in making it clear that the knowledge itself is not the key but the person

of Jesus, and the need to follow Jesus' example in prayer and action and especially in love.



## St. John and the Eucharist

A surprising omission in John's Gospel is the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. There may be two reasons for this. The first may simply be that John knew it had already been recorded in the Synoptic Gospels and felt that his own Eucharistic discourse (ch.6) emphasised its importance more than adequately, albeit in an explanatory format. The second was possibly because he wanted to concentrate the reader's mind on the other main issues of the Last Supper that were not discussed in the Synoptic gospels.

St John's powerful and disturbing account of the Eucharist (ch.6), with its direct references to eating flesh and drinking blood, must have been greatly disconcerting for all the Jews who heard it. With their strict laws on ritualistic purification, particularly related to what can be eaten (Lv.11) and the drinking of blood (Lv.17), for John to describe the discourse as he does points strongly to its authenticity.

## St. John's Last Supper Discourse

John's Last Supper discourse differs significantly from the Synoptic gospels by addressing the primacy of love as the new commandment of Christianity (ch.13 and 15), the relationship of Jesus to the Father and the Spirit (ch.14 and 16), and to prepare the disciples for their life and mission without him (ch.15-17). No-one reading what Jesus says about love can fail to be moved, **'love one another as I have loved you...it is by your love that everyone will recognise you'** and, **'no-one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends'**. The detail given indicates that the source must have been one of those present. This in turn supports the view that the author of the Gospel was the apostle John himself.