

Distinctiveness of the prologue: gospel of john



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Introduction

This paper is going to address the uniqueness of the prologue, and will further explore how it connects with the rest of the Gospel of John. The prologue previews most of the themes that the author will explain throughout the Gospel. There are 8 listed themes; 'the pre-existence of the word, light of world, light and darkness, witness or testimony, glory, life, world, father and son relationship.' [1] However, for the purpose of this essay, only three themes will be covered. Namely; the theme of the pre-existence, father and son relationship and glory.

Scholars believe that the Gospel of John was written between '70AD and 90AD'. [2] The author 'is identified as John the son of Zebedee, who was one of Jesus' twelve apostles and the beloved one'. [3] However, the authorship is debatable among scholars, some suggest that 'Prologue was originally a poem from some other religious traditions perhaps gnostic'. [4] According to the gospel, it is maintained that the author was a Palestinian Jew, familiar with the religion, land and rituals of his people. All throughout the gospel, the author suggests that he was an eyewitness to the scenes that he was unravelling.

The Gospel of John however is a unique book among the four Gospels. The true representation of Jesus lies at the heart of all that is unique in this Gospel. The Gospels are recognised as the Synoptics because of their close resemblances to each other. Jesus is revealed in different ways in these four Gospels. The Gospel of Matthew reveals Jesus as the king of the Jews. Mark presents Him as the suffering servant. In Luke's version, Jesus is seen as a

perfect man. Whereas in Luke's Gospel, Jesus is humanity whereas John's emphasizes his deity.

The Fourth Gospel, also known as 'the spiritual gospel',[5] begins by immediately presenting 'Christ not as the Son of David, nor the Son of man, but begins with 'a prologue in which Jesus' deity is openly declared'.

[6]Maurice Casey propounds that 'the Christology of the fourth Gospel is one of its most remarkable features, and one which distinguishes it sharply from the other three Synoptic'.[7]Its authenticity is sometimes questionable among scholars because 'many of the major themes and events of the first three Gospels are missing in the fourth Gospel'.[8]While on the one hand it includes 'many significant episodes not mentioned by Matthew, Mark and Luke'.[9]It is further argued that 'if the Synoptics present a clear picture of Jesus, then John's portrayal can hardly be accepted'.[10]D. A. Carson identifies differences between the fourth Gospel and the Synoptics. He observes that 'there are no narratives parables, no account of the transfiguration, no record of the institution of the Lord's supper, no report of Jesus casting out a demon and no mention of Jesus' temptations'.[11]

The first eighteen verses from 'the first chapter one of the Gospel of John are referred to 'as the prologue'.[12]This can be seen as 'an ancient Christian hymn'.[13]The prologue has an important bearing upon a focused interpretation of the rest of the Johannine Gospel. It also prepares the reader for what follows. The Gospel and Prologue work hand in hand, as Richard Bauckham states that 'the Gospel needs the prologue, the prologue also needs the Gospel, either without the other is incomplete'.[14]The relation of the prologue to the rest of the gospel is questionable among scholars. Their

critical arguments are mainly based ' on the source analysis which focuses on identifying the original independent hymn, Christian and non-Christians'. [15]They have argued that ' several theological concepts and terms in the prologue, for example, the incarnation of the word, the tent dwelling of the so, in the contrast with the dwelling in the temple the concepts of, and the unique literary style are scarcely reflected in the rest of the Gospel'. [16]They also suggests that prologue ' it is a wisdom hymn stitched by the author to the front of the Gospel to make it more acceptable to Hellenistic readers and was judged to have little relationship to the rest of the gospel'. [17]While those in support of the prologue argues that ' it was written as an introduction to the body of the Gospel, just like the writing of the Johannine Epistle with similar symbolic terms appearing in 1 John 1: 1-2 with the list of the themes which are shared in the prologue and the rest of the gospel'. [18]

Themes: divinity of the Son

The divinity of the Son Jesus is established in the Prologue and developed in the rest of the Gospel. The author begins this Gospel with a splendid declaration to his audience by say, ' *in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God*' (1: 1). The writer is expressing that Word " *logos*" pre-existent, He was not after or from or created, but He was in the beginning. The fourth Evangelist John reminds his readers of the Old Testament verse, ' *the beginning of creation*' (Genesis 1: 1) ' that Jesus is a timeless figure who existed in the past before creation'. [19]The Book of Genesis begins with creation so is the Gospel of John refers to creation. The same words are also found in chapter 17, ' and now, " *Father glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed* "

(17: 5). The concept of ‘ *Logos* ’ is said to have an extensive background in the Greek religious and philosophical cognition. The Greeks regarded “ *logos* ” ‘ as the principle of reason or order in the world ’.[20]Heraclitus “ *logos* ” ‘ was understood to be unifying principle of all things ’.[21]It is suggested that ‘ the Heraclitus had no concept of a transcendent God, but saw the “ *logos* ” as a law or reason that underlies the universe because they believed that the “ *logos* ” was common to all men, that it was a universal law which regulated all the events that took place within mankind, and that it had its own independent existence ’.[22]In Plato writing holds the words of Heraclitus ‘ that a person could not step into the same river twice ’.[23]

The Father and Son relationship

The Fourth Gospel presents a unique relationship between God the Father and His son Jesus. This unique relationship between the father and son can be seen also in the Synoptic Gospels. Daniel J. Scholz suggested that, ‘ the voice from heaven (Mk 1: 11) and the clouds at the baptism (Mk 9: 7) and the transfiguration speak of Jesus as ‘ *my beloved Son* ’ Lk 9: 35, signifies the unity between the father and son’[24]John’s Gospel comprehensively develops the Father and Son relationship. It is said that John’s gospel uses the term Father in the mouth of Jesus as the son, ‘ 120 times more often than all the other Gospels combined ’.[25]The author records the close, loving and unified relationship between the Father and the Son. The *logos* was in face to face relationship with God. No one has seen God; the word has been sent by the father to reveal God the world. The word took on flesh to reveal the glory of God. The unique relationship was described by the author in various ways. For example, firstly, ‘ as the father worked, so is the Son

worked' (5: 17-18).[26]Secondly, '*as the father raises the dead and gives life, so the son gives life*' (5: 21-23, 26).[27]' *The words that the father gives, the son gives to others*' (7: 17-17). [28] '*The son speaks the things He sees the Father doing*' (8: 28, 38, 12: 49-50). [29] '*As the father knows the Son, so the Son knows the father*' (10: 15).[30] *If you have seen the Son you have seen the father*' (14: 9). '*To not honour the Son is to not honour the Father*' (15: 18-19, 23).[31]' *All that belongs to the Father belongs also to the Son*' (16: 15, 17: 10).[32]Jesus' farewell prayer for his disciples said '*I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one – as you are in me Father and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me*' (Jn 17: 21).[33]Johannine sees Jesus' forthcoming suffering and death (the cross) on how the father and Son both glorified.

Theme of Glory

The theme of glory is also reviewed in the prologue and it runs throughout the rest of the gospel. The most obvious way the glory is revealed in Jesus's ministry is in the signs. According to Maurice Casey, '*the fourth evangelist uses the term signs used to reveals Christ glory*'. [34]The first sign is recorded in chapter 2: 11. Another indication appeared when the evangelist explained that Jesus was speaking about the spirit that had yet been given because Jesus was *not yet glorified* (7: 39).[35]From the resurrection of Lazarus forward the Johannine understanding of glory becomes increasingly clear. In chapter 11 points ahead to the resurrection of Jesus as a revelation of God's glory. Jesus announces, '*that the hour has come for the son of Man to be glorified*' (12: 3). '*Father glorify your name*' (12: 28). John 13: 31 says now the Son of man has been glorified and God has glorified in him echoes

Jesus' prayer " *father glorify your name* " in (12: 28). However, Herman Ridderbos critical scholars states that ' in Gospel of John Jesus' glory received so much stress, including in the passion story, that the Gospel can hardly be said to be free of a kind of Docetism, that is, that Jesus' suffering is not real suffering in John, that the cross is not Jesus' humiliation but only his exaltation, and that therefore his going out of this world consisted merely in a triumphal departure to where he was before'.[36]As Colver summaries that ' John also shows in his gospel that the way to the cross is the greatest expression of glory of God'.[37]

Conclusion

In conclusion one could say that it is how the author introduces the divinity of Christ in the prologue to his readers that makes it unique and distinct than Synoptic Gospels writers. It could be observed that the Synoptic Gospel writers traced Christ from a human point of view, while John give the account of Christ from his pre-existence that is before creation. John presented his work in a way that all the themes mentioned in prologue visible throughout the rest of his writing. On the hand one can also state that failing to understand the prologue may result in failing to understand the rest of the Gospel of John. In a nutshell, it evident that the prologue is not a wisdom hymn but deep divine revelation given to the John for a purpose. that is to give a clear explanation and understanding of Word and been Jesus Christ.

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