

Introduction to the New Testament History and Literature

Lecture 11: Johannine Christianity: the Gospel Transcript

<https://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/rfst-152/lecture-11>

Overview

The Gospel of John is a gospel dramatically different from the Synoptic Gospels. It is full of long dialogues, it speaks of “signs” rather than exorcisms or miracles, and its narrative differs at many points from the Synoptics. Themes in the Gospel are also repeated throughout—themes such as ascending and descending, light and darkness, seeing and knowing. Johannine literature also presents a high Christology that equates Jesus with God. The Gospel also reflects the sectarian nature of the community to which the author belonged.

1. Narrativ Differences between the Gospel of John and the Synoptic Gospels

[1] *Professor Dale Martin:* “In the beginning was the word and the word was with God”—somebody actually has memorized this. I’m so proud of you. I got me some good Sunday school people in the class, or at least somebody who’s done the reading for the day. “And the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God, all things came into being through him.” God, what a philosophical sounding term, “being.” It screams to be capitalized like Hegel or someone like that would do—being. Do you sit around in your dorm room worried about being? What is the nature of being? What is the nature of existence? Yeah? No? If you do you’re a good philosopher. “What has come into being—” now that’s also very philosophical, in traditional classical philosophy from Plato on, being is one kind of thing and coming into being is something else. Things that are truly, truly, truly being don’t come into being because that means at one time they were not, and this sounds so philosophical. “And the life was the light was all people, the light shines in the darkness, the darkness did not overcome it.” You skip down a bit, verse 14, “The word became flesh and lived among us. And we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” That sounds not only philosophical but downright theological. “No one has ever seen God.” Good theological point, right? “It

is God the only Son—” have we heard anything like that kind of language so far in this course? “God the only Son.” No, we haven’t. That sounds like a Christian creed. It doesn’t sound like Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It doesn’t sound like Acts, it doesn’t even sound like Thomas.

[2] We’re in a different world with this Gospel. This is not like anything we’ve seen so far. So from the very beginning of the Gospel of John, you should know you’re in a different world from the synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The style, for example, over and over again the style is repetitious. There are phrases and words that come up over and over again, darkness and light, light and darkness. I already did some of that with the—“In the beginning was the word, the word was with God, the word was God, he was in the beginning with God, all things came into being through him without him not one thing came into being, what has come into being.” “Come into being” is repeated three times, a little clue: don’t write your exegesis papers like this. This is not good American English writing style, you’re supposed to vary your terminology, right, a little bit, and alter your terms; that’s good English writing style. This of course is actually fairly good ancient Greek writing style which is the different—the writing styles are different. It’s also a writing style that we haven’t seen so far. There’s this repetition of words, there are memorable sayings in the Gospel of John that you don’t have in other

places. There's a whole lot less action in the Gospel of John and a whole lot more talk. Just flip open the Gospel of John almost anywhere and it'll start off with a scene, often a conflict scene with Jesus in kind of a—in conversation with other people. But pretty quickly it'll go into a dialogue in which Jesus is saying something, the other person says something, they go back and forth a bit, and then it goes even from a dialogue into Jesus just being Chatty Cathy and just talking for paragraphs. We don't have any of this kind of stuff in the synoptics of Jesus just going off on tangents for paragraphs at a time and talking for a whole chapter sometimes. And that's what you get in the Gospel of John.

[3] There are some scenes in the Gospel of John where the characters look actually more lifelike than they do in the synoptic Gospels. Have you noticed in the synoptic Gospels the characters sometimes are just a tax collector, a sinner, a Pharisee, a Syrophenician woman, a Centurion who had a slave? Most of the time they don't have a name, most of the time they'd say one or two things to Jesus; one of the longest conversations with Jesus that we have with another character is precisely the Syrophenician woman you've read about, where, you remember she comes and says she wants her daughter to be healed, and she's not a Jew, and so Jesus says, it's not right to take bread from the children's mouths and throw it to the dogs, calling her a dog. And undeterred she says, yes, but the dogs get to eat the crumbs from under the master's table. That's one of the longest dialogues that Jesus has with another person, not his disciple, in the synoptic Gospels. Very different when you get to the Gospel of John. We have this scene we'll go to in a minute where Jesus has a whole chapter talking to Nicodemus, we're told who Nicodemus is, we're told a little bit about him, and then Jesus has a conversation with him. We have a whole scene in which Jesus is talking to this woman at the well, a Samaritan woman. We know more about this woman than we know about just about anybody else in the synoptic Gospels. We know that she's had five husbands, how many people do we know that about? We know that she's a Samaritan, we know where she lives, we know that she goes out to draw water. So there are a lot of places in the Gospel of John where characters actually look much more lifelike and filled out

than they have been in the Gospels that we've read so far.

[4] This lecture is going to focus on the Gospel of John, but as you've already figured out, one of the main themes of the course is how were the different forms of early Christianity different from one another? It wasn't just one movement. It's not like some new religion just sprang out of the earth or fell from heaven. So one of the themes of the course has been to look at the different kinds. And the Gospel of John and in the letters of John—I, II and III John which we'll talk about next time—are a wonderful example of this. In fact, if you look at the syllabus, today's lecture constitutes a certain shift in the syllabus because—although I am talking about a Gospel and I have been talking about Gospels—I put a little subheading under this week that's sort of like the spread of Christianity and how different Christian groups look different. We talked about that with the Book of Acts last time, but this time what we're going to do is we're going to use Johannine Christianity, just one of the fancy scholarly words. This refers to different kinds of John Christianity. We've got the Gospel of John and we have three letters of John, and they are similar enough although it's quite debatable whether they're all written by the same person, we'll talk about that when we get to the letters of John. They're similar enough in their writing style and in their terminology, and in their theological themes that we believe that all four of these documents, the Gospel of John, I, and II, and III John represent one form of early Christianity and we're going to call that Johannine Christianity or somebody might pronounce it Johannine Christianity, it's the same thing; so this lecture's going to focus on that.

[5] Let's first look at the narrative differences in the Gospel of John. I hope you noticed this when you were reading through it. First, there's this prologue that I started reading at the very beginning of the lecture. It has several major themes that will occur throughout the Gospel, and it's just packed into this prologue. There's first Jesus' pre-existence. In no other Gospel do we get the idea that Jesus existed before his birth. That's counterintuitive to a lot of us because whether you're a Christian or not a Christian you're used to thinking about Jesus as an eternal divine being who becomes incarnate as a human being but always existed.

That's not in the other Gospels if you noticed, but it's definitely here in the Gospel of John. So we get the pre-existence of Jesus and his divinity, right there in the prologue.

- [6] You get this theme of life; you get this theme of light and darkness. Jesus comes from light, he comes into darkness, the darkness doesn't receive him, he brings light to his followers, there's the coming into the world. The world is not simply the physical world that you and I know, it's the cosmos, the Greek word where we get the word cosmology, all the universe. Jesus comes into the cosmos, so the cosmos as a dark enemy place in which Jesus invades it in a sense is one of the major themes of the Gospels that you get right here in the prologue. The world is a place of enmity, the world hates Jesus, the world hates the disciples, the world hates you if you're a follower of Jesus. Birth from God, so there's this idea that people are born from God. Son and father linkage, over and over again, God is Jesus' father in the Gospel of John. That's true in some of the other Gospels but it's just much more so in the Gospel of John.
- [7] John the Baptist as the lesser of the two is introduced right in the prologue. We don't take a while to get to John, we have John the Baptist right in verse 6, "There was a man sent from God whose name was John, he came as a witness to testify to the light so that all might believe in him. He himself was not the light." This guy wants you to know from the very beginning John the Baptist is not Jesus' equal, he's a secondary witness, just so you don't get confused. There's the idea that "the law comes from Moses but grace and truth come from Jesus." And there is the emphasis on seeing and knowing as we'll talk about later when I hit some of the major themes of the Gospel; seeing and knowing are two definite themes for the Gospel of John and it's all right there wrapped up in the prologue to the Gospel. John is different from anything else because in this very, very elaborately constructed poetic sounding, almost philosophical sounding prologue, you get lots of the major themes of the Gospel just laid out for you, so that's a narrative difference.
- [8] Another major narrative difference is the relationship of Jesus and John the Baptist. In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus' ministry does not begin until the arrest of John. Did you notice

this? Jesus goes to John the Baptist to be baptized, and it looks like Jesus, in a sense, is almost a disciple of John, although the Gospel writers try not to tell it that way, but Jesus doesn't start his own preaching ministry and his own healing ministry until the ministry of John the Baptist is over. For the synoptic Gospels, John the Baptist's ministry comes here, John the Baptist's ministry stops, Jesus' starts, very clear. In the Gospel of John that's not the way it is, their two ministries overlap each other. So, for example, sometimes John the Baptist is baptizing and the Gospel of John tells us that Jesus and his disciples are baptizing in another part of the Jordan. What? We don't hear anything like that in the other Gospels. Jesus and his disciples over here in another part of the Jordan baptizing their disciples while John is baptizing his disciples? And then sometimes John's disciples leave John and go over and join Jesus, and then there's some discussions between them. Sometimes John—the disciples—John the Baptist's disciples come and ask Jesus' disciples, what does your master do about this, or this, or that? There's an overlap of the two ministries that you get in the Gospel of John and you don't get it at all in the other Gospels.

- [9] Another big difference, Judea and Galilee. If all you had were the first three Gospels, the ideas you would have was that Jesus' entire ministry took place basically in Galilee until the last part of his life. And then he journeys to Jerusalem, and according to the Gospels, he's only basically in Jerusalem for one week and then he's crucified. That's not the way it is in the Gospel of John. In fact, did any of you notice, where is the cleansing of the temple incident in the synoptic Gospels, when does it happen? Wake up, when does the cleansing of the temple incident happen in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all three of them? I'm sorry, at the end, right on like maybe Wednesday before he is executed. It happens the last week of his life right before he is arrested. In fact, the Gospels present that as maybe one of the reasons that he is arrested. When does it happen in the Gospel of John? Chapter 2. Is it 2? I can't remember is it really two? Okay, yes it happens at the very beginning of the Gospel. I couldn't remember exactly what chapter, good. The cleansing of the temple happens at the beginning of the Gospel of John, not the end like in the others.

- [10] The length of Jesus' ministry, in the synoptic Gospels, if all you have is synoptic Gospels, it would like the ministry of Jesus probably lasted maybe a year, not much more than that. There's just no indication of how long it takes but he goes to Jerusalem only one time for the Passover and that's at the end of his life. In the Gospel of John there are three different mentions of Passovers. There's the Passover in 2:13, this is when he goes up to Jerusalem and cleanses the temple there. There's another Passover mentioned in 6:4, and there's another Passover mentioned in 13:1, that is the Passover that's at the end of his life when he's arrested. There's three Passovers that occur in Jesus' ministry according to the Gospel of John.
- [11] Have you ever heard the tradition that Jesus was thirty years old when he started his ministry, and his ministry lasted three years, so he would have been dead at thirty-three? You may have heard that. Do you know how people got that tradition? It's not in the Bible anywhere. They get the thirty year old idea from reading some passages in Luke and the idea of when he started his ministry. They get the three years from reading the Gospel of John. Notice how they've taken one little detail about Jesus' life from Luke, a different detail from John, they combined them together to give you the tradition, but no Gospel actually has that teaching in it. Christians have pulled these Gospel—the details from the Gospels together. That's because John's the only one that indicates that according to his reckoning Jesus' ministry covered at least three Passovers, the other Gospels don't have that.
- [12] Jesus' parents and hometown according to Matthew, Jesus' family is simply from Bethlehem. That's where they start off, that's where they end up, so Jesus' family is from Bethlehem, Jesus later goes to Galilee. According to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus' family is from Galilee, they go to Bethlehem only for the census, and then a month or so after the birth they go back to Galilee, so we've got differences right there. Matthew simply has Jesus' family from Judea in the beginning, and they end up moving to Galilee after they go to Egypt. Luke has them from Galilee, go to Judea, go back to Galilee. John doesn't have anything about this Bethlehem birth. In fact he has—in 7:31 people say, "How can you be the Messiah? Who says the Messiah is supposed to come from Galilee? The Messiah doesn't come from Galilee, the Messiah's supposed to come from Bethlehem." The writer of the Gospel of John, wouldn't this be a great time if he could just say, oh these stupid Jews, they don't know that Jesus actually was born in Bethlehem and therefore he is from Judea. He doesn't say anything like that. He just allows the reader, you the reader, to believe that Jesus really was from Galilee and you know what, that doesn't matter. They must have gotten it wrong, they must not have thought that the Messiah could actually come from Galilee but he can. Again, the Gospel of John different in its narrative structures.
- [13] The Last Supper, the Last Supper in the synoptic Gospels is a Passover meal. The Last Supper in John is not a Passover meal. In fact, also, the Last Supper is not the institution of the Eucharist in John. In Christian churches we observe the mass or the Eucharist and we say, Jesus established this in his Last Supper with his disciples, "do this in memory of me." That goes back to Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The Gospel of John doesn't have that. There's no place in the Gospel of John where Jesus initiates the Last Supper. He doesn't take the cup, he doesn't take the wine, and say, do this in memory of me. What happens at the Last Supper in the Gospel of John? He has a foot washing, there's a foot washing ceremony. Notice again what Christian tradition has done here. Any of you know what Maundy Thursday means in Christian churches? Maundy Thursday refers to the Thursday before Good Friday, which is the Friday before Easter, and on Good Friday according to the tradition Jesus was executed. The Thursday night before is when he has the Last Supper with his disciples. Now in many Christian churches, on the Thursday before Easter, not only will they have the Eucharist service—or a communion service, but they'll also have a foot washing service. At the church where I go the priests, the different priests will actually get down on their hands and knees and put towels around themselves and wash the feet of anybody in the church who comes forward on Thursday night before Easter. They're doing that in imitation of Jesus' foot washing of his disciples at the Last Supper in John. But notice what we've done here, again Christians have combined the Last Supper and the Eucharist establishment, from the synoptic Gospels, with

the foot washing service from the Gospel of John and they've put them together. But they weren't together in our Bible, they were in two separate documents.

[14] The arrest is also very different in the synoptic Gospels. In the Synoptic Gospels they come to arrest Jesus and they just arrest him and there's a few things. In the Gospel of John there's this funny, funny, funny scene, it's actually very humorous where they come up with the swords and the clubs, it's in the middle of the night in the garden, and they come up to Jesus and Jesus says, who are you looking for, and they say, Jesus of Nazareth, and Jesus says, I am he, and they all fall over on the ground. It's like an Indiana Jones thing. The power of him saying this knocks them all over, and they get up and do it again, and they all fall over again. The whole scene of the arrest of Jesus is very different in the Gospel of John. At his trial, in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus says almost nothing. Some of the Synoptics say he said nothing, other Synoptics say he said something, but he's very, very quiet. In the Gospel of John he just carries on this whole philosophical discussion with Pilate about what is truth. He just keeps talking and talking, very different scene.

[15] On the crucifixion there's some differences. Remember I'm here rehearsing just narrative differences between the first three Gospels and John. These are places where just the story is different in its details. According to the first three Gospels, the crucifixion takes place on the first day of Passover. The Thursday night supper—remember in Jewish calendar reckoning, a day begins at sundown, so on sundown of Thursday night that's beginning of Friday, and in the Synoptic Gospels that's the beginning of the Passover. So they wait until sundown and they have the Passover meal Thursday night and that's the beginning of Friday, the first day of Passover, and it's on the Friday the first day of Passover that Jesus is actually executed. That's not the way it is in the Gospel of John. Read the execution narrative in the Gospel of John. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus is not crucified on the first day of Passover, he's crucified on the day before Passover, and how do we know that? Because it says when they were crucifying him was the same time they were slaughtering the lambs in the temple. Notice, it's a wonderful little symbolism, right? Right

when Jesus is being slaughtered, the lambs for the Passover meal are being slaughtered. Because what you would do of course if you were a Jew in Jerusalem, you would take your lamb to the priest on Thursday, you'd have them slaughter it, pour out the blood, they'd take a little bit of it, then you'd take it back home to your family, or to the hotel where you're staying, or to the picnic ground where you're staying, and you cook your lamb, and that's where you have the Passover meal. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus is executed at the same time that they're slaughtering the lambs, which means he's not executed on the day of Passover but the day before Passover, completely different.

[16] The last big narrative difference with the Gospel of John from the synoptics is this guy named the beloved disciple. Who the hell is the beloved disciple? We don't know who he is. According to Dan Brown and the—what's that awful book? The Da Vinci Code, right—according to The Da Vinci Code the beloved disciple is actually a girl, Mary Magdalene. I guess it's because he couldn't believe that Jesus could be attracted to a guy, so he had to invent a girl to be the beloved disciple. Heterosexual as modern novelists are. No, the beloved disciple is a man and we don't even know who he is. He's Jesus' favorite disciple in the Gospel of John. This character doesn't exist in the other Gospels, he's just not there. Now tradition has said who is the beloved disciple? Well it's the—John, son of Zebedee, younger brother of James, son of Zebedee. If you go to the art gallery, which you will later in the semester, we're all going to take a tour of the Yale Art Gallery, you'll see that when John son of Zebedee is depicted in art he's always the depicted as a young man without a beard, very beautiful, almost feminine looking because he's sort of representing the boy that Jesus loved. Well, we don't know that it was John, the Gospel of John doesn't tell us it was John, it just tells it was the beloved disciple. Most scholars are just willing to say, whoever this beloved disciple was, and maybe it was just a figment of the literary pretensions of this writer, maybe there was no historical beloved disciple, we don't know. But he's a strong character in this Gospel and he doesn't appear anywhere else but in this Gospel. Notice in all those ways, the Gospel of John is very different from the other three Gospels. That in

itself makes it really interesting to study. It opens up a window for us of an entirely different kind of early Christianity than we would have if we didn't have this Gospel, so it's really wonderful.

2. Major Themes of the Gospel of John

[17] Some major Johannine themes, I'm going to go through this pretty quickly because, if you just take a concordance and look up these terms, you can look at all the different places. First, notice that some of these main themes, I've already mentioned some of them when I was talking about the prologue, these main themes occur over and over and over again like the ringing of bells in the Gospel of John. Every once in a while you'll see one in one chapter, and then you might not hear until the next chapter or a few chapters later, but they'll just keep coming up. This author hits you over the head several times throughout the Gospel with the same themes coming back at you.

[18] One of them is the descending and ascending redeemer figure. Jesus is the one who came down from above who's going up, look at 1:51. Now we're going to run like bunnies through the text here so get your text out and be prepared. Lick your finger, come on lick your finger, you're not going to get sick, it's your own finger. 1:51, "And he said to him, very truly I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man," so the angels are ascending. Look at 3:13, "No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man." Look at 3:31, "The one who comes from above is above all, the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all," and I could go on, 1:32, 6:38, 6:41, 6:58, 20:17. Just look up this coming and rising, you look up these words in a concordance and you'll find they occur over and over in the Gospel of John.

[19] Very similar to that one is the theme of being lifted up, so Jesus in 3:14, in 12:32, in 8:28. You don't need to remember these numbers because you can look at a concordance and you can read this and you can just mark out in the margins of your Bible whenever you see this idea, in all of those Jesus is the one who will be lifted up. This is a puzzle, one of the things

that we'll find is that the Gospel of John likes puzzles, he likes riddles. So what does this mean when Jesus talks about the Son of Man being lifted up? Does it mean his ascension into heaven? Does it mean his resurrection from the dead? Does it mean his being put on a cross, because when you nail somebody on the cross you did it on the ground and then you put them up like this, so does the lifting up of the Son of Man refer to his crucifixion? or his resurrection? or his ascension going back to the Father? It's a puzzle we're never told exactly and that's one of the wonderful things about this text is that it plays with you all the time. It wants you to wonder about what's being meant here, so that lifted up is one of the themes that goes along with this going up and coming down. And then another part of that theme—see these themes get complicated is when Jesus says, "Everyone who comes to me when I am lifted up I will lift up," so Jesus says, he will lift up people who are his disciples. This going up and coming down is all the way through the Gospel, so that's one of the main themes.

[20] I mentioned seeing; we're going to run like bunnies through the text. 1:18: "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son who is close to the Father's heart who has made him known." Now see I should have told you, knowing is another theme there, we got two themes right in the same verse, seeing and knowing and the relationship between seeing and knowing in the Gospel of John is also difficult. It's not always clear, do you know by seeing or does seeing lead to an inadequate form of knowing? These are big exegetical problems that the Gospel of John poses and scholars argue about. Look at 1:34, "And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God." I have seen. Look at 1:39, "He came to them, 'Come and see.' And they came and saw where he was staying." In other words, just look in the concordance for every time you find the word see, saw, seeing and you'll just find it over and over again. 3:3, 3:11, 3:32, 3:36, several right there in chapter 3, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. Again, it's always a little bit difficult to figure out do you have to see to have faith in the Gospel of John or, because it sounds like one place toward the end of Gospel Jesus says, "Blessed are those who believe without seeing." He says to Thomas, "Blessed are you, you saw and so you

believe,” so that’s okay. “Blessed are those who have not seen and believe.” Is seeing an inadequate form of faith? Is it better to have faith without seeing or is seeing necessary for faith? It’s a problem. I already mentioned knowing but I could do the same kind of thing. 1:18, 8:55, 14:17, over and over again.

[21] Where Jesus came from and where Jesus is going is a major theme. With the Jews often he’ll say, you can’t go where I’m going, and they say, what is he talking about going? Is he going to go out to the Greeks and preach to the Greeks? Is he going to go back to Galilee? What does he mean, he’s going? People are always misunderstanding this. One of the other points is signs, what are signs in the Gospel of John? Notice the Gospel of John has other differences that I haven’t even mentioned; for example, remember in the Synoptic Gospels there are lots of exorcisms of demons. Jesus is going around a lot casting out demons from people, and the demons even confess him. You know there’s not one exorcism in the Gospel of John. Jesus is not an exorcist in the Gospel of John as he is in the other three Gospels. Why is that? Obviously this writer knew that there were stories circulating around that Jesus cast out demons, why does he not have Jesus doing any casting out of demons in his Gospel? I don’t know. There’s probably a dissertation there somewhere if you can find an answer.

[22] Look at 2:11, so one of the things is that in the other Gospels they talk about Jesus’ miracles, his healings, but the term preferred by this Gospel writer is sign. He talks about the things Jesus did as signs. Now there are not a lot of them, Jesus doesn’t do a whole lot of miracles in the Gospel of John. He does some big important ones that become famous, for example, turning water into wine, which is of course, every college student’s favorite miracle of Jesus. If only he had turned it into beer that might have been a little bit better right, but Jesus is famous for turning water into wine, one of his major miracles. It’s only in the Gospel of John, it’s not in the other Gospels, so some of Jesus’ famous miracles are in the Gospel of John but they’re not called miracles in John, they’re called signs. Look at 2:11, “Jesus did this, the first of his signs,” this is turning the water into the wine, “in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory and the disciples believed in him.” Notice “the first of his signs.” Let’s look over it a little bit 4:54, “Now

this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee,” the second sign. This has actually led some scholars to say that one of the sources this writer may have had is as signs book, a collection of signs, that is, miracles that Jesus did. Notice they’re not just a miracle that Jesus does and then casts off. I think that the author uses the term “sign” because most of the time you can actually do an exegesis of these signs narratives and they have some kind of symbolic meaning. The signs in the Gospel of John are not just miracles to prove Jesus’ power, they seem to have some kind of theological or symbolic meaning imbedded into them also. The signs, again, are one of the major themes of the Gospel of John.

3. *Johannine Sectarianism*

[23] One of the most important things that drives the Gospel of John is sectarianism. What do I mean by sectarianism? According to sociology of religion, a sect—it’s not necessarily just an insult. In other words you don’t just say, you’re just some member of some crazy little sect out there handling snakes or doing other kinds of things. A sect is a sociological term that refers to any group, whether it’s religious or not, although we usually confuse this in religious contexts, that considers itself very well cut off from the rest of society. For example, I grew up in a very, very sectarian fundamentalist church in Texas. By sectarian I mean that we basically believed that we in my church were the only ones going to heaven. In fact, we would call each other “brother” or “sister,” and you wouldn’t even call a Baptist—I mean we thought the Southern Baptist were going to hell. That’s how much we thought we were the only ones—there was nobody who was right like we were right so you’d called each other brother. Brother Lamar, all the old men in the church especially were called brother, but you wouldn’t call people brother who were outside that group. We were the only Christians, you had to be in our group, in fact people would even talk about something like, if you brought somebody to church as a visitor, somebody might come up to you and say, well is she a member of the church? They didn’t need to say our church, or our denomination, it was just “the church” because “the church” meant our church. This—what made this group a sectarian group was we had very firm

boundaries. There were debates about whether it was okay to marry outside of that boundary. Could you actually marry a Methodist? Oh God no, and God help you, a Roman Catholic, so the stronger the walls between your group and outsiders, the more sectarian your social group is.

[24] John's church seems to be a very sectarian group, and that's one of the things people have—why does he talk so much about dark and light? These are stark divisions, insiders, outsiders, up, below, there are children of light and children of darkness, there are children of God and children of Satan. There's no in between, there's no gray area, you're either in or you're out, so scholars define this by talking about Johannine sectarianism, the insider-outsider divisions.

[25] We're going to look at one place where that comes up. Look at chapter 9. I'm going to spend a little more time with this chapter because some scholars have used this to say what's going on in the Gospel of John. So get Chapter 9, get your Bibles out, you know I may lie to you. This is a story about Jesus healing a man born blind, so I'm going to skip around through it, but first he heals him and then 9:10, they kept saying to him, that is the surrounding people:

“Then how were your eyes opened?” He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me. ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” They said to him, “Where is he? [Notice this “where is he?” how do your eyes open?] He said, “I do not know [know, know, know. I now see, see, see—where, where, where is he?].” “They brought him to the Pharisees, the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was the Sabbath day.

[26] Now wait a minute, this is verse 13 for crying out loud, we've been 12 verses into this chapter, into this story, and only at verse 13 are we told that it's the Sabbath day, why not? Why is that? Well because apparently what started out as a simple healing story this author has decided to turn into a conflict story. Have you noticed that in a lot of the stories of the Gospels, some stories just seem to be straightforward miracle stories, other stories seem to be nature miracles, like not just

healings but power over nature? And then there are lots of stories that are conflict stories. That is you're told that someone was healed but the real important part of the story, was not just necessarily that they were healed but that they were healed on the Sabbath and that starts a conflict between Jesus and other Jews about what's permitted to do on the Sabbath. By the time you get to verse 13 what started out as simply a healing story, although it may have had symbolic meaning, because the man's blind and he comes to see and those are big important themes for the Gospel of John, now it becomes a conflict story over the Sabbath. He tells the story again to the Pharisees in verse 17:

So they said again to the blind man [this is the Pharisees], “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.” [That's important.] The Jews did not believe [this is verse 18] that he had been born blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he see?” His parents said, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that he now sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” His parents said this [this is the narrator speaking now] because they were afraid of the Jews.

[27] Now wait a minute, all the people in this story are Jews. Jesus is a Jew, the blind man's a Jew, his parents are Jews, they're all Jews. Why are we talking about some people being afraid of “the Jews”? “For the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.”

[28] Now I hate to tell you folks but that's just outright anachronistic. There was no movement going on during the life of Jesus where anybody that confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be excommunicated from the synagogue, that just didn't happen. There were all kinds of people who thought—the Messiah was around. There were debates about this but you didn't have any synagogue rulers going around saying, well, we're going to make a rule, anybody who claims that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah will be

excommunicated, we'll take their union card away from them, they can't come to high holy days, we will return their dues. It just wasn't going on. Now it may have been going on decades later when this guy wrote the Gospel you see. Now we'll keep reading. What's going on here of course is what you believe about Jesus the Messiah has to do with whether you will be allowed to stay in the synagogue. If you take Jesus to be just a prophet you might be allowed to stay. If you confess he's the Messiah, you'll be kicked out of the synagogue, that's the basic conflict of the story. We keep reading and they go into more and more conflict, look at verse 30, "Then the man answered," they're basically saying, look we know Moses, this guy can't be the Messiah, he must be wrong.

himself has taken what may have been a simple miracle story that he got from tradition about Jesus healing a blind man, and he does a couple of things with it. For one thing he pulls up to the surface these themes about blindness and seeing, and coming from God, and this all plays into the identity of Jesus as the Messiah. Then he tells the story like the blind man is sort of like someone who comes to faith in Jesus as the Messiah, and he recognizes it. But sure enough, if he really confesses that he's going to be thrown out of the synagogue, and so he leaves the synagogue and he joins up with Jesus. He's thrown out of the synagogue; he becomes a disciple of Jesus. In other words, allegorically speaking, he has to leave the synagogue and, therefore, he becomes a member John's church. There are other people who suspect that Jesus may well be the Messiah, they want to confess him, and they don't do so because they're afraid about being excommunicated from the synagogue.

- [29] The man answered, "Here is astonishing thing! [this is the man born blind who now sees] You do not know where he comes from [comes from, comes from, comes from], and yet he opened my eyes [I see, I see, I see]. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. [They kicked him out of the synagogue.] Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he sir? Tell me so that I might believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord I believe." And he worshipped him. Jesus said [and this is how the story ends, okay, so this must be important], "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see—" [Now is Jesus still talking just about blind people? No, we can see that the whole story was an allegory now.] "—and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

- [30] Some scholars have pointed out that what's going on with this chapter, chapter 9 in John, is a wonderful way to see how the writer

4. Johannine Christology

- [31] Notice how this story has become an allegory for what's going on in the time of the writing of the piece itself. The Gospel writer is telling a story about a blind man but he's also telling a story about the conflict that his church is having with the synagogue in the neighborhood. And the main thing that's going on here also is that Jesus is the one who brings about this division that takes place. What's the main focus of the division? Christology. Remember I talked last time about different Christologies? What Christology is, is what do you believe about the nature of Jesus Christ? Is he just human? Is he God? Is he some of both? Is he a prophet? Is he only a prophet? Is he a moral teacher? Is he only a moral teacher? Is he the Son of God? Is he equal to God the Father? All these are options, and the first several hundred years of Christianity is all wrapped up in fights over which of the many different options you have for what you believe about Jesus is going to end up being the right one. What's going to end up as orthodoxy? The Gospel of John is a wonderful place to see this very theme starting out.

- [32] Look at 5:19, I'm going to back up in a minute and go back to some other dialogues. Don't worry I'll finish on time today but we will probably take up again some of the Gospel of

John next time before we talk about the letters of John. 5:19:

Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And he will show him greater works than these so that you will be astonished. Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Very truly I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and does not come unto judgment but has passed from death to life.”

[33] Look at 5:18, right before that:

For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him because he was not only breaking the Sabbath but was also calling God his own Father...

[34] Now that’s so far where you’ve gotten in the narrative but notice what the author adds right that. The very next phrase, “thereby making himself equal to God.” Is every son always equal to a father? Go like this—nope. All sons are not equal to all fathers. The Gospel writer is editorializing because this is what he believes. He believes that not only is Jesus God’s Son in some kind of derivative sense, he believes that by saying that Jesus is God’s Son, he’s actually equal to God the Father. Look at 8:58, I’m going to come back and talk about chapter 8 next time. Chapter 8 is one of these classic scenes in the Gospel of John which start out with Jesus just talking to someone in what seems to be a cordial and relatively peaceful mood. Then as the conversation goes on, things get more and more heated, and people accuse Jesus of things but Jesus is just as bad, he accuses people of stuff all the time, ridiculous stuff sometimes, like they’re children of Satan. And the whole thing ends up with this big division and everybody’s starting to throw things at each other. Then the next chapter will start and you’ll see them talking

again, and again, it comes down to a big division. This is the end of Chapter 8 which is one of these scenes of a discussion turning into fight, turning into a brawl, turning into a division. Where does it end? Verse 58, chapter 8:

Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was I am.” So they picked up stones to throw at him.

[35] Isn’t that interesting, all he has to say is, I am. Why is that so much of a problem? Where does “I am” come from? Yes.

[36] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[37] *Professor Dale Martin:* That’s the declaration of what God is, when God says, “I am,” to whom and where in the Bible.

[38] *Student:* Moses.

[39] *Professor Dale Martin:* Moses in front of the burning bush, exactly. The very name of God, which those of us who are non-Jewish we usually say is Yahweh, there are only four letters in Hebrew, and those four letters don’t have vowels attached to them so we’re not really sure how to pronounce them. In your English Bible they’re usually translated by “Lord” in small caps. Whenever you see “Lord” in small caps in your English translation of the Hebrew Bible that means that the tetragrammaton, the four letters of God’s name are in the Hebrew. But according to pious Jewish usage, you never pronounce those, so you would say something like “the Lord” as a substitute, and that’s the way in the Greek Bible it does, since the Greek Bible didn’t know what the name was, it just would say adonai or “the Lord” or something like that. And so we would use that in the English translation. The scholars think that perhaps the best translation for those four letters, as they occur in Exodus, is being-ness or “I am.”

[40] Notice what Jesus is saying, he’s claiming to be the one who spoke to Moses out of the bush. That’s radical. That’s way more radical than anything we’ve seen in any of the other Gospels. Jesus could be the Son of God and still not be God. Jesus could be the Son of the Father and still not be equal to the Father. Jesus could be the Messiah and still not be divine, and Jesus could be even the Messiah and

divine and still not be “I am.” In the Gospel of John, nuh-uh, Jesus says “I am,” he’s the one who spoke to Moses. It’s no wonder that the Jews tried to stone him. We’ll talk about that further next time.

[end of transcript]