

## THE TRUTH AND SIGNIFICANCE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL<sup>1</sup> (W. Hall Harris)

### WHAT CENTRAL TRUTH WAS JOHN SEEKING TO COMMUNICATE?

The Gospel of John was written to communicate who Jesus is, specifically as reflected in the purpose statement (John 20:31). John's Gospel witnesses to unbelievers and invites them to become followers of Jesus, and it strengthens the faith of believers by deepening and expanding their understanding of Jesus. The central truth as far as the Fourth Gospel is concerned is that (a) the pre-incarnate Logos was fully God, was present with God in eternity past, and was the active agent of creation (1:1-3), and (b) the Logos became incarnate, fully human, as Jesus of Nazareth (1:14).

The Prologue (John 1:1-18) thus plays a key role in communicating this central truth, because it reveals clearly to the reader who Jesus really is, and by doing so, places the reader of the Fourth Gospel in a position superior to any of the characters appearing in the rest of the narrative. The reader, having been given "inside information" about Jesus as a result of the Prologue, is thus in a position to pass moral judgment on all the characters in the narrative which follows, along with their decisions for or against Jesus. As a subtle rhetorical device, this pushes the reader to side with the author of the Gospel of John concerning who Jesus is, lending credence to the narrator as a reliable source of information about Jesus's identity. This is part of the evangelistic strategy of John's Gospel.

### WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL FOR TODAY?

People today still need to hear the testimony contained in the Gospel of John about who Jesus is, just as much as John's original audience in the first century did. Obviously the same could be said for the Synoptic Gospels. John's Gospel, however, still strikes most readers as somehow more accessible than the Synoptics. In part this may be due to the simplicity of language, and in part to Jesus's long discourses, which sound more like stories and less like the short, proverbial statements a Rabbi might make to his disciples. John's Gospel presents us with a Jesus who is fully God (John 1:1-3) but who has become fully human (John 1:14) and who is, as a result, all the more approachable.

In his earthly life lived in humility, human weakness, and vulnerability, Jesus prepares us for the ultimate self-sacrificial love which takes him to the cross and which draws all people to himself (John 12:32). This is the very definition of what love is: "We have come to know love by this: that Jesus laid down his life for us; thus we ought to lay down our lives for our fellow Christians" (1 John 3:16, NET).



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<sup>1</sup>An excellent full length commentary on the Gospel of John by Dr. Hall Harris, Professor of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary, is available online at [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org).