

JESUS IS...

John's gospel in the pages of the New Testament is quite extraordinary. Presenting a different perspective than the other three, the apostle John (Son of Zebedee) has an overarching purpose to his prose—that is to convince his readers beyond any doubt that Jesus of Nazareth is the one true Messiah sent by God to establish his kingdom and take away all sins. Everything that John wrote he wrote for this goal. Here is his purpose statement:

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (20:30-31)

And John's desire to bring people to both belief in Jesus and life in his name is evident at the beginning of his gospel. He presents Jesus to us in clear pictures. He introduces us to him and establishes his divine identity. In just the first chapter he informs us who Jesus is. According to John, Jesus is...

The Word of God (1:1-14)

In a beautiful poem John connects Christ to creation and to salvation. He is the living Word of God involved in every aspect of world—having chosen to dwell among this creation personally to bring both light and life to us. He is the tabernacle of God made flesh. He is the Word flowing from the beginning into the present, the presence of God among his creation. As the Word he fulfills all of God's will for his people. Nothing accidental happening here. Jesus incarnate was planned and sanctioned from the start.

The Lamb of God ((1:20-34)

No mistake, of course, that John the Baptist is in the story. He adds testimony to John's claims for Jesus. His ministry verifies Christ's. His baptism of Jesus further establishes the validity of Jesus—the Lamb of God. The lamb—gentle, obedient, submissive, non-threatening—the choice for sacrifices. All this Jesus is. The is why the Word became flesh to “take away the sins of the world.” Only a perfect lamb could accomplish that—Jesus.

Rabbi (1:38)

Jesus is the teacher—a master teacher as Nicodemus discovered—a teacher sent from God. Rabbis hold great sway in Jewish culture and Jesus had to be established as such. There was no doubting his brilliance (even though some sought to do so). The Word of God could be nothing less. The aspect of who Jesus is also had significance in him making disciples.

Jesus of Nazareth (1:45)

“The son of Joseph.” This was Phillip's description as he told his brother about Jesus. He added, “The one Moses wrote about in the Law.” John included this in his narrative not by accident. Everyone knew nothing good came from Nazareth, so how could this be? Not only does this unmistakably reveal the humanity of Christ—coming from a backwater village of ill repute, but also it unequivocally connects the creator to the creation in a shocking way. It is the paradox of heaven. He came to his own but went unrecognized by them, but even so it was the only way for salvation to occur. Jesus did

not descend from heaven as a conqueror. Instead he was born in the flesh into obscurity in order to fully embrace humanity and from that vantage point become the perfect sacrificial Lamb of God. Jesus is...different from any expectation. He represents the values of heaven, not earth. His way runs counter to our way. He brings salvation not by strength but through weakness, in order for all us to fully depend upon God. Nazareth represented weakness, but it was all a part of the plan. Even Moses bears witness to it.

The Son of God (1:49)

This indicates his divine origin as well (from Nazareth but also from heaven) as validating the stamp of heaven upon him. There was no mistake that this was all Jehovah's doing; his will and desire to offer his son as a sin sacrifice upon a cross. It is a heavenly connection that cannot be denied. It also demonstrates his great love (3:16) and desire to redeem. Only a lamb from heaven could accomplish this.

King of Israel (1:49)

This term used by Nathanael is the most controversial of all. It was shocking and inflammatory. Jesus did not act like a king, so how could he possibly be one? Yet, his kingship and kingdom still resonates. His throne was never to be in Jerusalem, but in heaven. His kingdom is not of this world, but from another place (18:36). It is a kingdom not of earthly power and might, but of peace, hope, joy and love. He is the true king of Israel and all who follow him will enjoy the blessings of his kingdom. This part of who Jesus is remains for many hard to fully recognize.

The Son of Man (1:51)

Not a usual descriptive term, but a necessary one. It connects humanity to the idea that it can be reconciled to God—after all Jesus embodies both. It also highlights the frailty of man in contrast with God, indicating man's need for the divine presence.

He is the Messiah

Not specifically mentioned in the first chapter of John, but there none-the-less is the fact that John clearly presents Jesus as the Messiah. He includes John the Baptist testifying to this (1:19-28 & 31-36). To his audience this would have been controversial—as were some of the other designations. Jesus simply did not fit the preconceived script and John wanted to establish that this was part of the plan too. Jesus is... everything God purposed him and needed him to be to accomplish his redemptive will. As one writer framed it (of John's presentation of Christ at the beginning of his gospel):

The fully human Jesus from Nazareth is the Messianic King and teacher of Israel and the Son of God who will die for the sins of the world.

To bring people to have faith in him; to find light and life; to have their sins taken away—this was John's purpose and goal.