

# *Jesus and Life*

*Word Pictures in John's Gospel*

John's Gospel comes out of the Jewish world into the Roman world at the end of the first century. Jesus the Jew is the Saviour of the world. He transcends time and place and yet belongs to a particular time and place. In the third decade of the twenty-first century the personal affirmations Jesus makes and the parables Jesus speaks in John's Gospel still ring true.

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The ink sketches were drawn by his colleague Craig Bowyer during the author's time of teaching at Prince Alfred College in Adelaide.

**This book is dedicated to Rosalie**



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# Introduction

## Jesus and Life

The importance of Jesus in human history and the reality of God's kind of life in human experience are summed up in the most famous verse in the Bible: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*(John 3:16)

In John's Gospel Jesus is all about life.

The major theme of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke is the kingdom of God. On the other hand, the major theme of John's Gospel is eternal life, God's kind of life. God's rule and eternal life are already present in Jesus' first coming and will be fully realised in Jesus' second coming. Between the first and second comings we are to trust and obey the Lord. As the Fourth Gospel says, *the signs of Jesus' ministry are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*(John 20:31)

By calling this book *Jesus and Life* I am making the point that John's Gospel is applicable to the lives of its first hearers and readers, and is certainly applicable to our lives. Back then and right now the Gospel tells its readers that *Jesus came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*(John 10:10)

The dynamic nature of the Fourth Gospel is evident in the combination of sayings and deeds of Jesus, the memories of his

disciples, and the guidance of his Spirit. The publication of the Gospel fulfils the promise of Jesus: *I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.* (John 14:25-26) As we read John's Gospel we are in touch with Jesus himself, the first followers of Jesus, and the Spirit of truth.

According to the Fourth Gospel, everything people look for in bread and light, shepherd and vine is ultimately to be found only in Jesus. Jesus doesn't identify a type of ethical teaching or a kind of doctrinal viewpoint or a system of religion with the real thing. He is saying that he himself is the real thing, Life with a capital L! Unfortunately, John hints, too many people are satisfied with pale imitations of the real thing!

## **Word Pictures**

The subtitle of this book is based on the fact that John's Gospel has an intriguing and meaningful range of word pictures.

The first group of the Fourth Gospel's word pictures parallels sayings about the central theme of the first three Gospels, the kingdom of God which brings God's new order. According to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus says, 'The kingdom of God is like this and that.' According to John's Gospel, he says, 'I am this and that.' In other words, he is the king of God's kingdom who brings God's kind of life.

In all four Gospels believers see God's kingly activity in Jesus who rescues people from sin and evil. He is the one who begins



a new godly community with a new style of living. His people are the ones who share his sufferings, know his resurrection power, and look forward to his final victory. God's rule and God's kind of life have begun to be realised in the life of Jesus of Nazareth and will be fully realised in the final victory of Jesus the Lord.

The Fourth Gospel includes eight **'I am' sayings of Jesus** with three particular features. They describe the identity of Jesus. They list requirements of followers of Jesus. They give promises to followers of Jesus.

The eight 'I am' sayings in John's Gospel are as follows:

6:35	The Bread of Life
8:12	The Light of the World
8:58	Before Abraham
10:7, 9	The Gate for the Sheep
10:11, 14-15	The Good Shepherd
11:25-26	The Resurrection and the Life
14:6-7	The Way, the Truth, the Life
15:1-2, 5	The True Vine

The second group of the Fourth Gospel's word pictures is akin to the parables of the first three Gospels. The parables compare everyday events with events of eternal importance. They are stories from real life. They challenge the listeners to stop and think about what they are doing with their lives. In such a parable everything is focussed on a single meaning. The parables of Jesus comment upon the meaning of God's kingdom in the life of Jesus. They remain literary masterpieces with perennial relevance.

In simple terms, the parables of the first three Gospels fall into four groups. Some are about the coming and growth of God's kingdom. God's rule comes and grows in the work of Jesus. Others are about the grace and mercy of God's kingdom. The grace and mercy of God's rule extend to all. Some are about the citizens of God's kingdom. The citizens of God's rule are God's kind of people. Others are about the crisis of God's kingdom. Decisions for and against God's rule are crucial here and hereafter.

The Fourth Gospel includes a dozen **parables of eternal life** which compare life in the spiritual order with life in the physical order.

The parables of eternal life in John's Gospel are as follows:

3:8	The Night Breeze
3:29	The Bridegroom and the Best Man
4:35-38	The Ripe Fields
5:19-20a	The Apprentice Son
8:35	The Slave and the Son
10:1-5	The Shepherd and the Stranger
11:9-10	The Traveller in the Dark
12:24	The Grain of Wheat
12:35-36	The Walker at Sunset
13:10	The Bathtub and the Basin
14:2-3	The Father's House
16:21	The Woman in Childbirth

When we look at both the 'I am' sayings and the parables of eternal life in John's Gospel some observations of Eduard Schweizer are relevant.

First, Jesus uses everyday language and connects with his hearers when and where they live.

Second, such everyday language of Jesus can only be understood by hearers who get involved personally.

Third, the word pictures in all four Gospels are exaggerated at times and are focussed on Jesus, God's kingdom, or God's kind of life.

Fourth, the teaching of Jesus involves continuing education for the believer in the community of faith.

Fifth, acceptance of the message of Jesus opens up the future. According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the kingdom of God starts to live in the followers of Jesus. According to John, the believer abides in someone who is the same yesterday, today, and for ever.

Finally, what is latent or implicit in the first three Gospels is patent or explicit in the fourth Gospel. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke make comparisons of God's kingdom, John's Gospel gives definitions of Jesus, the king of God's kingdom who brings God's kind of life.

## **How to utilise this book**

This book is designed to be read by individuals or groups as an introduction to key sayings in John's Gospel.

An individual may use it as a collection of devotional studies over an extended period of time. Once a week or so we may 'hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest' a revered part of the Holy Scriptures known as John's Gospel.

A home group may work through a series of Bible Studies on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Members of the group may take it in turns to lead the times of discussion and prayer.

Each short chapter includes the following:

- the key text;
- its context;
- its content, in detailed and summarised format ;
- connections, with questions for reflection and discussion;
- time for prayer, with an example of a short prayer.

My prayer for readers of this book is as follows:

*Shed upon your Church, O Lord,  
the brightness of your light,  
so that we, being illumined by the teaching  
of John the evangelist,  
may walk in the light of your truth,  
and be brought to the fullness of eternal life  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*