


*THE PASSION
ACCORDING TO JOHN*

Dr Debra Snoddy

Catholic Institute of Sydney

Our Task with Reference to the Gospel of John

- How does the Gospel according to John understand the Passion of Jesus?
 - Very differently from the Synoptics. The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel according to John is essentially theological.
 - Why was Jesus tried and convicted?
 - Jewish leaders sought to maintain the equilibrium that existed in Jerusalem. They understood Jesus as a mischief-maker who could destroy that. Jesus also made claims they believed to be blasphemy → sentence for which is death.
 - What is the meaning of Jesus' suffering?
 - Why did Jesus die?
- 

A Very Different Gospel!

	The Synoptics	John
1	Jesus mainly works in Galilee and comes to Judea only in his last days	Jesus travels back and forth between Judea (Jerusalem) and Galilee often during his ministry.
2	Assault on the temple comes at the end of Jesus' career.	Assault of the temple comes at the beginning of Jesus' career (2:13-21)
3	Jesus began his ministry after John the Baptist's imprisonment	Their ministries overlapped – and Jesus' ministry is more successful.
4	Only mention one Passover and imply that Jesus' ministry lasted about one year	Three Passovers are mentioned (2:13, 6:4, 11:55) thereby making Jesus' ministry 3-4 years.
5	Last supper is presented as part of the Passover celebrations and Jesus institutes the Eucharist.	Final meal with disciples occurs on the evening before Passover . The Crucifixion happens on the day when the Passover lamb was slaughtered, i.e. Passover meal would be celebrated that night after Jesus' burial.

John's Portrait of Jesus

- In the Synoptics, Jesus is a healer whose teachings deal primarily with Torah reinterpretation.
 - John describes Jesus as the embodiment of heavenly Wisdom whose message centers on his own divine nature.
 - Jesus is both human and the form *par excellence* of God's celestial Word
 - To John, Jesus' crucifixion is not a humiliating ordeal (as Mark characterises it) but a glorification that frees Jesus to return to heaven.
 - John does not highlight the *parousia*, but assures his community (and us) that the risen Christ is eternally present in the invisible form of a Paraclete (a.k.a. the Holy Spirit) which continues to inspire and direct the believing community.
-

Differences in John's Portrait of Jesus

1	No birth story or virgin birth	Emphasis on Jesus' spiritual origin; he is the eternal "logos" word of God become flesh making his manner of conception is irrelevant
2	No record of baptism	Jesus' independence and superiority to John the Baptist is emphasized
3	No time of temptation in the desert	John's Jesus is so unified with the Father that worldly temptation seems impossible
4	No exorcisms	Jesus overcomes evil through his personal revelation of divine truth rather than through the casting out of demons (Mk & Mt especially)

Differences in John's Portrait of Jesus

5	Never devalued by family or friends	There is a little friction between Jesus and his brothers (7:1-6). Otherwise, he meets lots of opposition, but his character is too commanding to be devalued by anyone.
6	No short parables of the Synoptic type.	Rather than homely images of agriculture or domestic life, Jesus gives long quasi-philosophical speeches often focusing on his own nature. He does this both publicly and privately in Galilee and Jerusalem.
7	No reinterpretations of Mosaic Law	There is a focus on only one new commandment—to love. True love is the sole distinguishing mark of a true believer.
8	No prediction of Jerusalem's fall	Each of the Synoptic accounts has an apocalyptic discourse which includes this


Differences in John's Portrait of Jesus

9	No prophecies of Jesus imminent return. No prophecies about signs of the coming of the end.	Only two references to Jesus "eventual" return. Jesus is already present among believers as the Holy Spirit who is Helper, Comforter, and Advocate (14:25-26, 16:7-15). To John, Jesus first coming means that believers have life now (5:12-26; 11:25-27). Divine judgment is a current reality, not just a future event.
10	No Last Supper ritual/ institution.	Instead, on the last night before his death, Jesus washes his disciple's feet (13:1-16).
11	No agony before his death in Garden of Gethsemane	Jesus remains calm and his death is his glorification. His final words are not a cry of despair as in Mark, but a pronouncement, "It is accomplished" i.e. his life's work is completed.
12	The writing does not supplement or build on earlier narratives.	The choice of material to include seems to be determined only by the writer's special concerns (20:30-31; 21:25).

The Passion Timeline

Mark's Timeline				
	Thursday Nisan 14	Friday Nisan 15	Saturday Nisan 16	Sunday Nisan 17
Daylight Hours	Day of Preparation	Passover Crucifixion and Burial	Sabbath Day	First Day of the Week Resurrection
Sunset begins a new day	Passover Day Last Supper...	Sabbath Day	First Day of the Week	
John's Timeline				
	Thursday Nisan 13	Friday Nisan 14	Saturday Nisan 15	Sunday Nisan 15
Daylight Hours		Day of Preparation Crucifixion and Burial	Passover and Sabbath Day	First Day of the Week Resurrection
Sunset begins a new day	Day of Preparation Final Meal and Discourse...	Passover and Sabbath Day	First Day of the Week	

John's Final Discourse

- John 13 to 17 tell a different story from Synoptics.
 - No a Passover meal
 - No giving of bread and wine as body and blood.
 - Instead Jesus washes feet of the disciples
 - Reversal of master/servant relation.
 - A central themes of the discourse
 - Unification and identification of disciples and Jesus, Jesus and the Father
 - The command to love which is both structurally and theologically the centre point of the final discourse .
-
- 

Love One Another...

...As I Have Loved You.

The One Whom Jesus Loved

- The “Beloved” disciple.
 - Early traditions say this was John, but this disciple is never named.
 - Leaned on Jesus’ breast (13:23)
 - Asks Jesus Peter’s question about who will betray him.
 - He was acquainted with the high priest (18:15-18)
 - He is only male disciple at the crucifixion (19:26-27)
 - He outran Peter going to the tomb (20:2-10)
 - It is rumored that he wouldn’t die (21:20-22)
-

John's Passion Narrative

- Many of the *events* of the narrative of Jesus' death are the same in John as in the Synoptics.
 - But his narrative makes its *meaning* quite different.
 - **Mark** tells a story of *suffering, grief, abandonment* by God, and a radical need to find the Jesus who is not in the empty tomb.
 - **Matthew** tells essentially *same story as Mark*, though with a firm sense of an historical community that comes after.
 - **Luke's** story is one of *reconciliation, forgiveness*, the death of an *innocent man* who forgives those who kill him, then is raised by God to *fulfill the scriptures*.
 - By contrast, **John's** story is one of *fulfillment* and "*glorification*" passing through and beyond death to triumph.
 - "*Glorification*" rather than *suffering* is the central meaning.
 - "*Glorification*" suggests a *transcending of history*, just as it means a transcending of suffering, pain, death.
 - John 12: 27-28: "*Father, glorify your name.*" Then a voice came from heaven, "*I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.*"
-

Points of Congruence between John and the Synoptics

- *Anointing as Messiah by a woman.*
 - John transferred to Mary, sister of Lazarus, as an anointing for death 12: 3-7.
 - Feet rather than head anointed.
- *Rides a donkey (just one!) into Jerusalem: 12: 12-16.*
- *Judas' betrays him.*
 - John tells us that this is because "Satan entered into him."
- *Cutting off the ear of High Priest servant by "one who stood near." (In Luke Jesus heals him.)*
 - John assigns the cutting to Simon Peter and names the servant, "Malchus."
- *Purple robe, crown of thorns, mockery of the Roman soldiers, as in Mark 15:16-20. (Pro-Roman Luke omits this.)*
- *Crucified "with two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them." (Luke gives a account of the repentance of one of the two.)*
- *The Titulus Crucis.*
 - John adds the objection of the Chief Priests (plural), and Pilate's "what I've written, I've written."

Voluntary Submission to Betrayal And Arrest

- *Contrary to the Synoptic tradition, arrest, crucifixion take place before Passover (Jesus is crucified on the Day of Preparation for Passover).*
- *You may have noticed that Jesus essentially gives permission to Judas to hand him over (13:26-27).*
- *And at the arrest, Jesus is calmly asking questions of the guardsmen (18:4-11).*
- *The "I am he" of 18:5 is actually, again, "I am" in Greek, which recalls the other "I ams" – truth, way, living water, good shepherd, vine, "before Abraham was, I am" (8:58)etc.*
- *At the cutting of the ear of Malchus, Jesus rebukes Peter – "Am I not to drink the cup . . . ?"*
- *Jesus carries his cross "by himself" – no Simon of Cyrene.*
- *Completely absent is any despair, or crying out by Jesus.*
- *Instead, his dying words are "it is accomplished," that is, completed, fulfilled.*

So who is in control in this Passion narratives?

Some Details Unique To John

1. Only John has Jesus being taken first to *Annas*, the former high priest, who had been deposed by Romans; he was the powerful father of four high priests, father-in-law of another....
2. Only John has *another disciple* with Peter.
3. John expands the role of *Pilate*.
4. Only John has Jesus distinguish between *temporal and celestial* kingdoms (18:35-38).
5. Pilate's famous (postmodern?) question: *"What is truth?"* (What should the reader remember?)
6. Only John has *chief priests (still plural) object* to Pilate's sign – in "Hebrew," Greek, Latin the languages of the Mediterranean world.
7. Only John has the seamless tunic (replacement quotation of psalm 22?).
8. Only John has Jesus' Mother, her sister Mary of Clopas, Mary Magdalene, and "beloved disciple" at the *foot of the cross*. (What is important to note here?)

Who is Pilate in the Passion according to John?

There are three ways of viewing the actions of Pilate

1. Pilate is **representative of one taking a middle position in an all or nothing situation** and his indecision is seen in his constant movement in the narrative. He fails to decide, therefore, disaster follows. As such, Pilate is symbol of would-be neutrals frustrated by external pressure, the **inevitable slaves to 'world'**.
 2. Pilate is playing out a crafty political agenda with the "Jews". **He manipulates them** into an allegiance with Caesar. **What is significant about this?**
 3. Pilate is a weak and impotent leader who is **manipulated by the "Jews"**. They succeed in having a mischief-maker killed which ensures the status quo in Jerusalem and maintains their power base.
-

At the Foot of the Cross

*What is this
text about?*

*What is
significant
about that?*

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

The Beloved Disciple and the Mother of Jesus

- All four Gospels narrate the presence of women at the crucifixion but John develops this in to an occasion of significance.
- **There is more** happening here than a moment of filial devotion (i.e. a son ensuring his mother's well-being after his death).
- Enthroned on the cross Jesus speaks to the two who accepted without question his word (his mother in 2:3-5 and the BD in 13:23(?)).
- His mother represents his past ministry (she was there from the first sign), the BD represents the future of that ministry in the community.
- Each is given by Jesus to the other and so the BD takes Jesus' mother "to his own home" in Greek εἰς τὰ ἴδια *eis ta idia* (cf... 1:11 and 16:32), the BD's action located in THAT HOUR i.e. BD and mother become one as result of Jesus being lifted up on cross.
- As such it **reverses** 1:11!!
- Therefore, because of the cross and from moment of the cross a **new family** is formed.

WHAT IS THIS NEW FAMILY?

**Jesus' hour (passion, death, resurrection, ascension)
make it a reality.**

Rem: the hour was "not yet" in 2:4; 7:20;
8:30 but with the advent of the Greeks is
"the hour has come" 12:23; 13:1; 17:1

A Technical Detail

28 After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.'²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.³⁰ When Jesus had received the wine, he said, **'It is finished.'** Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

- His final words in 19:30 are exclamation of achievement.
- The task given by Father is perfected (4:34 and 17:4) so in bowing head Jesus HANDS OVER the SPIRIT
- The Greek uses παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα ***paredoken to pneuma*** "to give (turn) over/ hand over/ entrust the spirit" in a manner similar to the way Jesus hands himself over to death (10:18).
- It recalls 7:39 in that the Spirit will not be given until his return to the Father.
- Now however, the Spirit poured out onto infant church (represented by BD & Mother).
- The use of the definite article with Spirit clarifies that it is "the" Spirit that is handed over.

Why is John's Different Chronology in regard to Passover?

- Recall John the Baptist's "Here is the Lamb of God" (1: 29 which is unique to this gospel.)
- Now connected to 19:31-37.
- "Blood and water" from the side of crucifixion victim is perhaps not surprising as death was most likely be asphyxiation.
- But for John the significance lies in Exodus 12:46 "you shall not break any of its bones" (referring to the Passover lamb).
- In John, Jesus dies on the preparation day for Passover, the day the lambs were slaughtered.
- So Jesus *becomes* the Passover lamb, with all this means.
- Passover victim to be eaten completely.
- What to make of the water, blood? How many symbols in John connect to these images?
- So one must "eat" this Passover lamb? How?
- What about the identification and unification that had been part of the final discourse? The idea of identification of final discourse: Father > Jesus > disciples > reader. *What does this really mean?*
- The cruelest form of death becomes *glorification*?

Our Task

- How does the Gospel according to John understand the Passion of Jesus?
 - Very differently from the Synoptics. The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel according to John is essentially theological.
 - Why was Jesus tried and convicted?
 - Jewish leaders sought to maintain the equilibrium that existed in Jerusalem. They understood Jesus as a mischief-maker who could destroy that. Jesus also made claims they believed to be blasphemy → sentence for which is death.
 - What is the meaning of Jesus' suffering?
 - Why did Jesus die?
-

The Trans-historical Character of John

- The radical differences of this gospel from Synoptic tradition give it a trans-historical character.
 - The most fundamental difference is that the Synoptics tell us what happened, John tells us what it means.
 - John goes beyond the physical and into the mystical.
 - “Channeling” the essential sense of what Jesus is, and what that means for all who believe in him.
 - The only ethical injunction in John: “love one another as I have loved you.” How has Jesus loved us?
 - So, *identification* and paradoxical *glorification*.
-

John in the Lectionary

- Our Lectionary has a Year of Matthew (A), a Year of Mark (B) and a Year of Luke (C).
 - But where is John?
 - The answer: scattered over all three.
 - On closer examination we find that of the 70 passages (including repeats) used from John's gospel, about 30 are in Year B (Mark), compared with about 20 for each of the A (Matthew) and C (Luke).
 - Most appear in Lent and Easter making John the Gospel of High Feasts and Holidays.
 - Some favoured passages occur every year. Thus in Holy Week, for instance, we have selections from John 12-13 and 18-20.
 - Only in John do we have the account of Jesus washing his disciples' feet (Holy Thursday).
 - John's Passion is the Passion read every Good Friday.
 - Similarly John 1:1-14, which tells of the Word made flesh, makes an appearance every year on Christmas Day.
-