

The Crown Left Behind

At a centenary birthday celebration for philanthropist Robert Mayer at London's Festival Hall, an elderly English socialite—the widow of a former ambassador to France—mingled with the distinguished guests. Afflicted with failing eyesight, she chatted warmly with another woman for several minutes. Suddenly, the fog lifted, and she realized she was speaking directly with Queen Elizabeth II.

Horried by her gaffe, the socialite blushed deeply, curtsied, and stammered, “Ma’am, oh, ma’am, I’m so sorry! I didn’t recognize you without your crown!”

The Queen smiled sweetly. “This is Sir Robert’s evening,” she replied, “so I decided to leave it behind.”

The Gospel of John is the story of Jesus—the Lord of creation, the One who was with God in the beginning, and who truly is God—yet who chose to leave His crown behind. Because He came to earth without His royal splendor, the world failed to recognize Him.

The Intimate Gospel

John, the fourth Gospel, was penned by the disciple closest to Jesus. While the Gospel of Matthew provides the record of a devoted follower, John offers the perspective of the beloved apostle who leaned close to Jesus at the Last Supper, stood at the foot of the cross as his Master hung dying, and was personally entrusted with the care of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Alongside Peter and James, John belonged to the inner circle of disciples. He witnessed the most private and dramatic moments of Christ’s ministry, hearing and seeing more than almost anyone else. For this reason, John’s account is widely known as “the intimate Gospel.”

John opens his record with a breathtaking statement that deliberately echoes the first lines of Genesis:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.” (John 1:1–2)

“The Word” is Jesus Christ. John begins with the astonishing declaration that this man—whom he knew intimately as a friend and companion—was nothing less than the Creator-God of the universe. Having observed Jesus’ life closer than anyone else on earth, John emerged absolutely convinced of His deity.

It can be profoundly difficult to grasp the full weight of the words, “In the beginning was the Word.” Yet, if we find it challenging, imagine how much harder it was for His disciples. They lived with Him daily, witnessing His raw humanity in a way we never will. They were constantly confronted by a baffling question: “Who is this man? What kind of person heals the sick, raises the dead, calms the wind, and turns water into wine?” Even after witnessing His miracles and wisdom, moving from “Who is this man?” to “My Lord and my God!” was the logical basis for faith.

Ultimately, the evidence was so overwhelming that John chose to anchor his entire historical recollection on this bold declaration: Jesus is God. Near the end of his book, John explicitly states his dual purpose:

“Jesus did many other miraculous 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 Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:30–31)

John provides ironclad evidence that Jesus is the Christ (the Hebrew Messiah, the Anointed One) and the Son of God, so that readers might find eternal life through His name.

Foundational Truths for Bible Study

Before diving into this treasured text, we must understand two structural realities about the Bible:

- The Bible is an integrated message system. Though comprised of 66 distinct books written by more than 40 authors over nearly 2,000 years, the Bible is a perfectly unified whole. Every detail is interconnected, anticipated, and deliberately designed.
- Its origin lies outside our time-bound universe. Only a God who stands outside of time can declare the end from the beginning with absolute precision. This makes prophecy—history written in advance—the ultimate validation of divine authorship.

Precision in the Details

Because Scripture is an integrated design, structural details matter deeply. Jesus Himself affirmed this in the Sermon on the Mount:

“For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” (Matthew 5:18)

A jot is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet; a tittle is a tiny stroke that distinguishes one letter from another. Jesus’ point is clear: Scripture is flawless down to its most microscopic marks.

Consequently, we must avoid treating biblical terms as generic synonyms. Subtle variations carry distinct theological weight:

- The Kingdoms: Matthew specifically uses the phrase “the kingdom of heaven,” while the other Gospels use “the kingdom of God.” Because Matthew uses both terms in different contexts, he clearly recognized a distinction between them.
- The Olivet Discourse: While Matthew 24 and Mark 13 share identical contexts, Luke 21 addresses a different timeframe and audience. Conflating them leads to prophetic confusion.

The Berean Challenge

In Acts 17:11, we encounter the famous model of the Bereans:

“These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”

While searching the Scriptures daily is vital, the more difficult step is the first: receiving the Word with a ready mind. Many believers struggle to understand Scripture not because the text is obscure, but because their minds are cluttered with preconceived notions, outdated science, or flawed traditions. Letting go of our preconceptions is often the hardest, yet most necessary, step in serious Bible study.

The Boundaries of Reality

Modern quantum physics has revealed a striking truth about our universe: physical reality has strict boundaries. There is a macro-limit to largeness (the universe is finite) and a micro-limit to smallness (matter breaks down into indivisible quantum units).

This indicates that our universe behaves less like an absolute reality and more like a beautifully constructed, finely tuned digital simulation. Scripture has declared this all along:

Scripture Reference	Biblical Truth
Romans 1	God's invisible attributes are clearly understood through the physical creation.
Hebrews 11:3	What is visible was brought into existence from that which is invisible.

Science is only now catching up to what the Bible has taught for millennia.

The Fourfold Portrait of Christ

Each of the four Gospels presents a distinct, deliberate portrait of Jesus, tailored to its specific purpose. This focus is perfectly mirrored in their opening sections and genealogies:

Gospel	Core Portrait	Ancestral Focus	Unique Feature in John
Matthew	The Messiah / The Lion of Judah	Traced from Abraham (The First Jew)	7 Specific Miracles ("Signs")
Mark	The Suffering Servant	No genealogy (A servant's lineage is irrelevant)	7 "I AM" Statements (Echoing Yahweh to Moses)
Luke	The Ideal Man / Son of Man	Traced to Adam (The First Man)	—
John	The Deity / Son of God	Traced to Eternity ("In the beginning")	—

John the Apostle and His Structural Focus

John and his brother James were nicknamed the “Sons of Thunder”—a testament to their fierce, fiery dispositions. These men were strong, rugged fishermen, which contrast sharply with the fragile, passive figures often painted in medieval art.

John was the only apostle to escape a martyr’s death, surviving into old age while ministering in Ephesus. As a direct eyewitness to the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, he poured that firsthand experience into a lifelong, sacrificial public ministry. John authored five New Testament books: this Gospel, three epistles, and the Book of Revelation. Because he likely penned his Gospel after his apocalyptic exile on the island of Patmos, his writing possesses a uniquely cosmic perspective and a profound insight into the eternal nature of Christ.

A Slow-Motion Camera

The sheer structure of John’s Gospel underscores its intimacy. Nearly half of the book is dedicated exclusively to the final week of Jesus’ earthly ministry, and a staggering one-third of its verses focus on a single 24-hour period. John deliberately slows the camera down, capturing every heartbeat, word, and prayer to reveal the true depth of the savior’s heart.