

Paradox Unpacked: Jesus as God in the Gospel of John

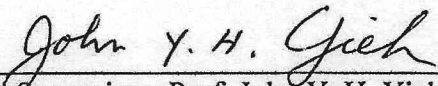
by

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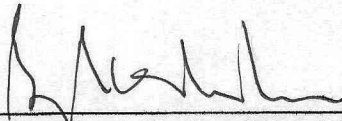
An Honor Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Department of Bible
of the Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary in Virginia
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master in Divinity

Alexandria, VA

May 1, 2022



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Abstract

The Prologue of the Gospel of John previews the theological framework which guides readers through the book. This thesis identifies in the Prologue three paradoxes pertaining to Jesus' identity, mission, and purpose and traces them through the remainder of GJohn, showing that each paradox is fundamental to Johannine theology. The paradox of identity shows the relationship between Jesus Christ the Word of God and God the Father. The paradox of mission shows how the Word made flesh brings grace and truth in conjunction with the Spirit of truth. The paradox of purpose shows how the Word offers life to the world through his death. In the Book of Signs and the Farewell Discourse, Jesus' words and actions develop each paradox further, both heightening and lessening the inherent tensions. By the Passion Narrative, the characters in GJohn and the readers themselves are asked to respond with belief to the paradoxical reality of Jesus Christ, through which belief they gain eternal life in him. Through careful exegesis of each relevant passage, this thesis shows how the author of GJohn uses paradox as a tool to present difficult concepts which are not easily explained but are foundational to an understanding of Johannine theology. This lays a foundation for further examination of GJohn through the lens of paradox.

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Introduction

The distinctive nature of the Gospel of John strikes the reader from the very first verse. The hymnic Prologue begins not with Jesus' birth or ministry, but with the existence of God and the Word in the prehistory of the world. The Prologue, unique in its style and content, lays out paradoxical statements about the Word, which set the tone for the story of Jesus' ministry on earth. The paradoxical nature of the theology in GJohn allows the author to present ideas which the early church struggled to comprehend. Who was the man Jesus Christ, who had walked the earth as the promised Messiah? What was his relationship with the God whom the Jewish people had worshiped for centuries? What was his mission? What had he come to the earth to do? What was his purpose? Why had he come to carry out his mission? These questions were difficult to answer in ways that adherents to a monotheistic religion could accept. Thus, the author of GJohn turned to paradoxes, to express the inexpressible. As GJohn unpacks these paradoxes, the reader encounters the truth about Jesus Christ.

GJohn presents its theology in three interwoven paradoxes concerning Jesus: his identity, his mission, and his purpose. Each paradoxical idea is introduced in the Prologue to puzzle the reader and set the stage for its exploration throughout GJohn. Jesus' own statements about his paradoxical identity, mission, and purpose deepen the paradoxes. In the Book of Signs, these statements tend to be for a general audience, but in the Farewell Discourse the message is for his disciples. By the Passion Narrative, at Jesus' hour, people must form a reaction to his paradoxical reality: those arresting him in the garden, Pilate during his trial, Thomas after the resurrection. Each of these figures provides a model of a positive or negative response to Jesus Christ. Through this, the readers themselves are challenged to respond with belief in Jesus in order to receive life in his name.

0.1 Overview of Related Scholarship

Scholars have long noted the paradoxical nature of Christianity's belief that God became human in the person of Jesus Christ. Charles Smith writes, "How can a tale about a clearly human Jesus and a tale about a clearly supernatural Christ be a part of the same basic account? To ask the question expresses the peculiar character of the Gospel narrative. It is *paradoxical*."¹ Smith's work draws out the essence of this paradox, showing how the historical human Jesus is related to the resurrected risen Christ. For instance, how is it that the Savior of the world cannot save himself from the cross? This, for Smith, is "the essential paradox of the Gospels."² His work traces the arc of Jesus' earthly ministry, giving a broad survey of the paradoxes inherent in Jesus' roles, but does not closely examine paradox through the language and theology of one Gospel as this thesis does. This careful consideration of the linguistic and theological details of GJohn is important because traditionally many scholars have considered dualism to be its overarching framework, due to its vivid use of opposites such as light and dark. Scholars have seen these polarities as opposed to each other, rather than paradoxically related to each other, which has created a significant body of scholarship on dualism in GJohn, but significantly less on paradox.

More recently, however, scholars have begun to challenge this assumption that GJohn is inherently dualistic. C.K. Barrett notes that the dualism in John does not follow the traditional pattern whereby dualistic pairs are opposed to each other with no inherent relationship, arguing instead that it is "a dualism in becoming, in motion."³ Because the dualistic pairs in GJohn are not static, these pairs can also evince paradox. "It is John's dualism in motion that makes it possible to

¹ Charles W. F. Smith, *The Paradox of Jesus in the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 19. See also C. K. Barrett, *Essays on John* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), 100: "In this sense the whole ministry of Jesus...is a paradox."

² Smith, *The Paradox*, 158.

³ Barrett, *Essays on John*, 106.

speak of paradox – of light in darkness, of life in death, of a person who is found below when he might be expected to be above...”⁴ While Barrett still supports a dualistic interpretation of GJohn, his nuanced sense of this dualism opens the door for a reinterpretation focused on the paradoxical relationships found there.

Douglas Estes goes a step further, claiming that paradox is the correct interpretive lens for GJohn, not dualism. Estes identifies a paradox concerning the Word’s identity as God in John 1:1 and one concerning the magnitude of Jesus’ deeds on earth in John 21:25, using these opening and closing statements to argue that paradox is the overarching interpretive framework for GJohn.⁵ Estes also places GJohn within the literary and philosophical context of the ancient Mediterranean, showing that paradox was not foreign to thinkers of that day. “Given the prevalence of paradoxical thought in the cultural milieu of the ancient Mediterranean world, we should not be surprised to discover it in the thought and language of the Gospel of John.”⁶ Estes’s primary case study of paradox is that of light and darkness, reframing a pair traditionally held to be dualistic in order to show that GJohn “was not written to depict binary oppositions as much as it was written to take opposing ideas and put them in dialogue with each other.”⁷ Estes’s article lays a strong foundation for what we will undertake in this thesis, to show that the paradoxical theology found in the Prologue of GJohn drives the portrayal of Jesus Christ’s identity, mission, and purpose throughout the gospel.

We must also note how paradox differs from another traditional literary framework for GJohn, that of irony. Out of the six ironic themes which Alan Culpepper identifies in GJohn, three

⁴ Barrett, *Essays on John*, 108.

⁵ Douglas Estes, “Dualism or Paradox? A New ‘Light’ on the Gospel of John,” *The Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 71, no. 1 (April 2020): 103, 105, digital file.

⁶ Estes, “Dualism or Paradox?,” 101.

⁷ Estes, “Dualism or Paradox?,” 108-09, 117.

of them overlap with our paradoxes: Jesus' origin and identity, which relate to our paradox of identity, and his death, which connects to our paradox of purpose.⁸ However, paradox is essentially different than irony. Narrative irony relies on the relationship between the narrator, the readers, and characters within the story, wherein often the narrator and the readers share information which the characters lack.⁹ For instance, the narrator shares information with the reader in the Prologue about Jesus' identity which the characters in the story lack as they interact with him. Hence, Jesus' identity is part of the narrative irony of the Gospel.¹⁰ However, the tensions inherent in a paradox are present for everyone who perceives it: narrator and reader alike (and characters in the story, where applicable). It is true that the paradoxes which we identify in the Prologue are not available to the characters in the story and in that sense create a certain sort of privileged knowledge for the readers. However, the thrust of these paradoxes is the uncertainty of knowledge which is created for the readers from the beginning, as they attempt to hold these seemingly contradictory concepts together. John presents these paradoxes as theological tensions about Jesus' identity, mission, and purpose, rather than as stable knowledge passed from the narrator to the readers.

In addition, irony hinges on the tension between the literal meaning and the intended meaning of an idea or event; the readers are led from the first to the second as they resolve the irony to create understanding and belief. According to Culpepper, this creates clear meanings which the readers are not invited to undermine further, since the irony in John is inherently stable.¹¹ With paradox, however, both apparently contradictory statements are intended. The paradoxes show us the separate truth of each contradictory statement, as well as the truth of the statements

⁸ R. Alan Culpepper, "Reading Johannine Irony," in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 195, EBSCOhost, relying on Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

⁹ Tom Thatcher, "The Sabbath Trick: Unstable Irony in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 76 (1999): 63, EBSCOhost, relying on Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*.

¹⁰ Thatcher, "The Sabbath," 63.

¹¹ Culpepper, "Reading Johannine," 204-05.

held together. It is this inconsistency, whether logical or ontological, which creates paradoxical tensions. These tensions lead the readers deeper into belief, but also remain present to the readers through the duration of GJohn. Paradox does not create stability, but it does lead to truth. This connects somewhat with the unstable irony which other scholars identify in GJohn. For instance, Werner Kelber argues that in GJohn, the resolution of unstable irony turns into “a stark paradox” and that the readers of GJohn are “faced with the paradoxical narration of life coming forth from death.”¹² Kelber’s argument acknowledges the tensions which continue to exist in GJohn, even as the readers process the irony which Culpepper identifies. However, paradox in GJohn does not exist solely as a product of unstable irony. Rather, the Prologue presents the paradoxes as a basis for the theology which unfolds throughout GJohn. They may be utilized as part of the literary irony revealed throughout the narrative, but they stand on their own as a theological framework for GJohn.

Paradox is also used as a rhetorical device in GJohn. George Parsenios explores how GJohn evinces the ancient rhetorical *ardens* style of writing, using it to “[express] the paradoxes and antitheses of its theological vision.”¹³ He argues that the gospel shows use of *sententiae*, which “produce their rhetorical effect...by relying on such things as antithesis, paradox, and paronomasia, where a play on words depends on the various possible meanings of a word or on the slight difference between similar sounding words.”¹⁴ GJohn thus shows both overarching use of paradoxical ideas and themes, which we will see throughout the Gospel, and instances of carefully framed dicta which contain a paradox, which we will see primarily in the Prologue.

¹² Werner H. Kelber, “In the beginning were the words: the apotheosis and narrative displacement of the Logos,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 89, accessed March 17, 2022.

¹³ George L. Parsenios, “A Sententious Silence: First Thoughts on the Fourth Gospel and the Ardens Style,” in *Portraits of Jesus: Studies in Christology*, ed. Susan E. Myers (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 18.

¹⁴ Parsenios, “A Sententious,” 18.

There is one well-known challenge to the idea that paradox is the overarching framework for GJohn. Ernst Käsemann disputed this idea when he claimed that GJohn is docetic in its portrayal of Christ. Docetism is inherently dualistic, and thus cannot contain the paradoxical relationship of Jesus the human with Christ the Word of God.¹⁵ “The disguise, the hiding, of a divine being in lowliness may appear paradoxical, but it is not really paradoxical at all. ... It indicates condescension, but not antinomy.”¹⁶ Thus, in order for GJohn to be paradoxical, the Word actually had to become flesh and not just seem to become flesh. John 1:14 is at the center of this debate. Does this verse show that the Word truly became flesh? Or does it merely denote Jesus’ presence among us without a full commitment to his incarnation or enfleshment?¹⁷ We will return to this issue later when we consider 1:14 as part of the paradox of mission in Chapter 2. For now, suffice it to say that we will follow the majority of scholars in not reading the entirety of GJohn as docetic. “In dogmatical language the paradox comes to full expression in the doctrine of the incarnation, the assertion that Christ was one with God and...became fully man: in actual nature, God; in actual nature, man.”¹⁸

0.2 A Definition for *Paradox*

Broadly used today, the word *paradox* can denote everything from a technical puzzle whose solution relies on shifting meanings of words to a conceptual tension where two seemingly opposing ideas are held together as true. This same range of meaning was seen in the ancient world;

¹⁵ Barrett, *Essays on John*, 104.

¹⁶ Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17*, trans. Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 12.

¹⁷ See Ernst Käsemann, “Aufbau und Anliegen des johanneischen Prologs,” in *Libertas Christiana* (Munich, 1957: Kaiser), 88-99, Internet Archive.

¹⁸ Smith, *The Paradox*, 29.

the Greek word παράδοξος as an adjective means, “contrary to expectation, incredible” and when used as the substantive παράδοξα, it referred to Stoic philosophical puzzles and word games.¹⁹

As a broad concept, it is important to understand that a paradox is not simply two opposing ideas; these ideas must have some sort of relationship to each other. “...paradox, as we have seen, is something other than plain contradiction; it involves some kind of relation between two contrasting propositions.”²⁰ This is why it is important to distinguish Johannine dualism from Johannine paradox. If GJohn is a traditionally dualistic work with unrelated, opposing concepts, its theology cannot be paradoxical. For instance, if life and death are held in opposition to each other, there is no paradox. However, if life comes from death, then there is an unexpected relationship that is inherently paradoxical. We will show that these opposing concepts are inherently related.

Estes proposes this definition for paradox:

...a paradox is a group of related propositions that, considered alone, are valid, but when considered together contains one proposition that is at odds with the others, and as a result creates a seemingly true but uncomfortable solution for the group.²¹

This shows how the two aspects of the paradox must be related to each other. Each one appears to be true on its own, but the validity of both is threatened when considered together. The person considering the paradox must work out whether there is a possible solution in which all the related propositions can be valid, both separately and as a group. This is a strong working definition, both for paradox as a rhetorical device and for paradox as a theological concept. The three primary paradoxes which we identify in the Prologue are rhetorical devices. Once the author establishes these, he maintains their broad conceptual tensions throughout GJohn. These tensions become the

¹⁹ “παράδοξος,” *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1309.

²⁰ Barrett, *Essays on John*, 104.

²¹ Estes, “Dualism or Paradox?,” 98.

paradoxical theological concepts which are unpacked through discourse and signs in the remainder of GJohn.

To what extent are we expected to resolve the paradoxes found in GJohn? The Stoic paradoxes so familiar to the ancient world were puzzles to be solved, often through fancy moves of logic based in shifting meanings of words. Paradox frequently relies on the plurivalence of language for its resolution; when we understand words in different ways, we can parse out how statements can seemingly be both true and false simultaneously.²² However, it is also possible to force a monovalent solution on a paradoxical idea which might hold more traction if the plurivalence of language were maintained. Does the author of GJohn want us to neatly resolve these paradoxical tensions? Or are we supposed to hold them in our minds so that they can work on us? Estes sees GJohn's use of paradox as solely in service to his theological ideas: "In both cases, the paradoxical language is supportive—it is not meant to interfere with the theological or literary goals of these statements... John is not a sophist, and did not compose these statements to be unsolvable."²³ However, the paradoxes in GJohn, which concern who Jesus is, how the Word of God can become flesh, and how life can come from death, are not easily resolved. Indeed, an easy resolution almost cheapens the depth and magnitude of what they purport. These paradoxical ideas become the basis of the debates in the ecumenical councils that ultimately produced the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds, resulting in theological discussion that is still ongoing nearly 2000 years later. Thus, these paradoxes are not meant for resolution as much as for continued discussion which develops into organic theological understanding.²⁴ This is not to say that the

²² For a discussion of the plurivalence of language, see John Dominic Crossan, "Paradox Gives Rise to Metaphor: Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics and the Parables of Jesus," *Biblical Research* 24 (1979): 25, ATLA Religion Database.

²³ Estes, "Dualism or Paradox?," 108.

²⁴ See Harold W. Attridge, "Genre," in *How John Works: Storytelling in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Douglas Estes and Ruth Sheridan (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 199: "The gospel facilitates an encounter with the resurrected Christ but in a context where theoretical issues arising from that encounter are of concern. It offers suggestions about resolving those theoretical issues but does not provide a definitive resolution."

paradoxes of GJohn are solely for sophisticated discussion and mind play; no, these paradoxes require a reaction. “There is no resolution of the paradox of Jesus in the Gospels which is not demanding and, in the deepest sense, a ‘following’ of the paradox of Jesus...”²⁵ These paradoxes set forth a compelling vision of Jesus’ identity, mission and purpose, to which the readers are asked to respond. GJohn gives us examples of others’ responses: the hostility of the soldiers in the garden, the skepticism of Pontius Pilate, and the faith of Thomas. The reader is not asked to solve the paradoxes; rather the reader is asked to believe in the subject of the paradoxes, Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who became flesh to offer us eternal life.

0.3 Method and Scope

This thesis builds on the work of scholars concerning paradox in GJohn discussed above, by identifying three paradoxes in the Prologue, following each through the remainder of the gospel and exegeting the relevant texts. My exegesis relies primarily on Raymond Brown’s Anchor Bible commentary, *The Gospel According to John*, as well as on various other commentaries. In order to prove that these paradoxes of identity, mission, and purpose are the underlying theological concepts driving the gospel, at least one instance of each paradox will be identified in the Book of Signs, and at least two instances of each in the Book of Glory, one in the Farewell Discourse and one in the Passion Narrative. Each of these sections of GJohn has its own unique purpose, so the paradoxical ideas will manifest differently in each. This shows both the theological coherency of the gospel and the independent traditions which underlie its final form.²⁶

Prologues tend to contain overarching themes and ideas, and despite its unique style and probable original hymnic composition, the Prologue to GJohn is no different. “[The Evangelist]

²⁵ Smith, *The Paradox*, 179.

²⁶ Due to the constraints of a Master’s thesis, I will treat the gospel in its final form and avoid discussion of original sources and redactional theories, unless directly pertinent.

prepares for the story by describing the Son of God in terms that rivet the attention of his readers, and so encourages them to read the story for themselves.”²⁷ The paradoxes of the Prologue prepare the readers for the surprising and mysterious ideas which they will continually encounter throughout the Gospel. The Book of Signs reveals times in Jesus’ ministry when he elaborates on these paradoxes in the context of the signs and miracles he performed. In the Farewell Discourse, Jesus imparts to his disciples what they need to know concerning his identity, mission, and purpose, so that they can be witnesses to the world after his departure. In fact, “the sayings at the Supper simply bring to a climax the many significant utterances that have gone before them.”²⁸ In the Passion Narrative, including the resurrection appearances, we see how the people interacting with Jesus face the reality of these paradoxes and are confronted with a choice: How will they respond to him? Will they be hostile and skeptical? Or will they find the belief that results in eternal life? And, finally, in 20:30-31, the readers are confronted with that same reality and choice.²⁹

²⁷ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, second ed., vol. 36, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 5.

²⁸ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 306.

²⁹ My chosen passages do not extend into chapter twenty-one. I am following many scholars in treating this final chapter as an epilogue; the chapter is essential to the text “to complete some of the lines of thought left unfinished,” but the major theological themes of GJohn can be considered concluded in 20:30-31. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, vols. 29 & 29A of *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 1078-79.

Chapter 1

1 The Paradox of Identity

The first verse of the Prologue to GJohn presents the identity of the Word as a paradox. *Identity* is the basic characteristic that makes the Word what it is. Thus, the Prologue through this paradox begins to answer the question, “Who is Jesus?” We learn that the Word existed in the beginning; the Word was with God; the Word was God. This is paradoxical: How can Being X both be with Being Y and be identical to Being Y? These two statements make sense by themselves, but together, each threatens the validity of the other. The next few verses do little to clarify the author’s meaning, so we are left wondering if the identity of the Word is the same as the identity of God. Are their basic characteristics the same? To understand the depths of this paradox, we must look further into GJohn.

The author returns to this paradox in the Book of Signs when the Jews confront Jesus about his identity (10:22-39). “Are you the Messiah?” they ask; to this Jesus cryptically responds that he and the Father are one, which echoes the paradox from the Prologue. But, is this a unity of will, or of power and operation, or of action, or of being? Later Jesus appeals to the Psalms to defend his status as the Son of God, revealing more about the paradox but still leaving it unresolved.

This paradox appears again during the Farewell Discourse when Jesus expands on his claim to be one with the Father. It is a oneness of indwelling; he is in the Father and the Father is in him. This is an exclusive unity. By its virtue, he is able to extend that indwelling to his disciples, so that they may be in him and he in them, and he offers them unity that will witness to the world. But it is not a unity which is available to humanity apart from him; his oneness with the Father is unique.

In the garden in the Passion Narrative, Jesus claims a full unity with the Father by claiming the Father’s name for himself. When the soldiers ask for Jesus, he responds with a simple, ἐγώ

εἰμι, the Greek translation of the Hebrew name for God, יהוה. In response to this, the soldiers fall on their faces in front of him. Jesus' claim on the name of God is an act of power, an act that has a physical impact on those who deny that claim. Jesus' use of the name of God finalizes his claim to unity with the Father.

1.1 The Paradox of Identity in the Prologue

The opening paradox of identity sets the stage for the entire gospel; the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection will center around the question of who Jesus is. This initial paradox intrigues the reader, because it is not easy to solve. Estes frames the paradox this way³⁰:

Proposition	Counter-Proposition
1:1a Word at Creation (Word \equiv God)	
1:1b	Word with God (Word \neq God)
1:1c Word was God (Word \equiv God)	
Word is God (?)	

It seems as if the Word is God. The Word is present at creation, and only God is present at creation because everything besides God is a part of creation. The Word is called θεός,³¹ though not ὁ θεός. However, as the counter-proposition states, the Word is also πρὸς τὸν θεόν. If the Word is with God, then is the Word the same as God?

This seems to be formed in the manner of a common ancient paradox, Eubulides' masked man paradox, which goes like this: "You know who your father is. Your father is identical with

³⁰ Estes, "Dualism or Paradox?," 103-04.

³¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Greek references are taken from Barbara Aland et al eds., *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Revised Edition (Stuttgart: German Bible Societies, 2012), digital copy.

the man in the mask. Therefore you know who the masked man is. Yet you do not.”³² The paradox plays on our ability to equate our father with the masked man and our inability to know who the masked man is because of his mask. The two can be the same person, and yet our ability to know that they are the same person is limited by circumstances which are tangential to their identity as the same person. The limitation of knowledge is in our own reasoning.³³ One can know who one’s father is, even if certain circumstances prevent one from making logical equivalencies. Thus, the paradox is solvable, by analyzing the reasoning behind the claims.

This contemporary paradox seems to provide a helpful frame of reference for understanding v1. The ancient readers, familiar with the cultural milieu of paradoxical references, understand that they must puzzle out how the Word can both be God and be with God. If the paradox is parallel to the masked man paradox, then the solution will be that the Word and God have the same basic characteristics, and the difficulty lies in the readers’ reasoning ability. However, as this paradox unfolds in GJohn, it will become clear that it is not an exact replica of Eubulides’ paradox. In the original version, there is an exact equivalency between the masked man and the father, but in the paradox in our gospel, it will be much more difficult to conclude that the basic characteristics of the Word and God are exactly the same.³⁴ Thus, the readers will be forced to expand their concept of identity in order to build a new paradigm for the identity of the Word as θεός. The starting place will be the two categories found in v1: πρὸς τὸν θεόν and θεός.

The idea of the Word being “with God” can be interpreted in two separate ways: accompaniment and relationship.³⁵ If the Word accompanies God, then they are together in each

³² Peter Cave, *This Sentence Is False: An Introduction to Philosophical Paradoxes* (London: Continuum, 2009), 87, EBSCOhost. See also Estes, “Dualism or Paradox?,” 104-05.

³³ Cave, *This Sentence*, 87.

³⁴ It is difficult to find a vocabulary word which expresses the relationship between the Word and God without lapsing into anachronism by reading Nicene and Chalcedonian language back into GJohn. The gospel provides the basis for the later theological language and concepts, but does not contain the language and concepts explicitly.

³⁵ Brown, *The Gospel*, 4-5.

other's presence. If the Word is in relationship to God, then they are connected to each other in fellowship.³⁶ Since the paradox suggests sameness, we might ask which of these interpretations leads us to seeing the Word and God as the same. A connection of relationship is more closely connected with the idea of sameness than that of accompaniment. One could argue that the idea of the Word accompanying God actually leads one away from seeing the two as the same, because when two beings are spatially present to each other, it is clear that they are not the same. However, if two beings are in relationship with each other, we might think of them as unified, which could lead to them being the same as each other. This might lead us to prefer an interpretation of relationship over one of accompaniment.

However, both ideas are developed later in the gospel. At the very end of the Prologue, we read that Jesus is εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς (1:18). κόλπος literally means "lap" or "bosom"³⁷ and thus here Jesus is portrayed as accompanying the Father. In addition, later in the gospel he says that he is not alone because the Father is with him (16:32) and that he has glory in the presence of the Father (17:5), both suggesting accompaniment. Jesus is also clearly in relationship with the Father, which the mutual indwelling language of the Farewell Discourse shows. The readers do not have to choose between these two ways of interpreting the phrase πρὸς τὸν θεόν. Rather, the two interpretations remain side by side in their collective consciousness as they continue to read. Thus, the complexity of the paradox deepens.

When considering the idea of the Word being "God," it is important to note the distinction between ὁ θεός and θεός. The verse does not say that the Word was ὁ θεός, but simply θεός, hinting that this is more complex than Eubulides' masked man paradox. Beasley-Murray notes, "θεός without the article signifies less than ὁ θεός; but it cannot be understood as 'a god,' as though the

³⁶ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 10.

³⁷ "κόλπος, ὁ," *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 974.

Logos were a lesser god alongside the supreme God; nor as simply ‘divine,’ for which the term *θεῖος* was well known...³⁸ Thus, the Word is the same as God in some way that is stronger than being a demi-god or a man with divine qualities, and yet the Word is not exactly the same as God himself.³⁹ As Richard Bauckham puts it, “...while the Word can be distinguished from God and said to be with him, the Word is also intrinsic to God’s own unique identity.”⁴⁰ What it means to be intrinsic to God’s identity, the Prologue itself does not reveal to us, even as it shows us that the Word is in relationship to and accompanies God. And so we turn to the Book of Signs.

1.2 The Paradox of Identity in the Book of Signs

In 10:22-39, Jesus is asked about his identity as the Messiah. He does not answer directly, instead claiming that his works done in the name of the Father testify to him and finishing with, “The Father and I are one” (vv25, 30). T. E. Pollard calls this verse the most explicit statement of the paradox of the identity in GJohn:

The Fourth Gospel, with its emphasis on the divinity of Jesus Christ—the central fact of the Church’s faith—set the Church the problem of fitting this fact into the framework of belief in ‘one God’—the basic presupposition of the Church’s faith. The evangelist himself was content to leave the problem in the paradox of *distinction-within-unity*, a paradox which is stated most explicitly in ‘I and the Father are one’.⁴¹

This verse is central to the gospel’s task of parsing out the identity of the Word. Does being “one” with God indicate being the same as God? Within the pericope, the Jews promptly accused Jesus of making himself to be God and tried to stone him for it (vv31, 33), so it is clear that in contemporary Jewish culture, this was an inflammatory statement. Jesus’ use of Psalm 82 to justify his statement helps us to understand its ramifications for our paradox.

³⁸ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 10-11.

³⁹ Again, we must be careful not to read Nicene theology into this. Brown, *The Gospel*, 10.

⁴⁰ Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 241.

⁴¹ T. Evan Pollard, “The Exegesis of John 10:30 in the Early Trinitarian Controversies,” *New Testament Studies* 3, no. 4 (July 1957): 348, digital file. Emphasis original.

The pericope is divided in half, as Jesus answers two questions for the Jews: “Is [he] the Messiah (24)? Does he make himself God (33)?”⁴² Jesus’ controversial claim about being one with the Father falls directly in the middle of this discussion; the answer to the first question culminates in the claim, while the answer to the second question justifies the claim. In the previous pericope, Jesus explained his identity as the Good Shepherd; despite the setting change in v22, the discussion here builds on that identity. In explaining his relationship to God the Father, Jesus refers to his sheep, to whom he has given eternal life and whom no one can snatch from his hand. God the Father has given him these sheep, and no one can snatch them out of God the Father’s hand either.

Jesus draws a close parallel between the sheep being snatched out of his hand (v. 28) and out of the Father's hand (v. 29). The Greek word “one” is neuter (hen), not masculine. Jesus is not saying that he and God are one person (which would require the masculine form), but that he and God are united in the work that they do.⁴³

Jesus and the Father are not exactly one and the same, which would require the form εἷς; but they are one in a certain sense. It seems that the unity that Jesus claims with God the Father is one of “power and operation.”⁴⁴ Both God and Jesus desire and effect eternal life for the sheep (operation) and both are strong enough to hold onto the sheep permanently (power). God has given Jesus the sheep to make this possible. The unity of power and operation is strong enough for Jesus to simply say that they are one.

It is important to note that the textual history of v29 is complicated. The various versions disagree about what is “greater than all else.” The reading from B* which is used for the NRSV is given a {D} grade by Bruce Metzger:⁴⁵ ὁ πατήρ μου ὃ δέδωκέν μοι πάντων μεῖζόν ἐστιν (What

⁴² Brown, *The Gospel*, 404-05.

⁴³ Gail R. O’Day and Susan E. Hylen, *John*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 110, digital file.

⁴⁴ Brown, *The Gospel*, 412.

⁴⁵ Bruce M. Metzger, et al. eds., “10.29 ὃ δέδωκέν μοι πάντων μεῖζόν ἐστιν {D},” *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2016), 197.

my Father has given me is greater than all else).⁴⁶ Other manuscripts read ὄς instead of ὸ, and μεῖζων instead of μεῖζόν. The various combinations of these words produce four possible permutations, which are all represented in various manuscripts.⁴⁷ Metzger argues that the ὸ reading is original, since it would be highly unlikely for ὄς to be changed to ὸ directly following a masculine nominative noun.⁴⁸ The variation between μεῖζων and μεῖζόν creates a significant difference in meaning. If the reading is μεῖζόν, the subject of “greater than all” is the gift of God (that is, the sheep or the Church) which is difficult to justify exegetically, since the church is not given that kind of prominence in GJohn.⁴⁹ If the reading is μεῖζων, the subject of “greater than all” is God’s power. Metzger protests that this reading “is impossible Greek, and cannot be construed.”⁵⁰ However, Brown follows this reading in his translation, treating the neuter relative ὸ as an accusative of respect, which adequately accounts for the Greek grammar and avoids the exegetical difficulty of calling Jesus’ flock greater than all else.⁵¹

The essence of the paradox in v30 is not impacted by which reading one follows in v29; however, the dramatic nature of Jesus’ claim is heightened under the reading that makes God’s power the referent of μεῖζων. To say that God’s power is greater than all and then to immediately say that he is one with the Father in respect to that power emphasizes the boldness of the claim that Jesus makes. It is also paradoxical in and of itself: How can he be “one” with what is greater than all else? Would it not mean that the Father’s power is not greater than all else? This paradox is only resolvable if Jesus’ power is exactly the same as God’s power. Thus, Jesus elevates the

⁴⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are New Revised Standard Version.

⁴⁷ J. Neville Birdsall, “John X.29,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 11 (1960): 342.

⁴⁸ Metzger, “10.29,” 198; Birdsall, “John X.29,” 343, agrees.

⁴⁹ Birdsall, “John X.29,” 343-44.

⁵⁰ Metzger, “10.29,” 198.

⁵¹ “My Father, as to what He has given me, is greater than all...” Brown, *The Gospel*, 401. While this translation by Brown does not use the word power explicitly, Birdsall, “John X.29,” 344, explains that “the subject is the unassailability of the flock of God because of his guardian power.”

power of God as greater than all else and then claims to be unified with God in respect to that power.

However, Richard Bauckham argues that the claim in 10:30, combined with the “in-one-another” language seen in 10:38, shows a “relational intimacy of Jesus and the Father within the identity of the one God,” and this relational intimacy becomes “not the same thing as, but the ground and source of, the unity of action played out in the sending of the Son by the Father into the world.”⁵² Thus, the perichoretic language of relational intimacy, which is developed further in the Farewell Discourse, shows a glimpse of deeper unity that supports the identity of power and operation seen in 10:30. Johannes Beutler also argues that the unity described here is more than a unity of action, basing this on the relationship between this verse, the claims in the Prologue (1:1, 18), and Thomas’s confession of faith (20:28). For him, this claim must “be understood as a statement about the unity of the Father and the Son in their being.”⁵³ Thus, this verse makes clear a unity of power, operation, and action, and hints at a closer unity of relational intimacy and being.

Indeed, Jesus’ audience heard the weight of this claim, since they immediately attempted to stone him for blasphemy. This reaction provides additional weight to the paradox; if the claim did not equate man with God, then the reaction would be unjustified.⁵⁴ In response, Jesus does not back down from his claim but uses Scripture to justify it. Not only does the paradox still stand, but the word of God supports it. Anthony Hanson argues that, “no explanation of this passage is

⁵² Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 33-34.

⁵³ Johannes Beutler, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Michael Tait (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 286.

⁵⁴ The blasphemy charge does not appear to be based on Jewish law, and the reaction recorded here may reflect the tension between church and synagogue contemporary to the author of the gospel. However, inclusion of this reaction serves to intensify the paradox. See C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1955), 318-19.

adequate which does not show how the Son being described as God fulfils the scriptures.”⁵⁵

Hanson describes two ways of interpreting this passage:

According to most editors the argument is merely: if men could in some circumstances be called gods, far more could the consecrated Christ be called God. But I would prefer to express the argument thus: if to be addressed by the pre-existent Word justifies men in being called gods, indirect and mediated though that address was..., far more are we justified in applying the title Son of God to the human bearer of the pre-existent Word, sanctified and sent by the Father as he was, in unmediated and direct presence.⁵⁶

The more common interpretation weakens the paradox, by saying that Jesus is like God in the way that other holy men are like God. This falls far short of Jesus being the same as God, unless we want to make other men almost the same as God. Thus the paradox becomes easier to resolve in our minds because Jesus becomes more distinct from God. However, Hanson’s formulation of this argument strengthens our paradox. He identifies two separate Jewish traditions concerning Psalm 82 which support his interpretation.⁵⁷

One tradition interprets the psalm as talking about the passage in Deuteronomy 1:15-18 where God made the leaders of the Israelite tribes judges. These judges were called gods because the word of God came through them to the people, and by this line of reasoning, Jesus can so much more be called God because he is the vehicle of the pre-existent Word.⁵⁸ Jesus is both parallel to the judges who channeled God’s word in their role as judges and he is distinct from them because he bears the Word of God in himself, which makes him more worthy of such a title. The other tradition is that this psalm refers to the time when God addressed the Israelites at Mt Sinai (Exodus 19ff.). Hearing the law (that is, the pre-existent Word) made them immortal, but because they

⁵⁵ Anthony Hanson, “John’s Citation of Psalm LXXXII Reconsidered,” *New Testament Studies* 13 (January 1, 1967): 367, digital file.

⁵⁶ Anthony Hanson, “John’s Citation of Psalm LXXXII,” *New Testament Studies* 11 (January 1, 1965): 161, digital file.

⁵⁷ Hanson, “John’s Citation of Psalm LXXXII Reconsidered,” 365-66. Other commentators also follow him in this interpretation.

⁵⁸ Brown, *The Gospel*, 410.

sinned with the golden calf, they were mortal again. Barrett applies this tradition to the passage in GJohn in this way:

But behind the argument as thus formulated there lies no belief in the “divinity” of humanity as such, but a conviction of the creative power of the word of God. Addressed to creatures, it raises them above themselves; in Jesus it is personally present, and he may therefore with much more right be called divine.⁵⁹

If the Word of God can make a sort of *theosis* possible when revealed to humanity, then the incarnation of the Word in a human makes that human even more worthy of being called God. This interpretation preserves the distinction between Jesus and the rest of humanity which strengthens the paradox. His claiming the title of Son of God is parallel to its use in Psalm 82 such that he avoids the charge of blasphemy, and it is not parallel such that he can make a much stronger claim about himself than the psalm makes about the Israelites. The paradox stands.

Before we turn to the Farewell Discourse, it is worth exploring briefly the history of interpretation of 10:30, since this was a central verse in the Christological controversies of the early church. As noted above, it is important to distinguish between our current understanding of trinitarian theology and the original context and intent of GJohn. It would be inappropriate here to talk of essences, persons, and the hypostatic union; however it does seem that the author wants to express the divinity of Christ without abandoning traditional Jewish monotheism. This is why early theologians gravitated to this passage and to GJohn as a whole as the Christological controversies surfaced. We can risk looking at how some of the earliest theologians exegeted this verse to shed light on its meaning in its original context.

The tension between the plural verb ἐσμέν and the singular predicate εἶν did not go unnoticed. Hippolytus of Rome (170-235 CE) believed that the use of the first person plural in this verse emphasized the distinction between Jesus and the Father, and he “interprets the εἶν as a moral

⁵⁹ Barrett, *The Gospel*, 320.

and not an essential unity.”⁶⁰ This is in line with modern commentators who see the unity claimed here as one of power and operation: Jesus claims that his moral intent is the same as the Father’s, but not necessarily his essence. This distinction was important in the early church’s battle against the Monarchian heresy which sought to erase a distinction between the Father and the Son. Tertullian (c. 155-220 CE) goes a bit further than Hippolytus. Although he agrees that Jesus’ claim is not one of singularity, he argues that it refers to unity, likeness, and conjunction (*Adversus Praxean* 22). Despite noting the tension between the plural verb and the singular subject, he concludes that there is some type of unity of substance. “For Tertullian, then, the ἐσμέν and the ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατήρ are proof of the distinction between Father and Son, while the ἓν (unum) is proof of their unity of substance.”⁶¹ Thus, while the use of this verse in the doctrinal controversies of the early church begins to remove its interpretation from its original context, it does show us that the earliest theologians believed that GJohn was expressing something significant here about Christ’s identity which defied normal grammatical usage.

1.3 The Paradox of Identity in the Farewell Discourse

During the Farewell Discourse, Jesus develops his paradoxical identity with the Father by repeating the motif of mutual indwelling from 10:38. First, he does this in response to Philip’s request that Jesus show them the Father (14:9-11). Later, he returns to this theme in his high priestly prayer for the church (17:21-23). Here we begin to see how Jesus’ paradoxical identity is not self-contained, but instead indwells the church and through the indwelling of the church impacts the world as a whole. Thus, his paradoxical identity is intimately connected to his paradoxes of mission and purpose.

⁶⁰ Pollard, “The Exegesis,” 335.

⁶¹ Pollard, “The Exegesis,” 336.

Philip wants Jesus to show them the Father, and Jesus responds that they have already seen the Father if they have seen Jesus, because “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (14:10). If any of them doubted this paradoxical unity before, Jesus returns to it here to emphasize it again.

The reality is greater than human language can express, but that to which it points is sufficiently clear: in the depths of the being of God there exists a *koinonia*, a ‘fellowship,’ between the Father and the Son that is beyond all compare, a unity whereby the speech and action of the Son are that of the Father in him, and the Father’s speech and action come to finality in him.⁶²

Although it is difficult to express this idea in language, the claim of mutual indwelling does help to parse out further Jesus’ claim of unity with the Father. How can two be one? Through being in one another. This refers back to both the ideas of accompaniment and of relationship first seen in 1:1. If they are “in” one another, they are both spatially present to each other and in relationship with one another. This falls short of resolving the paradox, however, because it is easier to conceive of how a spiritual God can indwell a human than to conceive of how that human being can indwell God reciprocally. Jesus’ identity in its very essence must be more complicated than that of a human being, even one who has a deep spiritual connection with God. The very mutuality of the indwelling preserves the paradox, even as it sheds some light on how it operates.

In 17:21-23, the paradoxical unity of the Father and Son appears in Jesus’ prayer for the whole church.⁶³ These verses evince a remarkable parallelism in the Greek, which is carefully constructed to show that the unity of the Father and the Son, described as mutual indwelling, is paralleled in the unity of the Christian church. This unity becomes a witness to the wider world of Jesus’ relationship with the Father and of the Father’s love. Verse 21 is paralleled by verses 22b-23; each block of clauses starts with a *ἵνα* clause which notes the unity of the church, which is

⁶² Beasley-Murray, *John*, 254.

⁶³ It also appears in Jesus’ prayer for his disciples (17:11), but the clause concerning the unity of the disciples is omitted in some textual witnesses, which weakens its importance there. Brown, *The Gospel*, 759.

followed by a *καθώς* clause that describes the unity and mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son, which is followed by a *ἵνα* clause that further describes how this unity manifests in the church, and finishes with a *ἵνα* clause that describes the witness that this unity bears to the world.⁶⁴ This parallelism is important because the structure shows how the unity of the church and the unity of the Father and Son interact. In each block of clauses, the unity of the church is dependent upon the unity of the Father and the Son (*καθώς*). “*Kathōs* has both a comparative and a causative force here...: heavenly unity is both the model and the source of the unity of believers.”⁶⁵ Thus the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son becomes the source of the unity of the church.⁶⁶

Here Jesus extends the paradox of his identity, the paradox of his unique unity with the Father, to his disciples and to the church as a whole. He invites all Christians to enter into the mutual indwelling which is constitutive of his relationship with the Father. The paradox is not something which we merely contemplate, but is something in which we participate, so that it changes us and witnesses to the world around us.

...from the loving communion between the Father and the Son flows the love with which Jesus loved his disciples, a love that enables them to enjoy an intimate “in-one-another” relationship with Jesus and his Father, and it is from this overflowing of divine love into the world that the oneness of believers among themselves stems.⁶⁷

This paradox of identity is life-changing and world-changing, and as such, it is related to the two paradoxes of mission and purpose. The paradoxical, unexpected mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son has an economic effect on the world; through the Son’s incarnation, he is able to relate

⁶⁴ John F. Randall, “The Theme of Unity in John 17:20-23,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 41 (1965): 388-89. Brown notes that the some early patristic works quote a version of v21 that is much shorter and essentially summarizes the verse (Origen and Jerome ten times each); however, it is unlikely that a shorter original version would expand into such careful symmetry seen here. Brown, *The Gospel*, 770.

⁶⁵ Brown, *The Gospel*, 769; F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Cambridge: University Press, 1961) §453.

⁶⁶ This verse became important during the Arian controversy when it was used to argue that the unity of the Father and the Son was the *same* as that of the believers, and thus nothing more than a moral unity.

⁶⁷ Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 36.

God's saving sovereignty to the church and through the church to the world. "More specifically, it is an outflow of the relations within the Triune God and of his action in and through the incarnate Son, whereby his saving sovereignty became operative in the world."⁶⁸ Thus the paradox of identity flows into the paradox of mission. In addition, it is through this paradoxical identity that Christ offers life to the church and the world. "The Father-Son relationship involves more than moral union; the two are related because the Father gives life to the Son (vi 57). Similarly the Christians are one with one another and with the Father and the Son because they have received of this life."⁶⁹ Thus, the paradox of identity also flows into the paradox of purpose. These connections strengthen GJohn's paradoxical theological framework.

Thus, the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son adds to our understanding of the paradox. The Father and Son are related through accompaniment and relationship; they are one in power and operation which stems from their relational intimacy; and they mutually indwell one another in such a way that it spills over to the church. And, as we turn to the Passion Narrative, we shall see the emphasis of the paradox move from the Word being with God to the Word being God.

1.4 The Paradox of Identity in the Passion Narrative

Jesus' paradoxical identification with the Father becomes a point of confrontation in the Passion Narrative during the arrest scene in the garden. Here Jesus uses the Greek version of the Hebraic divine name, ἐγώ εἰμι, to identify himself to the soldiers and temple police who have come to arrest him (18:5). While this is not the first time in GJohn that he has identified himself in this way, it is significant here because he claims his paradoxical divine identity as he is led away to his trial and execution. At the moment when it would be easiest for the readers to doubt his claim,

⁶⁸ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 306.

⁶⁹ Brown, *The Gospel*, 776.

GJohn repeats it and emphasizes it through the reaction of the soldiers and police, as they fall to the ground before Jesus.⁷⁰

However, the manuscript witness to the text of v5 is complicated. Some manuscript traditions show the name ὁ Ἰησοῦς either before or after the words ἐγώ εἰμι.⁷¹ If the original text contains the words ὁ Ἰησοῦς, then this is an instance of the standard Greek usage of ἐγώ εἰμι as first person identification and not an example of Jesus identifying himself with the divine name. Metzger gives the reading without ὁ Ἰησοῦς a {C} grade, indicating that it is not the most authoritative reading, but he still defends it. He acknowledges that because ὁ Ἰησοῦς was frequently contracted in writing to ΙΣ, it was easy for it to drop out through scribal oversight, but he also points out that it would be natural for a scribe to add in the name in order to identify the speaker. In addition, the fact that the name is sometimes inserted before and sometimes after the phrase ἐγώ εἰμι “is further indication of the secondary character of the longer readings.”⁷² Brown uses the appearance of an absolute usage of the ἐγώ εἰμι phrase in the Marcan Passion Narrative as an additional piece of evidence that the usage without the name is not out of place here.⁷³ Thus, while we acknowledge the complicated witness of the manuscripts, we will follow the scholarly consensus that supports the shorter original reading.

The usage of ἐγώ εἰμι throughout GJohn is complicated. Brown identifies three types of usage: the absolute usage where it simply means “I am”; the use with an implied predicate; and the use with an expressed predicate. In most cases, the absolute usage alone is identified with the Hebrew name for God, and there are four instances of this in John (8:24, 28, 58; 13:19). Our

⁷⁰ O’Day and Hylan, *John*, 171.

⁷¹ Ⲙ A C K L W etc. place ὁ Ἰησοῦς after λέγει αὐτοῖς while in B, it appears after ἐγώ εἰμι. ὁ Ἰησοῦς does not appear in p⁶⁰ D it^b e r l syr^s, palms cop^{bomss} Origen. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 317.

⁷² Metzger, “18.5 Ἐγώ εἰμι {C},” 215. See also Beasley-Murray, *John*, 317.

⁷³ Brown, *The Gospel*, 810.

passage appears to be an instance of the use with an implied predicate; an appropriate translation would be “It is I.”⁷⁴ The scribal tendency to add the name ὁ Ἰησοῦς to make the predicate explicit is further indication of this. However, its usage here is more complicated than that. Bauckham notes that not only does Jesus’ statement make the soldiers fall to the ground, but he also repeats it three times, which suggests “an emphatic climax” of the I AM sayings in GJohn.⁷⁵ Thus, here Jesus claims the divine name, deepening his paradoxical identity with the Father, which began with the pre-existent Word’s presence with God and continued through Jesus’ unity with the Father during his earthly ministry. As he goes to his death, he once again makes that claim, showing that, “It is as the uniquely divine Savior, fulfilling the sovereign divine purpose, that Jesus goes voluntarily to his death, in order to complete his salvific work.”⁷⁶ Jesus claims his paradoxical divine identity as he carries out his incarnate mission with the purpose of giving life to the world.

Here Jesus uses his paradoxical identity to confront the men who approach him with hostile intent. The men are divided into two groups: ἡ σπεῖρα and τὰ ὑπηρέται. ἡ σπεῖρα is a term normally used for a Roman cohort, a military unit of 600 soldiers, or a smaller maniple of 200 soldiers. Both units seem far too large to be sent to arrest one man, so Josef Blinzler argues that the author is using traditional Roman military terms to describe the Jewish military.⁷⁷ Brown, however, argues that this reference is to Roman soldiers, agreeing with other scholars that GJohn may be preserving a historical detail not seen in the Synoptics. Still, Brown downplays any specific theological meaning that may come from the mention of both Roman soldiers and temple police, since GJohn does not call attention to the idea that the soldiers represent Rome. τὰ ὑπηρέται refers

⁷⁴ Brown, *The Gospel*, 533-534.

⁷⁵ Bauckham, *The Testimony*, 245. See also Brown, *The Gospel*, 534.

⁷⁶ Bauckham, *The Testimony*, 249.

⁷⁷ See Josef Blinzler, *The Trial of Jesus: The Jewish and Roman Proceedings against Jesus Christ Described and Assessed from the Oldest Accounts*, 2nd revised ed., trans. Isabel McHugh and Florence McHugh (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1959), 62-70, for his full argument.

to the temple police sent by the Sanhedrin and the Pharisees; GJohn is the only Gospel to mention the Pharisees here, but their mention is not too significant because they had a voice on the Sanhedrin.⁷⁸ Thus it seems difficult to read too much into the specific details given in v3 and it is sufficient for us to view the soldiers and police collectively as a group sent by at least the religious authorities (and perhaps the secular ones as well) to arrest Jesus.

Why did the soldiers and police fall to the ground? Beasley-Murray in his discussion of this incident refers to the *mysterium tremendum*, that is, the dreadful or terrible mystery found in the presence of God. This is seen throughout Scripture, when people fall to the ground during prophetic visions (Ezek. 1:28, Dan. 10:9, and Rev. 1:17) and during individual encounters with God (Acts 9:4).

It is entirely comprehensible that the Jewish constables of the temple were awed by the “I am” uttered by Jesus in the garden (cf. the reaction to him in the temple, reported in John 7:46), and their shrinking back could have produced what is described in v 6; moreover, we should not dismiss as absurd an awesome effect of Jesus on the Roman soldiers in that situation (note the unexplained 19:8—“Pilate was *the more* afraid”).⁷⁹

Jesus’ paradoxical identity causes even those hostile to him to fall on the ground in dread and awe at the paradox.⁸⁰ This underscores both the paradoxical nature of Jesus’ identity and the power of that paradox. Just as people fall on the ground in dread in the presence of God, so the soldiers and police fall on the ground in dread in the presence of Jesus. Jesus is identified with God, both through his use of the ἐγώ εἰμι phrase and through the reaction that name evinces. In addition, his paradoxical presence has a powerful impact on people who in theory should not be impacted by him. They are large in number, they have weapons, they have the backing of the authorities, but

⁷⁸ Brown, *The Gospel*, 808, 815-16.

⁷⁹ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 322-23.

⁸⁰ Our concern here is less the historicity of this narrative and more its theological function in GJohn.

that means nothing in the presence of Jesus' paradoxical identity. While this still falls short of claiming that Jesus and God are the same, it adds weight to that part of the paradox.

John 1:1 presents us with a paradox of identity: the Word was with God and the Word was God. Thus the inherent question here asks, Is Jesus' identity the same as God's identity? This paradox is developed throughout the gospel, each mention adding weight to one side of the paradox or the other. The Word accompanies God and is in relationship with God; Jesus is one in operation with God; Jesus and the Father mutually indwell each other. Thus, the Word is with God. However, Jesus is also one in power and in relational intimacy with the Father, and he takes God's name for himself in the moment of his trial and execution. Thus, the Word is God. The paradox stands unresolved, but it still spills over into the church and stands as a witness to the world, leading us into the paradoxes of mission and purpose.

Chapter 2

2 The Paradox of Mission

What was the Word's mission on earth? How did the Word come into the world, and what did he come into the world to do? We find the paradoxical answer to these questions near the end of the prologue in v14: "And the Word became flesh..." The Word of God and flesh by their very natures are two incompatible entities. The Word of God is present before the creation of matter, and in fact is the rational and organizing principle of that creation, whereas flesh is a material and physical creation, able to be held and quantified and measured. Thus, when the Word becomes what he has created, these incompatible entities become related to each other in the body of Jesus Christ, creating a paradox.

It is through the Word becoming flesh that we see God's work among humans. Jesus Christ comes into the world to dwell with us, full of grace and truth, which he offers to us through his flesh. John emphasizes this in the Book of Signs when Jesus tells us that one must eat his flesh and drink his blood to gain eternal life (6:52-54). Thus, the Word becomes flesh to offer himself to his followers in physical, material form, to feed them. However, the paradox takes an unexpected shift. Roughly 10 verses later, Jesus tells us that flesh is useless and his words are spirit and life (6:63). How can Jesus' flesh both be essential for salvation and be useless? Spirit and flesh are two seemingly incompatible entities: Is this another paradox?

Here in this unexpected development, the author begins to unpack the relationship between Jesus, who is full of truth in his fleshly life, and the Spirit of truth, who continues Jesus' ministry after his departure. Jesus explains this to his disciples during the Farewell Discourse, telling them that the Spirit will "testify on his behalf" (15:26) and "will guide [them] into all truth" (16:13).

Rather than the Spirit superseding Christ in the flesh, he continues and completes Christ's work in the flesh, pointing the disciples to the truth of salvation.

And yet it is not only the disciples who must face the truth of Jesus. In the Passion Narrative, Pilate encounters Jesus as the truth in his flesh. However, unlike the disciples, Pilate responds with skepticism ("What is truth?") and with a half-hearted attempt to release Jesus (18:38-39). Pilate can recognize that Jesus has done nothing wrong, but he fails to see the truth of Christ as life-giving. Pilate's condemnation of Jesus is what lifts him up on the cross to complete his mission of giving his flesh for the world and sending the Spirit into the world after his resurrection.

2.1 The Paradox of Mission in the Prologue

The paradoxical nature of the incarnation documented in v14 of the Prologue is widely acknowledged. This verse tells us that the Word become flesh, which is paradoxical in and of itself because of the incompatible natures of the Word and flesh. Further, this paradox of mission is dependent on our paradox of identity. Because 1:1 states that the Word is θεός, we realize that 1:14 says that θεός became σάρξ. Thus, the Word became flesh, divinity became humanity, and God became man. Barrett describes it, "...the Logos adopted a paradoxical, unexpected role — a role that might at first seem inconsistent with his deity."⁸¹ Flesh appears to be inconsistent with deity because GJohn uses the word to describe the sinfulness of man who stands opposed to God. "For John, σάρξ means man in his creaturely human corporality who has fallen victim to sin, i.e., selfishness, and therefore to death, who stands in opposition to the spirit of God and who cannot know God of himself and therefore cannot attain eternal life."⁸² Thus for Word to become flesh,

⁸¹ Barrett, *Essays on John*, 105.

⁸² Martin Hengel, "The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 269.

θεός must become something at odds with himself, something which does not even know himself, because it is associated with the sinfulness of humanity. This is the height of paradox. Furthermore, it is through the Word becoming flesh that we see the Word at all; were it not for the incarnation, the Word would remain in eternity, out of reach of humanity. Thus, “Jesus's other-worldliness can only be seen in his flesh, his humanness. That is the paradox of the gospel.”⁸³ By the Word becoming utterly at odds with himself, we are able to see his mission dwelling amongst humanity, to bring us grace and truth.

The paradox of mission in 1:14 is central to the entire Gospel of John. “...the account of the prologue moves to the statement of v14; by virtue of its theological significance *it* forms the center of gravity of the prologue, and indeed of the Gospel itself.”⁸⁴ While the paradox of identity will tell us who carries out the mission and the paradox of purpose will tell us why he carries out that mission, it is the paradox of mission that tells the good news of the gospel itself: “because for the Fourth Evangelist, the fact that God now chooses to express Godself through a human being is the ultimate good news.”⁸⁵ It is through becoming flesh that the Word will be able to deliver himself, full of grace and truth, to humanity, and thus this is the good news which GJohn shares with the world.

Furthermore, it is significant that here the author switches into the first person plural to proclaim that “we” have seen his glory. With this shift, he draws his community into confession and worship, stating his message “in the form of a proclamation to which the response of faith of the community of believers corresponds.”⁸⁶ This foreshadows the response to which all three

⁸³ James L. Resseguie, “Point of View,” in Estes and Sheridan, *How John Works: Storytelling in the Fourth Gospel*, 96.

⁸⁴ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 4, emphasis original. See also Hengel, “The Prologue,” 283, “...v. 14 summarizes the whole Gospel.”

⁸⁵ O’Day and Hylen, *John*, 27. See also p. 26, “The move from logos in verse 1 to logos in verse 14 is the key to understanding the Gospel of John.”

⁸⁶ Beutler, *A Commentary*, 52.

paradoxes are building. The readers will understand the identity, mission, and purpose of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and, responding with belief, will receive eternal life.

Before we proceed, we do need to address further Käsemann's objection to this interpretation. In order for the Word becoming flesh to be paradoxical, the Word must actually become flesh. Käsemann did not believe that GJohn entertained the notion of kenosis, that is, the emptying of Jesus' Godhead so that he might enter our humanity, nor did he acknowledge that "the revealer himself gives up his divinity and becomes as earthly as we are."⁸⁷ While Käsemann acknowledges that 1:14 is inherently paradoxical, he sees the paradox as "the Creator enters the world of createdness and in so doing exposes himself to the judgement of the creature."⁸⁸ This is in contrast to the Creator becoming creature, which is what our stronger version of the paradox entails. However, Käsemann is short-sighted in his interpretation of the gospel. Firstly, the nature of the paradox is not that Jesus Christ gives up his divinity to become human, but rather that Godhead and humanity are joined in a paradox: two entities seemingly at odds with each other somehow joined together into one. In addition, his interpretation ignores the strength of the Greek phrasing: "Σὰρξ ἐγένετο is more emphatic than the related ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί, 'who was manifested in the flesh,' of 1 Tim 3:16."⁸⁹ In GJohn, the Word does not just appear in the flesh, but becomes flesh. This is supported through the way that GJohn shows Jesus experiencing human weakness, such as his exhaustion when he meets the Samaritan woman at the well and his sorrow over Lazarus's death.⁹⁰ Thus, the paradox is real and is something that needs to be unpacked in order to understand the entirety of GJohn.

⁸⁷ Käsemann, *The Testament*, 44-45.

⁸⁸ Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today*, trans. W. J. Montague (London: SCM Press, 1969), 158.

⁸⁹ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 13-14. Beasley-Murray also notes Richter on the meaning of ἐγένετο: "The verb γίνομαι in connection with a predicative noun expresses that a person or a thing changes its property or enters into a new condition, becomes something that it was not before." See Georg Richter, "Die Fleischwerdung des Logos im Johannes-Evangelium," *Novum Testamentum* 13 (1971): 88, ATLAS.

⁹⁰ Hengel, "The Prologue," 270.

While the exact nature of the paradoxical mission will continue to be unpacked throughout GJohn, we see a hint here in 1:14 of what the Incarnate Word will bring to humanity. He is “full of grace and truth,” a phrase that has resonances with the Hebrew pairing of חַסֵּד and אֱמֶת .⁹¹ Thus the Greek phrase $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ καὶ ἀλήθεια will carry Semitic connotations in addition to its Hellenistic denotation.⁹² In GJohn, the word $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ does not appear outside the Prologue, but “its threefold repetition here reflects its importance in the confessional theology of the Johannine church.”⁹³ $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ has a range of meanings from “grace” to “favor” to “thanks.” Because its usage in GJohn is so limited, it is difficult to use that context to determine its meaning. While Conzelmann notes that חַסֵּד has a stronger connection to עֲלֵוֹס than to $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$, here the pairing of $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ with ἀλήθεια gives us confidence in using the Semitic connotations of חַסֵּד to help establish the meaning of $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ in GJohn.⁹⁴ חַסֵּד , when used to describe God in the Old Testament, means “*kindness, lovingkindness* in condescending to the needs of his creatures”⁹⁵ and “denotes, not a disposition, but the act or demonstration of assisting faithfulness.”⁹⁶ In God’s lovingkindness, he is faithful to his covenant with Israel and provides “expected definitive redemption from every need,” thus showing a connection between חַסֵּד and salvation history.⁹⁷ The Greek word ἀλήθεια means “eternal reality as revealed to men—either the reality itself or the revelation of it,”⁹⁸ while אֱמֶת in Hebrew is “the quality of firmness or stability; as a property of persons it means ‘steadfastness,’ ‘trustworthiness,’

⁹¹ Beutler, *A Commentary*, 48. The fact that this phrase is first applied to God in Exodus 34:6 hints back to our paradox of identity.

⁹² C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 175; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 14-15. Dodd acknowledges the Semitic origin of the phrase but tries to downplay the importance of the Semitic meaning of אֱמֶת , saying that the “sense can hardly be supposed to come through to Greek readers” (176). However, this seems to ignore the essentially Jewish nature of GJohn, so I follow Beasley-Murray in seeing the meaning of ἀλήθεια as a combination of both Greek and Hebrew connotations.

⁹³ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 14. While our discussion will focus primarily on ἀλήθεια, we will briefly discuss $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ to show its relationship to the paradoxical mission of Jesus.

⁹⁴ H. Conzelmann, “ $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$, $\chi\alpha\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$, $\chi\alpha\rho\iota\tau\acute{\omicron}\omega$, $\acute{\alpha}\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$,” *TDNT* 9:391.

⁹⁵ “ חַסֵּד ,” *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 339.

⁹⁶ R. Bultmann, “ עֲלֵוֹס , עֲלֵוֹ ,” *TDNT* 2:480.

⁹⁷ Bultmann, “ עֲלֵוֹס ,” 480.

⁹⁸ Dodd, *The Interpretation*, 177.

and it is especially an attribute of God, as the One who is absolutely trustworthy.”⁹⁹ Dodd summarizes this as, “Ἀλήθεια is fundamentally an intellectual category, πίστις a moral category.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, we combine the moral faithfulness of God with the reality of truth in the world, and we see what the Word brings us in his incarnation. The incarnate Word is faithful and trustworthy to carry out his mission, the revelation of truth to his disciples and to the world, a truth that will lead them to a saving knowledge of God to meet their needs through his grace and lovingkindness. This truth is made manifest through his incarnation, and as we will see in the Book of Signs, the flesh of the Word is essential to humans for the knowledge of God.

2.2 The Paradox of Mission in the Book of Signs

The various pieces of the paradox of mission come together in a complex way in the Bread of Life discourse, which follows GJohn’s pericope of the feeding of the five thousand (6:22-71). The discourse begins with a discussion between Jesus and the crowd which has followed him after eating their fill; Jesus tells them to believe in him, the bread of life who has come down from heaven, instead of looking for miracles. This pericope clearly builds on the paradox of mission, as the Word made flesh offers his very flesh for the world. “In John i 14 the entrance of the Word into the world was spoken of in terms of becoming flesh; and it is this same flesh that is now to be given to men as the living bread.”¹⁰¹ However, the discussion becomes offensive when in v51 Jesus announces that the bread which gives life to the world is actually his flesh and in v55 insists that his flesh is “true food” and “true drink.” But before the passage’s end, GJohn will turn from the theme of flesh to that of the Spirit, who will bring life and truth to the disciples.

⁹⁹ Dodd, *The Interpretation*, 173.

¹⁰⁰ Dodd, *The Interpretation*, 173.

¹⁰¹ Brown, *The Gospel*, 291.

This passage is complex, and as such has produced much discussion concerning its redaction history. The pericope begins at 6:22 and continues all the way through to 6:71. While there seems to be a change in audience (and perhaps time and location) at 6:60, the conversation is still focused on Jesus' startling comments about his flesh.¹⁰² Brown sees vv35-50 and 51-58 as two separate versions of the Bread of Life discourse, both from the Johannine community, the latter one evincing a more developed eucharistic theology.¹⁰³ Beasley-Murray, however, sees the second part of the discourse as building on the first, with "the image of eating the bread of life increasing in intensity."¹⁰⁴ This increasing intensity seems clear. Even the structure of the pericope makes it difficult to mark a clear delineation where Brown does, since Jesus calls himself the bread of life or living bread in vv48 and 51, creating an *inclusio*.¹⁰⁵ Jesus' increasing insistence on the necessity of his flesh makes the contrast with v63, where the focus switches to the Spirit, all the more stark.

Thus, in this pericope, we have an intelligible development of the themes of belief, Jesus' flesh, and eating and drinking, all of which come together to bring eternal life to those who believe in Jesus through eating and drinking his flesh and blood. This is confusing and offensive to Jesus' Jewish audience, and to any audience with cultural taboos against cannibalism! Jesus does not back away from this offense but insists on the necessity of his flesh for true connection to himself and the Father. This is seen especially in v55. Beasley-Murray notes that some manuscripts read the adverb ἀληθῶς instead of the adjective ἀληθής, which the NA-28 uses. The translation with ἀληθῶς would read, "for my flesh is truly food and my blood is truly drink." This is easier to

¹⁰² Maarten J.J. Menken, "John 6:51c-58: Eucharist or Christology?," in *Critical Readings of John 6*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 202.

¹⁰³ Brown, *The Gospel*, 287.

¹⁰⁴ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 95.

¹⁰⁵ Beutler, *A Commentary*, 188.

explain metaphorically than the translation with ἀληθής: “for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink” (NRSV). Beasley-Murray is convinced that the ἀληθής reading is more accurate, and Metzger does not even think the variations with ἀληθῶς worth an entry in his commentary.¹⁰⁶ The widely accepted text with ἀληθής shows Jesus emphasizing the reality of the food and drink which he offers in his flesh and blood. Dodd notes the use of ἀληθής in this verse as a case of, “...when the adjective is applied to objects of experience, whether persons or things, which are in fact what they appear or purport to be. The sense here is ‘genuine’, ‘real’.”¹⁰⁷ Thus the food found in Jesus’ flesh is real food, not metaphorical.

Now there must be something metaphorical about this passage, since Jesus was not actually advocating cannibalism. Many commentators solve this issue by noting the eucharistic overtones of the passage. Maarten Menken, while acknowledging the eucharistic language, proposes a slightly different solution. He argues that instead of the flesh and blood being metaphorical (or eucharistic) food and drink, the actions of eating and drinking are metaphorical for believing in Jesus.¹⁰⁸ If the flesh and the blood is Jesus’ actual flesh and blood, then here Jesus refers to his death on the cross. To support this, Menken notes the phrase ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ζωῆς in v51. ὑπὲρ “is often used in John...together with a following genitive, to indicate ‘for’ whom or what Jesus’ death has a salvific effect.”¹⁰⁹ Jesus offers his flesh and blood, that is, his incarnate body, in death on the cross on behalf of the life of the world. This previews the paradox of purpose; Jesus becomes incarnate in order to give life to the world, and his flesh is central to carrying out that purpose.

¹⁰⁶ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 85; Metzger, *A Textual*, 183.

¹⁰⁷ Dodd, *The Interpretation*, 170.

¹⁰⁸ Menken, “John 6:51c-58,” 195.

¹⁰⁹ Menken, “John 6:51c-58,” 190.

And yet, Jesus appears to contradict himself almost immediately! This gives our paradox of mission a twist which reveals the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit, just as the paradox of identity reveals the relationship between Jesus and the Father. Why does Jesus tell his disciples in v63 that the spirit gives life while the flesh is useless? Rudolf Bultmann argues that Jesus is quoting the disciples themselves; in their consternation at his difficult sayings, they insist that the Spirit is important, not the flesh. Jesus responds that his words are Spirit and life. This retains the scandal: what is “Spirit and life” is his call for people to feed on his flesh.¹¹⁰ Brown argues that Bultmann’s parsing here is unnecessary because this saying is congruent with other teachings of Jesus, especially the contrast made between Spirit and flesh in 3:6, where flesh is “the natural principle in man which cannot give eternal life.”¹¹¹ While the thematic connections between chapters 3 and 6 make sense, Brown’s interpretation disregards the different connotation of flesh maintained throughout chapter 6. Good interpretive principles will not abandon a sense of the word σάρξ which has influenced the entire surrounding discussion. Bultmann’s suggestion is helpful, since it connects the conversation about Jesus’ flesh to the Spirit. The saying of the disciples might perhaps be true of sinful human flesh, which is opposed to the Spirit, but Jesus’ flesh is intimately connected to the Spirit.

However, even if we disregard Bultmann’s interpretation, we can see a plurivalent use of the word σάρξ here. Human flesh is useless. Jesus’ divinely human flesh is necessary for eternal life and is also necessary for the Spirit of God to come: Jesus’ gift of the Spirit comes after his death and resurrection and “is contingent upon” it.¹¹² The Spirit of truth will come as a result of the Word incarnate, as a result of his fleshly life and death. The Spirit is necessary for eternal life;

¹¹⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, ed. G. R. Beasley-Murray, trans. R. W. N. Hoare and J. K. Riches (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 446.

¹¹¹ Brown, *The Gospel*, 296, 300.

¹¹² Marianne Meye Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 179.

the flesh of Christ is not sufficient on its own. The Spirit will teach the disciples God's truth, and this will be necessary for spreading Jesus' words around the world. "In John, the Spirit is nothing else but the continual possibility and reality of the new encounter with Jesus in the post-Easter situation as the one who is revealing his Word to his own and through them to the world."¹¹³ Here is a glimpse of how that relationship between Word and Spirit will work, which will be expanded upon in the Farewell Discourse.

2.3 The Paradox of Mission in the Farewell Discourse

In the Farewell Discourse, the theme of truth comes up frequently. Jesus is again labeled "the truth" in 14:6, and the Spirit is introduced for the first time as "the Spirit of truth" in 14:17. Jesus and the Spirit together are the vehicles for God's truth to come into the world, Jesus in a fleshly role and the Spirit in a spiritual role.¹¹⁴ Here again we can consider both the Semitic and the Hellenistic senses of truth. For instance, ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πάσῃ in 16:13 echoes ὁδήγησόν με ἐπὶ τὴν ἀλήθειάν σου in Psalm 25:5.¹¹⁵ Jesus and the Spirit are trustworthy and faithful in the Semitic sense of truth and express the eternal reality of God in the Hellenistic sense of truth. This dual sense with both its moral and intellectual implications is important because not only do the disciples need real truth expressed to them, they also need to know that the one revealing that truth is trustworthy. The moral and intellectual senses together create a richer sense of the truth which Jesus and the Spirit bring to the world.

¹¹³ Käsemann, *The Testament*, 45-46. See also Beasley-Murray, *John*, 96.

¹¹⁴ John T. Carroll, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), 73, ProQuest; Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 320, EBSCOhost.

¹¹⁵ Dodd, *The Interpretation*, 174. Dodd points out this comparison, but then reiterates his belief that there is little to no Semitic connotation to *truth* remaining in John. For the reasons expressed above, I differ with him. Also, note that this is Psalm 24:5 under the Septuagint's versification.

There are several places in the Farewell Discourse which further our understanding of the relationship of the Spirit to the paradoxical mission of the Word made flesh. The overarching context here is that the Spirit is necessary because Jesus is leaving, and Jesus will send the Spirit when he leaves so that the disciples are not left alone (16:7, cf. 20:22-23). This relates to our paradox in that to a certain extent the Word's mission is bound by his fleshliness. During Jesus' life on earth, he was subject to the same physical limitations as other humans. While his resurrected body is different,¹¹⁶ the biblical tradition indicates that Jesus physically left the world with a promise of return after showing his resurrected self to the disciples (e.g., Acts 1:9). Thus, it seems that in the incarnation the Word permanently abandoned a certain privilege of being immaterial. So the Spirit is necessary to continue the work in Jesus' absence.¹¹⁷ In 15:26 and its context, we see that the Spirit will testify on Jesus' behalf through the disciples. In 16:8-11, we see that the Spirit will show the world that Jesus is who he says he is, despite his crucifixion and death which obscure both his identity and his mission. 16:13 explains the Spirit's future role, how the Spirit will continue to speak the truth of the incarnate Word long after his ascension into heaven.

First, in 15:26-27, we understand that the Spirit carries on his work through the disciples. "The Paraclete/Spirit is invisible to the world (14:17), so that the only way his witness can be heard is through the witness of the disciples."¹¹⁸ Where the flesh of the incarnate Word allowed Jesus to physically speak on his own behalf, the Spirit needs mediation to the world. The Spirit indwells the disciples who will then testify what the Spirit tells them. Thus, in a sense, even with the departure of the Word made flesh from the earth, flesh has not become entirely useless, since the Spirit of truth still expresses himself primarily through a medium of human flesh.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ See, e.g., 20:19, 26.

¹¹⁷ Carroll, *The Holy*, 75.

¹¹⁸ Brown, *The Gospel*, 700.

¹¹⁹ Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, 321.

What the Spirit's testimony looks like is unpacked in 16:8-11. In these verses, a trifold activity of the Spirit is laid out regarding sin, righteousness, and judgement. The first and the third activities are fairly clear: The world sins because it does not believe in Jesus, and the ruler of the world has been condemned in judgement. The second activity is a bit more obscure: The Spirit will convict the world "about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer." A key to understanding this passage is to remember that the Greek word which is translated here "righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη) can also be translated "justification" and has forensic connotations. Essentially, here is a connection to the trial of Jesus, during which he will be declared unrighteous and put to death. The Spirit will then convict the world that not only was Jesus righteous in that moment, but the world itself was unrighteous for condemning Jesus. "The Paraclete...unveils to the world the real nature of sin and righteousness and judgment in the light of what God was doing in Jesus, and its implications for men and women."¹²⁰ The Spirit of truth reveals the eternal reality of Jesus' mission, which appears to end in death on the cross, by showing the world that through that very death (and eventual resurrection), the mission was accomplished. This is also a foretaste of the paradox of purpose, which shows us that the incarnate Word carries out his mission through life coming from death. The Spirit's role is that in Jesus' absence, the truth about his mission will still carry on.

16:13 further refines the role of the Spirit of truth in the paradoxical mission. The references to the Spirit declaring ὅσα ἀκούσει (whatever he will hear) and τὰ ἐρχόμενα (the coming things)¹²¹ leave us with the question of closed or open revelation. Is the Spirit continually showing us new truth? Or is all the truth which the Spirit shows us contained within the message of the incarnate Word? O'Day and Hylen advocate for the former: "This promise also extends beyond the limits

¹²⁰ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 281ff. See also Brown, *The Gospel*, 712-13.

¹²¹ My translations. The NRSV translates the future ἀκούσει as the present tense "hears."

of the Gospel story, as it points to the power and possibility of ongoing revelation.”¹²² Beutler disagrees: “...the disciples have already known and found the truth in Jesus (cf. John 14:6), and so the Spirit has no role other than to lead the disciples deeper within this truth.”¹²³

There are two textual critical issues pertinent to this discussion. First, there are variant readings for the phrase ὅσα ἀκούσει. Some manuscripts have the present ὅσα ἀκούει, and some have the subjunctive ὅσα ἂν ἀκούσῃ. Metzger follows the future tense reading, explaining that this one best accounts for the other readings because the present tense is better dogmatically and the subjunctive is better grammatically. In Metzger’s view, the present tense reading indicates that everything the Spirit says he hears in his eternal relationship with the Father; thus there is no new revelation because everything is always present to the Spirit.¹²⁴ Thus, a scribe probably changed the future tense to the present to deal with the dogmatic issue. However, Brown disagrees with Metzger, pointing out that the Spirit’s work is phrased in the future tense at various other points in GJohn; why would scribes be concerned about this one particular instance of it?¹²⁵ We agree with Brown that the question of tenses related to the Spirit of truth and more generally in the Farewell Discourse is too complicated to make much out of this difference. Second, there is a discrepancy in the manuscripts between ἐν + dative and εἰς + accusative, with ἐν being better attested.¹²⁶ This could indicate that the author wants the disciples to grow “in their understanding of the truth rather than a new discovery,” thus leading us to understand the truth as being complete in Jesus.¹²⁷

A possible answer is that there is truth within the incarnate Word that was unrealized during his paradoxical mission to the world, and the Spirit remains attentive to express that truth in the

¹²² O’Day and Hylan, *John*, 159.

¹²³ Beutler, *A Commentary*, 417. See also Brown, *The Gospel*, 714.

¹²⁴ Metzger, “16.13 ὅσα ἀκούσει,” 210.

¹²⁵ Brown, *The Gospel*, 707.

¹²⁶ Metzger, “16.13 ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πάσῃ {B},” 210.

¹²⁷ Beutler, *A Commentary*, 417.

future. This would leave open the possibility of new revelation, as long as it coheres with the truth already revealed through Jesus Christ. As Marianne Thompson points out, the very nature of Jesus Christ as the Word made flesh is revealed by the Spirit after his death and resurrection. Clearly this is not something which the disciples understood during his earthly ministry. Indeed, GJohn itself with its “robust presentation of Jesus’ divine identity” must be part of this truth which the Spirit revealed later.¹²⁸ Thus, there is a middle ground; what the Spirit hears and will hear, will make more sense to the disciples after Jesus has given the Spirit to them. This is not “new revelation” in the sense that it was not expressed through the Word of God; it is new revelation in the sense that it was expressed through the Spirit about the Word of God. And it is through this revelation that we begin to understand the paradoxes of Jesus Christ, of his identity, his mission, and his purpose.

2.3.1 Χάρις and the I AM Sayings

We have considered in depth how the Word made flesh is full of ἀλήθεια, but we have yet to discuss χάρις. Its lexical absence from the remainder of GJohn does not indicate theological irrelevance; indeed, it is “an expression of the fullness of divine salvation given through the Son.”¹²⁹ The Semitic concept of ִרְפָּא tells us that God acts in our world to fulfill our deepest needs, especially relating to our salvation. In GJohn, the I AM sayings reveal to us how the Word made flesh fills these needs.¹³⁰

Jesus calls himself the bread of life (6:35, 51), the light of the world (8:12, 9:5), the gate (10:7, 9), the shepherd (10:11, 14), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the way, the truth and the life (14:6), and the vine (15:1, 5), each of which meets a human need. “In his mission Jesus is the

¹²⁸ Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, 321.

¹²⁹ Hengel, “The Prologue,” 284.

¹³⁰ Brown, *The Gospel*, 534, calls the I AM sayings, “a description of what [Jesus] is in relation to man.”

source of eternal life for men ('vine,' 'life,' 'resurrection'); he is the means through whom men find life ('way,' 'gate'); he leads men to life ('shepherd'); he reveals to men the truth ('truth') which nourishes their life ('bread')."¹³¹ Thus, each of these sayings shows us how God in his great $\tau\omega\tau$ and Jesus in his fullness of $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ reach down into our world to freely meet and fill our most pressing needs. He is the source of our life, he leads us to life, he shows us the truth, and he is our deepest nourishment. The grace of the Word made flesh appears throughout GJohn.

The paradoxical implications of six of these seven statements are developed elsewhere in this thesis. His statements that he is the sheepgate and the shepherd lead into his paradoxical claims of oneness with the Father, thus connecting these two means of grace with the paradox of identity. Not only does the Word become flesh, but his flesh is now our bread and is essential for our nourishment; here is our paradox of mission. We see him lay down his life on the cross in order to be the resurrection and the life, as well as the way, the truth, and the life; and as the light of the world, Jesus stands against and resists the darkness. Thus, the paradox of purpose is intimately connected to Jesus graciously filling our need for life and light. While the seventh saying is not inherently paradoxical, in the image of branches abiding in the vine, we see a glimpse of the language of mutual indwelling that describes Jesus' paradoxical identity and relationship with the Father.¹³² Thus, the way that Jesus brings us grace is interwoven with our three paradoxes. While $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ is not as obviously prevalent in GJohn as $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$, it does play an important paradoxical role in Johannine theology.

¹³¹ Brown, *The Gospel*, 534.

¹³² Klaus Scholtissek, *In ihm sein und bleiben: Die Sprache der Immanenz in den johanneischen Schriften* (Freiburg: Herder, 2000), 291.

2.4 The Paradox of Mission in the Passion Narrative

At Jesus' trial, the theme of truth once again comes to the forefront of GJohn's theology. In his interrogation before Pilate, Jesus identifies himself as a witness of truth; while Pilate tries to define Jesus by the worldly standard of "king," Jesus turns away from that to define himself again by the idea of truth. Indeed, the paradoxical mission which the incarnate Word came to the earth to carry out is a mission of truth which comes to its climax in Jesus' trial and crucifixion, in his last moments in his earthly body before it is transformed in the resurrection. However, as Pilate comes face to face with this paradoxical mission, he cannot assent to its truth. Despite being sympathetic to Jesus, he cannot see the truth Jesus embodies, and so he rejects it, becoming an example not to be followed by the readers of GJohn.

Jesus is cryptic in his encounter with Pilate, whose interest lies in finding out whether or not Jesus has declared himself king in opposition to Caesar, to determine whether or not to put him to death. Jesus does not answer Pilate's first question directly, but rather responds by acknowledging a kingdom that is "not from this world" (18:36). Pilate, not satisfied with this, asks again if he is a king, to which Jesus responds, "σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεύς εἰμι" (18:37). Scholars are divided on whether this is essentially a "yes" in acknowledgement of his kingship, or if his answer evasively repeats Pilate's own words without actually affirming them. That question is not particularly relevant to our discussion, since Jesus' purpose in the interrogation is to point out his kingdom of truth, rather than to fit himself into a worldly definition of kingship. "As at 6:14-15, Jesus rejects human attempts to define his kingship. Instead, Jesus portrays himself as a witness, one who testifies to the truth (v37)."¹³³ His witness to the truth within his kingdom from above is Jesus' sole focus here.

¹³³ O'Day and Hylan, *John*, 177.

Indeed, in this trial and crucifixion, we see the climax of the incarnate Word's paradoxical mission, a mission of the flesh that reveals truth to those who listen to Jesus' voice. "He was born and came into the world (a double expression to signify his coming from the presence of God, in incarnation) to bear witness to this kingdom...[and] to the truth of God's saving sovereignty, and to reveal it in word and deed."¹³⁴ Heinrich Schlier comments on Jesus' witness here, noting that it flows into martyrdom because he not only witnesses to the truth, but stands up for it with his life. Thus, it is not only in his role as witness but also in his death that he reveals the truth of his kingdom and the grace that it brings to the world.¹³⁵

His death reveals that truth in both a Semitic and a Hellenistic sense.¹³⁶ His death shows his trustworthiness and faithfulness as a witness, and the lengths to which he is willing to go for his paradoxical mission. His death (and the resurrection which follows) also reveals the eternal reality of his kingdom. But we might ask, how does being declared unrighteous at his trial and executed show us the eternal reality of his kingdom?¹³⁷ Here is where the role of the Spirit of truth becomes important, in that the Spirit helps humanity to understand that Jesus stands righteous before God. The resurrection is proof of this, despite the outcome of his trial and his execution. While the Spirit does not factor into GJohn's portrayal of the trial scene, the audience knows from the Farewell Discourse that the Spirit is going to come to vindicate Jesus on this precise fact and to show the truth to the world.

¹³⁴ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 331-32.

¹³⁵ Heinrich Schlier, *Die Zeit der Kirche: Exegetische Aufsätze und Vorträge* (Freiburg: Herder, 1962), 64, Internet Archive.

¹³⁶ David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 365: "The resonances of truth with trustworthiness, with faithful belonging, and with utterly reliable and authoritative testimony are especially present here."

¹³⁷ Admittedly, Pilate says that Jesus is not guilty. However, his crucifixion indicates that he is. In the eyes of the world, the fact of his crucifixion trumps Pilate's statement.

GJohn presents the trial scene as a commentary on whether or not Pilate will accept the truth that Jesus sets before him. After Pilate admits that Jesus is not guilty, the focus turns from Jesus to Pilate's response to Jesus.¹³⁸ Here we see Pilate wrestling with the question before him; while he believes that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, he cannot accept Jesus as the truth. Instead he responds with "τί ἐστιν ἀλήθεια;" His skepticism here is clear; he does not think that Jesus is guilty and yet he cannot respond to the truth.¹³⁹ Instead he looks for a way to avoid responsibility, trying to release Jesus according to "custom" (18:39) and stating twice that he could find not a case against him (19:4, 6). However, these actions fall short of acknowledging the truth of Jesus' kingdom, which can only become fully clear if Pilate does give the order to put Jesus to death. Even Jesus acknowledges that the issue is somewhat out of Pilate's hands; his power over Jesus only extends as far as what God allows (19:11). And yet, it is clear that for GJohn, Pilate's response is not one to be admired or imitated. Rather he is "just another foil for the Evangelist's presentation of the true or genuine world of belief in God."¹⁴⁰ The audience of GJohn knows that this is not what believing the truth of God looks like.

The trial scene, which leads into the crucifixion, is both the climax of our paradox of mission and the entry into our paradox of purpose. Here we see the fulfillment of the Word's incarnation. The Word becomes flesh to bring us grace and truth. Jesus says that we must feed on his flesh, which shows us how important his real, human flesh is to his paradoxical mission. However, his flesh alone is not enough, but we also need the Spirit of truth to lead us into truth once Jesus returns to the Father. His mission culminates in his trial and crucifixion, where his death shows both his faithfulness and the eternal reality of his kingdom of truth. And the Spirit vindicates

¹³⁸ Brown, *The Gospel*, 869.

¹³⁹ Ernst Haenchen, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 7-21*, trans. Robert W. Funk, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 180.

¹⁴⁰ Gerard Sloyan, *John*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 103, EBSCOhost.

him by showing us this. And yet, the paradoxes do not end here, with Jesus' death on the cross. Because out of his death comes life: the paradox of purpose.

Chapter 3

3 The Paradox of Purpose

Our final paradox is that of purpose. We considered the Word's identity and Jesus' unique relationship with the Father, and we unpacked the Word's mission: to become flesh and to send the Spirit, because the flesh is insufficient. But for what purpose did the Word come into the world? The Prologue hints at this in vv3-4, saying that everything in the world came into being through him, including life itself: "What has come into being in him was life..." The Jewish faith held that God is alive. If the Word is θεός, does not life already exist in him? How can life come into being in him? Thus, the origin of life itself is a paradoxical concept.¹⁴¹ The Prologue also connects the life of the Word to the light coming into the world, and the light's paradoxical relationship with darkness will shed light on the Word's purpose.

The paradoxical origin of life becomes more complex in the Book of Signs, when we learn that life comes from death in 3:14-21 and 12:24. In 5:19-29, Jesus tells his audience that the dead will hear him and live, which has a hint of paradox to it since one must be alive to hear. In 11:1-53, Jesus brings this teaching to life when he commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb: The dead man hears him and lives! Here Jesus calls himself the life and acts out the paradox from the Prologue; he is life and life comes into being in him as he extends life to the dead who hear him.

In the Farewell Discourse the paradoxical theme of life takes a backseat, emerging only twice: Jesus calls himself "the way, the truth, and the life" in 14:6, and the author in 17:2-3 defines eternal life as the knowledge of the one true God and his Son Jesus Christ. In the Passion Narrative the paradoxical theme of life and death culminates; through Jesus' death and resurrection, we see

¹⁴¹ O'Day and Hylen, *John*, 17, note that, "'Life' is a distinctively Johannine expression. The noun form occurs thirty-six times in John (compared to seven in Matthew, Mark, and Luke combined)." This paradox intimately connects to GJohn's thematic content.

that life in him comes from death. Doubting Thomas, upon seeing the risen Christ, knows who Jesus is and calls him, “My Lord and my God” (20:28). Thus, Jesus’ death and resurrection reveal his glory and his identity; it is through this that life comes to Thomas and all who believe in him. In the closing verses of the gospel, the reader is given the same opportunity as Thomas: to believe in Jesus Christ through the witness of GJohn and, through believing, to have life in his name.

3.1 The Paradox of Purpose in the Prologue

The Prologue reveals to us that the Word is not only “with God” and “God,” but that the Word is the source of all creation, including life itself (1:3-4). This creates an intriguing paradox concerning the origin of life. If God is alive as the Jewish faith has traditionally held, then how can life come to be in the Word? Does it not already exist there?

However, the textual history of 1:3-4 is complicated; the question is one of punctuation. Does the sentence break in vv3-4 happen before or after the phrase, ὁ γέγονεν? The first reading creates the division, χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὁ γέγονεν. ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν (hereafter “Reading I”), which Ernst Haenchen translates as, “...without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life.”¹⁴² The second reading creates the division, χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. ὁ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν (hereafter “Reading II”), which the NRSV translates as, “...without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life.” This impacts our argument because Reading I merely states that life was in him, which is not paradoxical. Reading II, however, creates the clause saying that life came to be in him, which is paradoxical.

¹⁴² Ernst Haenchen, *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-6*, trans. Robert W. Funk, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 108.

The NA-28 places the period before ὁ γέγονεν (Reading II), which many modern commentators use,¹⁴³ but Metzger gives this a {B} grade, acknowledging the complicated history of the two readings.¹⁴⁴ The textual witness of the manuscripts favors Reading II: “The best punctuated MSS. give *Reading II*; the Versions tend to be split between *Reading I* and *Reading II*; the Fathers prefer *Reading II* by a large majority.”¹⁴⁵ Scholars believe that Reading I came about because the Arians and Macedonians used Reading II to argue for two heresies. The orthodox changed the punctuation, and Reading I became the accepted reading for the better part of 1500 years (hence why it is known as the first reading, even though it is most likely the latter one). χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν was used to argue that the Holy Spirit was a created being,¹⁴⁶ while ὁ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ ζῶν ἦν was used to argue that the Son changed when life came to be in him, which threatened his equality with the Father.¹⁴⁷ Both of these difficulties disappear with the punctuation change. Linguistic and literary arguments can be made for both Readings. A common argument for Reading II is that it preserves the staircase parallelism of vv1-5.¹⁴⁸ However, there are other breaks in the parallelism, which weakens this argument.¹⁴⁹ An argument for Reading I is that in Johannine literature, sentences commonly begin with ἐν, especially ἐν plus a demonstrative pronoun.¹⁵⁰ However, statistically this does not happen frequently enough for it to determine a

¹⁴³ Ed. L. Miller, *Salvation-History in the Prologue of John: The Significance of John 1:3/4*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum lx (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 17-18. Miller traces the history of the alternate readings and notes that Reading II is “regaining ascendancy.” NA-26 was the first Nestle-Aland edition to print Reading II.

¹⁴⁴ Metzger, “1.3-4 οὐδὲ ἓν. ὁ γέγονεν ἐν {B},” 167.

¹⁴⁵ Miller, *Salvation-History in the Prologue*, 29. See also M. E. Boismard, *St. John's Prologue*, trans. Carisbrooke Dominicans (London: Aquin Press, 1961), 14: Reading II “was universally accepted in Christian tradition before the 4th Century.” Boismard notes that the Old Latin, Old Syrian, and Sahidic translations of the Gospels support Reading II, and names more than 20 ancient authors who used it before and during the 4th century. The first known example of Reading I is from the late 4th century.

¹⁴⁶ Metzger, “1.3-4,” 167.

¹⁴⁷ Brown, *The Gospel*, 6.

¹⁴⁸ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2.

¹⁴⁹ Miller, *Salvation-History in the Prologue*, 19.

¹⁵⁰ Metzger, “1.3-4,” 168.

stylistic trait.¹⁵¹ Reading I creates a text which is easier to understand and more compatible with Johannine theology.¹⁵² However, this is evidence that Reading I is the latter one, because texts are rarely changed to the *lector difficilior*. We will follow Reading II, based on the weight of the manuscript evidence.

The theological crux of the paradox in these verses concerns the origin of life. The Old Testament is peppered with references to “the living God,” showing that the ancient Israelites viewed their God as alive.¹⁵³ In Jewish monotheism, “God is the only living one, that is, the only one to whom life belongs eternally and intrinsically. All other life derives from him...”¹⁵⁴ GJohn continues this theological concept; 6:57 shows that the Father is living and is the source of life in Jesus Christ. This forms the basis for the paradox of 1:3-4 — how can life come into existence in a being that already has life? The plurivalence of the word ζωή hints at a solution. It can mean physical life, eternal life, and the uncreated life found in the Word. In GJohn, ζωή always means *eternal life*, but these verses in the Prologue show “a deliberate parallel to the opening chapters of Genesis.”¹⁵⁵ While the creation account primarily discusses physical life, eternal life is present in the tree of life, and conversely, GJohn primarily discusses eternal life but does so within the context of creation. Thus this paradox previews the idea that will be developed throughout the Gospel: that the Word provides both physical life and eternal life to humanity.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, Beutler notes that with the tense change from aorist to perfect (ἐγένετο to γέγονεν) we see a shift from the past tense

¹⁵¹ Miller, *Salvation-History in the Prologue*, 23.

¹⁵² Metzger, “1.3-4,” 168.

¹⁵³ See, e.g., Deuteronomy 5:26, Joshua 3:10, and Jeremiah 10:10.

¹⁵⁴ Bauckham, *The Testimony*, 242.

¹⁵⁵ Brown, *The Gospel*, 26-27.

¹⁵⁶ Boismard, *St. John's*, 17-18, notes an additional difficulty with this interpretation of these verses. If “life” comes into being in the Word in v4a (and thus seems to be created life), then how can “life” be the light of men in v4b (which would seem to be uncreated life, which is found in the Word of God)? He resolves this by arguing that GJohn uses two different senses of ζωή in successive halves of the verse. This shows the author of GJohn playing with different meanings of the word ζωή and hints at a connection with the secondary paradox of light and darkness.

of the creative act to the present reality of the economy of salvation.¹⁵⁷ Beasley-Murray concurs: “The Logos is Mediator not only in the act of creation, but in its continuance. Hence ζωή (life) and φῶς (light) include the life and light which come to man in *both* creation *and* new creation.”¹⁵⁸ Thus, the ζωή of 1:4 seems to refer not to the uncreated life of the Word, but to the physical and spiritual life offered to humanity.

The connection noted between life and light may indicate an additional paradox in the Prologue. Estes develops an argument around the theme of light and darkness in GJohn, claiming that it is paradoxical, rather than dualistic.¹⁵⁹ His argument relies on the difference between natural light (e.g., the sun) and artificial light (e.g., fire). Since artificial light both shines in the darkness and is easily extinguished, the statement in 1:5 that the light is not overcome by darkness, is inherently paradoxical.¹⁶⁰ This connects to the paradox of life, since the life of the Word is this light. We will see later in GJohn that death cannot overcome life, like darkness cannot overcome the light. “The light is the life of the Word, which can never be extinguished; though the darkness tried to extinguish the light, by his resurrection the Word shows that even death cannot snuff out this light.”¹⁶¹ However, there is a significant weakness in Estes’s argument. His premise that the light that shines in the darkness is clearly artificial does not take into consideration the stars, which shine in the darkness and are not easily extinguishable. Thus, a first century audience could have identified a light strong enough to resist the darkness and thereby read 1:5 non-paradoxically. Despite this weakness, his argument concerning artificial light is strong enough for us to consider this a secondary paradox that supports the primary paradox of the origin of life. In addition, there

¹⁵⁷ Beutler, *A Commentary*, 38.

¹⁵⁸ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 11, emphasis original.

¹⁵⁹ Estes, “Dualism or Paradox?,” 108-117.

¹⁶⁰ Estes, “Dualism or Paradox?,” 112-13.

¹⁶¹ Estes, “Dualism or Paradox?,” 113.

is another paradoxical reading of 1:5. Martin Hengel notes the plurivalence of the word κατέλαβεν. While the NRSV translates this word “overcome,” it also means “grasp.” Drawing out the connection with the creation narrative, Hengel notes that the first humans gave themselves over to darkness when they disobeyed God. This darkness does not grasp the light. This creates a paradoxical relationship between light and dark, where darkness, which ought to be dispelled by the light, instead tries and fails to grasp the light. This is why when the Word came to his own, his own did not recognize him.¹⁶² This theme of failure to understand and believe in Jesus Christ continues throughout GJohn.

Thus, by weaving together life and light, GJohn presents us with the initial paradox of purpose.¹⁶³ Life is characteristic of God the Word, and thus it exists in him before it comes to be in him. This life is light and is strong enough to withstand the darkness.¹⁶⁴ It is only through the Word being life that life can come into existence for the sake of humanity. But as we move into the remainder of GJohn, we will see this paradox of life shift. Once humanity is in the picture, life and death become intertwined. While it seems that life always ends in death for humans, Jesus’ presence on the earth challenges that. Life will begin to come out of death. The origin of life, especially eternal life, will not solely be the living Word of God, but life will also spring from the death of the Word, so that humans can also find life after death. In as much as the life is the light of the world and the darkness will not overcome the light, death will not overcome the life of the Word either.

¹⁶² Hengel, “The Prologue,” 276, 279. See also Beutler, *A Commentary*, 40.

¹⁶³ See Ford, *The Gospel*, 28: “New ‘light’ and new ‘life’ go inseparably together in the prologue and the rest of the Gospel.”

¹⁶⁴ Sloyan, *John*, 23.

3.2 The Paradox of Purpose in the Book of Signs

The Book of Signs thoroughly develops the paradoxical origins of life. It introduces eternal life in 3:15 when Jesus explains to Nicodemus that just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so Jesus must be lifted up, that is, crucified, in order to give eternal life to those believing in him. This deepens the paradox introduced in the Prologue, because now life comes from death. Then, in 11:1-53 life actually comes out of death in Lazarus's resurrection, a miracle previewed in 5:19-29 when Jesus defends a healing on the Sabbath. The paradox surfaces again in 12:24 when Jesus tells the parable of the grain of wheat. Jesus also weaves in the paradox of light and dark throughout these conversations, unpacking both paradoxes through teaching and through sign.

First, in 3:14-15, Jesus references Num. 21:4-9, where the Israelites looked to the bronze serpent raised on a pole to be healed of their snakebites, a punishment for their grumbling. This previews Jesus' own death in two ways. First, the snake on the pole foreshadows Jesus on the cross; as one is lifted up on a piece of wood for the salvation of the Israelites, so is the other for the salvation of the world. Second, the Greek word ὑψωθῆναι (to be lifted up) is consistently used to refer to Jesus' death; while the phrase "lifted up" does not seem to connote death, the related Aramaic word ܩܪܝܢܐ (*ezd^eqeph*) primarily means "lifted up" but has secondary connotations of being crucified.¹⁶⁵ Thus, GJohn already refers to Jesus' crucifixion in chapter 3 and directly references the life coming out of his death, eternal life for those who believe in him. In GJohn, eternal life is "a life in union with God who alone is eternal, with the blessing of abundance now and the hope for glory in the future."¹⁶⁶ This life, which comes from death, saves us from

¹⁶⁵ G. Bertram, "ὑψος," *TDNT* 8:610; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 50.

¹⁶⁶ John Y. H. Yieh, "God's Love, Christ's Cross, or Human Faith? Interpretations of Jn 3:16 in Ethnic Chinese American Churches," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Uriah Y. Kim and Seung Ai Yang (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 373.

condemnation and the judgement of the light, linking to our secondary paradox (vv17-21).¹⁶⁷ If the life of the Word is the light coming into the world (1:4), then the eternal life coming from the death of the Word saves the world from the judgement of the light. Jesus' life saves us from our inability to grasp the light in our darkness and gives us the courage to come into the light to receive present abundance and eternal hope.

The Book of Signs continues to reveal the nature of this life that comes from death in 5:19-29, as Jesus defends his miraculous healing of a man on the Sabbath. We have a recurrence of the paradox of identity here; the Jews are angry because Jesus called God his Father and thus made himself equal to God. Here is the same unity of will seen in our first paradox; the Son does exactly what the Father does (vv17, 19). Jesus shows us the deep connection between his relationship with the Father and the gift of eternal life. Without Jesus' perfect identity of will with the Father, he could not give us this life.¹⁶⁸

The dual eschatology of GJohn's conception of eternal life seems clear in this passage, almost to the point of creating a tension between the two. "The statement in 5:25 describes a present reality — the hour is 'now here,' when those who hear the voice of the Son of God may participate in God's life, while the statement in 5:28 portrays a reality yet in the future, namely, the resurrection."¹⁶⁹ 5:24 with its use of the perfect tense (μεταβέβηκεν) shows that the transition out of death into life has already happened.¹⁷⁰ 5:28-29 with its use of the future tense (ἀκούσουσιν, ἐκπορεύσονται) points to a coming physical resurrection. Not only has Jesus granted eternal life to people who believe in him, but when he speaks, the physically dead will hear his voice, come

¹⁶⁷ See Beutler, *A Commentary*, 98, for the argument that these verses build on the previous ones.

¹⁶⁸ Marianne Meye Thompson, "The Raising of Lazarus in John 11: A Theological Reading," in Bauckham and Mosser, *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, 237; Brown, *The Gospel*, 218; Bauckham, *The Testimony*, 243.

¹⁶⁹ Thompson, "The Raising," 239-40.

¹⁷⁰ Beutler, *A Commentary*, 155.

out of their graves, and live.¹⁷¹ Beutler summarizes the scholarly perspectives on these two strands of thought.¹⁷² For our purposes, it is important that GJohn has retained both traditions side-by-side; clearly the gifts of both eternal life and physical life are important to the theology of life espoused here. One we gain right now in the present and one we await in the future, but both are given to us through Jesus, to the living who believe in his words and to the dead who hear his voice. This hearkens back to the Prologue, where we saw both created physical life and spiritual life coming into existence in the Word. Both these types of life matter and both are granted to us through Jesus Christ.

This discourse is not simply theoretical; in 11:1-53 we see a dead man hear the words of Jesus and return to physical life. Lazarus has been in the tomb long enough that people are concerned about the smell of his decomposing body. Jesus speaks the words, “Lazarus, come out!” and Lazarus comes out, still wrapped in the grave clothes. Unlike John’s other sign stories, where the sign happens and then a lengthy discourse follows, here the discourse is woven into the action leading up to the miracle, beginning with the disciples before Jesus leaves for Bethany and continuing in Jesus’ private moments with Martha and Mary.

As in 5:19, we see a connection to Jesus’ identity. This pericope follows chapter 10 where Jesus claims to be one with the Father (v30) and to have a mutual indwelling with the Father (v38). “This sign, then, is meant to give unmistakable evidence for Jesus’ claim, stated just prior to the story, that he does the works of the Father so that people might know and understand that the Father is in him and he is in the Father.”¹⁷³ Thus, the paradox of purpose, that of giving life which

¹⁷¹ Note that this builds on our paradoxical theme: How can those who are dead hear? It is contrary to expectation, even miraculous.

¹⁷² Beutler, *A Commentary*, 157-58.

¹⁷³ Andrew T. Lincoln, “The Lazarus Story: A Literary Perspective,” in Bauckham and Mosser, *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, 217-18.

comes from death, becomes direct evidence of Jesus' paradoxical identity as both divine and human. His unity of will with the Father is so real in this passage that he does not even need to pray to accomplish Lazarus's resurrection; he prays only so that those around him would believe that he was sent by God.¹⁷⁴ And yet his human sorrow at Lazarus's death is just as real. "The one who gives life is also the one who mourns death. Here then we see the human face of the true God, the one through whom life comes to the world."¹⁷⁵ It is through entering the world of death as a man that the Word of God can extend his life to humanity.

We also see a connection to the secondary paradox of light and darkness. As Jesus prepares to go to Jerusalem, his disciples are distressed. Jesus responds in 11:9-10 with an aphorism about walking in the light instead of the darkness.¹⁷⁶ In the face of the danger of imminent death, Jesus points the disciples to his light, which enables them to walk without stumbling. Once night falls, natural light will fail them, but the "one inextinguishable light source in our world: the life of the Word" will not fail them.¹⁷⁷ They travel to Bethany where they will watch the resurrection of their friend Lazarus, who is rescued from darkness and death through the light and life of the Word.

Jesus' most direct commentary on Lazarus's resurrection comes during his meeting with Martha. Here in vv25-26, he calls himself the resurrection and the life and gives two startling statements: "Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live," and "everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." Here we have the two definitions of life (physical and spiritual) mirrored by two identical definitions of death, physical and spiritual. Most commentators agree

¹⁷⁴ Lincoln, "The Lazarus," 217: "Jesus' unity with the Father is such that he does not need to move out of a state of prayerlessness to one of prayer, because he is continually in a state of conscious dependence on the Father."

¹⁷⁵ Thompson, "The Raising," 243.

¹⁷⁶ This same theme is also developed in 8:12, 9:4, and 12:35-36. Estes, "Dualism or Paradox?," 114-15. In 9:1-41, Jesus heals a man born blind. The paradox of light and darkness is developed throughout this pericope, but without being explicitly connected to the paradox of life and death. Regardless, v39 shows how Jesus' light has a paradoxical impact: Religious leaders who should believe end up blind, while a poor beggar gains his sight. See Beutler, *A Commentary*, 263.

¹⁷⁷ Estes, "Dualism or Paradox?," 115-16.

that the first statement is discussing physical death and spiritual life: even those who die physically will live spiritually if they believe in Jesus. However, there is disagreement over the second statement.¹⁷⁸ Does this mean that physical life will not succumb to death if there is belief? Or does it mean that those who have spiritual life will never see spiritual death? The first interpretation seems difficult to support because people who believe in Jesus do die physically, and the first readers of GJohn knew that. However, the second interpretation seems to dismiss the importance of physical life by focusing entirely on spiritual life and death, which belies the context of Lazarus's physical resurrection. Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead shows that physical life is deeply important to the Johannine concept of life. Thus, we cannot dismiss physical life from this statement. Once again the paradoxical meanings of life and death are intertwined in seemingly impossible ways. We can simplify it as Brown does: "What is crucial is that Jesus has given (physical) life as a sign of his power to give eternal life on this earth (realized eschatology) and as a promise that on the last day he will raise the dead (final eschatology)."¹⁷⁹ Or, as O'Day and Hylen comment: "While Jesus does restore Lazarus to his earthly life, the primary meaning of the 'life' Jesus brings is not physical life, but a life that is shaped by relationship to God, one set free from the power of death."¹⁸⁰ These interpretations provide a meaningful and valuable resolution to the paradox. However, it is also important to remember that the plurivalence of language holds out to us the possibility that the paradox is not so easily resolved. While eternal life is primary in John, there is something about physical life which is just as important.

The responses to Jesus in this pericope are varied and significant. Early on, when Jesus decides to go to Bethany despite the danger involved, the disciples are baffled and afraid. Thomas

¹⁷⁸ Brown, *The Gospel*, 425, summarizes this.

¹⁷⁹ Brown, *The Gospel*, 437.

¹⁸⁰ O'Day and Hylen, *John*, 17.

announces boldly, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (11:16), epitomizing the disciples’ misunderstanding of Jesus’ purposeful actions. However, Thomas’s unwitting statement plays into the theme of life and death which is the overarching point of this pericope. The eventual outcome of this trip to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead will be Jesus’ death, but it will be through that death that the disciples and all those who believe in Jesus will be spared death. Next, Martha’s response to Jesus’ proclamation about life coming from death is profoundly confessional: “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world” (11:27). This foreshadows the commitment that will be asked of all the readers of the gospel narrative in 20:31. But even here, the readers are addressed implicitly: “Martha’s characterization invites them with her to believe in Jesus as the one who has overcome death for his followers...”¹⁸¹ Thus, as the paradoxes come together and as the Gospel unpacks these questions of who Jesus is and what he has come to do and why he has come to do it, we build towards the moment when we as readers will be asked to believe in Jesus as well.

The final response to Jesus’ miracle is not one which readers ought to imitate, but it does serve to deepen the paradox of purpose. Directly following the miracle, the Jewish authorities decide to put Jesus to death. Lincoln argues that the narrative arc of this pericope extends through v53, ending with this decision. “The story now has to be seen as...ending on the note that the one who is the giver of life now himself faces death.”¹⁸² Brown notes that while the Synoptics tend to present the crucifixion as a response to Jesus’ ministry as a whole, GJohn presents it as a response to this single miracle of resurrection which is so emblematic of Jesus’ purpose in the world. “Moreover, the suggestion that the supreme miracle of giving life to man leads to the death of

¹⁸¹ Lincoln, “The Lazarus,” 230.

¹⁸² Lincoln, “The Lazarus,” 213.

Jesus offers a dramatic paradox worthy of summing up Jesus' career."¹⁸³ Lazarus's new life is clearly linked to Jesus' death, further deepening our understanding of the paradox of life and death.

However, Brown's formulation of the paradox does not fully express its depth, because the story does not end with Jesus' death. So while giving life leads to his death, his resurrection then allows his death to bring life to the world. The Jewish authorities intended to end Jesus' life, and instead their actions became an important catalyst in the sequence of events that led to Jesus' death, resurrection, and offer of eternal life to the world.

What brings life to Lazarus brings death to Jesus — but what brings death to Jesus brings life to the world. So while the conflict between life and death might seem at first never ending, the conflict is in fact neither perpetual nor is its outcome uncertain because God has given and will give life to the world.¹⁸⁴

While Thompson characterizes the interplay between life and death as a conflict, rather than a paradox, her point here is salient. The paradox of life and death never ends with death. Because of Jesus' resurrection, death no longer has the final word, because life comes out of death through the power of God.

As the Book of Signs ends, the parable of the grain of wheat in 12:24 directly expresses our paradox of purpose: one must die in order to produce life. Beasley-Murray calls this “the law of the kingdom of God: life is given through death.”¹⁸⁵ This idea that fruit comes from death seems to be unique to GJohn; no Synoptic parable expresses it similarly.¹⁸⁶ Thus, this paradox is central to GJohn's expression of Jesus' purpose on earth. Here Jesus' commentary on his death leads into a discussion of light and dark, revealing further connection to our secondary paradox. When Jesus, the light for all people, is present, then it is possible to walk in the light and avoid being grasped

¹⁸³ Brown, *The Gospel*, 429.

¹⁸⁴ Thompson, “The Raising,” 237.

¹⁸⁵ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 211.

¹⁸⁶ Brown, *The Gospel*, 472.

by the darkness (v35). The motif of light is connected to the motif of belief; belief in the light creates children of the light (v36). The final verses of the Book of Signs say it most clearly: “I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness” (12:46). Thus, the life of the Word and the light for all people resist the death and darkness which threaten the world, so that those who belong to Jesus may become his children.¹⁸⁷ It is through these complementary paradoxes that eternal life is open to us, life which gives present abundance and eternal hope.

3.3 The Paradox of Purpose in the Farewell Discourse

In the Book of Glory, the theme of life seems to disappear. “It is noteworthy that *zōē*, ‘life,’ which occurs thirty-two times in the Book of Signs, occurs only four times in the Book of Glory. Now that ‘the hour’ is at hand, life is actually being given and need not be talked about.”¹⁸⁸ However, despite the absence of the word *ζωή*, the underlying paradox is still present. The life of the Word who is the source of all life is about to end, and the Farewell Discourse prepares the disciples for that impending death. The few instances where *ζωή* is used serve as brief reminders that the eternal life promised in the Book of Signs will be revealed soon. In the Passion Narrative, the resurrected Jesus becomes the very embodiment of the paradox. He is life, risen from death, ready to disperse life to all who believe in him. This is the point where we as the readers are asked to draw together all our knowledge of the paradoxes of Jesus’ identity, mission, and purpose and to believe in him. This belief gives us eternal life. So, despite the infrequency of the word *ζωή* in the Book of Glory, the paradox of life coming from death remains central to GJohn’s theological purpose.

¹⁸⁷ Estes, “Dualism or Paradox?,” 116-117.

¹⁸⁸ Brown, *The Gospel*, 620.

The first instance of ζωή in the Farewell Discourse is found in Jesus' well known claim: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6). Scholars disagree over the primary claim of this verse. Is the point that Jesus is the way or that Jesus is the life? If one considers the larger context of GJohn with the emphasis on ζωή and its relationship with ὁ λόγος, it would seem that Jesus as "the life" is the focus of the verse, and Jesus being "the way" means that he is the way to life.¹⁸⁹ This is the position originally taken by the Greek and Latin Fathers and held by most scholars until recently.¹⁹⁰ However, modern scholars emphasize the immediate context of 14:6, in which Jesus repeatedly considers himself the way: the way to the place prepared for the disciples and the way to the Father himself. In this context, the terms *life* and *truth* seem to be more peripheral. However, this does not mean that truth and life are unimportant here; rather they show us in what sense Jesus is the way. "The theological sense of the metaphor of the way is therefore clear—to go to the Father is to become, through the truth which is Christ, a sharer in the life of the Father."¹⁹¹ Thus, Jesus is the way to the Father, and we share in the life of the Father as we journey on the way.

In the paradox of mission, we saw how the Word became flesh to dwell among us and to show us God's glory full of truth; further, we saw that the flesh of the Word was necessary but not sufficient for our salvation, because we also need the Spirit of God to lead us into all truth. Here as Jesus calls himself both the life and the truth, we see a clear link between the paradoxes of mission and purpose. First, Jesus is the only way to the Father because "he alone is at the same time flesh with men and the Word of life with the Father."¹⁹² Jesus' claim to be truth and life together is what makes him uniquely the way to the Father. Second, we see that the truth of Jesus' words are the source of life. When Jesus claims that the flesh is not sufficient in 6:63, he says,

¹⁸⁹ O'Day and Hylan, *John*, 145.

¹⁹⁰ Ignatius de la Potterie, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," *Theology Digest* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1968): 59.

¹⁹¹ Potterie, "I am the way," 62.

¹⁹² Potterie, "I am the way," 64.

“The words that I have spoken to you are both Spirit and life.” Thus, Jesus’ incarnate death and resurrection are essential to life, and his words of truth spoken through the Spirit are also essential to life.¹⁹³

As in the story of Lazarus, we have an interjection from Thomas in this pericope. After Jesus tells the disciples that he is going away, Thomas responds that they do not know where he is going – so how can they know the way (14:3-5)? However, Jesus’ answer that he is the way, the truth, and the life shows that Thomas should have asked “Who?” instead of “How?”¹⁹⁴ Since the disciples know Jesus, they know the way to the Father. Thomas’s question reveals his ignorance, although the scene is less dramatic than when he claimed he would die with Christ in Bethany. Here we see him thirsting for knowledge, wanting to understand where Jesus is going so that he and the other disciples can follow him. The picture of Thomas in GJohn is deepening; he is “a loyal but pessimistic follower of Jesus, ready to die with him if need be, but slow to comprehend and ready to say so (14:5).”¹⁹⁵ Thomas’s interactions with Jesus will continue to help us unpack the paradox of purpose.

GJohn also reintroduces the idea of ζωή briefly at the beginning of the High Priestly Prayer in 17:1-5. Beutler notes that these verses are built with a concentric structure; v1 and v5 both address the Father and discuss the glorification of the Son, and v2 and v4 both discuss the work of the Father and the Son on earth. In the center is 17:3, which explains what eternal life is: knowing God the Father and Jesus Christ whom the Father has sent.¹⁹⁶ It reads almost as a confession of faith, looking back to Martha’s confession of Christ in 11:27 and forward to the confession of

¹⁹³ Brown, *The Gospel*, 631.

¹⁹⁴ Ford, *The Gospel*, 273.

¹⁹⁵ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 384.

¹⁹⁶ Beutler, *A Commentary*, 155.

Christ which all the readers of GJohn will be asked to make in 20:31.¹⁹⁷ Knowledge of and faith in God the Father and Jesus Christ are what humans need to receive the eternal life which is offered to us and which is both present abundance and eternal hope.¹⁹⁸

The brief appearance of eternal life in the Farewell Discourse is important for the larger paradoxical context of GJohn. Here we see a shift from “sign” to “reality.” The raising of Lazarus was the sign of Jesus’ ability to extend life to those who believe in him, and his death and resurrection create the reality whereby life is extended to all. Now is Jesus’ hour; now his death and resurrection are at hand; now the reality is here.¹⁹⁹ It is the paradox lived out in actuality: “Nor does his work come to an end with the end of his earthly life, but begins precisely then, in its real sense.”²⁰⁰ At the end of Jesus’ life, the work of giving eternal life to those around him begins. Life comes from the death of Jesus, created in and poured out from the eternal Word of God through his victory over death.

3.4 The Paradox of Purpose in the Passion Narrative

In the Passion Narrative, the paradox of purpose plays out in reality. Jesus Christ dies and rises again; in his embodied resurrection, we see life come from death. This is what was foreshadowed by the sign of Lazarus; in Jesus, the sign becomes real. Thus, the disciples’ response to the risen Christ is their response to his paradoxical reality. Thomas epitomizes this first in his doubt and then in his Christological confession of 20:28, which becomes a model for the readers

¹⁹⁷ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 296.

¹⁹⁸ See Käsemann, *The Testament*, 25, for a discussion of the relationship between faith and knowledge in GJohn. Faith needs dogma to transcend “the situation of personal decision,” but faith is also an act of discipleship that allows us to “recognize and acknowledge him anew.” This focus on knowledge appears to be Gnostic, but the larger context of GJohn shows that it is not, because eternal life is mediated through the historic death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and is extended to believers in this life, both of which are not characteristic of Gnostic doctrine. Brown, *The Gospel*, 752.

¹⁹⁹ Brown, *The Gospel*, 751.

²⁰⁰ Bultmann, *The Gospel*, 492.

of GJohn to follow. Belief in Jesus Christ, in his paradoxical identity, mission, and purpose, brings eternal life to humanity.

GJohn features Thomas in its discussion of the paradox of life and death. In the Book of Signs, as Jesus goes to raise Lazarus from the dead, Thomas dramatically offers to die alongside him. While he correctly foresees Jesus' eventual death, he misses the point of the Lazarus episode entirely. As Jesus shares the news of his departure in the Farewell Discourse, it is Thomas's question that draws out Jesus' response, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," helping us understand better the paradox of purpose. Here in the Passion Narrative, Thomas plays the starring role. Devastated at Jesus' death, he does not bother to gather with the disciples, and when he hears about Jesus' resurrection later, he claims that he will not believe until he has touched Jesus' wounds themselves. Once Jesus does appear to him, he speaks "the supreme christological pronouncement of the Fourth Gospel": "My Lord and my God!" (20:28).²⁰¹ After Thomas sees Jesus resurrected, their earlier interactions start to make sense to Thomas. Jesus' death is not that of a heroic martyr, rather it shows us the way to the Father and gives us life eternal. "The confession is reminiscent of Jesus' interaction with Thomas in the farewell discourse... Thomas now realizes the full impact of these words; and his confession fulfills Jesus' promise."²⁰²

The meaning of Thomas's words has been the subject of much scholarly discussion. The Greek forms are in the nominative case and both have articles (ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου), but these words seem to be used in the vocative sense, because Thomas is responding to Jesus who is right in front of him. The vocative form κύριε is used extensively throughout GJohn, so it might be expected for the author to use it here as well and make it clear that Thomas is addressing

²⁰¹ Brown, *The Gospel*, 1047.

²⁰² O'Day and Hylén, *John*, 197.

Jesus.²⁰³ However, there is at least one other instance of the nominative form being used in the vocative sense in GJohn, when the soldiers address Jesus as, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, in 19:3, so there is precedence for a usage that blurs the nominative and vocative.²⁰⁴ This use of the nominative makes it clear that Thomas's words are more than simply an address; he is also simultaneously making a confession of faith of who Jesus is objectively and of who Jesus is to him personally. "He confesses *to* the risen Jesus that he belongs to him as his willing subject; he adores him and henceforth will serve him as he deserves."²⁰⁵ This is a confession of faith which can be imitated by the readers, even though Jesus is not right in front of them.

Furthermore these words, ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου, harken back to the statement, θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος, in 1:1, although here θεός is used with the article. The lack of an article in 1:1 is significant, so it might seem that the use of the article here makes this statement about Jesus' divinity stronger than the one in the Prologue. However, when the nominative is used in a vocative sense with a possessive pronoun following, the article is required; thus, its use is probably not theologically significant.²⁰⁶ Both statements indicate the divinity of the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ.²⁰⁷ Some scholars argue that κύριος refers to the historical Jesus while θεός "adds a theological valuation of His person."²⁰⁸ However, this may lead to a separation between the Jesus of history and the Word of God which does not seem to be reflected in the gospel. It is better to

²⁰³ The form κύριε is used in GJohn more than 24 times, which is more than it is used in the three Synoptics combined. David J. Clark, "Provocative Vocatives in the Gospels: Part 3, John," *The Bible Translator* 71, no. 2 (August 19, 2020): 155, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2051677020925704>.

²⁰⁴ Clark, "Provocative Vocatives," 154.

²⁰⁵ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 385.

²⁰⁶ C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 116; Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 2nd ed., ed. Francis Noel Davey (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1950), 548-49.

²⁰⁷ During the Christological debates of the early church, Theodore of Mopsuestia suggested that this phrase was an exclamation in praise of God the Father, rather than referring to Jesus; however, the fifth ecumenical council established that these words refer to Jesus. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 385.

²⁰⁸ Dodd, *The Interpretation*, 430, who is referring specifically to a paraphrase by F. C. Burkitt.

consider “my Lord” as “a divine ascription alongside ‘my God’.”²⁰⁹ This follows the Septuagint’s usage of κύριος to translate יהוה and θεός to translate אלהים, thus again indicating the divinity of the risen Christ.²¹⁰

The responses to the paradoxes of identity and mission seen in those arresting Jesus and in Pontius Pilate are not worthy of imitation by the reader. However, Thomas’s confession of faith is worthy of imitation. In fact, “Thomas represents the transition from the faith of the apostles to the faith of the post-apostolic community,” thus becoming the connection to the readers of the gospel.²¹¹ Thomas’s confession both looks back to the Prologue, and also prepares the reader for the purpose of GJohn declared in the 20:30-31, thereby showing the arc of these themes through the entirety of the work.²¹²

GJohn was 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” (20:31). This clearly follows along with the paradox of purpose which we have been unpacking in this chapter. We have seen repeatedly that Jesus claims to be the resurrection and the life, and that people who believe in him will gain eternal life. Now this challenge is directly put to the readers of GJohn, alongside the people within its pages. Will we believe this, too, along with Martha and Thomas and the other disciples? However, scholars disagree about who the intended audience of the gospel is. There are two variant readings of the word for “believe” in v31, both of which have early attestations. πιστεύετε, in the present tense, would suggest “the aim of the writer was to strengthen the faith of those who already believe” while πιστεύσητε, in the aorist tense, would suggest “the Fourth Gospel

²⁰⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 394.

²¹⁰ Brown, *The Gospel*, 1047.

²¹¹ Beutler, *A Commentary*, 515.

²¹² Beasley-Murray, *John*, 370.

was addressed to non-Christians so that they might come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah.”²¹³ Some scholars argue for one audience or the other. Bultmann, however, considers the textual question insignificant, because the author is not concerned about whether his readers are Christian or not: “for to him the faith of ‘Christians’ is not a conviction that is present once for all, but it must perpetually make sure of itself anew, and therefore must continually hear the word anew.”²¹⁴ O’Day and Hylén agree, noting that this interpretation fits with the presentation of faith in GJohn. “...faith is not a one-time event, but a process. Many believe in Jesus only to later reject him; others have a tenuous belief that competes with their fear; even those who do believe do not fully understand.”²¹⁵ Thus, the purpose of the gospel is to create faith, whether new or renewed, in Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God.²¹⁶

While 20:31 also reads as a confessional statement, it is different from the one offered by Thomas, since it does not include the word θεός. However, this does not mean that we as readers should assent to a Christological statement less robust than Thomas’s. “The Word was God” (1:1) and “My Lord and my God!” (20:28) together provide the context for understanding the purpose of the gospel and the identity of the one in whom we are called to believe if we want to abide in the life of the Father through the Son.²¹⁷ Indeed,

Throughout the Gospel John demands not only belief that Jesus is the Messiah..., but also belief that Jesus came forth from the Father as His special representative in the world..., that Jesus and the Father share a special presence to one another..., and that Jesus bears the divine name “I AM.”²¹⁸

²¹³ Metzger, “20.31 πιστεύ[σ]ητε {C},” 219.

²¹⁴ Bultmann, *The Gospel*, 698-99.

²¹⁵ O’Day and Hylén, *John*, 197-98.

²¹⁶ For a discussion of how the whole language and structure of GJohn lends itself to both a Christian and a non-Christian audience, see Bauckham, *The Testimony*, especially 121-22.

²¹⁷ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 388.

²¹⁸ Brown, *The Gospel*, 1060.

Thus, we see the three paradoxes woven together to create the final confession of GJohn. Jesus, the Word of God, with his paradoxical divine and human identity, became flesh incarnate to show the world God's grace and truth through the Spirit and to bring life out of death so that we might have eternal life in him.

Conclusion

The pattern of paradoxes in GJohn is central to its theology and its purpose. Understanding who Jesus is, what he came to do, and why he came to do it is crucial to the readers' acceptance of Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of God" in order that they "may have life in his name" (20:31). However, there are no straightforward answers to these three questions. In order to communicate Jesus' identity, mission, and purpose, GJohn turns to paradox. The inherent oppositional relationships in the elements of paradoxes provide the freedom for GJohn to lay out concepts which are not easy to communicate or to understand. GJohn does not explain these paradoxes explicitly, but instead allows them to unfold through sign and discourse. The readers begin in the Prologue with their attentions piqued. How can the Word be with God and be God? How can the Word become flesh? How can life come to be in the Word when the Word is already alive? As the readers continue through GJohn, the paradoxes deepen and grow richer. Instead of simply contemplating the relationship between the Word and God, now they are faced with the relationship between the incarnate Word and God. The human Jesus Christ is in a relationship of mutual indwelling with the Father. Further, his flesh is necessary to our salvation, but also not sufficient; the Spirit of truth enters the picture as well. Jesus Christ must die in order to feed us his flesh and give us eternal life, which can only come from his death. Finally, the readers, along with Thomas, face the paradoxical reality of the risen Christ. Through belief in him, eternal life is offered to all.

Paradox is key to unpacking these questions, because the plurivalence of language and turns of logic which manifest themselves in paradox allow the readers to hold these opposing ideas in tension with each other. Life and death can be both spiritual and physical; both definitions of life and death are central to our understanding of the eternal life that springs from the death and resurrection of the Word. Through mutual indwelling, Jesus Christ, the Word of God, can both be

with God and be God. Jesus' human flesh in the power of the Spirit of truth can show us the invisible God through the light that the darkness cannot grasp. If we resolve these tensions too quickly, we miss the depth and breadth of theology which GJohn offers to us. GJohn does not exalt spiritual life to the detriment of physical life; rather, the eternal life offered to us is both present abundance and future hope. Jesus Christ is not human being with a special connection to God nor is he God seeming to be human; he is both human and divine. Flesh and Spirit in relation to each other accomplish our salvation. With each of these paradoxical pairs, both aspects matter, and the tensions in their relationships with each other shed light on the truth of the eternal life which Jesus Christ offers to us. When considering possible resolutions to the tensions, readers must be wary of settling too soon, before plumbing the depths before them.

The use of paradox makes GJohn an inexhaustible well of truth. Truth is there, both the ontological reality of the Greek concept of truth and the faithful steadfastness of the Hebrew concept of truth. But it is a truth we are invited into via paradox so that we do not come to its conclusions quickly or lightly. Indeed, GJohn avoids the clear resolution of these paradoxes for this reason. The readers are asked to respond with belief rather than understanding. This allows the paradoxes to remain as deep theological truths which readers can continue to search out and grasp. The paradoxes express deep truths about Jesus Christ which otherwise would be inexpressible, and these deep truths remain open to further consideration through prayer and careful study. Jesus' identity, mission, and purpose are clearer to us at the end of GJohn than they were in the Prologue, and the paradoxical tensions inherent in them remain present to us that we may continue to grow in our belief in Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God.

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