

John Part 1: "And the Word was God"

John 1:1 ESV In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. **4** In him was life, and the life was the light of men. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. **6** There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. **8** He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. **9** The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. **10** He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. **11** He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. **12** But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, **13** who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. **14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. **15** (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") **16** For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. **17** For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

- I. I want to take some time to explore the Gospel of John together with you. My hope is that we will better understand the person of Jesus, what he has accomplished and what it is that makes him so wonderful. Let's begin by considering how John is different than the other three gospels.
 - A. The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are known as the "synoptic" gospels.
 1. The word synoptic means "to see alike", and refers to the fact that the first three gospels, while in places having a slightly different perspective from each other, largely tell of the same events and teachings from the life of Christ.
 2. John is unique, however, in that the majority of events (though not all) that John writes about are found exclusively in his gospel.
 - a) Whereas the synoptics tell of many different miraculous signs performed by Jesus (healings, deliverances, etc.), John focuses our attention on just 7 miracles throughout the book.
 - b) Whereas the synoptics cover a wide spectrum of Christ's teaching, John hones in on 7 "I am" statements made by Jesus ("I am the Good Shepherd", "I am the resurrection and the life", etc.)
 - c) The differences between the synoptics and John should not pose a problem for us, however, because...
 - B. First of all, Matthew, Mark, and Luke were almost 25 years old at the time of the writing of John, and well-circulated. It should not seem odd that John would introduce additional stories about Jesus, his acts and his teachings, to inform and instruct new believers.
 1. Furthermore, each gospel was uniquely formulated by the Holy Spirit to be accessible to a different first Century audience.

- a) Matthew was heavily weighted with references to the Old Testament and explanations of how Christ fulfilled promises made to the Jews; how he was, in fact their Messiah.
 - b) Mark would have spoken to the heart of the political and militaristic Romans, with its announcement of the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the crowning of Jesus, the true King of the whole world.
 - c) Luke was a reasoned, thoroughly investigated account of the life of Jesus for sophisticated Greeks, written by a physician and intellectual.
2. John, however, was written to believers. The church he was writing for was now around 50 years old. His purpose was to provide a growing group of Christians a clearly stated theology of not only what Christ did, but who he was, and why it mattered.
- C. Secondly, John, along with his brother James, and Simon Peter, was one of Jesus' three closest associates (John refers to himself four times in his gospel as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" and describes how he was a close enough of a friend of his to be leaning against him at the last supper). This would make him uniquely qualified to offer more information about Jesus than what was already written for the benefit of the church.
 - D. Last, John makes clear in his gospel that there was no shortage of truthful and amazing stories that could be written about the Son of God.
 1. **John 20:30 ESV** And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:
 2. **John 21:25 ESV** And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.
 - E. Yet it is not enough to acknowledge that there was room for new information, or tout John's qualifications to provide such.
 1. This is because we're not dealing with an ordinary history or theology book here, but the living and powerful, inspired word of God.
 2. The Gospel of John exists for us because God has willed that it be added to his revelation of himself, that we might know and understand him better; meaning that without having what John brings to the table; our knowledge of the Christ is incomplete.
 - F. So let's begin to dig in to the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to John...
- II. Let's begin by acknowledging that a great story is often set in motion by the use of a great opening line.
 - A. Charles Dickens famously draws us in to his epic of the French Revolution, "A Tale of Two Cities" by telling us, "**It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.**"
 - B. One of my favorite novels, Anna Karenina by Leo Tolstoy, begins with this jewel: "**Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.**"
 - C. But there has never been a better opening line written, by any author ever, than what was written by the Apostle John in his biography of Jesus Christ: "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**"
 1. In these simple words, John sets Jesus apart from anyone else in ways that are indisputable.

2. If the case he is about to make about Jesus Christ in the next 21 chapters is true, what he shares in the very first verse sets the stage for Jesus to be taken very seriously.
- D. He begins by stating that Jesus was “In the beginning”. What does that remind you of? **Genesis 1:1 ESV** *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*
1. No one from a Jewish background could read those words without immediately going to Genesis 1:1 in their mind. The words “in the beginning” (Hebrew: “Bereshith” - “at the head”) mark the start of time.
 2. This was significant, because John’s words place Jesus (a man many of the people of his day would have believed have died and was resurrected at just 33 years of age) not just at the beginning, but pre-existing before all things!
 3. **Colossians 1:16 ESV** *For **by him all things were created**, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—**all things were created through him and for him.** **17** And he is **before all things**, and in him all things hold together.*
- E. When John says next that “the Word was with God”, it is a logical progression, because the Biblical teaching is clear: before God created, he was all there was! He is not a product of time, space, or matter but stood outside of each, creating them all!
1. This point is reinforced in verse 2, “He was in the beginning with God.”
 - a) But there is something more going on here. To say that he was in the beginning, before all things, **with** God, raises important questions, especially in the Jewish mind, about Christ’s identity.
 - b) What I mean is this. All Jews are fiercely committed to monotheism. The belief in one (and only one) God.
 - c) This is seen in the way that Jews recite the Shema Yisrael (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) every morning and evening: **Deuteronomy 6:4 ESV** “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”
 2. So if someone was with God in the beginning, before creation, who exactly would that be? John intends to remove all doubt with his next line...
- F. **“And the word was God”**. John introduces for his Jewish readers the concept of a trinitarian God. A God who is distinct in the person of the Father, the Son (as is pointed out here) and the Holy Spirit; yet the Trinitarian assertions of Christianity are never meant to be an assault the monotheism that states, “the Lord our God, the Lord is One”.
1. The Nicene Creed, formulated by Christians in the fourth century, describes the Son this way: **“begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father.”**
 2. The message is that Jesus is distinct from the Father and the Spirit, but together they comprise the one true God. While this remains a mystery to our understanding, the entire Bible stands or falls on this belief.
- G. John has no intention to be ambiguous about the fact that Jesus was God.

1. He shows this by attributing the work of Creation to the Son, telling his readers that when Genesis says, "In the beginning God...", that includes the Son.
 - a) **John 1:3 ESV** All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.
 - b) **John 1:10b ESV** ...the world was made through him... **BULLET THESE TWO**
 - c) Christ's instrumentality in the work of creation is also echoed in Colossians and Hebrews.
2. But there is another way in which John loudly heralds the fact that Jesus is God in this book; that is the seven "I am" statements I mentioned previously.
 - a) Just as participating in creation sets Jesus apart as God, so does the repeated use of the phrase "I am".
 - b) **Exodus 3:13 ESV** Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" **14** God said to Moses, "***I am who I am.***" And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: '***I am*** has sent me to you.'"
 - (1) The translation for the name "I Am" is the basis for the name Yahweh. Whenever you see the word LORD in the Old Testament in your Bible in all caps, it is the name Yahweh. It is THE name of God.
 - (2) The Jews, however, did not call God "Yahweh" when speaking about him. Though they knew this to be his name, they wrote it with no vowels (**YHWH**) so that it would not be possible to pronounce. They did this because the name of the Lord was far too holy to be uttered by sinful men.
 - c) But after saying clearly in his introduction, "And the Word was God", John tells of seven times where Jesus, during his earthly ministry, states, "I am" followed by a new revelation of how God wants for his people to know him.
3. If you doubt that John is connecting Christ to the great I AM of Exodus 3, take a look with me at **John 18:3 ESV** So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. **4** Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" **5** They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "***I am he.***" Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. **6** When Jesus said to them, "***I am he,***" they ***drew back*** and ***fell to the ground.*** **7** So he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." **8** Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go."
 - a) Verse 6 is puzzling if you just read it at face value. Why would the soldiers withdraw and even fall to the ground when Jesus identifies himself?
 - b) But the confusion is removed when you realize what Christ actually said. Most of you will have a footnote for verse 6 in your Bible telling you that the original Greek does not say, "I am he", but simply, "I am".

- c) Christ was not simply letting the soldiers know that they had their man, but that the ever existing, all powerful, completely sovereign God was not submitting to their plans, but that he had summoned them there to fulfill his.
- III. John goes on to say that **“in him was life”**. This is John’s way to say that the one to whom creation was attributed was not only the inventor of life, but the source of it; that he had life in himself that has flowed out from him throughout all eternity.
- A. Now the life had come to earth to restore order to chaos. And he would do so in a way that looked back to the first act of creation, when God said “Let there be light!”
 - 1. **“In him was life, and that life was the light of men.”** Just as God first flooded the dark, formless canvas of creation with marvelous light that originated in him (for there was no sun or moon as of yet), Christ would flood the darkness of a sin-corrupted planet once again with self-originating light.
 - 2. Isaiah, prophesying his coming, said: **Isaiah 9:2 ESV The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.**
 - B. John revels in the success of Christ’s mission when he says, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” The great proclamation of the book of John is found in verse 9 of chapter one: “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.”
 - 1. The one the Jews had been waiting for since Moses was here! And so much more! He was not just a conquerer, or a judge, or even a king. Instead he was all that and so much more!
 - 2. God himself had come into the world he created to do what only he could do.
 - C. But John shows us that he would be greeted by two very different types of people.
 - 1. **John 1:10 ESV He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.**
 - a) There were those who, though created by him, and owning their existence to him, did not know, recognize or receive him.
 - b) For all of his goodness, his healing, and his forgiveness, they rejected, mocked, harassed and crucified Him.
 - c) Even those whose ancestors had been in covenant with him, having received his law, and all of the predictions his prophets had made concerning his arrival, the ones John calls “his own”, did not receive him.
 - d) But that was not the whole story!
 - 2. **John 1:12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**
 - a) There was another group that included some disciples of John the Baptist, a Pharisee named Nicodemus, and immoral woman at a well, a lame man by the pool of Bethesda, a woman caught in the very act of adultery, a man born blind, and Lazarus and his two sisters that DID receive him, and believed in his name.

- b) These were rewarded with something they never could have earned: the right to become the very children of God! Though none of them had had any merit of their own (they were religious bigots, sleazy sinners, welfare recipients, and cripples!), God himself adopted them by his own free choice to do so!
- D. **John 1:14 ESV** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- E. This is what happened when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Life. Light. Adoption. John says we have seen his glory! What was once covert is now overt. The trumpets are blasting, the secret is out. Jesus has come and he is full of grace and truth.
1. Not just grace, so that we can remain in our filth and sin. When he gives us the right to be the children of God, he gives us the power to be transformed, and live like we belong in a palace as opposed to a barn.
 2. Not just truth, so that we would be overwhelmed by our inadequacies, and lose hope before we ever begin.
 3. He was full of grace and truth. This means that there will never be a shortage of either in him. There is enough truth to draw us to his grace, and enough grace to help us walk in the truth.
- F. **John 1:16 ESV** For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. **17** For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
- IV. One last note. Why is Jesus called “the Word” by John?
- A. The word for “word” is the Greek “logos”. It is a fairly common word, used 330 times in the King James New Testament. It is actually not a particularly significant word. It has to do with many facets of speaking to others and language, ranging from doctrine to a narration.
- B. But think again about what John has told us so far about Jesus in his opening line. **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”**
1. When God created the cosmos he did so with a series of spoken words. “let there be light, planets, trees, birds, tigers, etc.” As I said earlier, when he did this, order displaced chaos.
 2. Now there is a different kind of chaos reigning. The chaos of sin and all that it entails. God once again will bring order, but not with “a” word, but with “the” Word.
- C. Jesus is God’s doctrine of absolute truth, his final narration of how the story will end, and his message of reconciliation to his rebellious children. The very best thing he has to say.
- D. **Hebrews 1:1 ESV** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, **2** but **in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son**, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.
1. If you ever want a direct word from the Lord, a message from God to you personally, you must look no further than the life Jesus lived, the words Jesus

spoke, the death Jesus died, the life to which he was raised, and the kingdom over which he now reigns.

2. If you see that, you will know everything you will ever need to know about what God thinks about you, and has planned for you.