

Jesus: In the Beginning

Series: Jesus - John

John 1: 1-18

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OPENING PRAYER:

Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your great kindness to us in Jesus Christ. You have lavished such blessings upon us bringing us to this new year. Giving us again the opportunity to be in your presence together. To be encouraged by one another. To commit ourselves afresh to living for your glory. We come now as eager children, gathered for weekly conversation of heart and soul with you our Heavenly Father. We pray that You would speak to us by your word. That you would break the bread of life to us. That you would multiply its truth into our lives. That we are fed and nourished and live for your glory. We pray this together in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please be seated.

INTRODUCTION:

Now we're beginning together today a series of studies in the gospel according to John. And in fact, as many of you will already be aware, in these next three months or so, we mean to saturate ourselves in John's gospel. And we are going to study it in the following fashion: between today and Palm Sunday we will be studying here at our morning services John's Gospel chapters one through 12, which will actually bring us to Palm Sunday in the Gospel narrative. On Wednesdays, at lunchtime, we're going to be thinking about chapters 13 through 17, which are a very distinct section in John's gospel in which Jesus is unfolding His grace and glory to His disciples in the upper room. And then Easter week, Monday, Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday we'll follow Christ in John's Gospel from the Thursday of Easter week through Good Friday to Easter Sunday. And that will bring us to chapters 20 and 21 in John's gospel.

We will not read all of John's gospel in church. So I do hope that from week to week, you will keep up with reading John's gospel, privately. That you will graze there spiritually. That you will meditate upon God's word. And in doing this: A. the sermons will sound better. And, B: you will be surprised how much more you learn than what you have learned from the sermons.

SCRIPTURE READING:

Now let's read John chapter one.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

That is John the Baptist, of course.

He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to His own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

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. (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.'") For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

SERMON:

I love that saying about John's Gospel that a child can bathe in it but an elephant could swim in it. And I suppose whoever first thought of that neat way of describing John's Gospel was trying

to communicate both the fact that John's Gospel presents to us a beautifully simple and clear presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Indeed, John says, towards the end of the gospel, that the reason he wrote down his gospel, chapter 20 verse 30, was that people might come to believe in Jesus, the Son of God, and the Savior. So the Gospel of John is a wonderful introduction to Christ and a wonderful introduction to what it means to trust in Him. But at the same time, marvelously, it is wonderfully profound. Beautifully simple, and yet wonderfully profound. And so again, in chapter 20 verse 30, John says, that coming to believe in Jesus, which is why I'm writing this gospel, brings you into the experience of eternal life.

That is not just this life going on and on and on, which in your case and my case, might be a little drab and boring. But a different kind of life. A quality of life that has something heavenly about it. A density of grace and glory, that none of us can get to the bottom of. Not only can children bathe but elephants could swim. That there are things in this gospel that the most mature believer, the most experienced Christian in our congregational fellowship will feel I'm only scraping the surface of what I can still learn about the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so John's Gospel does two things: First of all, that evangelizes. It presents Christ, to those who do not yet know him. And so incidentally, we shouldn't be slow or embarrassed to have friends or house guests at morning services over these months. We shouldn't be in any doubt that if they come, by God's grace, they will learn the most basic things about the Lord Jesus Christ. And yet at the same time, the Gospel of John edifies us wonderfully.

I think, perhaps part of the reason for that was very well expressed by the French Genevan reformer John Calvin, who is not noted in history for his marvelous one liners. But he has a marvelous one liner on John's gospel when he says, "By comparison with the other gospels: The other gospel shows us Christ's body. John's Gospel seems to show us Christ's soul. Shows us as it were, the depths of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

And few places in the Gospel, interestingly, more evidently, than in what is usually called the prologue to the Gospel. Or if you wanted to put it in musical terms, the overture to this marvelous symphony that John has composed for us, and in which like sometimes an overture, he kind of weaves into the opening some of the marvelous things that he will then return to, and pick up so that when you're in the middle of the gospel, you look back and you say, *Oh, he gave me a little hints that I would find out more about this in his opening overture.* As he presents to us, interestingly, did you notice without mentioning his name, he presents to us the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the "Word of God."

Now your word of course is your clearest expression of yourself. Your Word is the way in which you communicate yourself to people and, and sometimes we find ourselves in situations where we say if only it only here, there was a word from God for me. And right from the very beginning John is saying to us, there is a Word from God to you and his name is the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in these opening paragraphs in our pew Bible, as you'll notice, there are four of them. John is beginning to unfold to us how marvelous Jesus Christ is. Oh, my friends, I wish I could communicate just that to you. How marvelous Jesus Christ is. And how — that's what faith says, *How marvelous Jesus Christ is.*

John himself, by the end of this passage is saying, what I think in his own heart, he's thinking, I wish everybody could say this. *We have seen his glory! He is marvelous! He is glorious!* And he's beginning to explain to us why it is that the Lord Jesus as the Word of God is so glorious.

And, of course, first of all, because he speaks in these opening verses about the eternity of the Word. The other gospel writers, of course, begin at different places when they speak to us about Jesus. Matthew, begins with Abraham. And, and Mark begins with really John the Baptist. And Luke, he begins with that little group of people who were longing for the Messiah to come. But, but John presses, presses backwards in history. He, he takes us as it were on a journey through time. And his Gospel begins with these awesome words, "In the beginning."

And if we knew the Bible quite well, of course, we would immediately think, *Ahh Genesis chapter one.* The very opening words of the whole Bible, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." But you notice that whereas Genesis takes us back to the beginning, and then moves forwards into history, John takes us back to the beginning and then, as it were, takes us behind the beginning of things. He opens up the curtain that separates the beginning of creation from the divine world of eternity. And he says, a little bit like his experience at the beginning of the book of Revelation, he says, *Oh my, look here, "In the beginning, was the word, and the Word was with God."* He doesn't just mean the word was somewhere there with God. He, he tries to express it in a way that will communicate to his readers that God and the Word were in the closest possible intimacy.

You know, what we have in our Western society as part of our etiquette almost everywhere, you must not look for any length of time into somebody else's eyes unless you are absolutely irreversibly and unreservedly committed to them in love. Isn't that the case? That's that's part of our etiquette. And it says something about our relationships. What John is saying, that the Word and God, the Father looked directly into one another's eyes, as it were, from all eternity. Eyes that said — some of you will remember, the very first time your eyes said this to somebody else's: I love you with all my being. The Word was with God.

Unless you be in any doubt what that means he goes on to say, “And the Word was God.” Everything that we can say about what it means to be God in His godness, we can say, and indeed John does say about the Lord Jesus.

Now, of course, from time to time, there are people who appear at our doors, usually two of them, and when they discover that we are Christian believers, they will almost instantaneously say to us, *You know, don't you that the Bible doesn't say that Jesus was gone.*

And you say, *but what about the very first verse of John's gospel.*

Ahh, they'll say, that's not what the Greek means.

Now, if you're in a bad mood, this is the time always to have a Greek New Testament somewhere in your house to bring it out, and to show it them and say can you, *Could you just show me that?* Because, of course, by and large, they're programmed to say that. And one of the reasons they will say that this is true is because in this text, John doesn't use a definite article, “the” definite article, and that indicates, he really just means that Jesus is divine. He's less than God. He's divine. But he's less than God.

What are you to say about? Well, there are many different things that you could say about it. Let me just say two things to you. Number one. Everything that John says about the Word in this passage, depends upon him being full and absolutely deity. There was nothing made apart from him, indicates that he does not belong to the created order.

But if you fast forward to the end of John's gospel, or certainly to the climax of John's gospel, you find a very interesting statement. And it's there for a very deliberate reason. John's Gospel is written that we might believe — no matter what our background, no matter what our doubts have been, that we might believe in Jesus as the Son of God, our Savior. And that's why he brings forward, as it were, as his last witness to Jesus Christ Doubting Thomas.

And do you remember doubting Thomases words? Let me put them quite literally for you. When Jesus says to Thomas, reach forth your hand, and put them into my feet and side and see that I really am the Savior I promised to be, Thomas says, quite literally, “My Lord, and the God of Me.”

And so as one commentator has put it, when we read through John's gospel, we understand that the deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God. If this be not true, the book is blasphemous. Or as Augustine put it, you might want to try his Latin on your visitors, (Dr. Ferguson quotes the the Latin here). He is either God or he cannot be good. He cannot

make these claims. If he is not God and be good. He is either God, or he is out of his mind. The eternity of the Word.

But then second, notice, what John goes on to say in verses six through eight, about the witness to the Word. And he he brings forward John the Baptist, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John, and he wasn't the light." Worth meditating on. Why does he say that? He wasn't the light, but he was the witness to the light.

Now, at this stage, in reading John's gospel, we might think, well, you know, we're all witnesses to Jesus, and John the Baptist was a witness to Jesus. But as we read through the Gospel of John, we find a very interesting thing. That John uses this word "witness" much more frequently than the other gospel writers do. Indeed, if you put the number of times he uses the verb and the noun together, he uses this language about six times more frequently than the other three gospels put together. And it's one of the underlying themes of his gospel.

He's saying, he's saying, in a sense, I want you to put Jesus on trial. What you think about Jesus is the most important decision you can ever make in your life. It is really! It's a more important decision than where you go to college, what you do in your vocation. It's a more important decision, dare I say it, even been the decision you will or may have made about whom to marry. This is the most important decision of your life. And so you need to think about it very carefully. And the best thing for you to do is to listen to the witnesses. What do the witnesses say? And so he brings forward the witnesses and we'll, we'll find them these people that meet Jesus and the conclusions they come to in the very first of them is John the Baptist. And he comes and he bears witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. And, and what's this all about? It's because John is pointing to him. Do you see what he saying about them? Later on in chapter one, verse 15, John bore witness about him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, He who comes after he ranks before me, because he was before me. "

So I think myself that John probably knew Luke's gospel. He knew that literally, physically, Jesus wasn't before John. John was before Jesus, isn't that right? What he means is that he was before me because he was before all time. He is the Lord God come in our flesh. Do you see how glorious he is? And John himself says, so marvelously in verse 14, "We have seen his glory." That's what this gospel is for.

That as you read this gospel, as we, as we come round to this gospel. In a sense we come under this gospels influence here. Here we should be sensing from time to time, he is glorious. It's glorious to hear these things about my Savior. So that we can go out into the world and say with our own witness, in the very way we live, people begin to think Jesus seems to be glorious to him, or to her. And in the words that we speak we to become witnesses to Jesus the Word.

And then you'll notice, there's a third thing and the third paragraph in verses nine through 13, where John speaks about the various responses there were to the world. You see, right at the start is wanting to say, this is the most important decision I ever made in my life. And it's the most important decision you will ever make in your life. But I do want you to know that people make different decisions about Jesus. He came into the world that He had made, says John in verse 10, but that world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people. The Jews did not recognize him.

Friends, the truth of the matter is that the majority of people in Jesus' day didn't recognize him. And didn't receive him. And the truth is today that the minority of people recognize Jesus.

But all John is saying — And, and we need, we need to get hold of this. Let me say this to you. Let me — let's just imagine for a moment that there is somebody here who doesn't recognize Jesus in this way. What do we want to say, to this man or woman or this young person? One of the first things we want to say is, *Oh, dear friend, you have no idea what you're missing. You have no idea what you're missing.* And if they say, *Well, what am I missing?* Well, John gives the answer in verse 12. "To all who did receive Him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Not because we were born of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but because we have been born of God."

I think this is lovely really, the way John puts together these two verbs. To believe in Jesus is to receive Jesus. And to receive Jesus is to believe in Jesus. What happens when you wholeheartedly receive somebody? Well, one of the things that happens is that even in your in your reception of the them, as you welcome them, as you embrace them — what are you doing? Well, you're emptying your hands of everything except them and you're filling your hand with everything that they bring.

That's really what it means to come to believe, to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. It means to receive him. It's obviously much more than simply knowing the facts about Jesus — believing that Jesus lived. And it's — it's receiving him. To all who received him, he gave this privilege of becoming the children of God.

That's something to wake up in the morning and, and your heads drowsy, and there are difficult things to face in the day and you've got burdens in the home, and in the family. And then you remember. Ahh, *but I'm a child of the living God. He is my heavenly Father.*

That's one of the reasons we want to say to the world, *Oh world, you don't know what you are missing. Or perhaps more accurately, you don't know whom you're missing.*

When they come and receive Jesus Christ, they're going to, *I never knew it was anything like this.*

The story of a great old British king, I mean, in the dark ages, to whom the gospel of Christ was brought up. And he said to the missionary monk, *But if I come to trust and receive in Jesus Christ, what, what will that mean?*

And the missionary monk said, *Oh King, it will mean wonder upon wonder, and every wonder true.*

To all who received him, he gave the right to become the children of the living God.

And that, of course, brings John right at the end of this section. From speaking at the beginning about the eternity of the word, and then to bringing forward those who will give witness to the Word, and then telling us how there will be different responses to the Word, to focus our attention on where it really needs to be. And that is on the incarnation of the Word.

Verse one, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And verse 14, amazing. The distance between verse one and verse 14, is immeasurable. "This word became flesh, and dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory."

That's what it means to receive Jesus Christ. That you discover that, that John's witness becomes your witness. He ranks before me, because he was before me. And your witness to others is, verse 16, "From his fullness, we have all received grace upon grace."

You know that phrase is so strange that all the commentators and scholars on John's Gospel are still scratching their heads and wondering, What does "grace upon grace" really mean? And you pay your money and you take your choice, but it means this. That it's grace. And then it's grace. And then it's grace. And then when you fear it's going to run out — you know, some of you who are Christians, you fear it's going to run out, don't you? You fear one day that the grace is going to stop and, and the real God will appear.

Friends it's grace all the way down, and it's grace all the way up, it's grace all the way around. But there's only one place where we find that grace. It's in His fullness.

And so, the law was given through Moses, which pointed to the grace of Jesus Christ, but grace and truth has come to us through Jesus Christ. None of us has ever seen God but the only God who is at the Father's side. He has, he's made Him known. So that when we see Jesus, when we hear the Word we know that this is what God is like to his children. And what he's like is this. He is full of Grace and truth. Full of Grace and Truth.

I don't , I don't think it really matters who you are. I believe with all my heart this is your deepest need and my deepest need today. Grace. And the only place you can find it, in time and eternity, is by receiving Jesus Christ and embracing him as your own.

I wonder if you've ever done that? You know, that's always my concern. I wonder if you've ever received him? Well, if today he seems — he's beginning to seem glorious, wonderful to you. Exactly who you need. Cover your sins. Give you a new life. Then take hold of this promise, “To all who believed in him who received him, he gives the right to be the children of God. May by God's grace we all fall down before with Thomas and say, “My Lord, and My God.”

CLOSING PRAYER:

Our heavenly Father, speak to us we pray that we may speak in living echoes of your tone into a world that is still full of darkness in which our Lord Jesus Christ remains unrecognized. So fill us we pray with grace upon grace, that we may live for His glory. We ask it in his name. Amen.