



Who is Jesus?

Series: John – That You May Believe

John 1:1-18

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The Most Important Question in the Universe – Who IS Jesus?

Beloved, I don't believe that I have ever been more eager or enthusiastic to begin a sermon series than I am to begin this sermon series in the Gospel of John, today. John's gospel is an utter masterpiece. The more we read it, the more we study it, the more our eyes are opened to the matchless glory of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, the more we are amazed at the power and grace and incomparable majesty of Jesus, the more our faith is established, the more our worship is enflamed, and the more we come to the realization that the ultimate ground of reality, what really matters is a person – Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

John's gospel is the last of the gospels that were written. Matthew, Mark, Luke – the synoptic gospels – had all been written long before John took a pen in hand and began to write his account of the life of Christ. It is the product of mature reflection, of a long life of faithfulness to Christ, a long life of growing in understanding and in real, solid, life-transforming faith.

I debated how we should begin this sermon series. In that past, we have often taken the first sermon in the series to establish the themes, to talk about the intentions of the author, to talk about all the questions of authorship, etc. But we aren't going to do that today, for a few reasons. First, all of that information is available in any good study Bible; the ESV Study Bible has a great intro to the gospel of John if you want to read it. Second, my approach to the John is going to be more devotional than academic. That's not to say that we won't learn anything, or that we are going to be sloppy in our study, but the goal is not simply to learn theology, but to know Christ and respond to His revelation. Then, third, John, himself, tells us why he wrote this gospel in John 20:30-31 where he writes, ***“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are***

written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:30–31, ESV) This book was written by John to do two things. First, it is written to bring people to faith in Christ, to introduce unbelievers to Jesus, as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And then, second, it is written to sustain and strengthen believers in Jesus and in that respect, there may be no better book in the Bible to keep you treasuring and trusting in Jesus Christ. John wrote this gospel so that his readers might be brought into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ through genuine faith and so that those who believe would continue to progress in their faith discovering the fullness of life that can only be found in living fellowship with God through His Son – so that we would believe and keep on believing. So wherever you may be spiritually, there is something for you in this book. If you have never really thought seriously about Jesus or put your faith in Him, John writes for you so that you will believe and have eternal life. If you are a relatively new believer, John writes to strengthen your faith. And if you have been a Christian for many years, John gives you profound truth to ponder and to celebrate.

What John does in this gospel is to answer the most important question in the universe – Who is Jesus...really? Who is He? Why does He matter? What makes Him unique? Why should He be worshipped? What does He have to do with us? It is no exaggeration to say that of all the people in history, no one has been more redefined to fit human tastes than Jesus. His identity, it seems is always up for grabs. Speak of Jesus and so many images flood people’s thoughts -- a harmless, gentle, soft-spoken, milquetoasty sort of man that no one needs to take seriously, whose basic message to humanity is “be nice”; a social justice warrior and the champion of common morality and equal pay; a magician; an amazingly charismatic leader of a reform movement who got Himself killed for his rabble-raising; a religious hippie; a fiery-eyed radical ready to burn everything to the ground and overthrow the establishment; a life guru who exists to help you maximize your life. The list is endless. None of those images is particularly awe-inspiring and it is because none of them is accurate – at all. And that is no small thing. As John MacArthur says and Scripture attests, “It is as damning to believe in the wrong Jesus as it is to believe in no Jesus.” So John, in this gospel, is going to tell us who Jesus is and why He matters – not just now but forever.

We are going to look this morning at John’s prologue, his introduction to the gospel and we are going to look at it the way he wrote it. We are not going to break this down into 10 sermons. If I did that, I would be preaching the rest of the book before it’s time. Everything we see here is going to be illustrated and expanded as John tells us his eyewitness account of Jesus. No, these first 18 verses are to be read together in order to whet our appetites for

what is to come. Think of it like this. To use a contemporary analogy, the first 18 verses are like the trailer to the greatest movie you have ever seen. You watch it and you kind of know the gist of the story, the basic outline and you get excited to see it. And then you see the movie and what you thought you knew is blown away by the rest of the story. And that is what this prologue is. As great as it is, it is just a glimmer of the glory of the rest of the story – the story of the Ages for all ages. So let’s take a stroll through the prologue together and whet our appetites for what is to come.

A Walk Through John’s Prologue Pick this up in verse 1 with me. John writes, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” (John 1:1–2, ESV)** John starts in a place entirely different from the other gospels. Without apology, John takes us back in time beyond Bethlehem where Jesus was born and Nazareth where He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin, beyond the beginning of time itself, before creation, back before human existence, back before the creation, before angels proclaimed the wonders of God, back into eternity to when God is and gives us a glimpse of a glorious person who has an eternal existence. He means for us to be awestruck. “In the beginning was the Word...” First, let’s deal with the question,

Why does John call Jesus Christ the Word? What does John mean when he calls Jesus Christ the Word? It is the Greek word, “logos.” John defines the Second Person of the Godhead in such a way that both Jews and Greeks, the original readers of this gospel, could understand. The Jews thought of God’s Word in several different ways, with several different connotations. They thought of it as the presence and action of God breaking into human history with unparalleled power and authority. They thought of it in terms of an event. Think of the creation. Psalm 33:6 says, **“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.” (Psalm 33:6, ESV)** Moreover, God’s expressed will and His truth, when directed toward men, was always called his word. We read throughout the OT things like this: The Word of the Lord came to: Abram, Samuel, Nathan, Solomon, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. God spoke to Moses. The Word referred to the active power and force of God Himself. It was his creative power, His redemptive power -- **“He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.” (Psalm 107:20, ESV)** God’s Word accomplishes all His purpose: **“so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11, ESV)** The Jews were well familiar with the concept of God’s Word, the greatness of God’s Word.

The Greeks, on the other hand, were a little different. They were philosophers. They loved philosophy and human reasoning and at the fountainhead of Greek philosophy was a guy named Heraclitus. Heraclitus made the famous statement that “a person never steps in the same river twice,” because of the constant change in all things, that nothing is ever the same twice. But Heraclitus taught this, that the creation of the world, the ordering of all of life, and the immortality of the human soul were all made by the logos – by the Word that was the invisible and intelligent force behind all that we see in this world. To the Greek, the Word was an impersonal power that gave order to all things.

But what John was saying to the Jews and to the Greeks was something monumental. To the Jews he is saying: The creative power, the presence and action of God breaking into the world, the mind and the will and power of God that you have seen all throughout the history of the OT – the Word of God – He is a person. He is the second person of the Trinity. Jesus Christ is that Word. To the Greeks He is saying: The intelligent force behind all things, the power that gives order to all things, that creative power of God’s mind – it is not some impersonal force – He is the Word, who was with God and who is God. Jesus Christ is that Word. Well then,

What Must We Know About Him? He is eternal. John writes: **In the beginning was the Word...** The similarity to the first words of the book of Genesis is deliberate. In the beginning of beginnings, before beginnings even began, the Word was. He is eternal. He has always been. In fact, these words could be translated "In the beginning was continuing the Word." Before the beginning of time the Word was there and the Word has always been there. John is saying if you really want to understand who Jesus is, if you really want to grasp something of the glory of Jesus Christ, you have to go back before the very beginning. You have to back before the moment when matter was formed and particles came together and atoms and molecules and neutrons and all of those sub-atomic particles and forces came into existence by the creative Word of God. You have to go back before the angelic beings were created. That’s where you have to start. He is uncreated. He is eternal. He is not part of the world, He is not part of the solar system, He is not part of this great universe in which you and I live. Because at the very moment when this creation was brought into being, He already had been, He already was, He already existed. It is why Jesus could say to the Pharisees: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58,**

ESV) The Word never came into existence, for the Word always was. The Word never had a beginning, for the Word always was. The Word is eternal. But even more than that,

The Word enjoyed “face to face” communion with God. That is the meaning of phrase, **“the Word was with God”** – “pros ton theon” – to be face to face with God. This is a phrase that means the most intimate relationship of communication and communion and fellowship possible. God and the Word took counsel together. They rejoiced together. They delighted in one another. The relationship between God and the Word, God the Father and God the Son, has always been a relationship of infinite love and infinite pleasure – for all of eternity, perfect fellowship, union and love. And here’s why. And this face to face communion is possible because:

The Word is God. Who could have the fullness of intimacy and relationship with God except Him who is God? Who could know God perfectly and exhaustively except Him who is God? A more resounding and unmistakable declaration of the absolute Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ it is impossible to conceive. The Father and the Son are one God, the same in essence and equal in power and glory. They share not only the same attributes and fellowship but an essential oneness of Being. Here, of course, we have the mystery of the Trinity. There is but one God, yet within the oneness of the Godhead, there are three Persons; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And these three are one God, the same in essence, equal in power and glory. John is saying, “If you want to know who Jesus really is, you need to forget about everything that you think you know according to your own wisdom, you need to go back before anything existed, back into eternity if you really want to know who He is. He isn’t a mere man, He is God.” The gospel begins where John wants us to end; with an understanding that Jesus Christ is God.

But John doesn’t stop there. Look at verse 3. **“All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” (John 1:3, ESV)** John says to us, “Do you want to know who Jesus is? **He is the agent of creation.**” Walk outside your front door and look around you. Look at the sun and the moon and the stars. Look at the galaxies through a telescope. Look at the vastness of the skies, trees, mountains, valleys, streams, oceans, dirt – all of it. Then look at the intricacies of all of life and nature through the most powerful microscope. It was all made by Him. It was all made by the Word. How important is Jesus? There is nothing that exists that does not owe its ultimate existence to Him. But wait, the Book of Genesis says that God created all things. It does. God the Father willed the

creation and the Word accomplished it. He made it all. That is what it means to be God. And the Word is God.

In fact, let's take it a step further. Paul says of Jesus, **“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. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”** (Colossians 1:16–17, ESV) Let me tell you what that means. The eternal ground of reality is a person – not matter, not energy, not physics, not science, not some impersonal force, not chance -- the eternal ground of reality is a person. Absolute reality, eternal reality is a person and everything and everyone finds its true definition – we find our true identity in relation to Him. John declares:

“In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:4, ESV) What does John mean by this? Well, certainly all life, all biological and angelic life, finds its source in Him – it has to, He made it. But that is not John's point – at least not chiefly. John has in view spiritual life, eternal life, true life. All true life, all spiritual life, all eternal life finds its source in the Word of God, in Jesus Christ. Spiritual life is found only in Jesus Christ. John is even more explicit in what he writes in 1 John 5:11-12: **“And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”** (1 John 5:11–12, ESV) In him is life. So if you have him, you have life. If you reject him, you reject life.

John goes on to say **the life was the light of men.** As sinners, we are futile in our thinking and our hearts are darkened (cf. Rom 1:21). We need light. Christ is that life that brings light, that brings spiritual understanding, that brings truth to the heart of man. He is the one who makes men who have been blinded by their sinful rebellion against God, who do not know reality from imagination, who do not know truth from falsehood – He is the one who brings the light to the darkened minds of men and woman who are trapped in sin. He shines the light of truth. And how has man responded? He tells us in verse 5.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:5, ESV) The word for “overcome” is a rich word. It has two meanings. The light of Christ – His truth, who He is – shines in the darkness of our world and the darkness has not “overcome” it – means,

first, that that the world in darkness didn't understand Him, couldn't comprehend Him, couldn't recognize Him. Our minds have been darkened by sin. But there is a second meaning to the word "overcome" that flows out of this. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness tries to take it down, to tackle it, to overcome and defeat it, to keep it hidden. That is the second idea of the word "overcome" here. John 3:19 says: **"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."** (John 3:19, ESV) Yet the darkness will not prevail over the light of Christ.

So how does the light triumph over the darkness? Jump down to verse 9. **"The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world."** (John 1:9, ESV) Here is what God would do. The Word, the One in whom is light and life – He came into the world and the idea here is that "He shines light on everyone" in the sense that In His coming in to the world, His light shined on all men and made a distinction. The phrase refers to the exposure that light brings when it shines on something. DA Carson makes the point that the light of Christ shines on all men and divides the race – those who hate the light and those who love it. And that makes sense because John goes on to say,

"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." (John 1:10–11, ESV) He came into the world, a world in darkness, a world that He made, to people He created and they didn't know Him. Even His own people, the Jews, who because of the revelation of the OT should have recognized Him and gladly received Him as the Savior promised by God, rejected Him. They didn't recognize that God was with them. This is the natural condition of all in the world – they do not know Christ, they are blind to His glories, blind to His beauty, blind to Him as the greatest treasure of their souls, blind to Him as god, blind to Him as Savior. They don't see His person as glorious. They don't see Jesus as supremely priceless. They don't see who He is. They are blind. That's everyone. We are all in that camp. So again, the question, **how does the light triumph over the darkness?** Verses 12-13 tell us:

"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." (John 1:12–13, ESV) Some did receive Him, some will receive Him. What makes the difference? It is not ethnic pedigree – it is not the bloodline that matters. It is not religious pedigree that matters – not the will of the flesh. It is not even the fallen will of man

-- not through their personal desire and will, but those who have been born of God -- born from above by the mercy of God -- they are the ones who receive Christ, who believe in His name, who become children of God and no longer children of darkness. What makes the difference is God -- His will, His power, His mercy, to make dead souls alive and blind eyes able to see. God makes the difference. Receiving Christ and believing on His name is the unfailing result of being born again, of receiving the new birth from God in Heaven, of being made alive from the deadness of sin to see the glory of God in Jesus Christ. Paul says it like this: **“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6, ESV)**

Do you see? The guarantee that the light will not be overtaken by the darkness -- the guarantee that light will triumph over darkness is the new birth, regeneration. God's plan is perfect. Everything hangs on being born again. Because without this, we are dead and blind. God's remedy? Send Jesus, the Word, into the world as the light of life, to reveal God and His truth, to live a perfect life, lay down His life for us and rise again from the dead and then cause people to be born again, by the power of God, so they can see Jesus and receive Him, and believe in Him and have life. That's what this gospel is all about.

The Apostle John did receive Christ, did believe in Christ, and so he can say with authority how that came about, starting in verse 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... 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.” (John 1:14, 16–18, ESV)** What a statement! This is the heart and the climax of the gospel -- what John will spend the next 20 and ½ chapters unfolding. John is saying, “I want you to know who Jesus is, because I do. I have seen Him with my own eyes, eyes made open and able to see, by God's grace. I know who He is. This is not ‘make-believe,’ not my imagination, not what some product of my wisdom or ideas. I know who Jesus is, who the Word is, and the reason I know is because He became flesh -- a man -- and dwelt with us and we saw His glory. This gospel is a firsthand account of who Jesus really is.” It is a fantastic claim, a miraculous claim -- and it is true.

The Word became flesh. God became a man. The infinite took on the finite. He did not cease to be God, but He added humanity to His deity and He dwelt with us. He lived, “literally

tabernacled,” with us. If you are a student of the OT, you know the significance of that statement. The tabernacle was that great tent, the tent of meeting, which God commanded Israel to erect so that he could dwell with them in His manifest glory. But you remember that God’s glory was concealed in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle. Though God dwelled with Israel, no one could behold God’s glory or, because of their sinfulness and God’s holiness, they would be consumed, destroyed. But the Word, Jesus, the Son of God, came and dwelt with man – John saw Him and lived with Him – and John saw His glory, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and by God’s grace, was not consumed.

He and the other disciples, saw the glory that belongs to Christ as the one and only Son of the Father, the Word made flesh. The word that is translated as “have seen” is a word that means “to scrutinize, to examine thoroughly, to contemplate.” It is the idea of fully perceiving something through personal contact and interaction. John is saying we saw the glory of God in Christ, we beheld his glory. By God’s grace, with understanding eyes, they saw His perfection, His matchless teaching, His wondrous miracles, His death and resurrection, all proclaiming His glory as the Son of God. They saw what others did not see.

It was better, even, than what Moses saw and communicated. Moses longed to see the fullness of God’s glory. He begged for it. But God did not allow Him to see His glory in all of its fullness. Exodus 33 tells us, **“Moses said, ‘Please show me your glory.’ And he said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” And the Lord said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.””** (Exodus 33:18–23, ESV) Then we read, **“The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.””** (Exodus 34:6–7, ESV) Moses got to see the God’s character revealed, but not in its fullness, he got to see the shadow of His glory, if you will. He was a spokesman for God, a faithful one, and through him came the Law – the description of God’s righteous character and our sinfulness in that we fall so short. He gave the principles of the sacrificial system to the Jews, but the weakness of the Law, because of our sin, was that it could never take away sin.

By contrast, John got to see the glory of Christ, full of grace and truth. What that means is this. Jesus came bringing the truth of God – the truth of His holiness and righteousness, the truth of God’s character – **a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty.** He came bringing the truth about our sinfulness, our brokenness, our unrighteousness and that we deserve judgment. But He also came with grace - -the grace of full and free forgiveness, the grace of peace with God, the grace that deals with our sinful separation once and for all, the grace that upholds God’s holiness and allows God to forgive sinners and count them righteous, the grace of Jesus’ own death to pay the penalty of our sins and bring us to God, made available to all who will believe in Him as He is. When Christ died, the ultimate truth of God’s glory and holiness was upheld, because sin was punished and God’s grace was most fully revealed, because Christ bore the punishment for us and we did not and instead have been counted righteous like Him through faith in Jesus. That is not to say that there was not much grace in the Law that came through Moses. There was. But, the glory of God, His glory as the eternally saving God, the God who delights to save sinners, was revealed to John and the others in a way that it had never been revealed before, specifically in the fullness of grace and truth that shines most brightly in Jesus Christ. Do you want to know who Jesus is? He came bringing grace and truth personified in Himself – that is the glory of Christ.

And John says, **From His fullness we have all received grace upon grace.** Through Christ alone comes the abundant supply of grace that we need that can never be exhausted or diminished; grace continually follows grace in a limitless, never-ending flow. All of the blessings of God’s grace, of justifying, pardoning, adopting, sanctifying, and persevering grace; all the promises of grace; all light, life, strength, comfort, peace, and joy – all of them come in and through and from Christ in a ceaseless flow of favor from God through Him. Do you want to know who Jesus is? There is laid up in Christ, as in a treasury, a boundless supply of all that any sinner can need, either in time or eternity.

In fact, John sums everything up, saying, **No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.** That phrase, “**has made him known**” means to explain or exegete God to us. In other words, in Jesus Christ, we see and learn as much as we can about God the Father as our minds can bear. It is as if God reached into His very being and plucked out His own heart in sending Christ to us. It is as AM Ramsey said, “God is

Christlike, and in Him is no unChristlikness at all.” If we are to know this infinite, eternal, incomprehensible God, we simply need to know Jesus in truth. This is because, to know Him, as Jesus will tell us later, in John 17:3, is to know the Father and to enjoy eternal life.

What Do We Do With This?

There are some of you here today that may be thinking to yourself, “This is overwhelming. I’ve never heard this kind of stuff before. This description of Jesus is unlike anything that I have ever heard.” That’s ok. John is going to explain every bit of this in detail. Stick it out. Keep coming and keep listening. It is worth your eternal soul.

Some of you may be thinking, “I have not taken Jesus or the gospel this seriously.” You need to. Start today. Who Jesus is, is the most important truth in the universe.

And for those of us who are believers, who know Christ and have believed in Him and want to know and trust Him more, the gospel of John is just the tonic that your soul needs. Just in what we have seen today, let this truth motivate you in two ways.

First, this truth should cause us to worship Christ. If in Him alone is true light and life then nothing is more important than our relationship to Him. We are called to worship Him without cessation, to obey Him without hesitation, to love Him without reservation, to serve Him without interruption.

Second, if Christ is the Word of God, then the most important thing that has ever happened in human history is that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and accomplished all that the Bible says He did and that demands a witness. You may have noticed that I skipped a few verses in the prologue. I didn’t skip them; I saved them until now. The Apostle John wrote: **“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 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... 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.’”**

(John 1:6–8, 15 ESV) Now, the John that these verses are talking about is John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. But a better designation for him might be “John the witness.” Truth demands a witness and I want to point out just a three things today and we will talk more about this next week when we look at his ministry. Three things – One, God was involved not just in sending *Jesus*; he is involved in sending *witnesses* to Jesus. Let this have an energizing effect on you. God is at work now—today—moving his witnesses through the world, making them the means of his saving work. Be one. And second, the message is about Jesus – not us. Witnesses don’t make much of themselves, but of Jesus. The message is not about us individually or all the great things about – fill in the blank – church. The message is about Jesus or the message is defective. So be a witness. A witness for Christ. Three – this is a message for everyone. The message of Christ is for everyone – irrespective of their IQ, age, gender, race, religious background or circumstances. John the Witness’s goal was that all might believe through His witness and that has to be our heart too.

So concludes John’s introduction that has carried us to the furthest horizons of eternity past and to Christ’s breaking into our darkened world. From here, he will embark on a journey through the ministry of the Word made flesh and I am eager and honored to take you through it. Let’s pray.

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