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Bridgeway Church  
The Gospel of John #1  
April 28, 2019

## Sermon Summary #1

### That You May Believe! John 1:1-5; 20:30-31

Last year, Ligonier Ministries in Florida conducted their annual theological survey among professing Christians. The results were shocking and disturbing.

30% of professing Christians do not believe that God is perfect and cannot make a mistake. 43% believe that Jesus sinned, just like the rest of us. Nearly 60% do not believe the Holy Spirit is a person but rather a force or impersonal power. 66% believe that God accepts the worship of all religions, even Islam. But one statistic in particular was not only alarming but relates directly to this opening passage in John's gospel. ***57% of professing Christians believe that Jesus was the first and greatest being created by God. Only 20% disagree and 15% aren't sure.*** In other words, ***72% of professing Christians either believe that Jesus was himself created or aren't sure.*** That is simply staggering.

Let that sink in for a moment. More than 2 out of every 3 of those surveyed think that Jesus is a creature, a person who at one time did not exist. Although he is regarded by these people as the "greatest being created by God," he is, nevertheless, only a created being. In other words, he is not eternal; he is not self-existent; he is finite; and by definition he cannot be God, because God is the Creator and not the one who is created.

The reason I mention this survey today at the beginning of our new series is because John's gospel is first and fundamentally about the identity of Jesus. We know this is the ultimate reason behind John's authorship because he tells us so in John 20:30-31. There he says:

"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).

The fundamental question is not so much, "Who is Jesus?" but "Who is the Messiah, the Son of God?" And the answer provided in this gospel record is that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God.

As you probably know, the answers given by many to the question of the identity of Jesus vary greatly. All you need to recognize this is to answer your door bell! I suspect that all of you, at some time or other, perhaps repeatedly, have had visitors show up on your doorstep trying to push upon you their beliefs about who Jesus is.

For example, those good-looking, clean-cut young men in white shirts riding on bicycles will tell you that the Mormon church believes Jesus was the first-born child of Elohim, the product of the physical union between the Father God and the Virgin Mary. For a time, God and Mary were husband and wife, and they had sexual relations and conceived Jesus. For them, Jesus is not the eternally pre-existent second person of the Trinity. Thus the debate over whether Mormons are Christians begins and ends right there: No, they are not.

If not Mormons, then Jehovah's Witnesses will likely show up at your front door. Ask them who Jesus is and, if they are honest, they will say something along these lines: "Before he came to this earth, Jesus was Michael, the archangel! He's only a creature, the first product of Jehovah God's creative work. When he was born of the virgin Mary he was divested of his spiritual, angelic nature and became wholly and exclusively a man. Jesus isn't God."

It is doubtful that a Muslim will ever turn up at your door, but if you should ever engage one in conversation he/she will tell you that Jesus was just like Abraham and Moses and Isaiah. He was a prophet of God. But he wasn't himself God. Mohammed, who lived 500 years after Jesus, was God's greatest prophet. Besides, Jesus didn't really die on the cross, as Christians believe. He was rescued by God at the last minute and carried to a safe place in the heavens. Since there was no death on the cross, there was no atonement for sin. And since there was no death there was no resurrection.

The group known as the Moonies aren't seen or heard from much anymore. But if you should encounter one along the way he will tell you that Jesus was the illegitimate child of an adulterous sexual relationship between Mary and Zacharias, the husband of her cousin, Elizabeth. Jesus failed to establish the perfect family on earth, so God has sent to us his second Messiah to carry on the work. His name is Rev. Sun Myung Moon. I must confess I don't know what they believe anymore, given the fact that the Reverend Moon died, and as far as I can tell, no claims have been issued asserting his bodily resurrection.

#### *A Few Comments about the Nature of John's Gospel*

Before we go any farther, I need to say a few brief words about the nature of John's gospel. The author is, of course, the apostle John, the son of Zebedee. He refers to himself four times in the gospel as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (13:23; 19:26-27; 20:2; 21:20). This isn't to suggest that Jesus didn't love the others; I'll have more to say about this self-designation when we come to it in the text.

He most likely wrote his gospel account after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d., probably in the mid 80's of the first century. His account of the life and ministry of Jesus differs significantly from that of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In saying it "differs" I do not mean that his account contradicts theirs. They are simply different in terms of focus, theme, and purpose, but they perfectly complement each other in terms of what they say about Jesus.

There are also a number of things found in the other three gospels not found in John. For example, John has nothing to say about (1) the virgin birth; (2) temptation of Jesus by Satan in the wilderness; (3) there are no parables in John's gospel; (4) nothing is said about demonic deliverance; (5) the transfiguration is not mentioned; (6) the institution of the Lord's Supper is nowhere described; (7) and very little is said about the Kingdom of God.

As for the purpose that John had in mind in writing this account of the life and ministry of Jesus, we've already seen it. He writes "***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 20:31). There is a sense, then, in which we might say that this gospel, unlike the other three, is distinctively evangelistic in purpose. That being said, let's jump into the text for today.

#### *Who is Jesus?*

Given the array of diverse opinions and beliefs about Jesus, we can rejoice in the fact that John goes into great detail in chapter one, verses 1-18, or what has been called the Prologue to his gospel. Today we are looking only at vv. 1-5. When we do, we clearly see that John says seven things about the Son of God.

But first we need to understand why John calls Jesus the "***Word***". John is identifying the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, as the Word. The Father isn't the Word and the Holy Spirit isn't the Word. Only the Son is the Word.

The Greek term translated "Word" is *logos*. We use it all the time in words such as *theology*, *psychology*, *biology*, *geology*, and so on. Thus in our day and time it can refer to a unit of language or a discipline of thought. In the ancient world it also was used to refer to reason or judgment, or a person's inner thought process. It can also refer to the outward expression of that inward thought and thus can mean speech or verbal communication.

But our concern is what John meant by it. The key is in the OT. There the "word" of God refers often to God's powerful activity in creation:

"By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host" (Ps. 33:6).

We also see that it is by his "word" that God reveals himself to us:

"Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, . . ." (Jer. 1:4).

We also read texts like these:

"He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction" (Ps. 107:20).

“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” (Isa. 55:11).

Thus we might say that God’s “Word” is his powerful self-expression in creation, revelation, and salvation. It is God himself coming forth to create, to reveal, to judge, and to save. It was God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, by whom all things were created. It was God the Son through whom the nature, character, and will of God are revealed. So, when John refers to the Word here in his opening chapter, he is personifying the term and using it to describe the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity.

I think there may be one more reason why the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ himself is called the “Word” of God. It’s because the very words that Jesus himself speaks are truthful. They teach us with perfect accuracy what God is ultimately like. Jesus, in his life and teachings, was the final and definitive and perfect message of God to you and me. That is why Jesus would later claim in John 14:6, “I am the way, *the truth*, and the life.”

We can look now at the seven things John says about the Word.

### *Seven Truths about the Word of God*

#### ***(1) The Son of God, or the Word, was eternally pre-existent: “In the beginning was the Word” (v. 1a).***

You should immediately recognize John’s language in v. 1 as an echo of Genesis 1:1 – “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Thus when John says that the “in the beginning was the Word” he is telling us that the Word, the Son of God, the person who became human in the person of Jesus, is eternally pre-existent.

Mark begins his gospel by saying: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). John may be alluding to Mark, saying: “Mark has told you about the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry here on earth. But I want to show you that the real starting point of the gospel can be traced back farther than that, indeed, back before the creation of the entire universe!”

John is telling us that when it all began, the Word already was. The Word was not a part of the beginning. He was eternally prior to or before it. He was *eternally antecedent* to the beginning. When the beginning began, the Word already was! The Word didn’t begin with the beginning. The Word was himself the beginner of the beginning!

Therefore, the Word was not made. The Word simply was and is. The Word was not started. He was the starter. He did not commence to be. He was not shaped or fashioned or formed. The Word wasn’t produced and packaged. The Word wasn’t constructed or created. The Word simply is, and always has been: unbegun, unmade, uncreated.

The Word was not the product of the Big Bang (assuming for the sake of argument that there was a Big Bang). If the universe started with a Big Bang, the Word was the Big Banger! He lit the fuse.

The Word, therefore, is eternal. He is ageless. To be measured in terms of age you have to have begun at some point from which your time in existence can be calculated. Not the Word! The Word has no birthday. Jesus had a birthday. When the eternally pre-existent Word “became flesh” (John 1:14), the human being we know as Jesus began to be. But the Word who became Jesus never began to be but always is.

There never was a time when the Word was not. In 1950, I was not. In 433 a.d., I was not. In 1342 b.c., I was not. No such thing can be said about the Word. The Word existed before creation and is therefore no part of creation.

Let your mind stretch back into human history, to the conquests of Alexander the Great, to Solomon’s Temple, to the parting of the Red Sea and Israel’s deliverance out of Egypt, to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. At no point, at no time, during no event can it be said that the Word was not there. Before all these events, indeed, before the creation of the first molecule and atom and quark, the Word simply was.

**(2) *The Son of God, or the Word, was eternally in fellowship with God the Father: “the Word was with God” (v. 1b).***

The Word wasn't simply there. He was there **“with God”** (v. 1b), that is to say, with God the Father. The preposition translated “with” often means toward or in some sense face to face. It speaks of close, personal intimacy with an emphasis on relationship. In some sense the Word is distinguished from God and yet in another sense is God. This is the mystery of the Trinity. There was never a time when God was lonely! He never has existed in solitude. God has eternally existed as Triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in perfect love, harmony, and togetherness. God is his own family.

**(3) *The Son of God, or the Word, was and is himself God: “the Word was God” (v. 1c).***

The Word who always was and is, the Word who always was with God, is himself God. Although the Word is in some sense distinct from God, so too the Word and God are in some sense equal. John doesn't say the Word was like or similar to or bears a striking resemblance to God. The Word *was* God. He doesn't say the Word was a copy or facsimile of God or a reflection of or merely analogous to God. The Word is God. The Word is not derived from God. The Word is God.

We see this truth all through John's gospel. We see it in the many “I am” statements that Jesus makes, clearly identifying himself with the “I am that I am” of Exodus. We see it in John 10:30 where Jesus says, “I and the Father are one.” We see it in John 10:33 where the religious leaders were about to stone Jesus to death because he claimed to be God. We see it in Jesus' response to Philip who asked that he be shown the Father. Jesus said: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). And Thomas declared it clearly when he encountered the risen Christ, calling him “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

Thus, whatever you can about God the Father that pertains to his being God, you can say about God the Son, the Word. John isn't saying that there is something “divine” about the Word, as if he has some exalted, mystical, godlike quality about him. He IS God!

If the Jehovah's Witnesses come to your door and engage you in debate, they will try to tell you that we should translate this statement: “and the Word was a God,” or “the Word was divine.” I don't want to get overly technical with you, but you need to know that they simply don't understand Greek. The Greek term translated “God” means God, deity. There is yet another term that means “divine” that John could have used, but he didn't.

They will also try to tell you that since the definite article, “the” is not in the text, we should translate this as: “and the Word was ‘a’ God.” But in this kind of construction, the noun typically lacks the article but retains a definite force. Also, if John has included the definite article, “the,” he would have contradicted himself. If he had said, “and the Word was THE God” one would conclude that the Word is all there is to God, that no being could be God except the Word. But John has already said that the Word was “with” God. The Word isn't all there is to God. There is also the Father and the Holy Spirit.

**(4) *The Son of God, or the Word, is the creator of all that is created: “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (v. 3).***

John clearly tells us that the Word was not created. In fact, everything that has come into being came into being because of the Word. If the Word was himself created, he was created by himself. But how does one create oneself? If you are a creature, something that has been created, there must have been a time when you did not exist. But if there was a time when the Word didn't exist, how could the Word have existed in order to create himself?

Note carefully what John says. He doesn't merely say that “all things were made through him” (v. 3a). After all, someone might object and say, “O.K., but the ‘all things’ that the Word made or created may not include the Word himself. It includes everything and everyone except himself. Perhaps then God the Father made or created Jesus.” But again, John doesn't stop there. He goes on to say that **“without him was not any thing made that was made”** (v. 3b). In other words, anything or anyone that falls under the category of being “made”, the Word made it. If you are a “made” thing; if you are in any sense a “created” thing, the Word is responsible. Therefore, Christ was not made or created or caused to be. Because before you exist, you can't bring yourself into being.

We read elsewhere that everything that has been created was created by the Word, by God the Son, by the very one who became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ (see Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:2; Rev. 3:14). The universe is not eternal. There was a time when it came into existence, and it came into existence through the action of the eternal Word of God, the second person of the Trinity.

**(5) *The Son of God, or the Word, is the source or origin of all life: “In him was life” (v. 4a).***

The fact that anything else in the universe exists and has life is due entirely to the work of the Word, for life was in him, that is to say, all life has its origin or source or beginning in and because of him.

**(6) *The Son of God, or the Word, was and is the light of men: “and the life was the light of men” (v. 4b).***

What does John mean when he says that the life that was in the Word is “the light of men”? I think he means to say that the Word, the second person of the Triune God, is responsible for the light of understanding and reason and knowledge. Whatever we human beings know and understand about the creation and its Creator ultimately comes from the Word of God. A bit farther down in chapter one, v. 9, John says that the Word was the true light that “gives light to everyone” (v. 9).

**(7) *The Son of God, or the Word, is the light that overcomes or conquers the darkness of this world: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (v. 5).***

The seventh and final thing that John tells us in these opening verses about the Word of God has to do with how he relates to the darkness of this sinful and fallen world. Although John may have in mind the darkness in Genesis 1:3, the darkness at the beginning of time that was dispelled by the creation of literal light, he also has in view “**darkness**” as a symbol or way of describing evil and sin and ignorance of God and rebellion against God. Listen to what John says in John 3:19-20,

“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. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed” (John 3:19-20).

This is why evil, unbelieving people hate Jesus. Don’t be misled by their declaration that they admire Jesus, that he is a wonderful, wise teacher and philosopher or moral guide. When the truth of who Jesus is finally dawns on them, that apart from their trusting in him for forgiveness of sins they will suffer eternal separation, their hatred will come to the surface.

I have to tell you that I really need this verse today. In fact, hardly a day passes that I don’t really need this verse. You may read it and think there isn’t much by way of practical application in it, but I beg to differ. Let me explain why.

I often find myself feeling overwhelmed by the darkness of our world. The “darkness” in our world, in our society, in our state, in our city, seems to be gaining ground. By “darkness” I have in mind such things as the unrepentant, arrogant expression of sexual immorality at every turn. I have in mind such things as the on-going slaughter of human life on the part of radical terrorists. I have in mind the perpetual slaughter of human life in the womb. I have in mind the inexcusable indifference in the human heart toward God and his beauty. I have in mind the rampant idolatry of our world, the unbridled greed and prideful ambition of young and old, the lying, cheating, embezzling, and outright theft on the part of people who try to tell us they are honest and forthright. I have in mind the nauseating frequency with which we hear about the abuse of children or their abandonment and the political corruption and self-seeking so pervasively present in our government. Do I need to say anything more? I hope not.

But here’s the good news. Here is why I’m encouraged today. **John declares without qualification that “the darkness has not overcome” the light of Christ Jesus, the Word of God.** To make sense of this, we need to know the meaning of the word translated “overcome” (v. 5). An earlier version of the NIV translation renders this word as “understand,” as if the response of the darkness to the light of Christ is merely ignorance or lack of insight. The more recent NIV translates it by the term “overcome.” The reason for this is that in 9 of the 15 occurrences of the Greek word here (*katalambanō*) it means to seize or overtake and subdue with hostile intent. In Mark 9:18 a demon is said to have

“seized” a little boy. In John 12:35 Jesus says that we should walk while we “have the light, lest darkness overtake you” (see also John 8:3-4; 6:17).

The world is not neutral about God and the Lord Jesus Christ. It hates him. It resists and defies him and lies about him. But take heart, Christian, for John promises us that no matter how deep and pervasive and persistent the darkness may be, it will never, ever conquer or overcome or defeat the light of the person and work of the Word of God, Jesus Christ. It may appear that Jesus is losing ground. It may appear for a season that the church is defeated. It may appear that there are fewer and fewer believers in the world and that church attendance is plummeting. But appearances are most assuredly deceiving.

Jesus is ever-present and all-powerful in the accomplishing of his purpose. Nothing will overcome him. No one will defeat him. His victory is absolutely certain.

It doesn't ultimately matter that the wrong people are elected to office. Don't despair when the wrong laws are enacted by Congress. That doesn't mean we shouldn't try to elect the best candidates and enact the most righteous and godly of laws. *I'm simply saying that when things go south politically and economically and morally and religiously, Jesus is not threatened and his purposes are not in jeopardy.*

There's one more reason why we can confidently know that the “darkness” will not “overcome” the light of Jesus Christ and his gospel. It is because of what John said in v. 3. The powers of darkness, be they demons or institutions or individuals, were all created or made by the Word. Jesus is sovereign over and in control of all that he has made, even those things and people that in turn rebelled against him. They didn't escape his control. And the creator is always stronger, infinitely stronger, than anything and everything he created.

Someone might say, “Isn't the atom bomb more powerful than the men who created it? Can't the atom bomb destroy its maker?” “The answer,” writes John Piper, “is that there is an infinite difference between, on the one hand, making a bomb out of materials that exist already and which are controlled by laws you did not write, and, on the other hand, creating out of nothing the very materials of the universe and the laws that control them. If you can make something out of nothing, you can always turn that something into nothing. And therefore the Creator always has the upper hand in his world. He will triumph.”

### *Conclusion*

Once again, John writes this gospel account so that you and I may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the incarnate Son of God, the Word who became flesh, and that by believing this we may have forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.

So let me say two things with the utmost clarity and conviction that I can muster. First, we at Bridgeway Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, worship Jesus Christ as the God-man! He is the Word of God, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, in human flesh. We obey Jesus Christ as the God-man! We adore and enjoy and stand in awe of Jesus Christ because he is the only one who is both fully God and fully man! We identify with Thomas, who is often unfairly remembered more for his doubts than his faith, and we say with him: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

Second, John makes it clear that it is only by believing in Jesus, the Word of God, and all that he has done for sinners on the cross and in his resurrection that we may have forgiveness and enter into eternal life. What, then, will you do with Jesus, the Word, today?