



The Word Who Was in the Beginning

The Incarnate Word Series #1

John 1:1-3

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This is our first sermon in our Advent series. Advent means “the arrival” or “the coming” of someone significant. We are thinking specifically of Jesus Christ. Essentially, this is what the entire Bible is about and what the Bible leans toward. The whole Old Testament moves from creation to the fall and to everything else that leads toward this coming Savior and Messiah Who would rescue God’s people. This sermon is going to be a little different in that we will stay in John 1 for most of the sermon, but I’m going to reference several other passages of Scripture as well.

Now, we know clearly there was a first coming of Jesus, but we are also looking forward to a second advent as well, a second coming. That is the good news: that, in the middle of this broken, fallen world, there is a Savior Who has come and is coming to rescue God’s people for Himself. We are going to specifically look at John 1:1-18 in these next four weeks. Today we will focus on 1:1-3. I’m going to begin by reading verses one through 18 to give us context, but then we will focus specifically on the first three verses.

John 1:1-18 says:

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who 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.*

Let's go to our God in prayer as we look into His Word.

Father, we need You to open our eyes. Help us to see Your Son, Jesus. Help us to see Him in all His glory. I pray that You would glorify Your Son. Father, may Your name be exalted and hallowed here. Help us to be gripped by this truth. Help every knee to bow at the name of Jesus. We pray this in His name. Amen.

It is possible that you do not know Jesus. You may know some things about Him, but you would not say that He is your God, that You trust Him with faith, or that you treasure or value Him. My prayer for you this morning is that God would open your eyes to see Him for Who He is, the only true God of this universe. Maybe you have come to church, hearing messages about Jesus, and you know Him and trust in Him. For you, I again pray that your eyes would be open to see Jesus for Who He is. May we respond to this God with hearts of worship.

What is the Word?

John gave us a glimpse into Who Jesus is by opening His Gospel with several verses about the Word. Verse one tells us the Word was in the beginning. John is in contrast to the other Gospels. These Gospels are not biographies of Jesus. They skip over most of His life, but they generally open by telling us Who Jesus is and highlighting different aspects of His ministry, i.e. what He said and did. Then they focus in on and rush us to the final week of Jesus' life, where He accomplished salvation through His death and resurrection.

Each of the Gospels introduces Jesus in different ways:

- Matthews opens with a genealogy of Jesus, tracing Him back to Abraham.
- Luke opens his Gospel with a genealogy tracing Jesus back to Adam.
- Mark opens his Gospel without any genealogy or background but says, *"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ..."* He just jumps right into it.

John takes a different approach and backs us up way before Abraham and Adam, starting in the very beginning. He says, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God..."* Let's focus on the first phrase, *"In the beginning was the Word..."* We know from reading the

rest of these verses, especially when we get down to verse 14, that John is making it very clear that the Word he is talking about here is Jesus. The Word is the Son. Verse 14 says, *“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.”*

So the Word that John introduces to us here is the Son; it is Jesus. Think of why he uses “Word” to describe Jesus. In the Greek, this is the word *logos*. Think of what his original audience would have been hearing when they heard about the Word. Those who were Jewish, God’s people, probably would have thought about the Word of God, a theme that comes up throughout the Old Testament as God reveals Himself. He reveals Himself through creation; He reveals Himself through the prophets; He reveals Himself through the Scriptures. This is the way God has disclosed Himself to His people.

Hebrews 1:1-2 says, *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...”* The way Jesus does that is not the same as the prophets. He did not just come to speak God’s word to us. Jesus Himself was revelation to us, as God became flesh and dwelt, or lived, among us. The Word—that revelation from God—we have through Jesus Christ.

Others living at that time who heard these words for the first time, *“In the beginning was the Word [logos]...”*, that was a term used by pagan religions and secular people at the time as well. Whether John is just linking back to the Old Testament or whether he’s using kind of a broad term that would have been generally understood by many people at the time, he does give it definition and defines it in a way that’s completely different—as this revelation, this Word, was in the beginning.

That takes us right back to Genesis 1, especially in the way that Scriptures open up the same phrase, *“In the beginning was the Word...”* This Word has existed from the very beginning, from before the foundation of the world. In Genesis 1:1, God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning. Jude 25 says, *“... [T]o the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever.”* In John 17:5, Jesus prays, *“And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”*

This is important for us to understand and believe. Scripture teaches that Jesus didn’t begin when He was born of a virgin. Jesus has always existed. He has existed from the very beginning.

Second Timothy 1:8-9 says:

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the

power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began...

Jesus, the Word, has existed from the very beginning, even before the foundation of the world. The first thing John teaches us about Jesus is that He has always existed, but then he goes on and says, “...and the Word was with God...” Then he basically said the same thing in a different way just two phrases later: “He was in the beginning with God.”

Let’s focus on that phrase, “...and the Word was with God...” Before focusing on the word “with,” let’s just remind ourselves of what the Bible teaches about God. When we hear that the Word was with God, let’s remember the Bible teaches there is only one God. Deuteronomy 6:4 says, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Isaiah 44:6 says, “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.’” There are many other passages that we could look at that teach us there is only one God.

So when John says the Word was with God, we should remember there is only one God, but this Word was with Him. He is distinct from the Father. In this sermon, we are going to be looking at a number of passages and are going to examine a difficult doctrine. Those who embrace Christianity embrace this doctrine. We call it the Trinity or the Triune God. There is one God Who exists in three Persons. We are going to be talking about this, working through this and wrestling through this in a way that humbly says, “We can’t fully understand God. He is beyond our understanding.” However, that doesn’t mean we won’t try. It doesn’t mean we back away from the truths He’s given us in His Word. We are going to reinforce the truth as we go through this Trinitarian passage—John 1:1-3—focusing on how the Word was with God. Let’s just focus right now on the distinction between the Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Distinction between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

There are other passages, but these four passages mention all three Persons of the Godhead. Let’s first look at Matthew 3:16-17, which speaks of Jesus’ baptism:

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

The voice from heaven says, “Jesus is My Son.” Therefore, the voice is from the Father. He is saying He is well pleased with the Son.

Matthew 28:19 is a Great Commission passage, where Jesus commissioned us to go and preach the gospel to all. He said, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...*”

In 1 Peter 1:2, Peter said, “... *[A]ccording to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood...*”

Finally, Jude 20-21 says, “*But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*”

In these passages, all three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned. Now, I want to look at a couple verses that focus on Jesus as distinct, showing His relationship with the Father.

In John 17:24, Jesus prayed to the Father, “*Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*” This shows the relationship of love between the Father and the Son. Again, this one builds up the truth that Jesus has always existed as the Son from before the foundation of the world. In John 17, Jesus prayed that God the Father would be with them so that they would see His glory.

Now, let’s look at the Son, Jesus, as distinct from the Holy Spirit. In John 14-16, John speaks of the Holy Spirit as the Helper and the Comforter. In John 16:7, Jesus said, “*Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.*” So Jesus would leave and send the Holy Spirit. Again, there is a distinction between the Son and the Holy Spirit.

What we have established so far is that there is one God and Jesus is distinct from the Father and distinct from the Spirit. If that’s all we had, then we would have what many other religions believe. They don’t believe that Jesus was God. They believe Him to be just like any other man or an angel or a prophet or the first creation from God. But that is not all we have, and John teaches that here in John 1. He said, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*”

This is where we can begin to build the doctrine of the Trinity. There is a distinction between the Persons, but there is only one God. However, the Father is God; Jesus is God; and the Spirit is God. John said this Word Who became flesh is God. John was close to Jesus; he was called the beloved apostle. As John introduces us to Jesus, the first thing he wants us to know is

that this Word, Jesus, has always existed. He is distinct from the Father, but He is fully God. The Word was God.

Is This a Mistranslation of John 1:1?

I'm going to take an aside here and deal with the objection that says this is a mistranslation of John 1:1. The New World Translation, which is the Bible for the Jehovah's Witnesses, translates this verse, "The Word was a god."

I know some of you don't want to hear about the Greek, and that's okay. If that's true of you, just tune me out for a few seconds. My last point will be helpful even if you don't care about the original language at all.

John would have written this in Greek. It was translated into English, and other languages have it as well. The words as they were originally written in Greek say, "*Kai Theos en ho logos.*" In English, this literally says, "And God was the Word." But that is not how it shows up in our Bible. There is a rule in Greek regarding the article in front of this construction. The Greek article is *ho*, meaning "the." That's the subject, and so you flip them. So that's why we have, "And the Word was God." But "*Theos*" is in the front to emphasize the word "God." So John said, "And the Word was God," and this is consistent with the rule that Greek scholars have formulated.

There are other examples from John 1 that don't have an article. But what Jehovah's Witnesses are saying is that, because "God" doesn't have the *ho* in front of it, it doesn't translate to "the God." Maybe it just means "a god" without being capitalized. In other words, Jesus was just divine-like. Incidentally, there is a word for "divine-like" in the Greek, but that is not the word used here. Also, if you look at the same passage in the New World Translation, that first phrase, "in the beginning," doesn't have an article, but they put a definite article there. They don't say, "in a beginning." They clearly see this should be translated "in the beginning."

Then we need to consider what they do with the word for "God" here in John 1.

- Verse six says, "*There was a man sent from God...*" In the Greek, there is no article there. However, in the New World Translation, they don't say, "There was a man sent from a god."
- Verse 12 says, "*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...*" This is the same thing. There is no article in front of "God." Clearly, from this context, John spoke of the one, true God.
- Verse 13 is similar, saying, "... [*W*]ho were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."
- Verse 18 says, "*No one has ever seen God; the only God...*"

In each of these verses, there is no “the” in the Greek. But it is clear from this passage, and even in their translation, that all of these references are to the one, true God.

In a recent publication, the Jehovah’s Witnesses said, “We acknowledge that rule in Greek, and we see that it is possible. But the best way to understand the translation is by context.” However, nothing in this context points to this not being the one, true God. Everything else points to this being the one, true God. So their explanation is, “Well, if you look at the rest of the Bible, it is clear that Jesus is not the one, true God.” But it is clear from this passage that this is what is being taught, and I will take us to other places in the Bible that teach us this same truth about Jesus.

All Things Were Made through Jesus

If you do not care about Greek and stopped listening, you can join back in now. Here is another way that John is clarifying for us that this is God, not some created being. In verse three, John said, “*All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*”

First, John said that Jesus made everything; He made all things. John then expanded on this and said it again even more dogmatically. “...[W]ithout Him was not any thing made that was made.” In a sermon on this passage, John Piper says, “In the category of stuff made, there is nothing in there that exists that wasn’t made by Jesus. So if Jesus is in that category of things made, that’s impossible, because everything that was made was made by Jesus.” So it’s impossible for Him to have been the first creation Who was then used by God to make everything else. He is God and has existed from the very beginning.

Let’s look at this from some other passages. In John 20:28-29, this is after Jesus was raised from the dead and Thomas was doubting, Jesus then says, “Here, you can see My side. You can see the nails in My hands.” Thomas answered him, saying, “*My Lord and my God!*” In this passage, “God” does have the article. It literally says, “The Lord of me and the God of me!”

Look at how Jesus responded to him. He did not say, “Thomas, leave that article out, because you should say, ‘A god of me.’” Some may think, “Well, maybe Thomas is just swearing, using God’s name in vain.” But Jesus did not correct him; He commended Thomas and spoke of his faith. Thomas’ statement is “You are my Lord and You are my God.” Jesus responded, saying, “*Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed [speaking of Thomas’ faith].*” Jesus is the true God.

Isaiah 9:6 says, *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

The book of Hebrews opens up with a description of Jesus. The author compared Jesus to the angels, but then he said, *“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom”* (1:8). The author goes on to emphasize the creative work of Jesus, saying, *“You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands”* (1:10).

Titus 2:13-14 says, *“... [W]aiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”*

In Matthew 3:3, the disciple referenced a quote from Isaiah 40:3, saying, *“For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”*

If you go back to Isaiah 40:3 and read this original quote, many of the English Bibles show a distinction between one Hebrew word for “Lord” and another. When you see “LORD” in all capitals in the English Bible, that is the word for “Yahweh,” which gets transliterated into English as “Jehovah.” So this passage in Isaiah is saying, “Prepare the way of Yahweh, or Jehovah.” This passage gets applied to Jesus in Matthew 3:3, showing that Jesus is the Old Testament Yahweh; Jesus is Jehovah.

This helps us build the doctrine of the Trinity. It is not a doctrine that is a clever invention of man or that someone just thought up. It comes out of the text. There are many passages in the Bible that tell us there is one God; we also see many passages in the Bible that tell us the Father, Son and Spirit are distinct Persons in the way they relate to one another. But then we see passages in the Bible that tell us the Father is God, the Son is God and the Spirit is God. (For the sake of time, we are not going to look at any of the passages that teach us about the divinity of the Spirit.)

John opened his Gospel by telling us that Jesus has always existed. Jesus is the self-revelation from God. He is the Word Who was with God from the beginning. He is the Word Who was God. He was in the beginning with God.

The last thing we are going to focus on is verse three: *“All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”* In the category of everything you can think of and imagine that has been created, Jesus made it all. That means you. It means the stars. If you ever get away from the lights of Chicago and are out at night on a clear night, look

up at space and see the vastness of this universe. The more science discovers, more is revealed about our God. We learn about things that we never even knew existed—things that are so far away that we cannot even see. More and more of this universe has been revealing God's glory and its worship of Him. In the same way, there are also things that are so small that we cannot see. I don't know how many thousands of things are alive on my hand right now, but I know that they exist. I've been told that and science confirms these things exist as well. They are things that we can't even see, but God made them all.

However, it is not just the physical things that we can see, either through a microscope or telescope. Colossians 1:16 makes this clear, saying, "*For by [Jesus] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible [which includes the spiritual world], whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*" So there is an addition here to what John taught. John taught that all things were made by Jesus. We should remember that includes us. In addition to that, everything was made for Him. We exist for Him. Paul concluded in Colossians 1:17, "*And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*"

Who is Jesus in John 1:1-3? Jesus is the Word Who has always existed. Jesus is distinct from the Father. Jesus was and is fully God. Finally, Jesus is the Creator of everything.

As we think about Advent during this time of the year, we think about an aspect of Jesus that is very true: He became a baby; He became flesh. He was born lowly, humbling Himself. John introduced Jesus here by telling us "*...the Word became flesh...*" but let's not forget Who He is. He is the very God Who made everything that exists.

How do we respond to this? We should respond in the same way Thomas did in John 20:28, saying, "You are the Lord of me, and You are the God of me." We respond in worship. John 5:23 says we should honor the Son in the same way we should honor the Father. Philippians 2:10 says there is coming a day when every knee should bow at the name of Jesus. Every knee should bow. So the way we should respond to Jesus being lifted up in front of us in John 1:1-3 is by worshiping Him.

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