

Jesus: The Preincarnate Word John 1:1-5

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in John chapter 1, the Gospel of John, chapter 1.

We come this morning to some of the greatest and most foundational truths about Jesus. John begins his gospel by setting the sure foundation of these core truths about the nature and essence of Jesus. You'll remember from last week that John's emphasis throughout the gospel is to show us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God – so that we would believe in Him, and that by believing in his name we would have eternal life. John wastes no time in getting right after his purpose. He begins his gospel of Jesus Christ with an 18-verse prologue in which he lays before us the key themes and truths that define the life and ministry of our Lord. These 18 verses are like the color palette of the artist out of which John paint this masterpiece of Jesus' life as he dips his brush into these truths again and again. He tells us of Jesus as the Word and the life and the light. He tells us that Jesus has come and has brought grace and truth. And he will tell us, in these 18 verses, about how this grace and truth will be rejected by most. He tells us of the darkness that will seek to overcome the light, but which will ultimately fail. He will hint at the deep relationship in the Trinity which will be given greater exposure later in the Gospel. He will tell us that some will become children of God through him, by believing on his name. So, what we have before us is much more than a mere introduction to the Gospel of John. Let's read this prologue – John 1:1-18.

The story is told about the early church theologian, Augustine, who was walking along the beach. He saw a young boy who was digging a hole and then using a large shell to go get water from the ocean to dump it into the hole. After watching him for a minute, Augustine finally asked him – “boy, what are you doing?” The boy answered, “I'm going to put the ocean into this hole.” Augustine smiled and continued on his way. His friends who were with him were talking about that boy later, and Augustine remarked, “And are you doing the like in thinking to comprehend the depths of God in the limits of the finite mind?”

There is a fine balance to be struck every time we talk about Jesus – but especially from a text like this. He has revealed himself to us and we want to know Him. But we are like that little boy, trying to pour the infinite depths of God into our finite minds – trying to fit the ocean of truth into our little hole on the seashore. So, there is a lot of the water of truth to pour into our minds this morning from these first five verses, but there is so much more of Christ!

Your understanding of Christ – and how you respond to that truth – will determine your eternal state. This very book tells us in 3:36 – “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” In order to believe in the Son, you must know some key and unchanging facts about him. You must know that true and the real Jesus in order to have eternal life. There are many false Christ's in the

world today. Many strange, or even just incomplete, beliefs about this Jesus. The world is generally okay with the Jesus of their understanding. They view him as a good moral teacher and as a wonderful example to follow in all things. Some would even call him Savior and would say that he loves the world and therefore all of the world will eventually be saved because Jesus loves everyone. Major religions peddle all kinds of views about Jesus. The Mormons will tell you that Jesus is the half-brother of Lucifer and the first one of the Creation of this world. The Jehovah's Witnesses present Jesus as a god – the firstborn of Jehovah – the most preeminent of God's created works – but not himself God. The Catholic Church presents a Christ who is God in the flesh, but whose works were insufficient to fully save. The Muslims tell of a Jesus who was a great prophet and who will even come again at the end of the age to prepare the way for the final prophet. There are many, many false Christs in the world. And the reality is, most people are happy to talk about Jesus – to name his name – put his words on a shirt – say they are a Christian – but most people don't want to define this Jesus we are talking about, or why He matters. The Gospel of John is unwilling to give up this ground. A Jesus who can be praised by the Mormons, followed by the Jehovah's witnesses, respected by the Muslims is a Jesus who has no true significance. He has no saving power. For eternal life, we need more than a Jesus everyone can be happy with. We need the real and true Jesus. And this is who John presents to us here in his Gospel. And he starts with the core truths which are the foundation stones for the rest of the truths. He launches immediately into the very essence of Christ – who he really and truly is – and always has been. All of his works and all of his words and all that he offers to those who believe in Him come out of the deep well dug in these 1st 18 verses.

But John doesn't just lay out these truths in bullet point theological statements. Rather, in some of the simplest Greek vocabulary he presents to us some of the most profound truths about Christ found in all of Scripture. Though the vocab is simple and the concepts are profound, these first 5 verses have a poetic sound to them. And they present to us the Word. Who is this Word? Well, you already know, but how do you know? The Word is Jesus. There are many hints in the text about who this Word is, but then in verse 14 we are told very plainly that this Word became flesh and dwelt among. And this Word showed us the glory of God – and there we learn who this Word is – he is the only Son of the Father – full of grace and truth. So, this Word is the Son and the Son is Jesus of Nazareth.

So, why does John call him the Word here at the start of the book? There are many reasons, but essentially, John is taking a term which has great significance to the Greeks and to the Jews and he is showing them that the true and real Word – Logos in the Greek – is Jesus the Christ. When you talk about the Logos of God to the Jews of John's day, they thought immediately of the word of the Lord all throughout the Old Testament. They would have thought of the Word of God at Creation – that the Lord spoke, and all things came into existence. They would have thought of the word that God spoke to different patriarchs and prophets throughout the OT. He would tell them what was coming, what they were to do, and he would reveal something about himself to them. When they heard "Logos" they would also have thought of the word of God which so often rescued His people from certain destruction. By the word of his mouth he intervened and rescued them and saved them. So, to the Jew, when you say Logos – they are thinking of the Creative power of God – speaks and it is done. And they are thinking of the revealing Word of God to his people – he speaks, and they know more about him and about his

plan. And they think of his power to save them – he speaks, and they are rescued by his great might. John is here to say to them – this Jesus of Nazareth is all of that in one person – He is the Logos – the Word.

When the Greek ear heard the term Logos they would have thought about the divine reason or logic which ran the entire complicated system of the universe. The Greek philosophers understood that there had to be some great organizing entity to this whole thing – and they termed that entity as the Logos – the great logic and rational thought behind everything. So, John says here – the great logic and reason behind all things was in the beginning. And he was with God, and he was God. And by him all things were made. And this Word, therefore, is the life and the light and the darkness cannot overcome it. Jews and Greeks alike – you need to know this true and real Word – this Jesus, the Christ.

And to start, John takes us to the very beginning. He says, “In the beginning.” This is not a complicated phrase. There is nothing else here to define what beginning he is talking about. He is not talking about the beginning of Jesus’ earthly life or about the beginning of his ministry. He is talking about the beginning – like, the beginning of the beginning – the very first beginning. This is exactly how the book of beginnings starts – the book of Genesis has these very words – “in the beginning.” And John intends for us to hear a reference to those first words of the first book. He is pointing us back to that very first moment of God’s creation. And he tells us three things that were true of this Word before his incarnation – before he came to the world in the flesh of humanity. John 1:1 tells us that the Word was Co-eternal, Co-existent, and Co-equal.

I. The Word was Co-Eternal – 1a

- a. Co-eternal is seen in that first phrase of verse 1 – In the beginning was the Word. We already know that we are talking about the beginning of all things created. And so, the statement is abundantly clear. When everything else began, the Word was. This is in the imperfect tense in the Greek which means that this is an ongoing state in the past. Not only is the tense of the verb important, but so is the actual word used. It is a form of the Greek word “eimi” and it means “to be” or “to exist.” It is a statement of solid, undeniable, and unchangeable reality. It is the word that Jesus will use throughout his life to identify himself. He will say to the crowd – “I am the bread of life.” “Ego eimi” in the Greek – I am. It is not the Greek word for come into existence or be brought into use – that is the word “egeneto.” That is the word that John will use in verse 3 to say that all things were made – all things were “egeneto” – brought into being by the Word.
- b. So, this means that the Word does not have a beginning. He was. In the beginning – when everything else had a beginning, he was. This means then that the Word is Eternal – without beginning and without end. He never started to exist, and he will never cease to exist. He always was, is, and will be. This means then, that he is God because only God is eternal. In Psalm 90:2 Moses says that before the mountains were ever formed – which is OT slang for the oldest of the old – before they were formed – even from everlasting to everlasting – God is God! God’s eternality means more than that he is just really old and will never cease to be. It means that he is transcendent to time – he is outside the realm of

time. His creation is governed by days and months and years and many other cycles of his design. But these are his slaves, not his master. He is everlasting and eternal.

- c. So, if in the beginning was the Word – then it easily follows that the Word was God. That is why I said this phrase teaches us that the Word is Co-eternal. The Word and God are eternal – therefore they are co-eternal.

II. The Word was Co-Existent – 1b, 2

- a. But there is more. The next phrase tells us that the Word was co-existent. The Word was with God. So, the Word has always been, and the Word has always been with God. For the Word to be eternal we have already established that the Word must be divine – he must be God. But here we are told that the Word was with God. Doesn't that create an impossible situation? Can the Word be God and be with God at the same time? The answer to that is found all throughout Scripture. God is presented to us as One God in three persons. He is a Triune God, in which all three persons of the Trinity share the same essence and nature as God, but they are distinguished in Scripture as distinct persons with distinct roles – all relating to one another for all eternity in the Godhead.
- b. Now, remember, we are like that little boy on the seashore. We are trying to fill our little hole with all the water in the ocean here. There is no way for us as limited humans to grasp the infinite wonder and glory of the Trinity. But our struggle to understand all the mystery here does not make it any less true. If there is not some perplexity in our grasp of God – if we have Him all figured out – then we are worshiping a false God of our own making.
- c. The Scriptures begin with the very truth of the Trinity – One God in three persons. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. In the Hebrew Scriptures the noun in that sentence is plural and the verb is singular. God – Elohim – in the Hebrew – is plural. Created – bara in the Hebrews – is plural. Why would that be? Why would there be a plural subject and a singular verb? It is not many gods bringing about one act. No, it is the One God who is singular in singular in essence and nature and plural in person. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are seen in that very first sentence of Holy Scripture.
- d. And throughout Scripture, all three are presented as God. They are co-existent and co-eternal. This is how it is true that the Word can be in the beginning as the Eternal One, and can be with God – the Eternal One. And in case you missed it, John repeats this idea in verse 2. He does that right after he makes the most unequivocal and obvious statement about the Deity of Jesus Christ – the Word was God. We'll look at that more in a minute – but you can't get any clearer than that. The Word was God. But John doesn't want you to gloss over the distinction within the Godhead between Father, Son, and Spirit. And so, he repeats himself in verse 2 – He was in the beginning with God. Both things must be true if we are going to cut it straight about Jesus. He was God and he was with God. If you get rid of one of those, you lose both of them. So, John wants you to know that the Word is Co-eternal and co-existent.

III. The Word was Co-Equal – 1c, 3-5

- a. And the Word was also co-equal. We see that at the end of verse 1. This is just four words in the Greek, as it is in the English – the Word was God. I know I have given you a lot of Greek this morning, but this is so important to rightly understand these deep truths about the Preincarnate Christ. And this phrase is one of the most important in the text. It has come under a lot of scrutiny over the years because it does not say – the Word was the God. The Greek word for God is Theos, and it does not have the article before it, which makes it indefinite. And so many scholars and unbelieving commentators have said that this means something less than saying that the Word is equal with God. They would say that the Word was divine – or had god-like qualities. Or they would propose that he was “a god”, but not “the God,” since the article is not there.
- b. If you’ve ever talked to a Jehovah’s Witness at your doorstep for any length of time you have probably gotten into this conversation. They have shown you John 1:1 in your Bible and then they have told you that the translators have corrupted this verse to make Jesus equal with God, but their translation got it right and it says that the Word was a god. Well, this is the same heresy that was committed by Arius in the 4th Century. He couldn’t fathom how God was 3 persons in 1 God. And that is exactly where the Jehovah’s Witnesses are today – and you could throw the Mormons in there, and many other heretical cults. They simply refuse to believe the clear teaching of the Scripture that Jesus is co-equal with God – that Jesus was truly God and truly man.
- c. So, how do we answer them here? Why doesn’t this phrase have the definite article for Theos? Is that a problem? Well, no, it’s actually completely necessary to communicate what John wants to communicate. If the definite article was in this phrase, then it would completely change the meaning and would distort our understanding of the godhead. If the phrase said, “The Word was the God,” then it would make the equation that the Word is all there is to God. That the sum total of God would be the Word – and that is definitely not what John is communicating here. He just told us that the Word was with God. He cannot then turn around and tell us that the Word is all there is to God – those would be completely contradictory statements – unless you buy the heretical view of the Oneness Pentecostals (like T.D. Jakes and many other prosperity gospel preachers) and say that God is one God who appears at different times as Father, or as Son, or as the Spirit. But that is not the witness of the Scriptures to the character and nature of the Godhead. And John is making this clear in His Gospel. The Word is not the Father, and the Father is not the Son, and the Spirit is not the Son or the Father – but all three are co-equally God.
- d. So, when the Jehovah’s Witness argues with you about the deity of Christ you can help them see from this verse that there is simply no other way to say what John was trying to say. But you can also point them to verses 6, 12, 13, and 18 in their own translation and show them that the same construction in the Greek is translated differently in those verses. Every time God is referenced in those verses the noun does not have the definite article in the Greek, but their translation makes clear that this is the one true and only God. So, their own translation

doesn't agree with them that when the definite article is missing it means "a god" instead of "God" – the one and only.

- e. Rightly understood, this phrase at the end of verse 1 is the clearest and only way to say that the Word was God. And notice again that the verb is in the imperfect tense which means that this was never not true. There was never a time that the Word became God. There was never a time that the Word was not God. In the beginning, the Word was God.
- f. Another way to say this is to say that the Word is co-equal with God in nature and essence, and therefore in existence. This is why Jesus, when he speaks of himself, will use the same verb to communicate his self-existence – "I am." He is not dependent upon anything else for his existence. And this can only be said about God. Which is the point John makes then in verse 3 – you didn't think we were going to get out of verse 1 did you? Because the Word is equal with God and self-existent as God – then the Word is the source of all that was made in the beginning. Because he was – he can therefore make everything else. That is the contrast in our text. The Word was, in verse 1, and all things were made, in verse 3. He is the great self-existent One who alone has the power to bring all other things into existence. Notice how this is stated positively and then negatively in verse 3. All things were made through him – and in case you were tempted to doubt if that means all things – he says it negatively – nothing that was made was made without him.
 - i. 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. – Col. 1:16
 - ii. Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. – Heb. 1:1-3a
- g. The Godhead are all attributed as creating the universe, but the Word in particular is seen as the specific agent of Creation. And this is yet another reason why John calls him the Word – the Logos – here. It is in the Creation that God is proclaimed and made known. Romans 1:20 tells us that the Creation proclaims the divine nature of God and the divine power of God. In creation we do not see nature as some independent other – but rather we see in creation the divine nature of God. We ought not marvel at nature when we look at the majestic mountain or watch the mighty thunderstorm roll across the sky. Rather, we should marvel at the nature and character of God. And this was all brought into existence, and is all held together by, the Word – the second person of the Trinity – Jesus the Christ. Which is why the denial of God's work in creation is an insidious attack on the nature and character of God. He spoke – and immediately it happened. And the Word was specifically the One doing the speaking – all things were created through him.

- h. The truth of verses 4 and 5 flow out of this idea then. If all things have their origin in God, then all life is found in him. And all life is dependent upon the energy and the heat provided by light. Therefore, this Word is the source of all life and this Word is the light too. What was the first thing God created in Genesis 1? “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.”
- i. John is telling you that this is the handiwork of God, specifically of the Word. He spoke into the darkness and created light and life. And there are such wonderfully profound spiritual truths to be found here. What we see in the universe relating to life and light and darkness are physical displays of the spiritual realities. Life is found only in Christ – both physical and spiritual life. This is why Jesus entered into our world to reveal God to us. He came to bring us life eternal. And as the life he also came as the light, and darkness will never overcome this light. As in the physical world, the light shines and immediately turns back the darkness. Darkness by itself can never overpower light. If you want to overpower light you have to cover it, or you have to cut it off at its source. But darkness is never able to overcome it. You cannot add more darkness to a room full of light and drown out the light. Even the smallest of candles, when lit, will penetrate the darkest of spaces.
- j. We will find out as we work our way through this gospel, that Jesus is that true light which has come into the world to shine in the darkness of ignorance, sin, and rebellion. Darkness is almost exclusively a word used by John in the New Testament. By it he is referring to the darkness of ignorance and the darkness of sinful rebellion and the darkness of wicked unbelief. It is the spiritual darkness which is the dwelling place of Satan and his demons. It is the darkness of the human heart born in sin and constantly choosing to go its own way.
- k. It is into this darkness that the light shines. And when the light of Jesus Christ shines, the darkness has never overcome it. Darkness is overcoming a lot of things in our world right now. And what is needed is not a reordering of the darkness so that it is less dark. What is needed is the true light of Jesus Christ to shine into the utter darkness of our hearts and of our world.

Conclusion: Do you know this Jesus? Do you believe in this Jesus? The One who is co-eternal, co-existent, and co-equal with God. The One who is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. The One who is the life and the light. If you do know this Jesus, then all other things have faded into the background of your life. He is everything to you. It will not matter too much to you what darkness might through at you, as long as you can have Christ!

The apostle John had many that he disciplined in the faith, but one of the most prominent was named Ignatius. I told you the story of his martyrdom last Sunday. As the faithful pastor of the church in Antioch into the 2nd Century he faced opposition and persecution for preaching Christ. He said this, "Let fire, and the cross, let the companions of wild beasts, let breakings of bones and tearing of members, let the shattering in pieces of the whole body, and all the wicked

torments of the Devil come upon me, only let me enjoy Christ."

Ignatius learned well from John. He knew the true Christ. His doctrine about Jesus was true and straight. He understood the full gravity of the truth about Jesus - that he was the Christ, the Son of God. He knew this so well that he could face the greatest and most threatening attacks against his person because he knew his life was in Christ. May we know the Jesus that John knew. May we know the Jesus that Ignatius knew. May we say with Ignatius - "throw me to the lions, burn me at the stake - I don't care - just let me enjoy Christ."