

A Creator Not of Our Own Making

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 October 2022

Preacher: Alan Stirling

[0 : 0 0] Is that me? Good. Well, good morning, everyone. Thank you very much for the very warm welcome. If you have your Bibles, would you like to turn to John's Gospel?

As Stephen said, we're starting a new series this morning. And as we read these words, the hair's already standing on the back of my neck. The prologue to John's Gospel is just such wonderful words.

And I hope you're blessed just by hearing them read this morning. So John writes this. He says, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him. And without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him.

[1 : 1 9] He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John bore witness about him and cried out, This was he of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me. And 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.

[2 : 4 2] Amen. And we really trust that God is going to bless the reading of his word to us. I think we're going to sing to be back with you once again. Kyle approached me a few months ago with, he says, Here's some dates.

Pick whatever ones you like. So I picked this one, and he seemed slightly disappointed. And then I realized why. Because this is the introduction. This is the first in a new series called More Than Flesh and Bones.

And I think Kyle's quite looking forward to preaching on this passage. But he's got the rest of the prologue to work on. So I think he'll be fine.

And he was very gracious in letting me bring God's word to you this morning. Let me briefly pray for us before we start. Father, as we come now to look at your word, we pray that by your Holy Spirit, you would open the eyes of our hearts to help us see Jesus.

that we would be transformed by your word. Lord, that none would go from here unchanged. We pray this in Jesus' precious name.

[4 : 05] Amen. Amen. So we're in John's gospel, written by John the Apostle, who also wrote the letters, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, and is also the author of the book of Revelation, right at the very end of the New Testament.

And John writes with purpose. He has a clear purpose in mind, and his prologue is the beginning of that.

But he tells us his purpose. It's very good when an author actually just tells us his purpose of doing something. There's no, it's not cryptic. It's not like, you remember being in school and you're doing English.

And he says, well, what's this poetry mean? I don't know. Ask the author. And here we have John, in John chapter 20, 30, 31, John gives us the purpose for writing his book.

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.

[5 : 17] See, John's aim is that his readers and we and many others would believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that through faith, we would have life in his name.

But I think it would be too restrictive to limit what John means by belief to simply the first belief that a new Christian experiences. It's not the case that we can't just say that John's book is just good for evangelism, that it's only for evangelism, and that if we as believers want real substance, then we need to go and read Hebrews or we need to go and read Romans.

It's absolutely not. But of course, John wants new believers, but he also wants those who already believe to keep on believing. Surely the words of Jesus, John writes about in chapter 15, would have been echoing in his ears.

We must abide in the vine. We must abide in Christ. We must remain in him. And John has that in mind as he writes this book.

John is likely writing this as an old man, having served in ministry and having preached many, many, many sermons about Jesus.

[6 : 41] And here we have the culmination of John's entire life experience. And John wants his word to bring about belief, but his belief is not some sort of general statement of faith.

You may have heard it talked about often in our current media, they talk about people of faith. And that is such a broad term. That covers everything from faith in aliens right through to us, faith in Jesus.

It's so broad. But what John is asking for here and telling us about is something which is super specific, very narrow, and yet quite simple. Jesus is the Christ.

He is the only Savior. Yet, what John tells us is so wonderfully vast that it will offer us eternal life. It offers us thirst-quenching satisfaction and a fullness of life everlasting.

John wants us to see as fully as possible who Jesus is. And he leaves no room for cherry-picking the bits that are nice and comfortable and ignoring the challenging bits.

[8 : 01] For John, it's either the whole Jesus or nothing. either what John's gospel says is true to its hearers or in the world in which John was writing, it would be utter heresy.

And John, he's a little bit different from the other gospel writers. Do many of you watch the TV series Catchphrase? Or do you remember Catchphrase? Yeah? So you've got an image that's hidden behind nine boxes and they have to try and figure it and that one box disappears and you can see an arm and you have to try and figure out what it is.

And like there, Matthew and Mark and Luke, they kind of, I think they reveal Jesus a little bit like that. Gradually, they show the whole picture of who Jesus is.

John comes in and John would make a terrible catchphrase host because John just lifts all the boxes the way at once in his prologue. He just says, here he is. Here's Jesus.

And he sets such a full picture of who Jesus is yet he leaves us. This is the beauty of John's gospel. He leaves us longing to see more because there is more to be discovered.

[9 : 18] And as I said, it's the whole Jesus that John wants us to see. If you like, it's the original Jesus, not the diet, sugar-free version. For those of you who are original Iron Brew fans, I believe you may be able to source the original somewhere rather than this tainted version that's currently in the market.

But he describes Jesus too as we're going to see in such a cosmic, mind-melting level, yet he also presents Jesus in such an earthly lowliness.

Jesus is both the suffering servant and the eternal creator king of the universe. He is both the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and the Son of God who exists in glorious splendor and absolute supremacy.

his entire book, the rest of the book, is effectively an unpacking of this prologue in which we're going to be spending weeks in.

And Cal, I know, is excited about this and as are the others who are preaching. So, let's get into the first three verses this morning to see what's being said.

[10 : 41] We're going to focus just on verses one to three. So, first little subheading for us this morning is this. In the beginning was the Word.

What does that mean? What's John getting at? The Word. Three times in the first verse, four times in total in the prologue, he uses this term the Word, which is a Greek word called logos.

And some suggest that John is borrowing this term from Greek philosophy. Logos was a term used in Greek philosophy. It was the, kind of called the rational principle by which everything exists.

Or maybe he's borrowing from other philosophers of the day. But, I think most commentators would agree that actually there's a much more readily available source from which John could take this idea of the Word, namely the Old Testament.

And given how frequently John quotes or alludes to the Old Testament, I think we're on pretty safe ground if we take the Old Testament as his reference source.

[11 : 53] You know, as we talked this morning a minute ago that this, the Old Testament was the scriptures of the day. It didn't have the New Testament. And so, if we look to the Old Testament, what we see is this idea of the Word is there.

Genesis, from Genesis right the whole way through, the Word is infiltrated the whole way through. God created by his Word. Psalm 33, 6 says, by the Word of the Lord the heavens were made.

God's Word reveals who he is, reveals his intentions and redeems his people. If you ever read Jeremiah, this repeated line comes up that says, now the Word of the Lord came to me.

Now the Word of the Lord came to me. Psalm 29, these great words of the psalmist says, the voice of the Lord is over the waters.

The God of glory thunders the Lord over many waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful. The voice of the Lord is full of majesty. And he finishes the voice of the Lord, makes the deer give birth, and strips the forest bare, and all in his temple cry glory.

[13 : 12] Psalm 107, verse 20, he sent out his Word and healed them. See, in the Old Testament, God's Word is so closely identified with God himself that Scripture actually presents his Word as eternal.

His Word is fixed in the heavens, Psalm 119 says. And the theologian John Frame argues that God's Word is his self-expression.

In other words, where God is, that's where his Word is, and vice versa. So if Christ is the one who comes to reveal God to humanity and to bring about reconciliation, reconciliation, then the use of the term Word makes such perfect sense for John to use it.

And look at what John says, first of all. He says, in the beginning was the Word. He's given us the Word and time. He wants us to see something. And you'll note, if you know your Bible, if you turn to the very, very first verse in Genesis, you will see the exact same words.

in the beginning. It's identical. John is making a parallel point with Genesis. Or if you turn to Mark's Gospel, Mark begins his Gospel, the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

[14 : 44] Perhaps John is acknowledging Mark, but is saying, yes, Mark is telling you about the beginning of Jesus' ministry and his earthly revealing of the Gospel, but I'm going to show you that the Gospel of Jesus goes right back before the beginning.

Before there was anything, before there was time and matter, the Word existed. The Word is eternal.

The Word is transcendent. It's not limited by or bound by anything physical or temporal. In the beginning was the Word.

And there's a certain comforting immovability about the Word. You know, while scientists have wrestled and sought to understand our universe, while kingdoms and nations and empires have come and gone, while our lives can seem to be in a state of constant flux and change, there is security and certainty in recognizing that the Word was before all of it and continues to be unbound by it.

It's the second thing that John is going to say to us, and this is, in the day, this would have been so controversial. Look at what he says next in the second half of verse 1. He says, the Word was with God and the Word was God.

[16 : 24] Now, the first part of that makes perfect sense. If the Word has been around since the beginning, then he must have been with God. It's logical to Jewish years.

God has been there since the beginning, therefore the Word must have been with God. God. But John is not done there. With a few very simple words in Greek, John is about to make an absolutely outrageous claim.

He's going to say that the Word was not just with God, but the Word was God. John is claiming that Jesus is fully God.

Verse 1 of his book. He's saying that Jesus is in possession of all God's attributes. He is all-powerful. He is all-knowing.

He is all-present. He is unchanging. He is self-existent. He's transcendent and sovereign. He's also love and justice, mercy, grace, and wrath, and joy.

[17 : 30] To see Jesus is to see God. That's it. To see Jesus is to see God. Now, if you've ever had a chap at the door, and usually there's a couple of people there dressed very smartly from the Jehovah Witnesses, and they will come to this verse with a different take.

In their translation of the Bible, they say, it says the word was a God, like God, but not actually God.

Now, you don't have to be a Greek scholar to dispute this. I am not a Greek scholar. Okay? I'm a geography teacher. My Greek is extremely limited to what I can read in a commentary somewhere.

And even then, I need it explained in really small words. But you don't have to be a Greek scholar to discuss this. In fact, just, if this ever happens to you, if you ever have the chap at the door, or you're speaking to someone in the street, just go to verse 3 of John, which we'll get there in a wee minute, and we'll see that that is sufficient to refute any argument.

But it's just to say that your translation of the Bible is correct. The Greek is super simple, and the word is God is there. It's not is a God.

[19 : 13] But, if we put all this content together of the first verse of John, then what we get to is the great doctrine called the Trinity. Jesus is fully God, but he's a different person.

The Father is fully God, but he's a different person from Jesus. It's the same essence, both fully divine, but two personalities. And later in John's Gospel, the third person of the Trinity will be introduced.

And it's worth emphasizing that while all the members of the Trinity share the same divine attributes, is that they are three distinct persons. The Bible always refers to them as persons.

It talks of the Spirit as he, not it. The idea of the Trinity is difficult to get our head around. Many have tried to explain it with varying illustrations.

In Ireland, the shamrock was the attempt to illustrate it. Some talk about water and steam and ice and liquid. None of those really work.

[20 : 33] But probably one thing we do need to get our head around is this, is that they are three distinct persons. It's not like God sometimes appears as the sun, or sometimes appears as the spirit, or sometimes appears as the father.

He does a quick costume change out the back, and comes out, oh I'm now the sun, or I'm now the spirit. It's not like that. That's actually an old heresy called modalism. General rule I'd say we want to avoid heresy.

I think that's a good principle. Knowing that the Trinity exists as three persons, yet they are all God. But there's something in the language that John uses which is really interesting.

He uses this word with. And the word translated with, barring one or two strange sentence constructions, always refers to persons.

Always refers to persons. Now Don Carson, commentator, says this, the word is translated with only when a person is with a person.

[21 : 47] Usually in some fairly intimate relationship. And that suggests that John may already be pointing out rather subtly that the word he is talking about is a person with God and therefore distinguishable from God and enjoying a personal relationship with him.

From the beginning, God has existed as a relationship between persons. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

The love of God is first and foremost directed towards the other members of the Godhead, of the Trinity, before it flows to us as his creatures and as his creation.

The words of the Father at the baptism of the Son, this is my beloved Son, and he makes me happy.

I delight in him. The Father loves the Son. The Son loves the Father. Now, there's a great mystery, as I said, when it comes to the Trinity.

[22 : 59] And I don't think we will ever fully grasp it, this side of eternity. But if you're a believer, here this morning, then you need to know that you are drawn in to the relational everlasting love of the Godhead, of the Trinity.

As a believer, our lives are now hidden in Christ. We are in union with Christ to such an extent that the love and delight that the Father has for the Son now extends to us.

us. I, you, we have no idea how much love is ours in Christ. It's unfathomably deep and intimate.

hear it right, God delights in you. Now, I know west of Scotland and Ireland is the same.

We often have God as quite an austere figure, like an old head teacher, who is quite distant.

[24 : 14] You don't want to get sent to him. But that's not the picture in Scripture. We are in Christ. We are drawn in to the love between the Father and the Son, and this is eternal love.

This is the love of God that has existed before the foundations of the world, and it is now extended to us. it is ours in Christ.

It's such wonderful truth, such a comfort to us, and source of security. Your identity is this, you are loved by God.

He delights in you. You make him happy. I know we find it really difficult to get our head around. You make God happy in Christ. It's wonderful truth.

But John continues. He says, he was in the beginning with God. So he's summarizing.

[25 : 17] Verse 2 is a summary of verse 1. And then he goes on to this, verse 3. He says, all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. What's he saying?

He's saying the Word is the Creator. We've already mentioned that in Genesis, we see God creating through his Word. But here, John is building on that foundation.

Everything that exists, from the smallest single-cell bacteria to the giant blue whale, all plants, rocks, ice, water, even the air that you're breathing right now, exists because of him.

never mind the material in our planet. Think about the multitude of galaxies, stars, and moons, black holes, matter and antimatter.

And then there's the stuff we can't even see, the spiritual realm. The angels and the archangels and the legions of heaven and this cherubim and the seraphim, all exist because of the word.

[26 : 29] He is the originator. He is the great creative artist. He is the grand designer of all that we can see. Paul's words in Colossians chapter 1, 15 and 17, he says this, He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for by him all things were created in heaven and in earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominion 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.

He's the originator but he's also uncreated himself. He's self-existent. He's the source.

He's the origin but not created. created. The word himself is not part of the creation. He sits outside it. He sits over and above it.

And I said verse 3 is your go-to place if you ever have conversations with Jehovah witnesses. Because John in verse 3 is being crystal clear for us.

In fact, he uses the double emphasis to show that Jesus, the word, is not a created being. He says it first positively.

- [27 : 59] He says all things were made through him. And then he says it negatively. And without him was not anything made that was made. And he's showing that the word is not a created being.
- He's not an angel. He is the originator. And all of creation is dependent on the word for its existence.
- So why does any of this matter? What difference does it make to you and I? What John says here. What John has done is he's unveiling the identity of the Messiah, the Savior, to his readers and to us.
- And his key takeaway is this, that the word did not just come from God, but the word is God. And this truth should affect how we think about Jesus and how we talk about Jesus.
- Because what it does, it avoids us reducing him. It avoids us presenting, as I said earlier, diet Jesus or low-fat Jesus.
- [29 : 19] And there are key areas where we can be tempted to reduce Jesus. And our society does this all the time. We actually sang a carol this morning, which was really appropriate.
- it. But we are, you know, I've seen mince pies in the shops already. I just roll my eyes. But we are coming up to the Christmas season and we can sometimes reduce Jesus to the child in the manger.
- And it's this sort of cute picture of baby Jesus, the way in in the manger.
- But what you need to remember, what I need to remember, is the infant Jesus, while on earth, totally dependent on his mother for sustenance and care, lying there in the manger, is still the one who is holding the entire universe together by the word of his power.
- He put on humanity. He didn't stop being God. He is still holding the universe together, even as an infant.
- [30 : 35] We sometimes can reduce Jesus to that of a great teacher. But again, we need to remember, this is God speaking, when Jesus speaks.
- Therefore, the words of Jesus have authority. And there's a need for instant obedience to his commands. Unfortunately, in our society now and in our world, the tendency is towards, well, let's deconstruct what Jesus said, let's take it apart.
- Maybe he didn't quite mean what he said, or I don't like what Jesus said, so I'm going to twist the words a little bit and make it mean something else. No, Jesus speaks with absolute authority because he is God.
- Or perhaps he gets reduced to, he was just a man who lived a life and then suffered on a cross. But again, and we, I think we do remember this well, God, it's God on the cross, bearing our sin and our shame.
- So yes, he is the child, he is the teacher, he is the man, but he's so much more. And his moreness is inexhaustible.
- [31 : 57] To see him, to think about him, to marvel at him, is to see the eternal God who has no ending and no beginning.
- You know, behind me in the wall, Alpha, Omega, the beginning and the end. We're never going to run out of things to see about Jesus, things to think about Jesus, or things to marvel about Jesus.
- He's unending. You can never tire of him. And as John has emphasized this morning too, he's the creator.
- But here's the thing about Jesus as a creator, he continues to be the one through whom creation occurs. Not just physical creation, but spiritual creation.
- New creation, new life, new hearts come from him. None of that is possible outside of Christ.

[33 : 02] There is no new creation without Christ, the creator. Which is why when we look at our new creation, when we look at our salvation, we can humbly realize that it did not originate with us.

Someone once said, all we contributed was our sin. But Christ brings forgiveness. He brings new life. life. And so it is for that reason we point others to the word.

We point others to Christ. To the one who is God. The one who holds all things together by the word of his power. And the only one who can create new life in dead sinners.

And grant them the eyes to see the wonder of who he really is. Let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, you have revealed yourself to us through your Son.

Lord, give us eyes to see. Help us not to grow tired. or weary. But let us be filled with joy and wonder when we look upon Jesus.

[34 : 35] When we look upon who he is. When we see him in his humanity and his majesty. Father, would you continue to bless us this morning as we sing your praises and as we gather around your table.

That's this in Jesus' name. Amen. We are going to sing.