

John's gospel - the introduction

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Preacher: David Skull

[0 : 00] I can move that over there. Thank you so much for your welcome to us and to the family. If you don't know us, we moved down to Brighton last September next to the Caldean Estate.

There's Vardy Park where there's a university kind of campus, accommodation campus. There's a lecture room there, conference centre. So we're going to be meeting there for a while at least as the next step.

So we thank God for that. Please pray for us as we seek to be a witness to the gospel in that area of Brighton as we'll continue to pray for you as well in your future. Brilliant. That's enough of me. Let's turn to God's word then. John chapter 1, as we start this new series in John's gospel. John chapter 1. By the way, I've got a couple of John's gospels here.

So if you've never read John's gospel, I say take a Bible. The church won't be worried about you taking a Bible, I'm sure. One thing you're allowed to steal from a church is a Bible. But I've also got some copies of John's gospel written in an understandable kind of language.

[1 : 23] Please do come and see me if you'd like one of those. This is going to whet your appetite today, hopefully, for what's coming up ahead. Okay, so John chapter 1. Before we get to that, just put your finger in John chapter 1, but turn to John chapter 20 at the end of John's gospel.

Sometimes Bible books very helpfully give you a verse that sums up what the book is all about. And John's gospel does that for us. So you understand why John wrote his gospel, his work about Jesus.

So look at John chapter 20, verses 30 to 31. John chapter 20, verses 30 to 31. It says there that Jesus did many other signs or miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples like John, which have not been written in this book.

But these signs, these miraculous signs, are written so that you, the reader, may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

That is why the Spirit inspired John to write John's gospel. It's about evidence about Jesus. Jesus did so many things, but John has selected a number of miraculous signs, and he's brought them together to build up the evidence as to who Jesus is.

[2 : 57] He says that Jesus is the Christ. He's the Messiah, and he is the Son of God. So this book is written to convince us or to reassure us, if we're Christians, as to who Jesus is.

And John's purpose in that is that we will put our faith, our trust in Jesus Christ. Nothing else will give us life, but Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, will.

Put your faith in Jesus, says John, and it will lead to life in his name. John's gospel is full of language about eternal life, a living relationship with God, your creator, that begins now and lasts through death into eternity.

This is the particular focus of John's gospel, the evidence pointing to who Jesus is, causing you to trust in Jesus, what leads to eternal life in his name.

The local church consists of people who are alive, spiritually alive, and others come into them and say, what is this all about? It's about Jesus.

[4 : 11] Find out about Jesus Christ. These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. So with that in mind, John's purpose, let's go back to John chapter one and look at John's introduction.

His introduction to this account of Jesus that he saw and knew. Now, I love going to the cinema. I've only managed to go to the cinema in Brighton once, but looking forward to going to the Odeon more and more.

And I love to get to the cinema in good time. I'm one of these people who can't stand wasting money by missing some of the film, although we tend to be late just by the nature of having a large

family.

But I like to get to the cinema in good time mainly because I love watching the trailers. I don't get it why some people just talk through the trailers.

I love the adverts as well. But just talking through the trailers. It was a time for heroes and spacemen. It was a time. I love that.

[5 : 14] Now, occasionally there is a trailer in the cinema for a future film and I've turned to the person next to me and gone, wow, I've got to go and see that. Back in the day, it was the trailer for the film Gladiator.

I know you might not have lived up to all the hype, but the hype around this film was, the trailer was amazing and I thought, I've got to see this film. A good trailer will grab your attention.

It will give you just enough of the film to help you understand what it's about and it wets your appetite with some of the themes coming up. I've really got to see that film. And that is just what John is doing for us in his introduction in John's Gospel.

You may have thought this passage was just about Christmas. No, it's about Christ. It's here to whet our appetites to Jesus who came to give us life through his death.

The miracles that he did, the signs are there pointing to the truth that he's the Messiah who changes people's lives today. And so John in these verses is trying to grab our attention with Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

[6 : 20] So if you read these verses and think, oh, there's nothing new here, you should be gripped as we go through it by who Jesus is. Let's go through it together. I'm going to have got four W's just to help us go through the passage.

I've got the Word, the Witness, the Welcome, and the Wow. The Word, the Witness, the Welcome, and the Wow. This is the trailer for John's Gospel, whetting your appetite.

First of all, the Word in the first few verses, verses one down to three. The Word. It's interesting, isn't it? Although this is a Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Jesus himself isn't mentioned by name until, which verse?

Which verse does Jesus come up by name? Have a look. Someone tell me. First person to win, wins, not a prize. I haven't got a prize. Which was for us? Christopher wins, not a prize.

Well, well done. Verse 17. Although this is all about Jesus, he's not mentioned by name until verse 17. John is kind of whetting our appetite for the coming of Jesus.

[7 : 27] Instead, John grabs our attention by speaking about Jesus as the Word. The Word. The reason for that is to kind of get us thinking and entice us into his Gospel.

So those from a Greek background would understand that kind of language of the Word to make them think of the kind of glue that binds the world together. Not a personal God that we know, but the impersonal principle or force that connects the world together.

So Greek kind of thinkers are kind of brought into it as John writes it. But even more than that, for those from a Jewish background, verse 1 really grabs our attention.

Can anyone remember the very first verse of the Bible? Genesis chapter 1, verse 1. Ah, you know your Bibles.

That's a wonderful thing. Genesis chapter 1, verse 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. What does John do in John chapter 1, verse 1?

[8 : 34] He starts off in the same way. In the beginning was the Word. Now, his readers from a Hebrew background, they're going, what?

What? It's like children who are going to be raised to learn certain songs. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. In the beginning, what was the Word? What's going on? Well, in these couple of verses, John gives us five things about the Word that kind of grabs our attention.

First of all, he says in verses 1 and 2 that the Word was before the world began. Was before the world began. John chapter 1, verse 1. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God.

The Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. So yes, Genesis 1, verse 1. In the beginning was the Word. In the beginning was God.

But in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, says John. Not just with God, but was God, he goes on to say. The very nature of the Word, his essence, is Godness.

[9 : 42] In the beginning was the Word. Just a reminder here that the Bible always teaches that the world has a beginning and the world will have an end and there'll be a new heavens and new earth.

It's not some kind of circular system that some people think of, just going round and round in circles. There is a definite beginning with the creation of the world, the beginning of Genesis. There's a definite conclusion as Jesus comes back and there'll be a definite new heavens and a new earth, heaven and hell to come.

It's a linear progression, a storyline that the Bible goes along. But the Word was before the world began. It means it brings us into the truth that there is one God, three persons, Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

John is clear on that in his Gospel. That's the first thing. The Word was before the world began. But secondly, the Word created all things at the beginning.

Verse 3. Did you notice that? All things were created through him, the Word. And apart from the Word, not one thing was created that has been created.

[10:48] So, Genesis 1 tells us in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. John says it was through the Word.

So, who is the Word? Genesis 1 tells us that God created the world by speaking. Genesis 1, verse 2. Let me read those words out to you if you can't remember them.

It says, In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now, the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

Then God said, Let there be light and there was light. God spoke and it was through his Word that all things were created in Genesis 1.

Well, John is taking that account of God's powerful creating Word and turning it into a picture, a description of a person who he describes as the Word with a capital W, as we would say.

[11:52] The Word was with God, the Word was God and all things were created through him. So straight away you realize that the thing that John is describing in the Word cannot be some kind of impersonal force that kind of knits the world together.

John is speaking about the Word as a him, a personal being with God, like God, was God. Thirdly, in verse 4, John describes the Word as the source of life, therefore.

If all things were created for him, who is the Word? Well, in him was life and that life was the light of men.

So in Genesis 1, when God spoke, he created creatures to become living creatures, Genesis 1. In Genesis 2, when God created mankind, humankind, he breathed the breath of life into man's nostrils and the man Adam became a living being.

God, through his Word, breathed life into the created world. In the same way, says John, that the Word is the source of life, creating both physical life in the creation and as we'll see in John's Gospel, the source of spiritual life.

[13:19] John will speak much about eternal life, which as we said is the quality of a relationship, right relationship now with God that begins now and continues through death into resurrection and beyond.

the Word is the source of life from Genesis to spiritual life, given by the Holy Spirit through his death and resurrection and ascension.

Fourthly, the Word is also the light shining in the darkness, verse 4. In him was life and the life was the light of men, that light shines in the darkness and yet the darkness did not overcome it or understand it, depending on your translation.

back in Genesis when God made the world, we see the first thing that God did, he said, let there be light. That's the first thing that happened when God created the heavens and when God created the world.

God's light penetrated into the darkness and John says that is just what the Word has done, says John. The light has penetrated into the darkness.

[14:28] That could be taken kind of intellectually, light brings understanding, doesn't it? Well, the light has come and shown us what is truth, what is real.

Well, it can be taken morally. The light is good. It opposes the darkness. It drives out the darkness, the bad. I always think of this when I think back to the films of the Lord of the Rings.

There's one film where Gandalf comes to the rescue, charging in on his white horse and he has his staff in his hand and light that kind of shines out from his staff and it blows all the orcs away as he charges through and maybe you're a fan of that.

It's the picture of Jesus. He's the light that's come and he's burst through and the darkness is driven away. You think we're in a bad, dark world? We've got plenty of evidence in the world today. Plenty of evidence in our own communities of the badness and the darkness of the world. Plenty of evidence in your own life probably of the badness and the darkness of the world. Well Jesus is the light and the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not either understood it or I would take it that darkness has not overcome it.

[15 : 43] Overcome it. So that brings us to the fifth point about the word in verse five as well that the word the light shining in the darkness just cannot be extinguished by human darkness or by sin or the devil or anyone.

Look at the end of chapter five the end of verse five the light that shines in the darkness yet the darkness has not overcome it. It cannot overcome.

It hasn't overcome the truth of the gospel from the very fall of Genesis chapter three all the way through to the coming of Jesus and it cannot overcome it now. The light shines in the darkness. Light will win John says. Hallelujah. It's great to come to church to remind us that the light will win. Jesus is the light of the world.

Well that's that's John's description of the word he's kind of wetting our appetite to something and it's more than a kind of force or principle it's a personal it's a personal person who is like God with God brought into the world before the world began the creator of all things the source of life shining into the darkness and cannot be extinguished.

[17 : 09] It was a time a time for the word. Secondly John goes on to talk about the witness to the word in verses 6 to 9 there was a man sent from God whose name was John not John the author of the gospel but John the Baptist he came as a witness to testify about the light so that all might believe through him he was not that light but he came to testify about the light the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world and John the Baptist was a big deal for those who were reading John's gospel who remembered those days he was a big deal he brought about a big change in the people of God at that time turning them back to God a huge kind of change in the culture happened during the brief ministry of John the Baptist and yet compared with the word John describes him as verse 6 just a man a man a man sent from

God yes but just a man he wasn't the light he testified to the light he was a living breathing signpost as it were to the coming of Jesus I am not the Messiah he said later but I have been sent ahead of him he must increase I must decrease so John says the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world one of the things I have really loved about being in Brighton is going out for early morning walks with the dog and just seeing the sun begin to rise above the horizon above the city where we are living it is a wonderful thing that I have been able to see and John really is there as the one pointing to the coming dawn it is coming he says it is not me the light is coming and the dawn is just beginning to rise you will see about that next time as he speaks about Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world John is the witness to the word thirdly though we see the welcome of the word the welcome of the word verses 9 down to 13 there are actually two welcomes here because we've seen in verse 9 the wonderful truth that the word was coming the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world but there are two welcomes! here the first welcome is a massive shock when the word has been built up in such dramatic language from Genesis 1 actually comes the first is the shocking welcome that the world gave to the word Jesus Christ look at verses 10 and 11 it says that he was in the world and the world was created through him and yet the world did not recognize him he came to his own and his own people did not receive him so I asked whether you ever met anyone famous or be next to someone famous and you hadn't recognized them the word was not recognized that word recognized actually in that verse is more than just an observation thing so I didn't kind of see that person at a distance it's a relational word other translations could say the world did not know him there is something in us that's predisposed to push this relationship with our creator away even though he made us he sustains us he helps us the one

God father son and holy spirit we are inclined to reject and push away that relationship because we're all sinners sin is the big problem sin is often described using the words sin which meaning shove off God I'm in charge no to your rules shove off God I'm in charge no to your rules I think that gives us a window onto our own hearts these verses that when the very son of God the word of God came even though it was his world and he made us yet the world he made did not know him and his people did not receive him Peter would later say about Jesus as he was going to the cross I don't

know him I don't know you and in the same way we by our sinful nature have all treated the son of God and God the father in the same way I don't know you I don't recognize you I reject you don't you hate it when people give you the cold shoulder sometimes a bit snooty just pretend that they haven't actually seen you don't want to talk to you what hope is there for a world that rejects the coming of the word what hope is there well that's the strange welcome of the world but there's also another amazing welcome by the word himself isn't there verses 12 to 13 you see there is a hope for the world and we are living examples of it because there's another welcome in these verses the way the word himself welcomes the world look at verses 12 to 13 it says to all who did receive him the word he gave the right to become children of

[22 : 55] God to those who believe in his name who were born not of natural descent or the will of the flesh or the will of man but of God it's remarkable isn't it the world rejects him doesn't want to know him the creator comes to his own yet the creator reaches out with generosity and love so this hope is found not in us of course but in the grace of God himself he gave the right to become children of God he gives it so although he is rejected and gets the cold shoulder from us he has come on his mission to give to give just to remind you here that no one is a child of God by virtue of their humanity no one is a child of God by virtue of being a certain nationality no one is a child of

God by virtue of being born into a particular family rather this is a gift from the word to those who by faith receive him who believe in his name remember that's the very reason why John has written his gospel so that we will believe in his name this is something that God does in chapter three Jesus will speak to the religious leader Nicodemus about being born again he says to him unless someone is born again he cannot see or enter the kingdom of God God is something God gives to those who would by nature reject him and give him the cold shoulder by his grace and his mercy the right to become children of God and this is what we've been brought into if you're a Christian you've been brought into the kingdom of God but most of all you've been brought into the kingdom of God that is a family of God through

Jesus the son it's through Christ so if you're a Christian today you have the right the privilege and the welcome as children of God the king as you are united to Christ by faith all accomplished of course through his cross with that rebellion that rejection was paid for and dealt with not on your own shoulders but on Christ who suffered and died all that we deserve to bring us into that wonderful relationship of life and love and the family of God which is on display in the local church friends it might be that you're here today and you're visiting church but you're not part of the church you love to come and attend occasionally and maybe you're just here today you don't know why you're here well verse 12 hints that there is an invitation for you today it says in verse 12 that to all who receive him he gives the right to become children of God verse 7 tells us that John the Baptist testified about the light so that all might believe through him through his witness and you'll read about that next week all who receive the son the word have the right to become children of God and that means today whatever you have done whatever your background however you've given Jesus the cold shoulder and hurt others or been hurt yourself you have the right if you come by faith to Jesus Christ to become a child of God and join the people of God because of his finished work upon the cross come and welcome Jesus says to sinners come and welcome the invitation is open today to you well we've looked at the words we've looked at the witness John the Baptist we've looked at the welcome the strange welcome of the world but the gracious welcome of the word himself and finally verses 14 to 18 it lands with the wow the wow there is a wow in the Christian faith did you know that it's not just I'm going for the motions of being a Christian it's a wow and Jesus is the wow is he I love football I'm sorry

I don't support Brighton I might have to change that while we're here since childhood I've been a fan of Liverpool Football Club and it's been the most amazing couple of years but you go to any football stadium and there is usually a wow isn't there there's usually a wow and excitement about gathering together around Jurgen Klopp there's an excitement how much more so is there a wow for being a Christian gathering around the word Jesus Christ look at verses 14 to 18 here's the wow that sets us up for the rest of John's gospel the word became flesh he dwelt amongst us is there someone here today that you haven't met before who could they be John says I found myself sitting next to the word the word became flesh and dwelt amongst us we've observed his glory the glory as the one and only from the father full of grace and truth the one

[28 : 32] John testified about verse 16 indeed we have all received grace upon grace from his fullness says John for the law was given through Moses grace and truth came through Jesus Christ

no one has ever seen God the one and only son who is himself God and is at the father's side he has received him the background to these verses is Moses in the book of Exodus asking to see the Lord's glory at Mount Sinai!

remember when the Lord said to Moses who asked to see God's glory I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you it's interesting isn't it I want to see God's glory the Lord says I will show you my goodness goodness and glory I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you Moses but you cannot see my face says the Lord for no one may see me and live even Moses was an unholy sinner so the Lord put Moses in a cleft and a rock and he covered him with his hand figuratively speaking until the Lord passed by on Mount Sinai glorious Moses on that mountain on that occasion was only able to see a glimpse of the tail end of the glory of God the after glow of God's glory as he passed him by on that mountain and you know what

Moses did after that we're told that Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshipped wow and his face shone with glory so much so he had to cover it up John tells us in verse 14 that the word became flesh and made his dwelling camped out amongst us we've seen his glory says John we have seen his glory the glory of the one and only who came from the father full of grace and truth he saw the signs he saw the miracles Jesus revealed his glory but most of all he saw him go to the cross where he suffered and died the holy

God standing in the place of sinful people and he saw him rise again the resurrected Jesus we have seen his glory and what Moses just glimpsed at what in the old testament came and went in the tabernacle the temple the shekinah glory of God the cloud filling the temple John says we've seen it John's implication is that what he has seen with his fellow apostles you and I the readers of his gospel can see today through the eyes of faith because what John has seen the glory of God is not a what at all is it Christopher was right verse 17 it's a who the glory the grace and truth are all things that flow from Jesus Christ he is the wow the church is a wow because

Jesus is at the center and before Jesus people of God we bow and say my Lord and my God this is just the trailer the introduction can't wait for the next bit sorry I'm not here let's pray friends to see Christ's glory today to the eyes of faith we must receive from his grace he gave the right to become children of God Christians I'll just ask you now as you begin this series to humble yourself before the Lord of glory and say help me see afresh see again your glory your grace and truth that came through

[33 : 22] Jesus and friend if you're not a believer today what will you do with the welcome that Jesus offers you will you give him the cold shoulder or you take and receive Christ he offers himself to you do not turn him away put your faith and trust in him today hear us Lord bless the church build it up and strengthen it in the faith we pray in Jesus name amen amen thank you