

John 1:1–5

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[0 : 0 0] text is John 1, 1 to 5. Please remain standing for the reading of God's word. 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. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

Firm with the psalmist that your testimonies are wonderful, therefore our soul keeps them. The unfolding of your words gives light. It imparts understanding to the simple.

And so, Father, we pray that you would unfold your word through your spirit to give understanding to us the simple. May we see Jesus, Jesus the living word. May we not only see him, but sense him.

Go with us in these moments, we pray. We ask these things for his namesake. Amen. At Ford, standing 6'8", hailing from Akron, Ohio, St. Vincent, St. Mary High School, number 23, LeBron James. Yeah! I can't do it as well as Joe. But that's something along the lines of how the LA Lakers announcer announces the four-time NBA champion, the four-time most valuable player, the four-time most finals most valuable player, the NBA's all-time leading scorer.

[2 : 1 5] And the accolades go on. Incidentally, he won the first play-in tournament last night in the NBA. And incidentally, he's the oldest player in the NBA at 38.

Introductions serve as announcements. They build hype, foster excitement, lend credibility, pique the audience's curiosity, and if done well, grab attention.

We see it in the realm of professional sports. If you attend a special lecture at the university, speakers are introduced highlighting their education, their research, their publications, their accomplishments, as to give credibility for what you are about to hear.

It happens everywhere. It happens everywhere. In the realm of music, the arts, academia, athletics, politics, and more. And this morning, we come to an introduction. It is like no other introduction.

It is unrivaled, unparalleled, unmatched. We are introduced to the Word of God, the Son of God, Jesus the Christ. And beginning this week, for the next three weeks, through Christmas Eve, we will set out on a series titled, Jesus the Light of the World. I've taken for my sermon title, The Light Shines. Straight out of verse 5, The Light Shines. How does one to introduce Jesus?

[4 : 1 1] Interestingly, the four gospels all do it differently. Matthew begins with a genealogy. For him, it is important to show that Jesus possessed the proper blood lineage that gave him the right to the throne of Israel. Mark's gospel is rooted in sacred literature, citing the great prophets of the Old Testament, Isaiah and Malachi, that he was the completion of the promises of the nation of Israel.

Luke gives us the most human material surrounding Jesus' birth, as if to convey his humanity.

His humanity translates into his universal application to all people. We can say for all the other gospel writers, it was this humanness, this human heritage, they were trying to draw out. He is a king. He is the fulfillment of promises. He is a man.

Or to borrow the language of the song, what if God was one of us? He is a man like us. Not so with John.

John's gospel will make no mention of a manger. He will not have wise men traveling from afar.

There are no shepherds keeping their watch at night.

[5 : 4 4] There is no genealogy or mention of his mother. No human relationship would define him. Instead, we have to see his heavenly standing.

He is not introduced, born in Bethlehem during the reign of Herod the king. He is not the child of Mary and Joseph. He is not trained to be a carpenter or raised in Nazareth.

The gospel accounts will show us all those interactions with fellow people, we might say. But God, but John, wants to show us Jesus with God.

His introduction is like no other because he is like no other. And as we pause to celebrate Advent, we are possibly drawn to the seasonal nature. A baby, a manger, angels and stars, the presentation of gifts.

But John reminds us as we think about his humanity, it is all for naught until you realize his divinity. In the beginning was the Word.

[6 : 57] We cannot overstate this introduction that is given by John this morning.

In the world of Christian literature, there is no shortage of material on these verses as I found out. Much has been written. But for our time this morning, I want to frame it with those journalistic questions you were taught to ask in elementary school.

The five W's. The who. The what. The where. The when. And the why. And John will answer all of them from the outset of his gospel.

And I'll address them in the order that they unfold. When is this happening? Who is this about? Where is this taking place? What is this? And probably most importantly, why? Why is this?

[8 : 03] When? When? The opening verse gives us the subject, namely the Word. But John the writer wants to show us when the Word was.

When exactly did the Word appear? And the answer reaches back as far as we can conceive. He's saying it's undocumented.

It's unquantifiable. It's undated. Unquantifiable. But it's reiterated twice in verse 1 and reaffirmed in verse 2. In the beginning.

From the start. From the outset. From the launch of it all. Was the Word. And for those of us who are familiar with the Bible, you might begin to connect the dots and go, Those are the first words in our Bibles.

In the beginning. The Bible begins this way. In the beginning. God created the heavens and the earth. Here John inserts the Word into those same verses.

[9 : 11] That same verse. As if to say. Before God created. The Word existed. When? Before time began.

The Word existed. When? Before space was formed. The Word existed. Mark starts with the prophets.

Matthew traces it from Abraham and David. Luke traces to Adam. John says, Before time was, He was.

To echo and champion the words of Athanasius, There was never a time the Word was not. As Christians, this is the historical position.

The Word is preexistent. Eternal. Everlasting. He is both Alpha and the Omega. In one sense, He is the beginning. And He is the end.

[10 : 11] In another sense, He has no beginning. And He has no end. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And this is the point of contention if you befriend a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness.

The claim is that Jesus was God's first creative act. Jesus was created, they'll tell you. There was a time, they'll tell you, He was not.

No. In the words of John, the Gospel, In the beginning was the Word. When was He? He always was.

When was He? He always is. When was He? He always will be. He is no creature. He is not the first created one.

No. As a matter of fact, the verses will tell us He is the creating one. The very source of light and life. And so when we ask the question, when was the Word?

[11 : 17] The answer is always. The big word is the Word's eternity. He's eternal. When?

Well, secondly, who? Who are we talking about here? Who are we being introduced to? Well, it's the Word. The Logos. The Word is only referenced in these first verses of the Gospel.

And then His name is disclosed in verse 17 as Jesus Christ. The Word is the only Son from God, the Father, full of grace and truth.

And why is He called the Word? Why Logos? John didn't make up the Word. I know sometimes if you read academic articles, they're just made up words.

They're just creating new terms. It's a blend of the German and the English or something. But here, this is a preexistent. This was an existent word in Greek vocabulary.

[12:16] It was found in their philosophical traditions. Logos was equated to reason or rationality, order. It was that which brought the material world together.

This is where we obtain our word logic, what makes sense reasonably. But it's probably more than that. That it wasn't simply a Greek term John was using.

It was a term embedded in Israel's religious tradition. The Word of the Lord was that which came to the prophets, disclosing the mind and the heart of God.

It would come as a word of guidance or love or even judgment. The Word of God really is the action of God. God's Word can be thought of God's work.

When he speaks, things happen. When God said, let there be light, there was light. When God said, let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed and fruit trees bearing fruit, the next sentence tells us, and it was so.

[13:24] That when God speaks, God actually accomplishes his act. And for simplicity's sake, we can consider communication theory. One's words are the expression of one's mind and one's heart.

So logos, the Word, carries this idea of God's self-expression. If God wants to make himself known, how will he do it?

According to John, it will come through the Word made flesh. It is God expressing himself.

It's his communicative act that tells us what he's thinking, shows his heart and conveys himself to us. It's God showing us himself.

The J.B. Phillips translation puts it so well. At the beginning, God expressed himself. That personal expression, that Word, was with God and was God.

[14:33] And he existed with God from the beginning. Who was the Word? The Word is God's self-expression. When we encounter the Word, we are getting to know what God is like.

When you get to know Jesus, you get to know God. Well, when and who, where?

It's a bizarre question to ask. Because before creation, there is no time, there is no place. Was there a space where the Word could actually reside?

Where could the Word inhabit? What could possibly hold him? And yet, John answers this question for us. Do you want to know where the Word was?

The Word was with God. Where was he? He was with God. There are a few words in Greek that writers use that can be translated with.

[15:33] This particular Word conveys intimacy. A facing toward another. A constant communing fellowship with another. John wants us to know the Word is present, was present with God.

We are to envision that they are toward one another. Intimately, continually, persistently, constantly. God and the Word occupy the same place at the same time.

They were all together. God and the Word. John is careful to show us that the Father is not the Word, and the Word is not the Father.

They are distinct in the presence of one another. You see, it's, how can I be with someone unless there are actually two parties there?

Theologians have used the terminology of persons to address God. God the Father was with the Word. The Word was with God the Father. The Word is fully God.

[16:34] But God is not fully the Word. That's a little thought for us. He is separate. He is a separate person from the Father. The Word has his own personality, though sharing the essence of the Father.

Where was he? He was with God. Fourthly, what is the Word? We've already mentioned it's God's self-expression.

But it's more than an expressive thought. It's more than a powerful force. It's greater than a simple idea. Because in verse 14, we find that the Word becomes flesh.

The Word is a person, a human, namely Jesus. But lest we think he's just a mere mortal, the end of verse 1 will set all of that aside.

The Word is made flesh in a person, but the Word is God himself. What is he? The Word is God.

[17:42] He is not God-like. He is not similar to God. He doesn't just resemble God. John wants to establish early on in his book that the Word is God himself.

And here we begin to see the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The Word is with God, showing multiplicity. But the Word is God, displaying his singularity.

There are two distinct persons in one another's presence, but only one God. And Christians have always affirmed monotheism. There is only one God, but we are Trinitarian, holding to the conviction that God is three persons in one.

He is one essence comprised of three persons. And the Bible conveys this. Because if you were somehow able to append John 1-1 into Genesis 1-1 and 2, you see this.

In the beginning, God. In the beginning was the Word. And if you recall, the Spirit hovered over the waters.

[18 : 53] Genesis shows us the Father and Spirit were present at creation. And here John shows us that the pre-incarnate Son is also there. And the Word is God is affirmed because creation is attributed to the Word.

It is only God who created and God alone. And yet, in verse 3, it tells us, All things were made through him. And without him was not anything made that was made.

That which only God could uniquely do. Create. Create out of nothing. We find the Son, the Word, can also do. We are to understand the Word of God as the means, the agent whereby creation is established.

Another Bible translation puts it helpfully, When all things began, the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God. And what God was, the Word was.

So when we ask the question, What is the Word? It is the divine Son. We are shown the Word's deity.

[20 : 10] When, who, where, and what. And with the remainder of my time, I want to spend it on the why.

Why did the Word come? Why did the Word come? Why the Word? Why the Son? Why Jesus? And part of the answer is found in verse 3.

Our very existence depends on the eternal Word. All things were made through him, And without him was not anything made that was made. No word, no being.

No word, no you. No word, no world. But verse 4 gives us the fullness of the answer.

In Jesus, we derive both light and life. Why the Word?

[21 : 14] Well, the Word provides both light and life. We are all dependents, the Bible is saying. In heaven's tax return, if there is such a thing, When Jesus goes to file his taxes, And the form says, How many dependents do you have?

All of them. All of them. Because you and I would like to think we're independent. We would like to think we somehow operate as self-sustaining, Self-existing, autonomous individuals.

But we're not. You depend on the Son. You depend on sustenance that comes from the outside to feed your inside. You depend on the oxygen that fills your lungs.

You depend on the water that makes up 60% of your physical composition. You depend on so many things. And certainly Jesus' physical body demanded the same.

But in verses 4 and 5, What is being offered goes beyond physical light and life. John is asserting. That the word is the true and only reservoir for real life.

[22 : 34] He is the only cistern to supply eternal life. You see, he is self-existing.

I know that's a big word. But later on in John's gospel, what you'll find is this. This is a fascinating verse. Jesus says, You see, we are not like that.

We are not like that. No, rather we are dependent on the one who gives light and life.

The Bible is really a tale of two creations. In Genesis, if you were to reread it, You find the first creation, you saw light and life.

God said, let there be light, and there was light. He filled the oceans and the sky and the land. He filled it with fish and birds and animals and humanity.

[24 : 07] The first creation brought both light and life. And it was termed good. Creation was very good. However, we know that in that goodness, It was corrupted by human disobedience and rebellion.

What was created for our pleasure, for our prosperity, Was laden with thorns and thistles, Curses and corruption, Destining us to our destruction.

The original creation had life, But we found it to only result in death Because of our disobedience.

The original creation was filled with light, But filled with, resulted in darkness Because of our sin.

And this is the human predicament. Destined to die. Despondent in darkness. Yet God would not leave us there.

He would not abandon those whom he created. He created initially out of his goodness. And now he creates again, Seemingly in John 1.

[25 : 24] Not out of his goodness, But out of his grace. You see it. He commissions his beloved son On a rescue mission. His only son who's full of grace.

And in this second creation act, We are once again given the opportunity To experience light and life Through the word.

Here we find God making all things new. Recreating is what we can call it. A new creation is what Paul calls it. Jesus speaking in Revelation says, I am making all things new.

And how can he do this? The darkness that overwhelmed us Would not overwhelm him. You need the promise in verse 5.

Why did he come? To really dispel the darkness. As our sins. As the sins of the world rested upon him.

[26 : 26] Jesus the son. As he was fastened upon the cross. Surrounded by the scorn of sinners. Forsaken by his father. The son itself.

The S-U-N. Closed its eyes. And the land was covered in darkness. From 12 to 3 p.m. The writers of the gospels tell us. Creation paused.

As her creator was slain. And the whole world went dark. From 12 to 3. And though it appeared dark. You need to know.

When the world went black. As the sun was fastened upon the cross. The word was still shining. The light shines.

You notice that right? It's present tense. The light shines. When the corpse was laid into the dark tomb. And the stone was rolled across the entrance. And when death has taken its toll.

[27 : 29] And he was sealed in complete darkness. You need to know. That the darkness did not overcome the light. The light shines. The light shines.

To the first century reader. They need to know. That though Christ had died. Risen and ascended. The light shone. To the modern reader. Regardless of the outside indications.

Of this present world. You need to know. The light shines. To the future reader. All appearances. Notwithstanding. However bad this gets.

The light will shine. He will outburn any human. Commemorative flame. He will outlast any lone lighthouse. Sitting on the east coast.

Or ocean shore. He will outshine every star. And our very own sun. Because he is. The everlasting light. The eternal light. The light of all lights.

[28 : 32] This is Jesus. Light of the world. Life. To the world. The darkness. And for those of us.

Who have walked in this morning. I don't know what darkness. You walk in. Perhaps it's the darkness. Of pain.

That may have settled upon you. From loss. The darkness of hardship. The darkness of despair. The life taking power. Of addiction.

Or the life stealing power. Of sin. Or the life destroying power. Of hate. Whatever it is. You need to know. That the light shines. I am the light of the world.

He says. Whoever follows me. Will not walk in darkness. But will have. The light. Of life. I have come into the world. He says.

[29 : 27] As light. So whoever believes in me. Will not remain. In the darkness. For God so loved the world. That he gave his only begotten son. That whoever believes in him.

Shall not perish. But have everlasting life. Life. I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me. Will never hunger. Whoever believes in me. Will never thirst.

I have come. That you may have a life. And have it abundantly. I am the resurrection. And the life. And though you die. Yet you shall live.

The word gives life. And light. And it overcomes all darkness. Imagine the introduction.

Imagine for a second. You're interviewing somebody. You're conducting an interview. The candidate. It's not for a spouse.

[30 : 25] Or an employee. Or a business partner. But it is for the Lord of your life. And he walks in the room. Let me see your paperwork.

Let me see what kind of experience this person has. Let me see what qualifications make this person able. What's your name? Jesus.

What's your birth date? I was never born. What's your title?

The word. What's your address? I don't have one. What's your work experience?
I created all things. I'm the life of the world. And sustain all things. What are your skills?
[31 : 34] All that to say. What. A resume. For the Lord.

Of the universe. So John is introduced to us. Jesus. The light. That forever shines. He is.
The image. Of the invisible God. He is. The firstborn. Of all creation. For by things. All. For by him.
All things were created. In heaven and on 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. For.
[32 : 29] In him. All. The fullness. Of God. Was pleased to dwell. And why on earth is he here?

Well. To reconcile to himself. All things. Whether on earth. Or in heaven. By making peace.
Through his blood.

On the cross. Introducing Jesus. The light. That shines. Father we.

Thank you for your word. Jesus. Amen. Amen. You are the light.

He is the light that shines. And he will never be overcome by darkness. And wherever we sit.

[33 : 33] In darkness. I pray that the light of the Lord Jesus. Would come. Seek us out. Save us.
Search us. And impart life.

Abundant life. Everlasting life. Life. That is found. Only in God. We pray these things.
For his name's sake. Amen.