

John 1:1-5

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Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] Again, the scripture text is John 1, 1-5, on page 981 of the White Bibles. 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.

You may be seated. Well, good morning, and welcome to Holy Trinity Church.

As we begin our summer series that will take us all the way up to Advent, we plan on handling the first half of the book of John.

[1 : 07] And so those wonderful journals that you've been given, since they all look alike, and since you don't always take things with you when you go, put your name in it, or we'll have a mess through the year.

Bring it to community group, and keep writing in it, and in some time you'll have your own record of what we're doing in the book of John. How does someone come to know God?

How might anyone, any one of us, enter into a meaningful relationship with God? How can you know that you're hearing from God, or walking with God?

How can you be sure that you're beginning to understand and grasp the purposes of God, or grabbing hold of the life that God intends?

Has he left any signs along the way, hints in the created world, and by means of revealing himself to us?

[2 : 18] These questions are John's concern. These questions are the reasons for which he picked up his pen and published his news, which will lead us to Jesus, or as we're putting it this year, Jesus according to John.

In the first five verses, which is as far as we'll make our way today, John would already, in those short verses, persuade you and me that the questions we wonder about will be answered as we wrestle down what he means by word.

I mean, his argument is wonderfully put in the opening six words in English.

In the beginning was the word. I mean, on a day when we think of the incarnation of Christ and his descending to earth, on a day when we think of the arrival of the Spirit in Pentecost and attending our life, in a day in which we're wondering where do we go to find God, John opens by pushing your mind back as far as he possibly could.

He doesn't open like Mark does with Jesus already at age 30. He doesn't open like Luke does with those interlocking narratives of the birth of the Baptist.

[4 : 01] He doesn't open as Matthew does with an earthly genealogy. He pushes you from the infancy of Christ or the early ministry of Christ.

He pushes you from the genealogy of Christ. And he is going to move you back to this phrase, in the beginning was the word.

What does he mean by word? It's such an evocative opening. As someone who appreciates literature, you work hard at the very first sentence.

And this is a phrase that has elicited volumes. In the beginning was the word.

It's enigmatic. You're not quite sure what to do with it. It's mentally invigorating. And truth be told, it's rooted in the soil of an ancient world that had a multitude of options in regard to what it may or may not mean.

[5 : 14] In other words, it's intentionally ambiguous. Word. Lagos.

In the Greco-Roman world, that would have just simply meant some rational principle by which all things exist or could be explained.

In other words, you can't get back beyond word, the rational principle of existence, or others like Philo who would have thought, well, or others who would have thought, well, there's a philosophical sense to word.

There's an ideal word, and then there's all the words that we have. Or there are others who would say, word is equated with wisdom.

And in the beginning, you have wisdom, which creates and moves. In our own day, word is associated with human reasoning. And human reasoning is the source of all things that therefore are created.

[6 : 20] You could even get as tight as words like science and its relationship to that which is known and explained. And so John says, in the beginning was the word.

And ink is being spilled through the centuries. Because with so many options, most people are trying to discern which arena is John drawing upon.

Which I think is the wrong question entirely. I don't think John is drawing upon word through a particular stream that was known by his reader in isolation from other streams.

Rather, I think he's laying down a gauntlet before all of those streams. His self-understanding of word is going to challenge every particular conception of what we mean by word.

He's not mirroring something in the ancient world as much as he is challenging the self-perception of anyone in that world who thinks they know what they mean by word.

[7 : 43] It's not a lens through which he decides to communicate. By John's word, he actually is putting forward something that is gazing on you and sizing you up.

In the beginning was the word. And I'm convinced that if you want to know how to come to know God, you have to wrestle down John's conception of word.

Let me do it in three ways this morning from these verses. What might John mean by word that would challenge every conception that we have when we consider the term?

First, for John, word has a particular relationship relationship to God. I want to show you that in the first two verses.

Particularly in two ways. He's going to tell you that word is with God and that word was God. Hear him out. Hear him out if you're wanting to know how you might come to know God.

[8 : 58] He says, in the beginning was the word and the word was with God. There's the preposition. And then the word was God.

And then beautifully balanced, verse 2, he was in the beginning with God. What does John mean then when he speaks of the word and its relationship to God?

First of all, that it is with God. Literally, toward God. It's almost as if John is saying, when I think of word, I can speak of word in distinction or in particular ways that don't just get enfolded within God. In other words, for John, word is facing God. But, he knows that that would not be the conception of what he thinks word is.

It's not merely distinct from or particularized away from. He goes on and says, and the word was God. In other words, that which faces God, that which can be spoken of as being toward God, that which can be talked about with particularity when one speaks of God, is nevertheless God.

[10 : 27] Now, the Jehovah's Witnesses, which will knock on your door, will refer to this verse and they will indicate to you that at the end of the verse there, and the word was God, there's no definite article before the word God.

So, they would interpret it to say that the word was a God. And that the Christian understanding of what will be anticipated later in the book that Jesus himself is God, falls.

That's just not the way language works. I mean, if you even glance your eye across to verse 49, you'll have the same construction in the original language.

Nathaniel answered him, Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel. There's no definite article before king in the text either. But nobody, Jehovah's Witnesses included, would think that that verse means you're the son of God, but you're merely a king of Israel.

It just doesn't work that way. It's not the way language works. So, what John is saying concerning the word that he wants you to wrestle down, word has a relationship to God.

[11 : 38] Word can be spoken of in distinction from God or with particularity in God. word faces God. Word is toward God. Word in one measure is distinct from God as long as you allow me the

next sentence.

Word also equals God. In essence, is God. John Calvin, I was reading this week when I was trying to wrestle down those verses as I've given them to you.

and I thought, how come I can't say it the way he does? Here's what he said. Just as men's speech is called the expression of their thoughts, so it is not inappropriate to say that God expresses himself by his speech or word.

word. That, for John, word is the very expression of the mind and thought, indeed, image of God. How do you come to know God? How do you know that you're hearing from God? John will say, I'm going to unfold for you over 21 chapters that editors have divided up that if you want to know God, you will have to know the self-expression of God.

[13:10] And the self-expression of the mind and image of God is word. And that word was in the beginning with God. I mean, it is, it is beautifully put.

But then he moves on. He wants you to know that there's not only a relationship of this word to God, there's a relationship of this word to the world in which you and I live. I mean, look at verse 3. All things were made through him and without him not anything made that was made. In him was life.

Now, just as the relationship of the word to God I framed through those ideas of with God and was God. In these verses, the relationship of the word to the world goes like this.

Everything is through him and there's something that we have in him. There's something through word, there's something in word.

[14:14] What is through him? Now, intriguingly, and the translators, you know, you can't blame them, but here they've used a personal pronoun, he.

But in some sense, they're anticipating next week's sermon where word is further explained to be personified in an individual.

But at this point, there's no distinct personality in play. If you can just kind of limit your range up to verse 5, it would really sound something like this.

That the word was in the beginning with God. All things were made through the word and without the word was not anything made that was made and in the word was life.

That would actually be what you're hearing. Everything was made through the word. word. That that which was God and yet in relationship to God is the maker of all things you and I know.

[15:26] That word creates. Now there's a real echo here into Genesis 1, isn't there? If you've ever read the very opening of the Bible, it seems to me that John is wanting you to attach something back to Genesis 1, where it says in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was formless and void and the spirit was hovering over the waters and God said, there's the idea of language and word, God said, let there be light and there was light.

So that at the very beginning of the Bible, you're hearing that God created the world through word and here you're hearing that that word was such that nothing that has been made or came into existence did so outside of his word.

I mean, this is really stunning then. The word then is by nature a creative force. This is why people say, what changes the world today? And the true answer is an idea.

An idea that can be communicated has the power to change because words by nature are creative. So in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and he said, let there be light and there was light is an indication that word creates and that you don't have anything that has been created into existence without word.

Now, you create differently than God creates. You create out of stuff. You create out of things that have been given to you whether they be in the material world or through philosophical thought you're able to create.

[17:14] But when there was nothing, God stood on nothing, looked out across nowhere and said something and all things began to move.

This is amazing. Let me put it to you this way. Word then according to John is what breath, human breath is to speech. It creates.

It can't help but create. You want to get from point A to being a car this week, what do you got to do? You got to put gas in the car.

Don't talk to me about your plugging into your electric thing. Some of you might have that Prius but you have trouble going uphill. I know that. word to what is made is what gas is to going.

And it's even more intimate than that. It's what making love is to creating life. life. So word, everything is through him but that's what's anticipated.

[18 : 32] Also, word is the life you and I know is in him. That's what it says there. In him was life.

In the word was life. Life was in the word. The word is life. There is no life without word. You want a life? You have to know word.

Now, coming up with that is the thing that's going to be interesting. So what is it that I grab hold of or who is it that I listen to? John says, let me put it this way.

John is going to anticipate just for a moment because you already know he's going to talk about Jesus. but we're going to hold him off until next week for the most part until we get to this table behind me.

But if you want to know God, it isn't that in Jesus you can get a life. It isn't that in Jesus you can have a life.

[19 : 40] It isn't that the word that comes to you embraced by faith will provide for you a life. No, that when you embrace John's conception of word, when you do Jesus according to John, you have life.

He's not giving you something at his disposal. He is life. Word is life.

There's something in these early verses. about word. Word has a relationship to God, with God, was God.

Word has a relationship to the world in which you and I live. It all came through him. It all in one sense is in him. But let me close this down over the next six minutes this way.

There's a third thing. There's a relationship of the word, not only to God or the world, but to you and me. This is where this magisterial opening becomes intentionally intimate.

[21 : 01] In him was life, notice the phrase, and the life was the light of men. just as in Genesis 1, you're introduced to God and the heavens and the earth, but by the end of the chapter he's narrowed down to the creation of a man and a woman.

So too here, you're introduced to God and the world, but his attention is on the world of men and women. Word somehow is pressing in upon you and me as light.

Light reveals. Light makes manifest. Light shines so that you can see.

I asked you the question at the beginning, where do you go to see God? How do you know that you are walking in the light of the pathway of God? Well, the word which is life is light unto us.

Now, notice what he says here. The light shines in the darkness. First of all, the light shines.

Change of tense, present tense where everything has been heirs to before that.

[22 : 29] The light is shining. The light is already here. The light is making itself manifest. And look what it's doing.

The word as light is displacing darkness. The indication of John is that the word which is God and who knows God and created all things for the glory of God is now being manifested in the world of men and women and it's shining.

but when it shines it's breaking in upon darkness which is challenging for you and me because implicit in John's thought then isn't that we are all born as children of light but that we are all dwelling in moral darkness and upon which this light shines the word makes manifest the moral fabric of our personhood that's never fun is it let me wake you up sooner or later it's going to get warm in Chicago and sooner or later you're going to want to go outside and you want to be clothed for the warmth and sooner or later you're going to be at the lake and you go man

I'd love to go on that lake but man it's been a Chicago winter and I got 15 more pounds on me than I wanted and I don't want anything about my person manifested the word is making manifest the moral fabric of our life and it indicates we are in a place of need we're covered and we're going to need covering or coming to know God through word will only expose and set us off in a frightful way away from him the word displaces darkness the word is pressing in on the minds of men and women the word it has two words here it's really fascinating the darkness has not overcome it in other words the word will not be shut out the word will have its way let me think on this for just a moment before we go to the Lord's table the word is light for us but the word also is not something that can be seized by us or subjugated to us so if you're sitting here going how do

I get hold of God well the darkness has not overcome it literally in other places the darkness can't really seize it the darkness can't comprehend it the darkness can't understand it so what John is doing in the first five verses is placing us in an awful predicament he's telling us I'm going to tell you

how you can know God you will know God through word word is related to God word is related to the world word is coming into the minds and hearts of men and women and men and women are not able to get hold of it it's like it's like sand through the fingers is word in other words you can't grab hold of God your mind!

[26 : 34] heart has deficiencies brought on by sin that make it impossible for us to govern God the world cannot seize it the world cannot grab it John 12 35 walk while you have the light in the world and the world itself will not overcome it this is what John is saying nothing you cannot subjugate the word to you you must be subjugated to the word how are we going to come to know God John says wrestle down word how do we wrestle down word look for one who faces

God is God through whom the world is created by God and in whom he makes manifest upon your heart will and life the reality and the fact that you need change and only he can do it you're going to see a lot of signposts along the way that lead you from that opening verses to the man named Jesus but today I leave you one sign the body and blood of our Lord the means by which we will eventually come to know God our heavenly father we give now the rest of our service to being strengthened by a tangible sign that can be tasted that speaks to the perfect sign that makes you known and so we come with anticipation to this part of the service in Christ's name amen