

Introduction to John's Gospel - Part 1

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[0 : 00] John was known as the beloved disciple.

And as a young fisherman, as I've said to the children, he was called by Jesus to follow him. And he walked the roads of Palestine for three years. He saw him crucified, and he saw him after his resurrection.

We don't know much about John's life after that. We assume he was a preacher of the gospel, an active apostle.

But we know that as an old man, he was inspired by God to sit down and write an account of what happened when Jesus was with them. And that account is ours today in John's gospel.

So we're going to spend this morning and this afternoon's message also on the first 18 verses of the first chapter of John.

[1 : 07] It's known as the prologue to John's gospel, a kind of an introduction where John tells us what the whole book is going to be about in brief.

And I want to consider the points that are on the screen you see before you there. John's purpose in writing. Jesus, the eternal word.

Jesus, the word who became flesh and lived among us. We're going to look at those this morning together.

What was John's purpose in writing? Now this is the first chapter of John. To find his purpose in writing, we need to go to almost the last chapter.

We need to go to chapter 20. When we read that in chapter 20 and verse 30, John wrote, Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book.

[2 : 14] But these are written so you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

You see, John's purpose in writing wasn't simply to write a biography of Jesus. It wasn't so that his readers would get their history right. His purpose was that those who read would come to have faith in Jesus.

That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ. He wanted them to come to a faith that makes them sharers in God's eternal life.

in believing that they might have a life in his name. Now, many people say they've got faith.

They say, I have my faith. That's me. I don't want to talk about it. If you ask them what they've got faith in, then I'm maybe not so sure, not so clear. To say, I've got faith doesn't mean that my faith is pleasing to God.

[3 : 29] To say, oh, I believe in God isn't necessarily what God wants. Jesus once spoke to his enemies and they believed in God.

They were religious men, very religious men, but they opposed Jesus and they killed him eventually. And Jesus said to them, you believe in God? Fine. So do the devils.

And they tremble. You see, the belief of the devils does not save them. They do not doubt the existence of God. They know he is there.

He is. They do not doubt it, but they tremble because they do not have a faith that saves. John wrote this book, That We Might Believe.

So how are we doing? What about us this morning? You see, when we read the Bible, we need to judge our faith and make sure it's a biblical faith.

[4 : 31] We need to make sure we believe what God has revealed to us in his word and not just what we think is true about God. You see, when we, God as a spirit and we can't see him and when we try and imagine God, we invariably go wrong and we imagine an idol of some sort and we can only know God because he's a speaking God and he has spoken in his word and revealed himself to us.

So, John wanted his readers to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God because it is faith in Jesus, the Son of God, that saves.

It is a faith that believes that he's the Messiah promised in the Old Testament and he came to rescue and save his people.

Old Testament believers look forward to his coming, you see. We, if you read it in Luke chapter 2, you find two of them mentioned, Simeon, an old man, and Anna.

Simeon waiting for the consolation of Israel and Anna waiting for the redemption of Israel and they saw the baby Jesus. God, God, the Holy Spirit took them into the temple that day and Jesus was being presented in the temple and they saw him and they recognized him and Simeon would say, mine eyes have seen your salvation.

[6 : 13] They recognized who the baby Jesus was and he said, now I'm ready to die. Now I've seen your salvation. As I've said, John and the Gospel writers weren't just writing a history, a bare record of the facts of Jesus' life.

John was writing a message from God, inspired by God. Good news to all people. As the angels announced the shepherds of Bethlehem and he wanted us to understand it.

He wanted us to realize that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. The Jews had been waiting for their Messiah for hundreds of years.

At least they thought they had been. Jesus had come. He had taught. He had worked miracles. They had seen his glory a little bit and they had crucified him.

He had risen, but the main part of the Jewish people still did not accept him. Now, John writes the message down.

[7 : 24] See, the original witnesses to Jesus' life and teaching would soon all have gone. John was maybe the last living disciple. He lived to be a very old man by all early church history.

Lived to be a very old man. And he writes down all that he, that the Lord prompted him to write. And he starts in this prologue by summarizing the message of the book.

Here we find the major themes that the rest of the book will show us. I'm only going to look at two of those themes this morning. We're going to look at Jesus, the eternal word, and Jesus who became flesh and lived among us.

Jesus, the eternal word, then. John's gospel, which we're considering, is one of four gospels to state, something you all know, of course.

And they give us nearly everything that we can know about the life and miracles of Jesus. They all start differently. Mark starts with the baptism by John of Jesus and he goes straight in to Jesus' ministry.

[8 : 49] Matthew begins his gospel by giving us the genealogy, the family tree of Jesus back to Abraham.

Luke goes one step further. he gives us the family tree back to Adam in the garden, right back to Eden. And John, well, John begins in the beginning.

In the beginning was the word. He begins by echoing the opening words of the Bible. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

See, here John is reaching back to before the creation of the world and saying that even then, even then, when nothing that we know existed, God created the universe out of nothing.

How did he do it? It was the word. God all things were made by him, the word. And without him was not anything made that was made.

[10 : 07] We ask who or what is the word? The word here is the Greek word logos. And when we read the passage, we find that John wasn't talking about ink on paper or sounds coming out of somebody's mouth.

This word was there from the beginning. This word was with God. This word was God. Now, we need to perhaps try and enter into the Hebrew mind at the time.

In the Hebrew mind, the word of God is God himself in his creative action. and very often they would use the word of God instead of God's name because they wouldn't use God's name.

They were so concerned that they would take his name in vain. So they would have understood what John was talking about when he was talking about the word of God.

They would have known he was talking about God. We see it in Psalm 33 verse 6. By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

[11 : 23] And so here in our passage we see all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.

Everything we see, everything we can't see even, and everything that exists was made by him. And this word is a person. It's clear here that he's a person.

John refers to the word as he or him and as someone in verse 14 who becomes flesh and dwells among us and we have seen his glory.

The word, the word is a creator of all things. The word was with God. The word was God. The word is our Lord Jesus.

Finally named named in verse 17. The law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. The word is our Lord Jesus.

[12 : 31] The Gettys have a wonderful hymn which puts this teaching very clearly. God says, you're the word of God the Father from before the world began.

Every star and every planet has been fashioned by your hand. All creation holds together by the power of your voice. Let the skies declare your glory.

Let the land and seas rejoice. You're the word of God the Father. The word the creator of all things the eternal God.

The word became the word Jesus the eternal word. Now young people you will be taught other explanations to the origin of the world in school.

quite likely. You'll be taught it just happened that one day there was a big bang and when the dust had settled and joined up together there was a universe and a few million years later we come along.

[13 : 50] That life has evolved from non-life and in this teaching there's no room for a creator and no need for a creator and you'll be taught it as a fact probably not as a theory and expect it to be able to describe it in your exams.

Well you can describe the theory in your exams but remember by the word of the Lord the heavens were made and by the breath of his mouth all the starry hosts.

Remember it isn't something that happened by evolutionary chants over millions of years. Jesus spoke our world into being and keeps it in being.

He is the eternal word. We see here in his opening verses that the story of Jesus did not start in Bethlehem in the reign of Caesar Augustus.

No. Jesus the word existed before the world began. before anything that we can see or know existed.

[15 : 03] Jesus was. There never was a time when he was not. There never was a time when he was not. He is the eternal word.

The same yesterday, today and forever. were. Secondly, I want to think about Jesus the word who became flesh and lived among us.

Verse 14 there. We have it. Jesus and the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory. Glory is the only son from the father full of grace and truth.

He became flesh. flesh. Now he didn't come as a spirit, drifting around, taking shape at times. He didn't come even as a spirit, taking up residence in a body, but not being part of it.

Like water in a glass. You know, if you pour water into the glass, I've got one here. I'll take a little sip of it while I'm at it. the glass stays as a glass and the water is water.

[16 : 16] And you can pour the water out of the glass and there's no change in the glass. It's not like that for Jesus. He became flesh and lived among us.

He took on our humanity in its entirety, except without sin. God became a man. He had a real body that sweated, cried, ached with weariness, real flesh.

Yet he was also God. The divine and the human became one in Jesus. You couldn't separate them. He came along with a microscope or a scalpel and examined the living Jesus.

You couldn't separate the divine from the human. They were united. Let me read to you how the Westminster Confession of Faith describes this.

The incarnation of Jesus, as we call it, the taking on of the human flesh. The confession says, the Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin.

[17 : 53] Yet without sin. Taking upon himself man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof.

The Word became flesh and lived among us. The eternal Word became a man, but he didn't cease to be God. He was still the only Son from the Father.

There could never be another Jesus. The glory which we see in him can never be equal, for it is the glory of God himself. In Jesus, God, the Creator, became a creature.

One of us, humanity entered into the Godhead. That's the wonder of the incarnation, the taking on of our flesh.

And that's the measure of how much we matter to God. He came among us, he lived among us, he became one of us, that we might be brought back to him.

[19 : 01] Lo, within a manger lies he who built the starry skies. Think of that. Think of that. Jesus, a completely normal baby, helpless, needing fed, needing changed, yet still fully and eternally God of one substance with the Father.

He became flesh and he made his dwelling among us. Now, the literal meaning of those words is that he pitched his tent among us. This again would have taken the Jewish readers back to the desert wanderings in the wilderness.

When their fathers had come out of Egypt, they'd made the tabernacle and God had come and it was the seat of God's presence, if you like, among them.

them. And they saw glimpses of his glory, the pillar of cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night, the voice from the mountain.

They saw all these things. And they would have recognized when John spoke that he had made his dwelling among us, that would have come to their mind, because they were people who knew their Bibles.

[20 : 19] Now God was come to live among them in a more personal way. The writer to the Hebrews, in Hebrews chapter 1, he writes, In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways.

But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed, heir of all things, through whom he made the universe, the Son.

We're talking here about a village carpenter walking the roads of Palestine. The Son is the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful Word.

The Word, the Son of God, became a man, a real man, a true man, yet he remained God, the eternal God, in a manger, ruling the universe, and he completely and fully reveals God to us.

The revelation is complete. Revelation is complete. He is spoken to us by his Son, the regents of God's glory, the exact representation of his person.

[21 : 41] There's no further revelation to be added because Jesus has come and Jesus completed the revelation of God.

You know, later on in John's Gospel, Philip tells us that, or John tells us rather, Philip said to Jesus, show us the Father and that will keep us happy, as it were.

And what did Jesus reply? He replied, He who has seen me has seen the Father. He who has seen me has seen the Father.

You want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus. He who has seen me has seen the Father. That is the wonder of it.

You see Jesus weeping at the tomb. You see Jesus healing the sick man. You see Jesus preaching the Gospel. You see Jesus having pity on the woman taken in adultery.

[22 : 44] This is what God is like. There's a man, the God man, at the right hand of God in heaven, praying for us.

He is now our great high priest. Jesus, the Son of God, who can sympathize with our weakness because he knows what it is to be tempted.

And now through him we can find grace to help us in our time of need. So we've got John's reason for writing, we've got Jesus the eternal word, and we've got Jesus who came and became flesh and lived among us.

There's a wonderful hymn which I was going to quote to you. I think it might be here. Is it here? Here? Pause for the technical side.

Ah, there we are. I found it. Though now ascended up on high, asked Jesus, he bends on earth a brother's eye, partaker of the human name, he knows the frailty of our friend.

[24 : 00] Our fellow sufferer yet retains a fellow feeling of our pains, and still remembers in the skies his tears, his agonies, and cries.

In every pang that rends the heart, the man of sorrows has a part. He sympathises with our grief, and to the sufferer sends relief.

With boldness, therefore, at the throne, let us make all our sorrows known, and ask the aid of heavenly power to help us in the evil hour.

In every pang that rends the heart, the man of sorrows has a part. John wants us to believe that, to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, God's rescuer, who's come to rescue us.

Jesus came, and John wrote, that we might believe, and in believing, we might become children of God.

[25 : 07] Now, we're going to carry on with the passage this evening, and I hope you can come. If you can't come, I hope you'll be on Zoom. May God bless his word to all our hearts.

Let's pray. Father, we do thank you indeed for our Lord Jesus. thank you that he sympathizes with our griefs, that he hears our prayers, that he bends down to show himself strong on our behalf.

Oh, Father, we praise you for these great truths. We thank you that he became a man that we might become sons of God. We thank you, Lord, that he lived and he died to bring us back to you.

We praise you for that, Lord. We pray you'll write your word on our hearts. Bless us now, we pray, in Jesus' name.