

John 1:1-5

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[0:00] Well, good morning again. You guys will have to watch me.! John chapter 1.

And I'm really excited about it and a little bit terrified. This is one of the mountain peaks. And so I invite you to turn with me to John chapter 1.

And last week, as you're turning there, last week we began with the end in mind. It's always a wise thing to do. We turned to the conclusion of John's Gospel where he taught us what his purpose was in writing this Gospel.

He tells us what he hopes that we will get out of this. John chapter 20, verses 30 and 31. He said, 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.

[1:24] The whole book of John is concerned with revolves around who is this Jesus. And whether the people he encounters trust in him or not.

Trust in him as he comes to offer them eternal life. And that's what we saw last Sunday. That's where John concludes. Today we'll see that it's also where he begins, talking about who is this Jesus.

And just like in the conclusion, there are kind of two parts to the answer. John wrote his Gospel so that you may believe, one, that Jesus is the Christ, and two, that he is the Son of God.

And that by believing you may have life in his name. And in this introduction, it's often called John's prologue. John testifies to both of those things, that he is the Christ and that he is the Son of God. And he begins, as we'll see today, with the Son of God part. Because that is his eternal being, and the Christ is something he assumed to himself. We'll talk more about that next week.

[2:37] As we discuss the incarnation, the Lord taking to himself a human nature. And so, from beginning to end, the Gospel of John is about the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

The life that he offers, and the response of the world. Even you, and even me. So let's read the opening words of John's Gospel, and ask, who is Jesus?

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. Lord, it's with trembling hands that I come to preach a passage like this.

[3:49] Lord, I pray that you would grant me clarity in my expression. Lord, I pray that you would help us to see the glory of the Word.

The Word who we'll see next time becomes incarnate for our sake. Lord, will you glorify yourself? And will you lead us to believe that Jesus is the Christ?

The Son of God. And by believing, have life in his name. We ask this in his name. Amen. I've heard it said that preaching this passage is really difficult because it's like explaining a joke.

If you have to explain the detailed parts, you lose the big, beautiful idea of it. There is an astonishing amount of doctrine bound up in these five verses.

But it's not just like a lifeless data dump either. It's not just, you know, information. And while it's not quite poetry, it's not quite song, John offers us these truths wrapped up in wonder.

[5:08] It's full of truths and stated with beauty and with elegance. And I think that that beauty is part of what he's trying to tell us.

That this is glorious and wonderful and worthy of our attention and our longing and our love. So that's what we'll try to see and sense today.

We'll try, we'll look and see what John teaches about who Jesus is, namely that he is the Son of God. And we'll look to see some of the wonder with which he holds these truths.

So that believing that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, we will have life in his name. And it's interesting that he starts out talking about the word.

Now, spoiler alert, if you read forward to the rest of the chapter, beginning in verses 14 and onwards, you'll see that he shows that the word is indeed Jesus of Nazareth. But why use this title? [6:14] Why not simply use his name? In the beginning, Jesus existed. Or why not a more familiar title? In the beginning was the Good Shepherd, perhaps.

Or in the beginning was the Almighty. Why the word? Lots of possibilities have been suggested over the centuries. One possibility is, you know, like the rest of the New Testament.

John wrote his gospel in Greek. And the Greek word for word is logos. And some have suggested that that might be a reference to the logos concept in Greek philosophy.

The ancient Greek philosophers understood that to be, that's what they named like this organizing principle or rationality of the universe. One writer summarized the concept like this.

In stoic thought, logos was reason. The impersonal principle governing the universe. A spark of universal reason was thought to reside within people, at least the best and wisest of them.

[7:17] And certainly, a Greek audience reading the gospel of John would have connected John's words here to ultimate reality. And certainly, John is talking about ultimate reality.

But John is a thoroughly Jewish writer, writing about the Jewish Messiah. He almost certainly has a Hebrew concept in mind when he calls Jesus the Word.

And as you see here, he ties the Word, verse 3, to creation. And it reminds us, how did the Lord create all things? By his Word, right?

In the beginning, Genesis chapter 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And God said, let there be light. And there was light. And God said, let there be light. And there was light. And then follows this long sequence of God creating all things, not with hands, or with tools, or by agents, or by any exertion.

[8:31] But God said, and it was so. He created by his Word. The Psalms pick up this theme. Psalm 33 says, By the Word of the Lord, the heavens were made.

And by the breath of his mouth, all their host. And that idea that the Word of the Lord comes again and again and again throughout all the Hebrew Scriptures leading up to the Gospels.

And it is portrayed, this Word of the Lord is portrayed in some very, very interesting ways. Personal ways.

We see in the book of Exodus that the people fear, that is, they reverence the Lord, and they also fear the Word of the Lord.

As if there was a distinction. You can see that in Exodus chapter 9. Repeatedly, the Word of the Lord isn't presented just as content. Not just as information, like the message that he would be saying.

[9:42] But the Word of the Lord repeatedly, repeatedly comes to people. Visits the prophets.

Almost as if the Word is, in some sense, his personal presence. Not just a message. Most frequently this happens when he visits the prophets. If you just do a search for the Word of the Lord, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel especially, have like a million hits on that.

It also comes to, the Word of the Lord also comes to other people. King Solomon, for instance, in 1 Kings chapter 6. And that presence of the Word of the Lord not just comes in a blip, but he can also reside with people.

And so we read in 2 Kings chapter 3, Jehoshaphat said, the Word of the Lord is with Elisha. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

The Word of the Lord isn't just a spoken message. Get this. Zechariah chapter 7. The Word of the Lord speaks.

[11:01] The Word of the Lord speaks. Zechariah chapter 7 verses 8 and 9. And the Word of the Lord came to Zechariah saying, Zechariah chapter 8. The Word of the Lord has a voice.

And this isn't a one-off. This happens in chapter 4, in chapter 7, in chapter 8, again in chapter 8. It keeps going. The Word of the Lord has agency.

Psalms chapter 107 shows us that the Word of the Lord heals. Very interesting. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble and He delivered them from their distress. He sent out His Word and healed them and delivered them from their destruction.

And the Word of the Lord reveals the Lord. 1 Samuel chapter 3. And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel to Samuel at Shiloh by the Word of the Lord.

And so, the Word of the Lord throughout the Hebrew Scriptures is not simply a message. It's not merely information. The Word of the Lord acts, creates, visits, as if it's a presence, even dwells with people.

[12:35] The Word itself speaks and heals and reveals the Lord. John understands this, that the Word of the Lord is not like your speech or mine.

Not even like the Word of the kings of this world. The Word of the Lord speaks and exerts a presence and reveals the Lord's very being to His people.

And John, here in chapter 1, is connecting the dots because we're going to see that he has had some very interesting conversations with Jesus that sound an awful lot like what we just heard about the Word of the Lord throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

John heard this exchange between Jesus and His disciples. John chapter 14. Philip said to Him, Lord, show us the Father. Reveal to us the Father, perhaps?

And it is enough for us. Jesus said to Him, Have I been with you so long and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

[13:46] How can you say, show us the Father? John has heard the Lord Jesus say, John chapter 12, Whoever sees me sees Him who sent me.

The Word of the Lord visits and speaks and reveals the Lord and whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father, the Lord. John's connecting the dots and calls Him the Word because Jesus is the true expression of the Lord of Heaven.

Hebrews chapter 1 puts it best. long ago and at many times and in many ways, God spoke. God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son. not like He gave the Son a message to talk to us about, but He, the Son, the very Son, is the very message that He sent to us. He has spoken to us by His Son whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.

And we're going to get to that in verse 3. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature.

[15:08] And He upholds the universe by the word of His power. And John tells us that this word, well, it's really hard to know where to start because there is so much.

We've introduced the main character now, and now John is telling us so much about Him in just five verses. It's hard to know exactly where to start because it's all interrelated. I guess I'll start at the beginning where John says in the beginning was the word.

Right? And this is, that's the first thing that John tells us and it's a clear reference to the first thing that the Bible tells us. Right? Genesis chapter 1 verse 1. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

And then the parallels are quite evident. You can probably notice them. Right? In the beginning, in the beginning. There's talk about God being there at the beginning for both of them. Both talk about creation.

But this is kind of a, this is a big deal the way John is putting this. Right? The word is in the beginning just as God is. This word is creator just as God is.

[16:17] John is drawing these parallels calling them the same. This would be blasphemous if it were some other person. Right? Right?

It wouldn't be a problem except that John is about to say that the word was with God as if the word is somehow distinct from God. Right?

Which is it, John? If the word was God there's no problem here. Maybe it's a weird way to name the Lord but you know there's no logical confusion. But if the word was with God and is distinct from God and yet gets equal billing in the beginning alongside God and is creator like God and the word is life as we'll see like God well that gets kind of complicated doesn't it?

Pause and take a breath. We are going to talk mostly because John talks mostly about what unifies the word and the father.

that's most of what the passage is about. Then we'll turn our eyes to the distinction so we're going to come back to the with God part. Dragon? Dragon. So like we said this is a clear reference to creation the creation account and obviously verse 3 he's talking about being you know creation.

[17:43] John is super careful to make sure we don't misunderstand the word as simply like God's agent of creation.

He is not like the prophets who were God's agent of prophecy. John goes way out of his way in verse 3 to make sure we don't understand that you know all things were made through him right? That's you know that proves the point right there right? Well not for John he wants to be extra certain and says without him not anything was made that was made. There is no space to wiggle in the idea that God you know quickly at the very beginning created the word and then used the word to create other things.

No. Without him was not anything or sorry without him was not anything made that was made. Even himself. The word is not part of the created order. The word created the created order. And friends the scriptures are clear only God is self-existent.

[19:00] Only God is outside of creation. Everything else that exists exists because of him. Everything else both things seen and unseen belongs to the realm of creation.

Everything that you have ever seen or ever touched every star and planet even the angels and the rest of the non-physical world and you yourself all of it is created and as creator he owns it and you. And John is going way out of his way to say that the word made it all if anything anything at all exists apart from himself he made it.

That there is a great chasm a great divide between God and all that he has made on one side of that line exists the one who is self-existence who has life and is himself everything else all of creation came into being by his command and John is careful to put the word on the not-created side of the line the self-existent side of the line and this is the kind of thing that Jesus is going to say about himself too Jesus who John verse 14 and following is going to identify as this word he's going to talk about his own pre-existence he's going to say things like John chapter 8 truly truly I say to you before Abraham was I am and that is an incredibly loaded statement we'll get to it when we get to chapter 8 but you could say well I mean maybe he did pre-exist

Abraham but maybe that makes him just the very first creation right no not possible as he's praying to the father about to go to the cross John chapter 17 Jesus says and now father glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed before creation the word existed with God and shared his glory glory it is one glory belongs to both of them everything that came into being was caused by the word which means that the word isn't part of the things that were made which means that the word was uncreated possessing in himself an eternal everlasting existence which means that to predate everything that started existing means that he has always existed he is in fact eternal which is exactly why

[22:08] John says verse 4 in him was life and the life was the light of men as we progress through the book of John we're going to see that that is true in several ways first here we see that he is the source of all life that he is the creator the originator of all life all things and related to that he upholds and sustains all life we saw that in Hebrews chapter 1 which we quoted earlier and Paul tells us in Acts chapter 17 in him we move and breathe and have our being second we'll see that he offers resurrection life third we'll see him as we talked last week he calls eternal life he has a very specific definition for what that is he defines eternal life in that same high priestly prayer in John 17 verse 3 he says this is eternal life that they know you the only true God in

Jesus

Christ whom you have sent eternal life has less to do with the duration of the life and more to do with the kind of life that it is and it is life that is connected to the Lord we might ask here if there is some distinction here between the word and God how is it that they both have life how is it that the word was life had life in himself the answer begins to point again to that distinction that we mentioned earlier in verse 1 the with God bit jumping ahead to chapter 5 verse 26 Jesus is going to tell us for as the father has life in himself so he has granted the son also to have life in himself Jesus doesn't call himself the word only John does but

Jesus calls himself the son that's perhaps his favorite title for himself and he says here that he has life in himself and that it came from his father so theologians what the church has confessed throughout the centuries is that there is an order to the trinity the father to the son to the spirit however we must not mistake the order as if the father is more God than the son or the spirit right the father can't be father without the son that it simply couldn't be a father without a son always neither of them exist without their mutual spirit that is their substance so there clearly is an order he's showing us here a procession some might call it in the inner life of God but it isn't in terms of time like the father came first and then

I would like a son right if there ever was a time when the son wasn't then the father wasn't father not possible in his great little book delighting in the trinity Michael Reeves writes perhaps the way to appreciate this best is to ask what God was doing before creation and some smart aleck might be well what was he doing before creation making hell for those cheeky those!

cheeky enough to ask such questions but actually it's an easy question to answer Jesus tells us explicitly in John chapter 17 father he says you loved me before the creation of the world and that is the God revealed by Jesus Christ before he ever created before he ever ruled the world before anything else this God was a father loving his son and that little book delighting in the trinity I highly commend I think we're out of copies of it probably by now I highly commend it to you can tell the doctrine of the trinity is not some confusing thing that we're like yeah we confess that let's get back to the normal stuff it is the very core and center that when you think about the trinity think about the gospel think about the God who came and gave himself gave his son I highly commend it's a short read it's a!

[26:51] a wonderful read It will make your heart sing for the beauty of our triune God. The nature that we see here, there is motion in the Godhead, so to speak.

The essence of God revealed in the Bible is like an eternal flow of mutual love between the Father and the Son, His Word, in the bond of their one spirit. And God is unchanging.

You might be a little bit unsure about that language of motion. The scriptures are clear that God is unmoved, that He does not have passions. That's a technical term.

Not passions like passionate about stuff. But He is unmoved. He does not change. But He is unchanging like an everlasting hurricane, a ceaselessly flowing river as the Father delights in and grants self-existence to the Son.

A delight that is returned to the Father by the Son in the bond of their one spirit. And you've got the spirit isn't highlighted here in chapter 1. Don't worry.

[28:01] Jesus is going to teach us quite a bit about Him soon enough. Which reminds me that it's probably a good idea as we're thinking forward and forward and forward, it might be a good time to look back and see what we skipped over, that second half of verse 1 and verse 2.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. The Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

That with God and was God part. That reality is difficult for our minds to comprehend because the Bible is so clear. There is only one God.

Deuteronomy 6. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Deuteronomy 4. The Lord is God. There is no other beside Him.

Know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath.

[29:01] There is no other. In 1 Kings chapter 8, Solomon prays these inspired words. Let these words of mine, which I have pleaded before the Lord, be near to the Lord our God day and night, and may He maintain the

cause of His servant and the cause of His people, Israel, as each day requires, that all peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God.

There is no other. Yet. From the outset, the Lord is one. But from the outset, scriptures have hinted there is some kind of, I struggled here to say what, there is some kind of diversity.

I don't like the word, but it's the best I have. There is some kind of diversity in God. From that creation account, right? Today we're talking about creation in the beginning.

Well, in the beginning, God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness. Perhaps it's a royal we sort of thing, but perhaps it isn't. In Daniel chapter 7, Daniel witnesses one in a vision, like one like a son of man who receives the glory due the Ancient of Days, the Lord Almighty, right in front of the Lord Almighty.

We saw earlier today that the word of the Lord speaks on behalf of the Lord. None of these prove the doctrine of the Trinity, but there's always these hints, these nudges throughout the Hebrew scriptures that this one God is unlike us.

[30:44] He's not just a supersized human king. He is altogether different. The Orthodox expression of this doctrine is that God is one being in three persons.

Not three people adding up to a triumvirate. Not one person putting on three different hats for three different roles. How could the son then pray to the father?

Not any of the analogies that people have been tempted to make. Every analogy is a heresy. We do not have anything to compare him to because there is nothing to compare him to.

He alone is God. He alone is Lord. He alone is eternal and almighty and omniscient and perfect and triune.

There is nothing to which we can compare him. Which makes the sacrifice of the cross so extraordinary.

[31:46] We can simply say what the scriptures say. There's nothing else to compare him to, but we can say what his word tells us, that the word was with God, that the word was God, that the word has life in himself from the father, that God created all things.

God, the word created all things. That the word shares the father's glory, their one glory from eternity past in a bond of love. And so Christians throughout the ages have confessed these words. We believe in one God, the father almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible, and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the son of God, the only begotten of his father, of the substance of the father, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the father by whom all things were made, both which be in heaven and in earth.

and we worship him. I love how the Anglican preacher, J.C. Ryle, put it. The father and the word, though two persons, are joined by an ineffable union.

Where God the father was from all eternity, there also was the word, even God the son. Their glory, equal, their majesty, co-eternal, and yet their Godhead, one.

[33:34] This is a great mystery. Happy is he who can receive it as a little child, without attempting to explain it. John tells us one last thing, here in verse five, that this God, this triune, self-existent, creating, light-bringing, life-giving Lord, is in conflict.

And it's against, verse four, his very nature, darkness against light. Spoiler alert, it is not a fair fight. Verses four and five read, 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 is a conflict here. Darkness in conflict with light. Now there is some ambiguity here. When John says darkness, he's going to keep using this theme, over and over.

If you read the Gospel of John, he uses it a ton. If you read his letters, first, second, and third John, you will see this light and darkness theme, come out. It's how he expressed himself. When John says darkness, is pitted against God, the light, what does he mean by that?

[34:56] Does he mean the evil kind of darkness? Or the ignorance kind of darkness? And when he says that the darkness has not overcome it, some of your Bibles might say, the darkness has not understood it, because that is also another way to translate that word, because it has multiple senses.

Both terms could be used different ways. And John, in fact, does use them differently. Like, for instance, darkness.

In John chapter 3, clearly, he's using darkness to talk about evil. This is the judgment. The light come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their works were evil.

For everybody who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But then, moving to John chapter 12, he uses darkness to talk about ignorance. Jesus said to them, the light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. The great Bible scholar, Leon Morris, observed that John has this habit of using words that can be taken in different senses.

[36:26] They can be interpreted in more than one way, and he's doing it on purpose for the intention of communicating more. D.A. Carson, in his commentary on the book of John, said, this verse, verse 5, is a masterpiece of planned ambiguity.

Right? And if you think about it, evil, like the two different kinds of darkness, evil and ignorance, they kind of go hand in hand, don't they?

Misunderstanding, the darkness has not understood, and hostility, trying to overcome, right? They kind of live together, don't they? What we're going to see in the book of John is people not understand Jesus, not wanting to understand Jesus.

There's a culpable ignorance, a responsible blindness. darkness, they will reject him, and persecute him, and persecute him because they have on purpose not understood him.

Darkness, misunderstanding, hostility, a plan to overcome him, it all wraps together. And they will think they have overcome him.

[37:46] They will think that they have extinguished his light and entombed it in darkness. But that is simply the word delving down into the grave in verse 4, shining in the final darkness.

As he rises from the grave, after all, in him was life. How do you kill him? As we come to a close here, I want to observe something.

There are no instructions. There are no imperatives. There are no commands in this passage. This passage is about the word, not about us.

It teaches us who our God is and what he's like, and that's the purpose from the outset. Isn't it? The whole point of this book is to know who Jesus is and to entrust yourself to him and to find life in his name.

And so I ask as we think about this Christ and what he has been shown to be in this passage, do you find him trustworthy?

[39:09] As you consider that, I want to read you a quote from John Piper's book, God is the Gospel. I love that title. So often we use the phrase, the Gospel, to talk about a message of good news that salvation is available, which, that's good news.

It's fantastic news. But Piper takes it one step further because being saved brings us to this God and that's the best part of the news.

It says, the Bible teaches that the best and final gift of God's love is the enjoyment of God's beauty. Psalm 27, one thing have I asked of the Lord that I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

The best and final gift of the Gospel is that we gain Christ. Philippians chapter 3, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

How much does that sound like John 17, 3? This is eternal life that they may know you, the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

[40:27] For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. This is the all-encompassing gift of God's love through the Gospel to see and savor the glory of Christ forever.

In the beginning was the Word with God and God. Friends, there is a God of dazzling beauty whose very existence is beyond the comprehension of our minds.

That's the who. We want to trust him. And he came into this world to shine his light and enliven even you and even me.

That you may have life in his name. How? How did this light come into the darkness and shine and seemingly be overcome but not?

Well, that's the whole story that John is telling so we won't say it all right now. But here's a preview.

[41:40] Right? This prologue introduces him as the creator. As we see the book of John unfold, what we will see, I love these words from the theologian Octavius Winslow.

so completely was the word bent upon saving sinners by the sacrifice of himself. He created the tree upon which he was to die and nurtured from infancy the men who were to nail him to the accursed wood.

What a God and what a Savior. Let's pray. Truly, Lord, there is none like you.

There is none like you. And so we turn our hearts to you in wonder as John did.

Lord, I pray that you will turn every heart to the glory and majesty of you, our triune Lord.

[43:00] I pray that you will turn every heart here to trust in you and to find in you the self-existent life-giving light was from before all time in glory and in love.

May we find that life that you came to give us by trusting in his name. Amen.