

The Word on the Word

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

- [0 : 00] Would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening, in Christ's name, Amen. You can grab a seat, folks. Okay, page fell out. What page is it? 21.
- Wonderful to be with you this evening. And thank you, Andrew. That was just so incredibly encouraging. I'm really looking forward to hearing other stories of God's grace.
- Well, tonight we are looking at the Gospel of John. We're beginning this series. It's an incredible book. Over the next few weeks, we'll sort of unpack a bit about what makes this book unique.
- But just for this evening, what I want to do is I just want to dive right into these first 18 verses. These verses are the, you call them the overture. You call them the overture of the book.
- You know, like an overture of a piece of music perhaps kind of runs through little snippets of various melodies, you know. And this is what it's doing. It's throwing out some of the main themes of John.
- [1 : 01] And you've heard it read and it's soaring stuff and it's mind melting, really. But I think if we could break it down into just a couple of things, I'd say this. In this epilogue, in this prologue, in this overture, you'd say that it's about, one, the greatness of Christ.
- And two, the greatness of his grace. And those two points are going to form the structure of the sermon. So first, let's get into it. The greatness of Christ. Okay. So the Gospel of Mark and Luke, they start off by telling us about, you know, John the Baptist.
- That's kind of one of the first things that comes up. Matthew. That Gospel starts off by talking about, well, with genealogy. It traces Christ's ancestry back to Abraham.
- Well, John starts before Abraham. Starts before Adam. Starts before creation. Would appear to start before time. And very simply, it says, in the beginning was the Word.
- Obviously referencing Genesis 1 here. In the beginning, Jesus was. In the beginning, Jesus was. It means there was. He was eternally with the Father.
- [2 : 26] Jesus was not created. There was no point when Jesus was not. Now, why John chooses to call Jesus the Word, we'll come to in a moment.
- But the passage continues. In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God. So, in the beginning was the eternal Jesus. And in these two amazing claims, the Word was with God.
- And was God. So, first, Jesus was with God. So, He is distinct from God. Jesus is distinct from God. But this word with here, it's a very interesting word.
- It's like this incredible intimacy. Like there's this continuous movement towards each other. The Son and the Father are continually moving towards each other.
- Like a scene in a bad romantic movie. Beach. Lovers running towards each other in slow motion. And they drag it out for ages. And Journey plays in the background.
- [3 : 26] You know, like that kind of scene, right? That's kind of the sense of us. This continuous movement towards each other. Jesus was with God. In the most way, two...

In the most intimate way, two distinct things can be with each other. Jesus was with the Father. The second claim. Jesus was God.

In the Da Vinci Code, if you remember that, one of the main characters says that Christians never considered Jesus to be God up until the Council of Nicaea in about the 4th century.

This is, of course, nonsense. It's here in very clear language, in very plain language. The Word was God. Now here's where it's probably helpful to define the Word.

Why does John use the word, Word, to describe Jesus? Well, John's borrowing from two different cultures of the time. The first is Greek. Okay. Greeks and the Hebrews.

[4 : 26] So the Greek word is logos. And the Stoics. People of the time, the Stoics, philosophers, they love this word. It's like their favorite word in the world. And they use it to describe the principle that ordered the universe, like the force in Star Wars.

That kind of thing, right? Now the Israelites use the word to signify God's creative power. You know, God speaks and stuff happens.

So John's attempting to bridge these two cultures and make the gospel more understandable. So he appropriates that word. So what is he saying when he's calling Jesus the word? He's saying two things.

He's saying, first, the thing that makes sense of the world is not an abstract principle, Stoics, as he's saying. It's not a principle. It's not just a formula, an idea.

It's a person. That's what makes sense of the world, a person. Plato, in about 400 BC, said this. It may be that someday there will come forth from God a word, a logos, who will reveal all mysteries and make everything plain.

[5 : 30] So Plato was hoping for a formula to make sense of everything. What did God send? God sent a person. God sent a person.

So that's what he's telling the Greeks. There is no unifying theory. There's flesh and blood. A man. Now, second, by calling Jesus the word, the Hebrew people would have heard the word of God, right?

This idea of the expression of God. So it's saying Jesus, to those folks, is the expression of God. The ultimate expression of God is not more commandments, Hebrew people. It's not more commandments.

The ultimate expression of God is a person. It's Jesus. So and some, so far, what have we got? We've got Jesus who was always there.

Jesus who is God, but distinct from God. Now, the Bible doesn't explain how something can be, can be something and yet distinct from it. And this is the mystery of the Trinity.

[6 : 32] Bible doesn't explain it. It just proclaims it. So that's all I'm going to do is proclaim it. Okay. Now have a look at verse three there. All things were made through him and without him there was not anything made that was made.

It's the scripture we started the service of with. John's really ratcheting up here his definition of Jesus. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.

What does it mean? It means that the word, Jesus, was God's agent in creation. The pre-existent Jesus made everything. Now, in case you think, you know, John's like really talking it up here.

Kind of sort of making stuff up that's not really biblical. Let me quote Jordan. Actually, what Jordan quoted at the start, not that. What Jordan quoted at the start was Colossians here. For by him, Colossians 1, for by him all things were created.

Him is Jesus here. By him all things were created in heaven and earth, visible and invisible. Whether thrones or dominions or rules or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

[7 : 41] It was Christ that put the estimated 100 octillion stars in the universe. That's one with 29 zeros after it. He made them. They were for him.

Now, obviously, these things we're talking about are just enormous, right? And we're just sort of skimming the surface here. All right. So we're talking about the greatness of Christ. And what are the claims so far?

The word, Jesus, is divine, is God. The word is personal. It's inherently relational. This person was never created, Jesus.

He's always existed. And he's the source of all life. Now, is that bigger than the Jesus you have in mind?

This Jesus that John proclaims here is surely worthy of our plans and our dreams and worthy of all of our affections and clearly deserving of our trust.

[8 : 43] The remarkable thing that John here, that he does, I think, that's really important for us in an age of spiritual foggiess is he doesn't, you read this and you go, we cannot tame Jesus.

We cannot reduce Jesus. And that's really important. Because every perversion of the gospel, almost every perversion of the gospel, every Christian sect, every liberal theology, every Christian cult, almost always the root of that is a reduction of Jesus.

It's the word, it's the word, it's the word, to make Jesus smaller. Gerhard Lofink, that's exactly how you pronounce his name, is a German Catholic theologian.

Let me read, let me read a chapter from a book. Ah, no, that's a bit long, isn't it? Let me read a paragraph from a book. Sorry, ESL. It's confusing.

Jesus, here's what he says. Jesus is tamed and rendered irrelevant when he is presented only as a sympathetic rabbi, a prophet mighty in word and deed, or a gifted charismatic, or as the first feminist, or a radical social revolutionary, or a gregarious social worker.

[10 : 24] All that conceals his true claim. In all these categories, Jesus is shrunken, distorted, twisted into shape, planed smooth, disempowered, and accommodated to our secret desires.

Folks, this is why these first words of John are such a treasure to the church. Okay, we're going to keep going.

Let's move on to the rest of the passage. My second point. So I've talked about the greatness of Jesus. Now let's talk about the greatness of his grace. Have a look at verse 14 there.

Just one of the best things in the Bible. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And the word became flesh and dwelt among us. So that first part, the word became flesh, literally means Jesus pitched his tent among us. Or in the message it says Jesus moved into the neighborhood.

[11 : 31] So the word who is God, who stands beyond time and space, and is the author of creation, becomes part of his creation.

I mean, that's just mad thinking about that, isn't it? The author of creation became part of his creation.

Jesus, who we just talked about, divine, personal, always existed, became a baby. God became flesh. Now what are the implications of this?

Well, I mean, he's, you know, a bazillion, obviously, but a couple here. God became soft and vulnerable and killable.

God became killable. And why would he do that? Well, the passage says, so that we would see his glory. Glory is like God on display.

[12 : 29] The qualities of God displayed. So this means the word became flesh so that we would know, we would know God. Like here's another reason John uses the word word to talk about Jesus.

Because it conveys the sense that Jesus has eternally desired to be communicated. That he loves us and wants us to know him. And in the real living man, Jesus, we have the ultimate message, the ultimate disclosure of who God is.

Now, just drop, drop, rise down to verse 18 there. No one has ever seen God, the only God, who is at the Father's side. He has made him known. The Old Testament assumption was that God cannot be seen by sinful humanity.

Because he's holy. And we are far from holy. In Isaiah 6, a very famous passage. You know the passage of Seraphim and beholding the throne, Isaiah. And it's, you know, it's crazy.

Like it's, and, and, uh, and in it, Isaiah just, he just sees that the head, it talks about the, um, the train of his robe, the train of his robe, or the hem. Like the hem, like the back of his coat.

[13 : 36] Like, he just sees the back of, of God's coat. Like just the bottom part of his coat. You know. And, and Isaiah's response to just that is this.

Woe is me. I am undone. I am undone. Unholy people cannot be in the presence of a holy God. The assumption was you cannot see God.

But God has broken that barrier and made us possible, made it, made it possible for us to see him. And he did that through Jesus. You see that, there's this fantastic phrase right at the, right at the end of verse 18 there.

He has made him known. What does that mean? It's a great word. It's, uh, he's made Jesus know is what it's saying. But that known word in verse 18, that's the Greek word exegete.

Uh, it's where we get the word exegete from. So when a, uh, scholar exegetes a Bible passage, it's explaining the passage. It's, so it's saying here, it's made him know it's Jesus is exegeting God for us.

[14 : 37] Jesus is explaining God for us. Uh, elsewhere in the New Testament, the word is used when someone's like telling a story. Like narrating something. So it's like Jesus is narrating God.

By being God with us, by becoming human, he's telling us about God. And it's an astounding thing that he did there, isn't it? Astounding.

I mean, there's no other, like, of the main theistic religions. None of them have a deity that would, that does this. In fact, the idea that, that, that God would condescend to be one of us in the main faiths is offensive.

Uh, we have a guy that lives with us who is a devout Muslim man. He is lovely, lovely man. We love him. He lives with my family. And we have these great discussions about faith. I can tell him what I'm preaching on most of the time.

We can have a great discussion about it. He'll say, if I talk about the greatness of God, like here, if I talk about, uh, how to live out your faith. He's like, yes, yes, yes. It's true. It's true. It's true. But I remember the time I talked to him about the incarnation and that how God became a man.

[15 : 47] And I could see on his face the, the, uh, unpleasantness of the idea. It looked like he was eating something horrible when I, when I told him that his face sort of went, he could not get his head around it.

It's very offensive to other cultures, to, to other, uh, not cultures, to other faiths. And yet, it's what we believe. It's what the Bible teaches.

It's what the, it's what the gospels record. That this word who could not be seen, who is the agent of creation, who is eternally God, but separate from God, who the passage describes as light, who the passage says is life.

Life, this God became a vulnerable baby and he did that so we could know God. I mean, it's staggering. This is the greatness of God's grace.

And what is our response to the incarnation, which is the fancy word for God becoming man? What is our response? Passage gives us two responses. Verse 10. He was in the world and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

[16 : 56] Listen to the absurdity of it. It's trying to make it sound ridiculous. Okay. He was in the world. He came down to the world. The world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

It's absurd, right? The created, the created thing refuses to recognize the creator. So one response to God reaching down for us is, is rejection.

And the apex, obviously, of that rejection is the cross, the creature trying to get rid of the creator. But instead of getting rid of him, we got him forever.

That's a different sermon. Response two is verse 12. This is the other response.

I remember trying to explain the gospel to somebody who was not that into it. And I should have talked to Andrew beforehand. And in the end, they said to me something like, look, I'm going to do what I'm going to do, and I'm okay, and you're okay, and let's just be okay together, and it's all good.

[18 : 01] And anyway, we're all children of God, is what they said to me. That's actually not true. We are not all children of God. Not everyone is a child of God.

That has to be received to be true. The Bible in general does not say that God is your father just because you've been born. You're only a child of God if you have a relationship with the father.

But the offer is on the table. Okay, let's wrap up here. It'll be a longish wrap-up, but just so you know it's coming.

Chronicles of Narnia. So that's good, right? And the book, Prince Caspian. So this is C.S. Lewis.

So there's this great scene. Lucy, who's been away for a long time, finally gets to see Aslan again. You might recognize this scene. Lucy's been away for a long time, finally gets to see Aslan again, who, you know, is sort of the Christ figure in the book, right?

[19 : 09] And I quote four lines here. Aslan, says Lucy, you're bigger. That is because you are older, little one, answered he. Not because you are, she says.

I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger. Okay, end of quote. So Lucy's a year older. And yet, and Aslan appears bigger.

So the reality is Aslan hasn't changed, but Lucy's understanding of Aslan has grown. She's grown in faith. And this should be the Christian experience. The older you get, the bigger Jesus becomes in your understanding, which is what John is trying to do here.

He's trying to accomplish right from the beginning of the story. He's trying to expand our understanding of Christ. So you'll see the greatness of Christ. And you'll see the greatness of his grace.

And when you do that, goodness, I just think other stuff falls into perspective. And some things fall away. And idols get destroyed.

[20 : 15] And priorities are changed. Now, for you folks here, I want to sort of talk to three different groups. For you folks here that are sort of on the margins of faith.

You're a Christian, but you're sort of just sort of on the edge a little bit. For you, what are the implications of these staggering claims of John? Remember what John has said about Jesus. He's eternal, personal, relational.

He is God, but distinct. He's the agent of creation. He became an historical man so that we could know God. Okay. So, if you're on the edges of faith a little bit.

When somebody makes claims about someone like this, you can't just like the object of those claims, can you? You can't just be fond of them.

If that's true, you've got to give him everything. If this is who Jesus is, the only response, the only proper response is to give him everything, surely.

[21 : 22] Your ambitions, your aspirations, your heart. Jesus is just too big to exist on the sidelines of your life. If this is Jesus described by John, everything else is peripheral.

All you know and do and believe should be brought under this one truth. Now, let's say you're not on the margins of faith at all.

Let's say you're just completely not a Christian at all and you've joined us this evening. Fantastic. Welcome. What does this passage say to you if you're not a Christian? Well, if you're here and you're not a Christian, you're probably quite a spiritual person.

That's wonderful. Perhaps you're looking for God. That is great. You may have really well-formed spiritual ideas. You may respect Jesus. But perhaps maybe you think he is one of a number of ways to be connected to the divine.

What is the challenge of this text for you? The challenge is this. It's very direct. And it says in very clear terms, the only way to know God is through Jesus.

[22 : 34] Jesus is the only revealer of God the Father. Now, you can know about God. But to know him personally as he wants to be known, this passage says that can only, only happen through Jesus.

Let me say one more thing to folks sort of on the journey, on that journey there. But don't claim to be Christians here. In my experience, one of the things that can trip us up as people exploring faith is we want a slam dunk argument for God, right?

We want an airtight argument. We want a proof, like a formula almost. Well, God doesn't give us a slam dunk argument. But what he does give us is a slam dunk person.

There is no watertight perfect argument for God. But there is a watertight person. There is a perfect person. And there's Jesus. And that's what you should be contending with.

And that's what you should be focusing on. You want faith? If you don't have it, you want faith? You want to make sense of the world? You want to know God?

[23 : 46] Get to know Jesus. Get to know Jesus. Keep coming back to church. Keep hearing about this Jesus. As we learn about him in this gospel by John.

Lastly, for you here who have been on the journey for a while, who are Christians, what do I say to you? Well, simply this. This is going to sound really simplistic, but isn't it good to know Jesus is God?

Because we can have in our heads nice Jesus, angry God sort of thing. Good cop, bad cop kind of deal going on. But isn't it good to know Jesus is God?

Isn't it a relief to know God is just like Jesus? Because he is Jesus. Because he is God. So when we read about Jesus and John, here's what I want you to be thinking about.

It's telling us what God is like. We'll read about Jesus, how he forgave the worst of the worst sinners. That's remarkable, isn't it? That's what God is like.

[24 : 53] Jesus, who was very comfortable around the sexually broken. Isn't it good to know that's what God is like. Jesus, who looked out for the least.

Isn't it good to know that that's what God is like. Especially if you're very aware of your own brokenness. So as we go through the gospel, keep telling yourself, this is Jesus, this is God.

I'll finish here. We're going to be returning to all of these themes as we continue in John's gospel. Now the people I've talked about, if you are not a Christian, I would love to talk to you.

You could also talk to Jordan. You could also talk to Andrew over here. If you're on the margins and you feel like, you know, I need to recommit my life to Jesus. I'm just like flapping about here and not really doing much.

If that's you, I'd love to pray with you. For those of you who are Christians. And you need to know that Jesus is God.

[26 : 00] I'll pray with you as well. There's also some folks over here at the end of the service who will be available for prayer. Anytime from the offering song onwards. Folks, are you looking forward to John?

Isn't it going to be awesome? Well, pray for us. Pray for us as we continue this journey. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.