

John 1:1-2 PM

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[0 : 00] Hello everybody, it's good to see you. If you haven't met me before, my name is Aaron Roberts. I'm the minister that look after this service. Thanks, Judy, for reading for us this evening. Thanks, Richard. Richard's over here. He seems like a nice guy, doesn't he?

He's a nice guy. What about interns? Here's a fun fact. Richard has a PhD in philosophy and teaches at UBC. Who would have picked that, eh? Who would have picked that?

But I'm mad of hidden depth. You could probably say the same thing about our passage tonight, actually. It's short. This is John 1, 1-2. It's short, but it's just got so much depth to it.

It's inexhaustible in its meaning. So we'll start with the big picture first. So many of you likely know that in the Bible there are four stories focused on the life of Jesus.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. Most of you probably know this, right? Matthew starts with the genealogy. Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac was the father of Jacob. Jacob was the father of Judah, etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., until he gets to Jesus.

[1 : 06] Mark and Luke start by telling the story of John the Baptist. That's how those Gospels begin. But the beginning of John's story of Jesus is very different, isn't it?

He starts his account of Jesus' life with what you could describe as a poem. It's got poem-y aspects to it, doesn't it?

For example, he calls Jesus the Word. We don't actually hear Jesus' name until verse 17. Very poetic, very rich in meaning. And the big point of his introduction is Jesus is astonishing.

Jesus is astonishing. More astonishing than you can wrap your head around. Now, why does Jesus start this way? Why start with a poem that kind of gives the game away theologically?

Well, here's the best guess. John is about to write 21 chapters on what Jesus did, what he said, what he taught.

[2 : 15] But before we get there, John wants to tell us, before we get there, the most important thing we can know about Jesus, which is that Jesus is God.

And he does that. So we don't just read these stories and fall into the trap of thinking Christ was just a really great man, you know, just a really good teacher who unfortunately died early.

Because that's not the message of the gospel stories. So John begins his account of Jesus' life with this soaring, theologically dense poem about Jesus' identity.

Now, let's get stuck into it. And just a heads up, the passage we'll be preaching on each week is very short. We're just going to slowly work our way through what you call the preamble, the thing right at the start of John's gospel as we head towards Christmas in our Advent season.

So right then, here we go. John 1, 1, 2. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. In the beginning was the Word.

[3 : 33] Let's talk about it. Now, a pretty good question to start with is this. Why does John call Jesus the Word? Why not just call him his name? Well, again, it's a poem, and I think it's what he's doing here is very clever and very simple.

What's a word? What are words? Words are messages. Words are a message. Words disclose something. And Jesus is God's ultimate self-disclosure.

And that means if you want to know God, you have to get to know Jesus. Now, we could have got into some really freaky, platonic thought about the Greek word logos and stuff there, but I just want to keep that really simple so we don't lose the point.

If you want to get to know God, get to know Jesus. Back to verse 1. Here we go. In the beginning was the Word. What's John getting across there? In the beginning was the Word. Well, many of you can probably guess it's a reference to Genesis.

So it's saying, in the beginning, Jesus was. Meaning Jesus was not created. Jesus always was.

[4 : 44] Now, some of you folks might be a bit science-y. Perhaps you've studied physics or geology. And you have an enormous capacity to conceive of beginnings.

The beginnings of things. The beginnings of life on earth. The beginnings of the universe. And those fields are fantastically interesting. And John is saying here, no matter how far back you can conceive, no matter what model you use to conceive of the beginnings of life in the universe, when you get back to that moment, who's going to be there?

Jesus is going to be there. There's this great line from a guy called Robert Jastrow. He's a NASA physicist. He's an agnostic. But he's very sympathetic to the idea of a creator God.

And he's written a lot. In one of his books, he wrote this. And I think he was discussing science's attempt to come up with some kind of unifying theory to explain everything.

And he's got this fantastic line. Let me read it for you. For the scientist who has lived by his faith and the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance.

[5 : 59] He is about to conquer the highest peak. And as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.

It's great, isn't it? Athanasius was one of those theologians. He was a fourth century Egyptian bishop who very succinctly says this.

There was never a time when Jesus was not. It's a great summary of that first part of the verse.

There was never a time when Jesus was not. So all that to say, the first thing Jesus wants us to know, the first thing John wants us to know, is that Jesus has always existed.

Okay, next line. So, in the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. So, the Word refers to Jesus. So it's saying, in the beginning, Jesus was with God.

Now, the English word with means, what does it mean? It means sort of beside or like alongside, right? But this story was originally written in Greek.

[7 : 03] And the Greek word, which is translated with, more literally means towards. But it doesn't sound very good, right? It doesn't sound that great. But it's got a lot more meaning.

It's way more helpful to us. So it's, in the beginning, Jesus was towards God. So that's what the ancient hero would have heard. In the beginning, Jesus was towards God. But what does that mean?

Well, it's talking about intimacy. See, Jesus and God the Father are towards each other. They are facing each other. So you know the cliché beach scene where lovers are running towards each other in slow motion, right?

This is an absolutely horrendous example. A terrible example. But it's kind of the best I could come up with. But it's like that scene forever. The relationship between Jesus and God the Father, They are continually moving towards each other.

That is the sense of the word. Jesus is with God the Father. In the most intimate way, two persons can be with each other.

[8 : 08] Their relationship is perfect. And if you just allow me a brief excurses here to talk about the Trinity. So Jesus, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, They are a self-sufficient community of persons.

And when I mean by self-sufficient, is the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, Don't need people. Don't need us. But in a way we don't understand, it was decided in the Trinity That the Son, Jesus, would go down and become a human, A human baby and die for us.

Why is that? Because they wanted to share their relationship with us. In John's Gospel, chapter 17, Jesus is praying.

And listen to what he says here. It's kind of, it's slightly confusing and dense, But just listen to it here. Jesus is praying. He says, That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, And I in you, that they also may be in us, So that the world may believe that you have sent me.

So do you see what Jesus says there? He is referencing in prayer this astonishing relationship That Jesus has with the Father. And he prays that we get to experience that.

[9 : 34] He prays that we would get adopted into that amazing relationship That he has. That exists. At the center of the universe.

At the center of the universe is a community. So when people talk about, So I don't know, I don't know all of you here, Some of you here might not be Christians.

Some of you might be exploring Christianity. But I just want to make this very clear. When people talk about coming to faith, Or becoming a Christian, Or being born again, Or being saved, All those

kind of phrases, right?

They're not saying, I am wanting to become a better person. I am going to become really nice. The goal is not niceness, right? The goal is, You get to be with God.

You get to participate in the greatest love in the universe. You get to know God. And you get to experience the beauty of knowing that you are loved by God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

[10:36] You get to be adopted into that relationship that has always existed. Doesn't that sound wonderful? And we're treading deep water here, I know.

So I will end my excuses. And where are we in the passage? Okay, so what have we learnt so far of this little preamble? In this little preamble, We've learnt that Jesus has always existed, That he is in a relationship with God the Father, A perfect relationship.

So there is a distinctiveness between those two persons. In the beginning was the Word, And the Word was with God, And the Word was God.

So that's the next line. And it's a bit confusing, isn't it? Because it talks about distinctiveness, And then it says, Jesus is God. The Word was God.

The Word is with God. And the Word is God. It's confusing. Jesus is distinct from the Father, But the same. This is what the Bible teaches us. I can't explain it. It's confusing.

[11:37] It's a mystery. But the Bible presents us with These two different truths, And doesn't try and reconcile them For our sort of brains there. And I know when we talk about such things, We are, I remember doing a preaching course, Where the person preaching it, Said in the preaching thing, He goes, Yes, you've got to land the plane.

You've got to land the plane. You've got to land the plane. You know? And I'm trying to land the plane With very limited visibility. So, I'll make this, I'll try and say this, Let me say it like this.

At its simplest level, When it says, Jesus is God. Isn't it just good to know Jesus is God? Isn't that great to know?

Isn't it good to know That Jesus is God? In other words, Isn't it a relief to know That God is just like Jesus In the Bible?

So when we read about Jesus In John's Gospel, It's telling us What God is like. When we read about Jesus Who forgave the worst Of the worst sinners.

[12:47] Who was very comfortable Around sexually broken people. Who was so kind To the least. Isn't it a great relief To know That this is what God is like.

Especially when you're aware, Like me, Of your own brokenness. So, As you read these Gospel stories, Just keep telling yourself, This Jesus, This is God.

So, There you go. That's the first couple of verses Of John's Gospel. What does it mean for us? What does this mean for us? It means a lot of things.

I'm just going to mention one thing. It means that Because Jesus has always been, Because Jesus is God, It kind of forces our hand, Doesn't it?

That reality forces our hand. This Jesus, Who is the eternal God, Distinct but the same, Distinct but one, We can't have Jesus exist On the edge of our life.

[14:05] We can't push him To the margins of our life. This Jesus is too big, Too important, To exist on the edge of our life. Now he must be at the centre.

If this is true, He must be at the centre of our life. And folks, I promise you, If he is at the centre of your life, He will transform it. So I'll finish here.

We're going to be returning To these themes As we continue Looking through This incredible preamble, This incredible prologue To John's story About Jesus.

So, Come back next week And you'll hear more. Amen. And let's stand. Let's stand.