John 1:2-5 (PM)

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[0:00] Good evening, folks. My name's Aaron. If you haven't met me, I'd love to say hi to you, so come and grab me afterwards. For Advent, we are very slowly working our way through the beginning of John's Gospel.

So just three verses tonight we'll be looking at. So last week we did verses 1 and 2, tonight 3 to 5. But first, I want to jump for a moment right to the end of John's story, John 20, 30 to 31. Let me read it to you.
Now, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book. It's quite interesting, isn't it? 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.
So here, right at the end, John says, let me tell you why I wrote this whole thing. Let me tell you why I wrote this story, why I put pen to paper.
And he says, it's so you would believe in Jesus. You would believe that Jesus is not just a great man, but he's the Son of God.
[1:14] And that by believing in Jesus, it would change your life. That you would gain new life. Verse 31 again. By believing you may have life in his name.

Life. Now, what does that mean? In the New Testament, there are two, well, actually three words, but there are two main Greek words that we translate life.
They are bios and zoe. So bios is where we get the word biology from. It's like physical life. Zoe is a special kind of life that God wants to give to you.
And John loves this word and he uses it lots and lots and lots in this story. So what's the big difference between zoe life and bios life? Because it says here that Jesus wants to give us this zoe life.
Okay, the big difference is this. Bios is more about our physical body. So it's great. It's physical life. It's great life. It's important. But we know it decays and it dies.
[2:11] So at a graveside funeral at an Anglican service, the minister will say ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Why? Because that's what happens to bios life. Fades away. Disappears.

It ends. Zoe life, though. Zoe life. It doesn't decay. It doesn't die. It can't. I mean, how can it?
It's the life of God himself, the life that he wants to give you. But it's not just infinite life. I think Christians, we make the mistake of thinking that zoe life is kind of like the life we have now, but like in perpetuity forever.
No, it's zoe life is, it is infinite life, but it's also a type of life. It's a passionate life, a thrilling life, a buoyant life, a life with radically different priorities.
It's a life lived in accordance with how you were made by your creator. And Jesus wants to give us this life.
[3:12] All that to say, at the end, at the end of this story, John says, the reason I wrote this is because I want you to experience this zoe life.

And the only way you can get it is through knowing Jesus. Knowing him. For who he really is. He's the eternal God who came to be with us.
And that takes us right back to the start. What we're going to dive into now. Because John wants no misunderstanding about the identity of Jesus. Because, folks, there is just, there's too much at stake, isn't there?
So let's head back to the prologue. Which is all about the identity of Christ. Now last week, we zoomed in on verses 1 and 2.
This is the last week. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. Now, can I just do five-minute summary here?

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[4:14] Because I think this is really important. Little summary from last week. So the Word, that's just talking about Jesus there. And John is being very poetic and very clever.

Because the word, the Greek word, word, is the word logos. And logos has a dual meaning. It is probably at its more basic level.
It's like, well, a word is an expression, right? Words express things. Words disclose things. That's just common sense. And Jesus is God's ultimate self-disclosure.
So it's a great word to describe Jesus. But the other side of it, the other side of the meaning is a bit more philosophical. In Greek thought, the concept of logos was really important.
This is back in the days. Logos was the name the Greeks gave to the idea that there was a rational principle behind the whole universe. I like DIY, so I asked for power tools for birthdays and Christmas.
[5:23] And those power tools come with instructions. The instructions are the logos of the power tool. The Greeks believed in a logos for the whole universe.

And they said the key to life is being aligned with the logos. If you want your lives to go well, align it with the logos. Figure out the logos and align with it. And the problem is, of course, is different people had different ideas about what the logos was.
The Stoics believed that you should just accept whatever happens in your life. Just stiff up a lip. That's the only way to be happy. Epicureans said that, you know, just do whatever makes you happy.
So John here, knowing Greek thought, using this word, word, logos, has been quite evangelistic. And into this concept of logos, John just drops a bombshell.
And he says to the Greeks, back in the days, he says to them, The unifying theory that you believe explains the whole universe is not just a concept. It's not just a rationale.
[6:31] It's not just an idea. It's not a formula. It's a person. It's a person called Jesus. That's the bombshell he drops.

Just a reminder, we're still summarizing last week. You'll also remember from last week that John goes on to say that Jesus, the word, logos, has always existed. In the beginning was the word. Which is, you know, is a nod to Genesis.
But I think this is very interesting for us because it upends modern thought on the matter of beginnings, doesn't it? So the widely held proposition is that the beginning of all things, first there was material things, matter and energy, and from that came life.
But as Christians, we believe it's the other way around. First there was life, and then there was physical matter, and then there was energy. But first there was personhood.
Then came stuff. First there was a relationship that Jesus had with the Father. Okay, still summarizing last week.
[7:36] After talking about creation, John goes on to say something a bit confusing. He says the word was with God, and the word was God. A bit confusing. He's saying Jesus is distinct from the Father, but still God.

And it's a mystery how all that works out. But I think at its simplest level, it means that at the heart of the universe is a relationship. And when you scoop up all the Bible's teachings on this, it tells us it's a relationship between God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Three in one. One, the other thing we talked about last week is this quite simple idea. Based on what John says here, it just means if you want to know what God is like, you do that by getting to know Jesus.
And that is awesome, isn't it? Because it means, I mean, people have different ideas about God, right? People have lots of ideas about God.
People will say, she doesn't exist. Or he is like this. Or it, I like to think it is more like this. But it's all just opinion, isn't it?
[8:52] But the reality of Jesus means that our personal view of God does not have to stay in the realm of, well, we all just have opinions.

Because now we have Jesus, who reveals God to us. So, there you go. That was a very long introduction for me, I know.
Somebody told me last week, I preach too short. So, I thought I'd just pack it out a little bit this week. So, there you go. There you go, brother. So, that brings us up to date now.

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We're looking at verses 3 to 5. 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 and women. The light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it. Let's start with that.
[9:55] Verse 3 there. All things were made through him. And without him was not anything made that was made. Jesus, John says, not only was Christ present at the beginning of creation.

But he was the point man. Like, he quarterbacked it. He did it. He made it all. And you see, John really wants to stress this point. Because he states it positively.
And then he states it negatively. He says, all things were made through him. Positive. And then negatively. Without him, nothing was made. That leaves no wiggle room for anything else coming into being.
It's like me saying, I will only eat foods that are yellow. Or not yellow. Right? That's everything. Jesus made everything. Now, in case you think John is just sort of talking it up here a bit. Let me remind you of Colossians 1.16.
[11:02] For by him, it's Jesus. For by him, all things were created. In heaven and on earth. Visible and invisible.

Thrones or dominions. Rulers or authorities. All things were created through him and for him. That covers everything.
It was Christ that launched the estimated 100 octillion stars in the universe. That's one with 29 zeros after it.
He made them. They are for him. Now, I think the question we must ask ourselves after hearing this is, is this the Jesus you have in mind?
Or is the Jesus you have in mind smaller than this? Because the Jesus described here is worthy of our whole life.
[12:05] He's a Jesus we can submit all our plans to. The Jesus described here is worthy of our dreams and our desires. He's worthy of our affections.

He is certainly worthy of our trust. Now, it's very tempting to want to tame Jesus, isn't it? To make Jesus smaller. Smaller than described here in John.
Because a smaller Jesus we can ignore, right? A smaller Jesus we can push right to the edge of our life. And he can just be this kind of philosophical conversation partner.
See, a small Jesus that we can push over here, we can say, you know what? I love that you're nice to people. You should say we should be nice to people or something like that. But my sexuality is my thing.
Or my money is my money. Or the career I have, that's mine. And I'm just going to leave you over there. John doesn't let us think like this, does he? He doesn't let us reduce Christ.
[13:06] And this is very important. Because almost every perversion of the gospel, every Christian cult, every liberal theology has at its root a reduction of who Jesus is.

Let me quote a German Catholic theologian here, Gerhard Lofink. He says this, 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 a radical social revolutionary, or a gregarious social worker.
All that conceals his true claim. In all these categories, Jesus is shrunken or distorted, twisted into shape, planed, smooth, disempowered, and accommodated to our secret desires.
Folks, this is why the first words of John are such a treasure to us. They remind us of the greatness, the bigness of Jesus.
And as we go through life, that bigness should get bigger. As we know him. There's a great scene in the Chronicles of Narnia, Prince Caspian. And Lucy has been away for a long time.
[14:22] She comes back and she finally sees Aslan again. And now quoting the book, Aslan, says Lucy, you're bigger. That is because you are older, little one, answered he. Not because you are.

I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger. So Lucy is a year older, but it's Aslan who appears bigger. In reality, Aslan hasn't changed.
But Lucy's understanding of Aslan has grown. And this should be the Christian experience. The older you get, the bigger Jesus should become in your understanding. And this is what John's trying to accomplish here.

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He's trying to expand our understanding of Jesus so we would see his greatness. Right, where are we? We're in verse 3.
All things were made through him. Without him, nothing was made. Now, verse 4 more quickly. In him was life. And the life was the light of men and women.
[15:21] What does this mean? So we discussed this idea of life right at the start. But let me talk about it more generally now here. Jesus has eternal life in him. He wants you to have it.

He wants me to have it. And when we have it, it will produce light in us. And this is a concept John comes back to again in the gospel.
And again, it's a sort of a clever word choice. It's like the word at the start. It's a clever choice of words. Because what does light do? It illuminates. Without light, we can't see.
When I was 17, I became a Christian. And it happened fairly simply. Friends of mine had a part-time job. I worked at a fast food restaurant. Friends of mine there just really clearly explained to me who Jesus was.
Clearly explained to me why the world was like it was. Clearly explained to me my need for forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. And I remember thinking at the time, that makes complete sense.
[16:27] I just thought that was the best explanation of the world. And honestly, it was like what John describes here.

It was like God just turned a light on. And I could see properly for the first time in my life. In him was life. And the life was the light of men and women.
Now compare that to the wisdom of the world, which says, in the West anyway. The world says the light is not something you receive from out there.
It's in you. Search inside yourself and you will find it. Find the light in you. In her Lifetime Achievement Award acceptance speech at the 2018 Golden Globes, Oprah Winfrey says this.
What I know for sure is that speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have. Speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have.
[17:32] Your truth. Your truth. This idea is so ingrained in our modern understanding now that we just fail to see that it's incoherent.

It's an incoherent statement. But this idea gets so much play in the world because we live in this post-truth age. And in this age, the individual is the primary source of truth.
And there's lots of problems with this, of course. The main one being it's out of step with how we were created, which is why this idea creates problems for us.
I mean, find your own truth. It's supposed to be liberating. But what does it do? It just creates a burden for you. How are you supposed to find your own truth? You were never designed to make up truth. We weren't created to live like this.
It's a French sociologist who I won't say his name. I'll brutalize it. But he wrote a book called The Weariness of Self. And in it, he talks about how this idea of finding your own truth just doesn't...
[18:39] I don't think he's a Christian. But he says it just doesn't work. He says it's the reason why us moderns are so fragile. And he has this phrase.

He says... He talks about how the self-creating person turns out to be fragile and weary of her sovereignty. Weary of her sovereignty. Isn't that a great line?
See, John presents us, moderns, with another way of doing life, another way of finding meaning. And it's to look to the transcendent. It's not looking inside yourself for the light in you. It's looking outside yourself.
And John's claim is Jesus is the source of light and truth. Which makes complete sense. If he's the creator. Let's keep moving.
This last verse. Our last verse for today. Verse 5. The light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it. Again, John really plays with these ideas of light and darkness throughout the gospel.
[19:41] But I'll say this simply or quite broadly here. The light that Christ brought into the world will never be snuffed out.

What Jesus wants to accomplish in this world, he will accomplish. That's what John says. And history has his back. Have you ever wondered why the story of Jesus is not just some footnote in history?

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So I went on Wikipedia today. And I looked up messiahs. Messiahs. And had this really long article of all these self-proclaimed messiahs.
Jesus was the first one. And I looked through like a hundred names. I recognized three names. Hayley Silesi, David Koresh, and Jesus. I didn't know any of these other people who claimed to be messiahs.
Why is it that Jesus is not just another footnote? Why is it that the Bible is not out of print? Why has the enlightenment of skepticism or pluralism or communism, why has it not extinguished Christianity?
[20:57] And the answer is in the metaphor John uses very cleverly when he describes what Jesus is going to bring to the world as light. It's very clever because where light goes, darkness has no chance.

Darkness can't outdark light. Light always defeats darkness. So the light of Jesus has come and it's been changing lives for 2,000 years and will continually do so.
And it won't be overcome. So how do we summarize these astonishing ideas of Jesus? Well, if all this is true, what John says, the only logical way to live your life is to arrange it around Jesus, to make him your chief goal, to place all your aspirations at his feet.
My dream for you guys, my goal for you guys, my hope for you guys, is that you would know this life that Jesus offers and you would live into it and you'd be consistently bringing all your hopes and dreams and goals and desires to Jesus.
I'd say, purify them. Purify my heart. One of my favorite Bible verses, moments, stories is in John 6. Jesus has just done this really hard teaching.
[22:20] This preacher's thing and it's people having trouble with it. And it actually says a whole lot of his followers take off. They just leave him. It's like, ah, it's just too much, Jesus.

Too much, Jesus. I'm out of here. I'm gone. And it's this really tender moment. Jesus goes up to Simon Peter and says, are you going to leave me as well?
I mean, you know, this is one of his best mates, right? Are you going to leave me as well? And Simon Peter responds with these wonderful words. He says, where would I go?
Like, what are my options? Where would I go? You alone have the words of life. Where would I go? You alone have the words of life. I love that. This should be our default position. Because we know who Jesus is.
[23:21] Amen.

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