

The Word on the Word

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 January 2015

Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[0 : 00] As we stand, let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you and we praise you for your Holy Spirit who leads us into truth, who glorifies your Son, Jesus Christ, and who strengthens us to be your children.

So, Father, we pray for the work of your Holy Spirit among us as we hear your word today. In Jesus' name, amen. Please be seated. Well, we are starting a new sermon series in the 730 service, actually all the services, and it's a sermon series on the Gospel of John.

And many of you have read the Gospel of John. It's not something that's new to you. It is a gospel that John himself says changes people's lives, and the whole purpose of it is to give life.

And so, at the very end of the Gospel of John, he writes, I write these things. I write about Jesus, about the signs of who he is, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and in believing, you may have life in his name.

So, this is the gospel of life. And in this passage that we heard, this incredible passage that you could do a whole sermon series on, the God of all power comes close to us into every aspect of your life and my life because he was born a child in Bethlehem, and his purpose in touching all of our lives is to save us very, very simply.

[1 : 46] And that is why the reading that we just heard from John is completely focused on Jesus. And it's interesting, isn't it, that we don't see Jesus' name mentioned until down in verse 17 because he wants us to first understand the glory of Jesus by calling him the Word.

And it's something that is a curious name, isn't it, to say that Jesus is the Word. But that Word means God expressing himself in creating the world, in revealing himself in the Old Testament, and in saving the world as well.

So, the Word means God's self-disclosure to us. It is the ultimate self-disclosure. And that's why we see right away in verse 1, John says three things about the Word.

He says, first of all, that he was in the beginning. And beginning does not just mean that there is nothing before him. It means that the Word is the source of everything.

It is like the foundation of all things. And the second thing he says in verse 1 is the Word was with God. Literally, the word with means towards God.

[3 : 14] There is this deep, close relationship with God. And here we're brought into the life of the Trinity right away. The Word is completely oriented to the Father.

He exists in the closest possible connection to God the Father because of the third thing that it says about the Word in that verse 1.

The Word was God. And the original language is emphatic about this, that the Word is God. It's an incredible thing for a Jewish writer to say.

He's not saying there's something divine about Jesus. He is saying the Word is God. So if a person says Jesus is a mere prophet or that he is a teacher or merely a holy one, a rabbi, they have to ignore the Gospel of John completely.

You can't say it and read John at the same time. So here we see proclaimed three truths about the wonder of who Jesus is.

[4 : 24] And then verses 3 and 4 say that all things were made through him. In him was life and the life was the light of men.

So here's that life again that we're going to be hearing about all through the Gospel of John. He is saying that all creation was made through the Word and the Word sustains all life.

That's not only physical life, but spiritual life, our moral life as well. In him is all life. It's an incredible statement.

This is the majesty of Jesus. He has called the Word that always existed with God and is God himself. And he's brought every aspect of the universe into being and sustains it today. And that's the truth that is beyond our ability to comprehend. Science is beginning to describe the work of the Word in creation because it recognizes that there is a definable beginning to our universe and that it is being held together.

[5 : 32] But of course it also understands, science understands that there is a massive amount to learn about this universe. And so here we have that universe laid out before us and we see the Word defining that, sustaining and beginning it.

But then in verse 5, there is this first hint of trouble. There is need for recreation. Something has gone wrong with the world. So the light shines in darkness and darkness will not overcome it. There is a hostility in this world that God created, that the Word created against the Word. And it is darkened by evil that is not able to accept the light of the world.

And we see this all of the time, played out in front of our eyes. And you probably can't get a better example of it than what has happened in France this week.

You see the darkness of people's hearts. You see fear that arises because of several people who have been overcome by this evil.

[6 : 44] And we are constantly informed of darkness like that every time we look at the Internet or newspapers or television. We see the result of this pain not only outside of us, though.

We see it in our own lives. Every time we say this is not the way things are supposed to be, every time we experience the pain of brokenness, of relationships, or health, whatever it may be, we are recognizing that there is darkness.

That there is a world that has gone not according to the will of God. And so the only hope for the world then is for God to save and to rescue.

So in verse 6 and 7, John announces the true light that comes into the world. And then if you jump down to 14, we see this played out more. We see the nature of that coming.

The Word becomes flesh and He dwells among us full of grace and truth. So there it is.

[7 : 47] That is the grand miracle that we just celebrated at Christmas. That in a dark world, the light of God shines brightly. And it is an extraordinary thing that is being said here because the Word becomes flesh.

And this is the grand miracle, a miracle that is the glorious act of God coming as close as He possibly can to humanity who needs the light of God, the life of God, in them and in the world. And so you see a movement here, don't you? And this helps us to really understand this prologue, these 18 verses, because the Word is highly exalted. But then He comes down to become one of us.

He who was rich becomes poor so that by His poverty we might become rich. That word flesh means vulnerable humanity.

It talks about our exhaustion and our grief and our thirst and our hunger, our suffering, as well as the glories of what it means to be human as well.

[8 : 55] And as I was reading about this, I think that C.S. Lewis was the most helpful in thinking and going deeper into what it means that God becomes man.

He says this. He says, this is in a book called *The Grand Miracle*. Think what that descent is. The coming down, not only into humanity, but into those nine months which precede human birth. One has a picture of a diver stripping off garment after garment, making himself naked, then flashing for a moment in the air, and then down into the green and warm and sunlit water, into the pitch black cold freezing water, down into the mud and slime, and then up again, his lungs almost bursting back again to the green and warm and sunlit water, and then at last out into the sunshine, holding in his hand the dripping thing he went down to get.

This thing is human nature, but associated with it all nature and the new universe. You see, this is the power of the incarnation.

The word has come infinitely close to us. He became everything that we were. He identifies with our emotional and physical pain.

[10 : 25] And we see that most powerfully on the cross where he takes our worst sin and pain onto himself. All hurts, every kind of abuse that humanity experiences, all violence, all loss, all is brought into Jesus' being when he dies on the cross.

And that can only happen because of the incarnation, what we just read in this prologue. And that is why when Jesus rises from the dead on the third day, he brings humanity with him, as C.S. Lewis was writing about.

He can give them a new life, spiritual life, that will not end. And so Jesus says two chapters later in John 3 that a person must be born again, born of the Spirit.

Jesus is the one who gives that new life here on earth now. The light comes into the darkness. And I think this is tremendously hopeful for us today.

We tend to think that Jesus cannot fully identify with all the things that I've gone through, my unique pains. He hasn't known the abuse or the betrayal or the loss that I've experienced.

[11 : 43] But the cross tells us that he does, that he took all of the sins that have been committed and that will be committed against us onto himself. As a man who is God, he experiences the fullest effect of your sin, of your hurt on himself.

He was our substitute. And so the joy of Christmas that we have been experiencing is not just what Jesus gives to us, but it is what Jesus takes away from us as well.

The word became flesh in order to take away your sin and pain, all of it, onto himself. And then to give us a new life through the forgiveness of our sins.

It is giving to us a healed relationship in the midst of all of the darkness that we experience in our lives. A God who is infinitely close to us now in the place of darkness.

And that's how he rescues us. That is why he became man. And so the right question here as we go away from this passage is how do I receive this gift?

[13 : 02] Well, the center of our passage is verse 12. So if you look at that, you'll see, I mean, it is literally the center, but also theologically it is too.

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God who are born of God. And what this means is that God rescues us not only from the darkness but into the family of God, into the very life of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit forever.

And so that no matter what pains and sins we experience in the darkness of this world, we belong to his life. We have life in him. He knows us and he loves us.

He is with us because Jesus rose from the dead. He is the living one who forgives now, who teaches you now, who leads you now by his living words in the Bible.

And so there is a permanent joy that surrounds our present griefs in this world. And so that's why the New Testament writers say that even the deepest of hurts are superficial compared to the joy of knowing the love of our creator, of the love of our rescuer, the love of the one who shows himself to us because he wants us in his life.

[14 : 28] He wants us to have life. So there is also this joy of actively growing into this new role, into this new life of being adopted by God.

It means that life is about enjoying God and obeying him, loving what he loves, rejecting what he rejects. This defines us.

This is why a child of God wants to hear God's word, wants to glorify the one in whom all life is. And so God speaks to all of us this morning.

He gives us grace to welcome Jesus, to believe in him, in his name. He has descended from his exalted place for our sake, to utterly change our life by touching every part of it with his life.

Do we welcome him into every part of our life, the intention of the incarnation? salvation. May we take joy this morning in welcoming that rescue.

[15 : 33] Welcome the forgiveness of sins. Welcome that greatest and most wonderful of rights, the right of being a daughter of God, a son of God.

By Jesus' gift, may you give away the joy and the peace that is yours in Jesus as you live out that new birthright. By the power of the Holy Spirit who is at work in you.

Amen.