

# Personal Reflections On The Prologue to John's Gospel

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you, Bill. Well, when Bill announced last week that I would be here to finish us off, I thought I'd better wear a tie this time.

Let me open with a prayer from a well-known textbook. It's actually a statement of faith. I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father through whom all things were made, who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven.

Now, the prayer book, and in this case the Creed, have clearly been inspired not only by the Holy Spirit, but in this case by the prologue to St. John's Gospel.

And I think you'll find, as we look at the first 18 verses of John's Gospel, those thoughts that we just read are very much in that chapter.

[ 1 : 41 ] I plan this morning to read those 18 verses first of all, because as you have heard, these are personal reflections that I'm going to be sharing with you, and it's far more important that we hear the Word of God and we hear it completely before I start to reflect on it.

So, if you don't mind, I'm going to use the Jerusalem Bible, because this is in fact a rather shocking passage from the Bible, and we need to be shocked and reminded that this is an extraordinary, extraordinary statement.

After reading these 18 verses, I have three questions to address. First of all, what is a prologue? Several people have asked me, what is the prologue to St. John's Gospel? I'll try and sort that one out. Secondly, what is the structure of this prologue?

And thirdly, which contains the bulk of the personal reflections, what are some of the unique characteristics of this prologue? So, if you will bear with me, just listen to the Word of God as written in the Gospel according to St. John, chapter 1.

[ 3 : 18 ] And don't worry, it's not Christmas Day. You'll be familiar with reading this regularly on Christmas Day, but it seems to me that even at the end of the season of the Learners Exchange, it's good to be reminded of it.

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

Through Him all things came to be. Not one thing had its being, but through Him. All that came to be had life in Him, and the life was the light of men, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower.

A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, as a witness to speak for the light, so that everyone might believe through Him.

He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light. The Word was the true light that enlightens all men, and He was coming into the world.

[ 4 : 47 ] He was in the world that had its being through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own domain, and His own people did not accept Him.

But to all who did accept Him, He gave power to become children of God, to all who believe in the name of Him who was born not out of human stock, or urge of the flesh, or will of man, but of God Himself.

The Word was made flesh, He lived among us, and we saw His glory, the glory that is His as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

John appears as his witness. He proclaims, This is the one of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks before me, because He existed before me.

Indeed, from His fullness we have all of us received, Yes, grace in return for grace. Since, though the law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ.

[ 6 : 08 ] No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son who is nearest to the Father's heart who has made Him known. Thanks be to God.

John is an extraordinary character. He's the only one whose writings have got separated in the New Testament.

A gospel, three letters, and a revelation. And yet, they're a massive contribution to our understanding of God's purposes.

The first question then to look at is, what is a prologue? Those of you who have publishers will know that there are various preliminaries that are required for books.

some of them may be a foreword, a preface, a prelude, or in some cases an abstract, and in other cases a prologue.

[ 7 : 27 ] Well, in John's case, we have a prologue. Literally, standing in front of the discourse. Pro, standing in front of, logos, the discourse.

So that we have, unusually, for the Bible books, a prologue which alerts us to something dramatic that is about to come about.

if you recall, the other Gospels have different kinds of beginnings. Mark is introduced very briefly with a reference to Isaiah's prophecy about John the Baptist.

Matthew introduces us to the Gospel by looking through the whole lineage of the, from Abraham onwards. and Luke takes us to the annunciation of the birth of both Jesus and John the Baptist as the preliminary.

But none of these could legitimately be called a prologue. They constitute background context for the story. John is an aged man in his seventies probably like myself.

[ 9 : 01 ] Not so aged. But he is reflecting as he writes his Gospel on the extraordinary significance of the life of Jesus.

This friend with whom he was particularly close about whom he is to write an account which is quite unique, absolutely fantastic and unbelievable unless one gives some substantive introduction to warn the reader that here are unique, historically unique events that are coming up and interestingly enough the time that John has had to reflect on his experience of friendship and with being part of the unique events of Christ's life makes him more and more convinced of the necessity to give people warning.

This is dangerous stuff. This is absolutely unbelievable stuff. And that's the context it seems to me in which we're looking at a man who has gone through a lifetime of service and a witness for Christ and he sits down to write this gospel and he says I've really got to have a prologue of substance before the events start to unfold.

It is an extraordinary thing time. Whereas the other gospels stretch back in time for a couple of years in the case of Luke 750 years in the case of Mark and 2000 years in the case of Matthew John's prologue talks about the whole of time from the very beginning to the end.

It's a cosmic scale prologue. I was tempted to think of a prologue as an abstract.

[ 11 : 22 ] Those of you who write scientific papers will know that an abstract is always required on any paper but an abstract is different. An abstract gives the findings in a summary form of the whole of the text.

This is not what John does. John says the most important thing for us to prepare ourselves for in reading this gospel is that Jesus is the word.

Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. Jesus encompasses the whole of time from beginning to end. And it's remarkable how that sense of the cosmic scale of John's perspective comes out in this prologue.

As I say, it's quite unique in relation to the other gospels and indeed it's quite unusual anywhere else in the scriptures. People seem to be generally rather busy to get on with the story without giving us the benefit of a summary of what's about to happen.

And in some cases we would love to see it. We have to be careful here not to be too heretical because we're not supposed to add to the scriptures, but in a book like Isaiah or Jeremiah it would be lovely to have a prologue.

[13:00] So the value of this prologue seems to me that it just sets us up for the unique events that are about to happen.

Second question, oh yes, do you know what a prologue is now? Well I haven't said how it differs from a preface or a foreword and so on, but I mean a foreword is usually if you ask the Archbishop of Canterbury to say some nice things about your book.

John didn't actually ask the Archbishop of Canterbury or anybody else to say any nice things about his book. So the preface is a few light words introducing, the prologue is much heavier, much more substantive and so there's a matter of degree here.

Publishers talk about these, whatever they are, prefaces, abstracts, preludes and prologues as preliminaries and they're usually filed in a separate file.

So what is the structure of this prologue? It's a very simple structure. Verses 1 to 5 tell us about Jesus the Word.

[14:16] Verses 6 to 8 indicate that there was a man called John, John the Baptist, not to be confused with the Apostle John. Verses 9 to 13 talk about Jesus as the true light.

And then there's the dramatic statement in verse 14 that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. And finally the last four verses, 15 to 18 give us the way in which John's witness focused exclusively on Jesus and the way in which Jesus has made God known to us.

So that's probably the easiest of the questions to answer. However, theological scholars in the audience, please excuse the naivety of that summary.

So the third question, what are some of the unique characteristics of this prologue? And this is where my personal reflections come in and I ask for your patience in this context.

There have been many influences on my life that have been important, many that have been unimportant also, but I confine myself to three at this point.

[15:47] You've heard about my mother at various times in the past. She impressed on me the importance of gratitude. That was her big theme as I reflect on it.

We have been delivered from so great death and destruction and inability to do anything that is good in God's sight and we have been rescued by this Jesus of Nazareth, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God, who came, took on himself the flesh of a person, died on the cross for us and rose again for us.

What more motivation for gratitude could there be? Those of us who were at the early morning communion were inspired by looking at Psalm 136 and the sense of gratitude that was enjoined upon us in that Psalm.

The whole atmosphere of the Psalm 136 is that it just almost forces one to say thank you to God for all his good gifts.

And it moves through from the created order through to the way in which God redeemed his people and the way in which he rescued them and the way in which he continues to redeem his people today.

[18:01] I'm sorry if I've stolen the punchline for those of you who are going to a later communion service, but it's written out in the booklet anyway. A sense of gratitude also was very clear in Dr.

Packer's statement last Sunday if you recall. He talked to us about holiness for dummies and we all confessed that we were indeed dummies in relation to the requirements of holiness.

But one of the themes that I heard from his statement was the importance of gratitude in generating holiness. We'll come back to that in a moment as to how that relates to this prologue.

The second influence which I want to refer to was from my PhD advisor. He, by the way, was also a Christian of somewhat different stripe than some of us but nevertheless a man of great integrity and wisdom.

His emphasis in my efforts to produce a thesis was try to make it simple, Olaf. There's a lot of rubbish in the literature of our discipline.

[19:29] don't believe any of it until you've actually tried and tested each of the ideas that you can expose to.

And of course, I didn't realize how much I needed this advice at the time but it has always stood me in good stead because I have an inveterate tendency to be distracted and always find things very interesting on the other side of the fence.

But that advice, an emphasis on simplicity seems to me to be terribly important in so many ways.

We can become extremely complicated in our theological perspectives. We can become extreme experts on minutiae and forget the central and simple truths which I think as we reflect on John chapter 1 are specified very clearly in that prologue.

The third influential person I draw attention to, not a Christian as far as I know but a man of enormous influence in various ways, was my first boss, a man called Luna Leopold who was the son of someone called Aldo Leopold who you may know of from the ecological literature, the author of Sand County Almanac, which is one of the first great treaties in the environmental movement, published posthumously in 1949.

[ 21 : 17 ] Anyway, this man's son was my boss, and his immediate instruction to me was focus on the big questions, Olaf.

You're getting much too picky. You're spending a lot of time on unnecessary detail.

what are the big questions that you and I should be focusing on? So, every week we would have a little session to find out whether we had made any progress at all on the big questions.

Now, in relation to this happy group, those big questions might seem quite small. Nevertheless, this has considerable application to us in the Christian community.

What are the big questions which we should be focusing upon? And so, what I would like to do in these few moments is to reflect with you, not trying to suggest that this is in any way exhaustive, in any way comprehensive treatment, it's just personal reflections on 18 of these verses.

[ 22 : 49 ] Starting with the sense of gratitude, where in these 18 verses do we get a sense of gratitude? Well, surely, John's mature reflection on unique events and a unique friendship essentially underlies the atmosphere of this prologue.

There is gratitude written all over it. The sense that in order to adequately project the significance of what his friend and Savior had done, there needed to be this very special prologue to express his sense of the enormity and the extraordinariness of what had happened to him.

It's almost as if, I mean, this may be irreverent, but it's almost as if he's pinching himself and saying, did I really experience this absolutely extraordinary series of events?

This person who I got to know so well as a personal friend was and is God. What greater sense of gratitude could one have than to project as clearly as was humanly possible the magnificence of this friendship and of this life that he had been witness of?

So it seems to me that although it does not, there's not a series of specific statements that says, thank you, the atmosphere of this whole prologue is one of gratitude.

[ 24 : 57 ] More specifically, the question of simplicity. The words that come to the fore in these 18 verses are life, light, love, grace, and truth.

These five words are very prominent, some of them occur several times, but they are the simple essence of what John's experience and John's prologue is all about.

If we read it specifically from the word, all that came to be had life in him.

And that life was the light of men, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower.

John was a witness to speak for the light. He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light.

[ 26 : 21 ] light. The word was the true light that enlightens all. The word was made flesh, he lived among us, he saw his glory, the glory that is his, as the only son of the father, full of grace and truth.

indeed, from his fullness, we have all of us received, yes, grace, in return for grace.

Grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. In the last analysis, when we come to think about what our commitment is as individual Christians, what could be a more important list of features of our life in Christ.

First of all, the life itself, as contrasted with death, death, secondly, the light as contrasted with darkness, love as contrasted with hate, grace as contrasted with greed, and truth as contrasted with error.

so that these very simple words, we sort of dress them up in our discussions very often, in very elaborate phraseology, but these are the essentials to which we have been called, and which have become possible, because of this person, the word, our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 28 : 44 ] John continues this emphasis, of course, in his letters, not only in the Gospel, but also in his letters, and you might say, well, he doesn't quite make it that simple in the Revelation.

I'm skipping over the whole theological, the whole historical question of the authorship of Revelation, but I think for this group, you can be, well, I feel moderately safe in assuming that John

has something to do with Revelation, the same John as we're talking about here.

Well, actually, it's not quite right to say that Revelation is totally impervious. The first four or five chapters continue the theme of the simplicity of the Christian life, the simplicity of the Gospel.

And it's only when it comes to the prophetic and eschatological part of the text that we find things a little more complex.

This is perhaps not surprising when one is looking into future events, and indeed, those who have simplified the future have found to their cost that they are always wrong in their predictions.

[ 30 : 16 ] John's mystical expressions about the nature of the future and the clarity with which the key personnel involved in that future is expressed does in fact characterize a very straightforward sense of the simple truths of the Gospel.

The third question is one about the big questions.

To what extent does John focus on the big questions? Well, I'm sure that the cosmic scale of John's thinking is something quite unique it's not explicit in much of the rest of Scripture, although indeed it is implicit in so many places.

The big questions concerning the relationship between the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

What is the significance of the coming of Jesus in the form of human flesh is another big question, but I've got another thought in this which I'd like to try out on you and see whether you think it sounds reasonable helpful.

[ 32 : 13 ] It seems to me the big question that John is tackling in the prologue is the way in which philosophy and history intertwine. Or if you like the way in which philosophy, theology, and history intertwine.

he seems to me to be saying that this is the only alternative to materialism. In the beginning was the Word.

In materialism, in the beginning is mass and energy and nothing else. so E equals MC squared defines the core of materialist thinking which has dominated for the last 300 years.

Well, E equals MC squared hasn't dominated for the last 300 years, but the idea that mass and energy are the only real entities is thinking that has lasted at least 300 years as a dominant way of looking at the world.

The statement in the beginning was the Word is profoundly different because the Word is personal and the Word was not created.

[ 33 : 49 ] The Word was there from the beginning. Energy and mass come about as a result of creation. This is a thought which was brought to my attention in a little book by John Lennox.

I don't know whether you've seen this. It's called God's Undertaker Has Science Buried God? Interesting question.

But in this book John Lennox explores the statement that was made at a recent scientific conference which said in the beginning was the bit.

The bit being pieces of information. Now I'm not trying to prove anything here. I'm just trying to suggest that the importance of information in our present understanding of the genome for example is quite consistent with the sense of the in the beginning there being something that is not mass or energy.

Something that is personal information that has come through Jesus in the form of Jesus and is at the root of the creation itself.

[ 35 : 33 ] and is the origin of this creation. This is not a well exhaustively thought out reflection but it's something that I think is worth pondering about.

How the Bible sees the word as the origin in the beginning we know from Genesis chapter one the very first verse that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and the uniqueness of that whole creative activity is something which is quite beyond and above the standard perceptions of science.

science but it may be that science in its understandings of information is getting closer to an understanding of the importance of information as the source of knowledge and as the source of wisdom in this context.

So a big question which the prologue addresses is clearly the intertwining of philosophy theology and history the way in which Jesus is described as the word in the first part and then John is described as coming to bear witness to that light and then the light is described in the next section

and then the final nature of John's witness those four sections of the prologue in a way which is quite different from any of the other gospels intertwines the thoughts about the nature of Jesus and God and the events of history and that surely is one of the big questions that we are all interested in thinking about.

A final group of comments I want to leave with you has to do with the overall importance of this prologue.

[ 38 : 15 ] I've often wondered and I'm sure you have too how a community of Christians most of whom couldn't read would actually be able to absorb some of this information.

And you may have read about the way in which the early church characterized John in its art and in its literature as the high-flying eagle that in order to impress the community with the way in which John viewed the revelation that he had been caught up with that he was looking from a great height just like an eagle as you know the eagle can see remarkably far and remarkably under the water from a very high altitude high elevation so that the people who were being informed by John presumably in his sermons and presumably before even writing his gospel would have been informed that this was looking at the world from a very high elevation high elevation and the symbols and the art that were associated with

John was something that the early church absorbed I guess much more readily as they were sitting in the pew looking at the art looking at the architecture in which the eagle was prominently displayed none of the other gospels has that sort of overview from a great height they are looking at the detail of the history of Jesus his life and death and resurrection as it happens day by day year by year whereas John takes the perspective that we really have to sit back stand back take a very long look and see what the global the timeless the cosmic is actually all about so I commend this as summer reading

I commend it because it seems to me that the essence of John's gratitude his ability to see the simple truths and his grappling with the big questions are all made rather clear in this passage not to suggest that I understand it in the sense of a comprehensive understanding we none of us will ever understand this detail until we get home but we can wonder and we can use this passage as an inspiration to our prayer life and our thought life and in our conversations with friends and others so those are my personal reflections the floor is open for questions that you would like to ask rather than the three that I have asked and I hope that we may have some exchange of thoughts together thank you yes tell us some more about mass materialism as a is it a philosophy or what is it I guess that most of us have succumbed to materialism at some time in our lives even if it's just Christmas shopping no the idea is simply that there is nothing in the world other than mass and energy and that all things can be explained including the origin of the universe although we don't know what happened before it started but that all the calculations on the first microsecond of the existence of the universe until the end of time can be calculated and can be predicted in relation to various forms of mass and energy this is a neat way of avoiding questions of value questions of judgment questions of personality but I mean

[ 44 : 06 ] I suppose it's seen most radically at the present time in the discipline of neuroscience in neuroscience we have only electrical circuits and in our cranium and the secret of life is essentially communicated through those electrical circuits so that meaning is superimposed artificially on top of this material and energy do I make sense I'm struggling maybe you're not a materialist Harry no but I mean is it not something that you've encountered with discussions about your faith with people of strong materialist inclination well is it that the fact that

God is concerned with the personal salvation of one six hundred million people on the planet today and that have succeeded a generation of the same size that preceded us you know that all that is is that all our sort of mass materialism because we have this deep sense of the gospel being immediately relevant to the individual person within a mass society in which the individual person is reduced to practical meaninglessness yeah I think the situation gets confused if you call it mass materialism because it is both mass and energy which are being regarded as the fundamental the fundamental elements so it is not just mass and it is not mass in the sense of a crowd it is mass meaning the weight of substance so that people are saying that the rest is really all the subjective side of the person well I'm talking really about

Mr. Dawkins at this point Mr. Dawkins Mr. Dawkins right who is convinced that there is nothing other than mass and energy that can explain everything yes just looking at verse 7 there John about this was a witness to testify concerning the light so it's really a old man might believe Jesus

said John about this is the greatest he was out in the wilderness wearing camel hair and eating wild hunting and wild this sort of thing and he talked like you know repamper we'll burn up the chaff of unquenchable fire and that sort of thing about some tanner that you came across in our witness for Christ how much should we be incorporating this edge you know as a witness how much should we be incorporating much how much should we be incorporating his kind of lifestyle his tenure repent he's quite extreme and he's the greatest witness so should we have this edge or how far are we going to have to do you well I mean it's a very good question because we're all of us over consuming we're all of us doing great damage to our environment by engaging in unsustainable practices so John's John the Baptist model is one which should make us think about how necessary all the things that we have in our attic might be for our well-being but whether we all ought to be eating locusts

I mean that's a tricky one although recently in Japan I was given something that looked like locusts for breakfast and it was very crackly it tasted very good actually but I'm sorry I'm not trying to avoid your question but John the Baptist was indeed commended as you say as being the greatest but surely the greatness did not so much exist in his vegetarianism as in his pointing to Jesus I would think that's sorry you made the distinction between at the beginning there being material versus information but I'm not sure if you can separate those two can information exist outside of material well that's a very interesting question and you're probably better to answer it than I but the case that would be made is that information is not created that it is something that comes from personal inspiration and thought and that well if you think about the way in which the structure of the human genome is now conceived that it consists of a series of pieces of information that are associated in different ways that is something that does not have mass and energy in itself before whereas mass and energy are clearly post-creation information derives from a personal source you're skeptical [ 51 : 17 ] I know but clarify the basis of the skepticism well to me information is something that describes the state of matter so for example if there is no universe if there is nothing you don't have integers you can't count there is no zero or one because there is nothing you can't so I think it comes down to what we think information is the definition of information yeah yeah yeah well a huge superstructure of science is being built up on the basis of the distinction between zero and one right those two those two essential bits but it's much I guess the only case I could make is that it is a much closer analog to the kind of understanding that we have of the word as being the beginning than is the sole dependence on the idea of mass and energy that's that's the case I would think about yes please don't mass and energy imply the big bang theory well there are many many versions of of origins through mass and energy concepts yeah but big bang is one of them yeah well the puzzle I always have if I think about that theory is something has to start it there is a big bang something started it yeah yeah well what was the creation of that thing that's what genesis chapter 1 is very explicit about so that there is there is a word of creation sure well I'm not a physical scientist so I'm a social scientist so I'm getting lost in some of this stuff and I want to go back to what

Shin said about information I think there is a type of information that we have not discussed and that is the part that is revealed and John was an unusual witness in being able to do this John the apostle John the Baptist may have been the greatest witness that Jesus identified but he was not part of the events of Jesus life that John the apostle was with he was you know with him for the whole of his ministry the only identified disciple that was at the crucifixion and the ascension all of those things he witnessed in a lengthy life apparently he used his superior powers of censuses which is another way of dealing with information putting it together and came up with what we get in both the prologue and revelation does that make sense those are very wise words yes and they get us away from some of the trivia of science yeah well I don't think we can explain that it's just circuitry in the brain you know

I think that there we need to believe that not everything is discovered in a test tube I hope I haven't given the impression that I believe that no but that's you're so wise in your comment Sheila I think that there are others in the room who would extend this discussion to art and poetry and the inspiration that derives from those which cannot it seems to me be reduced to fundamentals of mass and energy so that I'm not trying to convince this group on this point but I'm thinking that John's prologue gives the most effective counterpunch to those who would insist on materialism and that he is in fact fighting a remarkably contemporary heresy in this chapter by pointing to things that are not possible to be explained under materialist assumptions yes your comment by your

supervisor focus on the big things made me think a little bit about this issue science versus theology and I think my understanding of science and probably yours too is that most scientific discoveries begin by discovering of small things which lead to the big picture for example the radio scientist who noted this cosmic background energy led to this theory of the origin of the universe it was very small a few tenths of a db difference in energy levels that they could detect with their telescope well it seems to me that perhaps theology has been mostly concerned with the big picture and science has been concentrating on search for truth to discovery starting with small things which lead they're a long way from coinciding in their views

I hope they do eventually but it's an interesting thought you put in my mind that theology is concerned with a big sense of picture and science with a small picture leading to truth from the small I think that's a very helpful perception Ed yeah yeah yeah Colin to the scientists that you know and read your big picture here it's so lovely thank you very much for it do they give thanks for the stuff of science the possibility of doing it is their gratitude generated there do they struggle with that Paul says they refuse to give thanks the error starts with refusal of thanks scientists turn out to be human beings oddly enough some of them are grateful and some of them are not

I used to say that I thought great scientists were grateful I was peculiarly fortunate in some of the ones that I had bumped into but of recent years I have become more skeptical especially this whole Dawkins outrage which is just full of nonsense and arrogance and shows no gratitude of any kind so I think the statement that you quote is absolutely correct there are people who do brilliant science but don't have any sense of gratitude but at the same time there are those who through their investigations become grateful and my supervisor is an example of a person who became a Christian in the course of his research and his being overwhelmed by the beauty of God's creation so it's not a straightforward question but I think you know what is happening at the moment there's a lot of people jumping on the

[ 59 : 48 ] Dawkins bandwagon and really can't see the word for the trees sir what do we what do we do with the not contradictions that we're faced with but you talk about the big question you use the word absorb and for me to believe and to accept has a great power Job's questions were never answered by God and God more or less said you ain't going to know why should I explain to you I did explain to you all these other things that I've done and I didn't consult you on any of these things so Job didn't get these questions answered but he did come to a conclusion which was

I've heard about you but now I see you so we have to cope with that thought so absorbing and accepting is there a line between those things or does one become the other I don't know the idea of understanding E equals MC squared knowing that Jesus spoke and things came into being or into shape or both I believe not based on anything really except that we are encouraged to believe Jesus said 13 times in the New Testament it is written which is a sort of a guide to how we approach these things and respond to them but absorbing is something

I'm not quite sure what and how or what is expected of us as believers it's a tricky question isn't it I would have thought that in relation to the chapter in hand that both those concepts are extremely relevant we both accept and attempt to absorb the content of that prologue we accept by faith and we absorb through reflecting on the implications of the exercising of that faith which we can if it's revealed which we can if it's revealed yes but is that I'm happy I'm quite happy well I'm not trying to make you happy Bill that would be impossible and the quality of your introductions would decline dramatically yes can we make a reasonable guess from the structure of the prologue that perhaps unlike many other

New Testament writers John had in mind readers who had practically no knowledge knowledge of the Old Testament is not drawing on their prior knowledge of God through the Old Testament and the question is does that mean then that John's gospel would be especially valuable for us today in living in a society where the Old Testament is an unknown he's in their shape almost that's that's a wonderful reflection Phil I think that's something that we should all think about that this is really a very special gospel but you know what is also so staggering to me is that we we rarely talk about these books together it seems to me that

John's gospel the three letters and the revelation really hold together in a remarkable way and that both your comment about the relevance of this passage for contemporary people who were ignorant of the Old Testament would apply equally to the letters and certainly the first five chapters of revelation not suggesting that the end of revelation isn't relevant but it'd be more difficult to communicate in that way did everybody get that point because I think it's really a very helpful

reflection from Phil that John is whereas Matthew is steeped in the Old Testament and every opportunity he shows us how the Old

[ 65 : 36 ] Testament was fulfilled and it's a powerful argument for those who know the Old Testament but that argument becomes very tricky if you don't know the Old Testament whereas in John's case you don't have to assume that thanks very much Phil yes Sam I'll just take a shot as well at what Jim was saying I remember it was about ten years ago I heard a guy named Philip Johnson speak at Regent College and it was kind of at the beginning maybe maybe it was one ten years ago at the beginning of the ID movement growth and in talking about materialism he made the best statement I don't think he intended to be profound but I remembered it because it was profound to me he is the example of one of Shakespeare's writings maybe Hamlet as an example and suggested that

Hamlet exists in written form or exists in the memory of actors that performed it or in some I think his words were disembodied form as it travels in electronic form through the internet or whatever and he was attempting to demonstrate it and I think successfully that that information exists apart from material it doesn't seem to me that you can point to any material and say there it is it seems like information so for a layperson like me it was convincing that that wasn't made up of any material on another note part of what you were saying I guess maybe just reading straight out of the prologue it reminded me of when we say in the creed I believe in all things visible and invisible and I sympathize with the materialist because all of us live with our senses and almost all that we perceive we perceive through our senses but it doesn't preclude the possibility that things exist apart from what our senses can perceive and each of us have to answer that question does that happen is there something apart from what our senses experience than is real well it's all part of our arrogance

I think that we suspect that there is nothing beyond what we can measure or put our hands on I think that's probably one of the most fundamental aspects of the sinful condition that we really think that we've got it and this powerfully expresses the fact that we don't have it and we needed some considerable help in order to get it people down to which I think is an appropriate moment for concluding the discussion if I may well I was looking to you for guidance Bill and not getting it so I thought Thank you, Olaf. If any of you here don't know, I did introduce Olaf in a way that revealed anything about him, but if you would like to Google him, if you don't make him laugh too much, if you Google him, you'll find out all about him, because you've probably realised that he's a bit of a scientist, and he's doing a geographer, and all of that rolled in, so you'll find him on the internet, and if you Google my name in, you'll find absolutely nothing.

Are you trying to prolong? Hello? Last week in the question and answer period, Olaf asked Dr. Packer a question about books. Can you remember your question, Dr. Packer?