

# John 1:1-18 "What Is the Meaning of Life?"

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[ 0 : 01 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us. The Gospel of John introduces itself.

I usually start a sermon series with introductory thoughts about themes and why we're studying the book and key context and we'll come back to some of that at the end this morning.

But the prologue of John's Gospel is, it's like a trailer to a movie that shows you some of the highlights before you even get there. It's like an orchestra.

Have you ever gone to a show in the orchestra before, when the lights are down, before the curtain opens and there are actors on stage, plays through like the whole show and you hear what's coming.

So I want to just start by reading it together this morning. I'll simply say this before I do. The Gospel of John for centuries has been referred to as water that a little child can paddle in and that an elephant can swim in.

[ 1 : 19 ] And I have been feeling that like an elephant doggy paddling for many days in the last few weeks.

A little bit like the girl Marcus described, standing before the ocean and just having categories redefined and mind blown, earth shattering.

Just looking at the prologue, it's overwhelmingly glorious. The greatest ever written. And I'm sure it's a literary masterpiece of chiasmic structure and word choice.

And it is gloriously simple too. So all of us should listen carefully to God's word. Nothing I say will touch the edges of these words.

So listen most closely right now. We put these page numbers up here so that if you don't have your own Bible open, you can grab one from the back of the pew and have it open in front of you as I read the written word of God, John 1 at verse 1.

[ 2 : 31 ] In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. 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. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

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.

[ 3 : 50 ] John bore witness about him and cried out, This was he of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me. And from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.

For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. God, the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Let's pray. God, I ask that you would show us your glory. Show us your grace.

Would you show us yourself in your word? God, we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

If you want people to realize that you're writing about something really big, you start with, In the beginning. Immediately, John reaches all the way back to the opening words of the Hebrew Scriptures in Genesis, back before time began, and he puts his account in the context of that grand story that's reaching a climax in the events that he's going to recount.

[ 5 : 17 ] All the way back, before anything else was, was the word. The logos. By using that word, John is telling us that he is discussing the very meaning of life.

What or who is at the center of the universe that helps everything else hold together and matter. When we ask, What is the meaning of life?

We're asking really big why questions, right? What's our purpose? Our identity? Our significance? Our place in this world?

That's what nearly everyone in John's day would have heard when they heard the word logos. They wouldn't have imagined the same thing, all of them, but they would have known that whatever it was, the word was the meaning of life.

See, religious people reading John's book, they knew that the word in the Old Testament was right at the center of everything. It referred to God's way of creating by the word of the Lord where the heavens made.

[ 6 : 29 ] It referred to God's mighty acts in his world, his power, to his lasting nature that he endures forever. And as a result, to the hope of God's people, as it goes out from his mouth, his word accomplishes their blessing.

That was their ultimate hope. But the word was the meaning of life for irreligious people, too. In pagan philosophy, it was a principle, the logos, which if you understood this principle, then life would have meaning.

It was the goal of life. Sometimes the beginning and the end. So now everyone is listening. John is talking to all of us this morning.

Whether we've said that the meaning of life is my pleasure, self-fulfillment, God and his glory, or even some then and now who say there is no bigger meaning.

Don't we long for something that's bigger than ourselves? We feel it. We know there's got to be some meaning in this life. Back then, they felt it so desperately that many would say, just live like there is, even if you don't think there's meaning.

[ 7 : 48 ] Live like there's something bigger. You have to. And we keep asking that question, don't we? What is the meaning of life? Well, John tells us several things about this word.

It's at the heart of the answer to that question. He's already telling us about its eternal self-existence.

There was no time when the word was not. He was before all things, we've read. In the beginning, the word began?

No. Became? No. No. That's used several times of other things in this passage, but the word here is was.

The word was in the beginning. The Genesis account begins with God acting to create things, but here it's the word's existence.

[ 8 : 53 ] Back, all the way back then, with God. Again, verse two, this same word, in the beginning with God. So close to God, yet distinct in some way.

I skipped the phrase, and the word was God. That equates the word with God. But some argue about grammar there, so let me come back to it once you see what John says to help us understand that phrase.

But second point, verse three, is the word's creative power. Whatever or whoever the word is, is the power behind the creation of the entire universe without exception.

John is especially pointing out positively, he made all things, and then negatively, nothing was made except what the word made.

John's especially saying the word is not created. But the word does create everything else. There are so many implications of that.

[ 10 : 06 ] If you stop to ponder for just a minute this morning, the word's unparalleled power, perhaps if you're feeling weak or overwhelmed this morning, having that kind of power come to you.

The fact that the smallest particles of every bird, every flower, every rock, if you were to break it down beyond the microscopic to its very smallest particles, every single one of them hypothetically would have TW inscribed on it, made by the word.

Every single tiny particle in the world. Nothing in the universe is beyond his control, right? Boy, things feel out of control sometimes. If that's true, that he made every single thing, then the word gets to dictate how things work, doesn't he? That means us too. It doesn't work the other way around. We don't dictate to him. He made us. He's the creator, the author, the designer. What he says goes. [11:22] Maybe some of you like me have been in a literature class at some point and you're discussing a poem, right? And I'm saying, well, I think the poem is about this. And someone else says, well, I think the poem is about that.

And then the teacher says something like, in a letter to a friend, the author of the poem explains that the poem is about the moon. You can say that it makes you think of your friend or that it makes you feel love or whatever else you want to say, but the debate on what the poem is about is over. It's about the moon. The author said so. The creator, in this case, the word, has authority over all things.

No exception. Do we live sometimes as though our lives, our time, our sexuality, our mission, our exceptions?

Next we read, the word is the unique light source. Clearly the word has life, right? Not merely to create, but to direct everything.

[12:36] The light of men. Yes, people are saying, we all agree with that. It's the meaning of life, right? It drives out darkness. It's the hope, the peace, the purpose.

That's the word. Do you see how already the deity of the word is being asserted in this passage? Only God can be eternally self-existent.

God created the heavens and the earth. Nobody else, right? The light to every single man must be God. It can't be some other man or created principle if it's going to be life and light for everyone. So while the word is distinguishable from God, the word also was God. God, not a God, fully God, lacking no aspect of God at all.

Whatever God was, the word was. That's what the grammar means. No matter what a Jehovah's Witness might tell you about the grammar there, beyond that, it's what the context demands for the understanding of the word was God.

[13:50] John is telling us of the deity of the word at its very essence. And this will get even more critical as he identifies the word, right?

It's not this other John that he starts telling us about. Maybe if you'd read this for the first time, you'd think, oh, the word is named John. No, no, he's very clear. He came as a witness to the light.

We'll hear his testimony next week. But whatever you do, don't get confused, John says, about who the light is. It's not John. It's not you and your pleasure.

Nope, there is something bigger. The meaning of life. The word is God. And John says, was coming into the world.

Last year, we were in London during Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee, celebrating 70 years on the throne.

[14:50] A seemingly mythical, larger-than-life figure for that many years, right? We saw her pictures all over the paper.

We heard about all of the amazing things that she had accomplished during her reign. We read many wonderful things that she said Queen Elizabeth was everywhere. And then one day, on an unassuming, uncrowded street in London, with just a few people around us, we saw her. We saw the Queen. Not on TV, not up on a palace balcony, but less than 10 feet away from us. Smiling in the back seat of a car, driving by really fast, right by where we stood on the sidewalk. But all of a sudden, in that moment, she seemed more real. She was like our friend for the rest of the trip. We talked about her, like we knew her. We had this deep connection because we had seen the Queen.

Can you imagine the difference in knowing about someone who's so far removed? Maybe it's the president of your company. Your life has been impacted by his decisions over and over, but you've never met him.

[16:15] Maybe it's your favorite athlete. You have watched them over and over and over. You know everything they're like, you think. Maybe it's your favorite entertainer. You've heard all their songs.

You've read their biography. You know this person. But then the difference when you meet them, not merely for a drive-by.

Imagine if you lived for a month with Taylor Swift. Oh my goodness. Imagine if you talked with Lionel Messi.

If you watched them with their family and when they let their hair down, you would get to know them on an entirely different level, right?

Verse 14 moves us from the glorious, far off, incredible word to the mind-blowing, we have no categories for this, the word became flesh.

[ 17 : 21 ] The meaning of life is a person. No, no, no. It can't be, cry the irreligious.

The word is separate from this world. It's beyond. It's apart. It can't take part of this material. No, no. It can't be, cry the religious.

The word is God, not man then. There is one God and he is holy. We can't even see him and live. It can't be. John says, yes, it is.

Yes, the word becomes a man with flesh and blood like you and me and in fact, not just in a drive-by moment, but dwelling for a while, tabernacling among us.

That word for dwelling refers to the tabernacle, the tent where Yahweh, the one living God, once lived among his people as they journeyed in the desert.

[ 18 : 29 ] It kept them safe from his full glory which they could not handle. It was too much for them. It also refers to revelation where one day forever, the dwelling place of God is where?

With man. Already in the word made flesh, this relationship, God with man has begun. Men and women and children see the glory of God and what happens?

They live. The unique one who has been near God, the Father, who has always been there before and after John and is therefore of greatest rank, shines the radiance of God's glory into the world, John says, so that we receive what?

Grace upon grace. Really, that means what verse 17 explains. The grace of God's law through Moses. It was a gift, a grace, but we needed yet more to know God fully and truly, to know not just his creation, the things he has done, to know not just his laws, the things that he has said, but now, up close and personal, the full grace and truth of Jesus Christ.

There's the name for the first time. The eternal word, the light of the world, who has come into the world, John wants us to know, is Jesus Christ.

[ 20 : 03 ] Christ, the promised king. And so, so now we see him when we, with unveiled faces, see Jesus.

We, we see the glory of God. We encounter the very meaning of life. We personally know God on an entirely different level. In the face of Jesus, we see the glory of God in human form.

In the life of Jesus, we see the perfect image of God. In the gentle and lowly heart of Jesus, we feel the heartbeat of a God who is abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

In the sacrifice of Jesus, we experience God actually forgiving sins, not merely a system of laws, picturing that. In the death of Jesus, we see the deep love of God for us played out.

In the resurrection of Jesus, we witnessed the power of God to bring life from death and light from darkness. Do you see the point?

[ 21 : 10 ] Do you see why the word became flesh? It's to make God known to us, to reveal the Father perfectly.

Because see, no one has ever seen God. Verse 18 summarizes. So God, the one and only, the word with God near to his heart, the only one who can do this perfectly has made him known.

That's why John wants you to know the word is God. God and the word became flesh. Both of those things somehow, amazingly, so that you know you see Jesus and you're not missing anything.

The whole thing right there. You can have a Mormon tell you or you can read in a Christian science reading room that God found a man to dwell in.

This is so much better than that. this is God himself. True God of true God. Very God of very God.

[ 22 : 22 ] The old creeds clarify for us. The God of all creation. The God of the flood. The God of the burning bush. The God of the red sea.

The God who walked with his people back in the Garden of Eden. You remember? The God who traveled with his people in the tabernacle. The God who lived with his people in the temple taking on flesh.

That God revealing himself again breaking apart the heavens to come down breaking in to draw near again in relationship so that you and I can really and truly and personally know him. Grace upon grace. Amen? Can you believe that he's done that? Jesus the word made flesh didn't step down from the palace in order to gain votes to attract followers to make an obligatory appearance for a photo op.

Jesus came down to know you and to invite you truly to know him.

[ 23 : 45 ] God made you to live with him. That is the meaning of life friends. God has designed all of history so that for all eternity his people will live with him.

That's the point. And God became man because he was unwilling that you should stay in darkness apart from him. He was unwilling to leave you living for your own pleasures defining your own identity not realizing that there was a light that you were made for a life with unimaginable joy and purpose and hope.

He didn't want to leave you without that so he came down. Let's back up just a few verses and see what happened when the word became flesh for that very purpose.

Verse 10 he was in the world and the world was made through him yet the world did not know him. He came to his own and his own people did not receive him.

many of the religious and the irreligious reject this Jesus who comes to reveal God to them.

[ 25 : 06 ] Perhaps they prefer their own meaning of life perhaps there are other reasons but regardless we're going to see this time and again through John's gospel this is what happens Jesus comes and his words and his actions and his claims elicit widely different responses many do not receive him but verse 12 don't miss this if you've gotten lost come back this is spotlighted by the whole structure of the entire prologue verse 12 but to all who did receive him who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God children of God are you kidding me the greatest blessing in all of the scripture that could ever be given to someone to have God as your father to relate intimately with him who to know is life itself having him listen to you and provide for you and lead and guide you and defeat your enemies and remake you after his image and live with you forever that is the life that Jesus is inviting you into he has come that we might believe both religious and irreligious if you're here this morning all who receive him who truly and simply believe become children of God not based on their performance not because they were better than the next guy it's not their own willpower to get them there but it's the grace of God they are born of

God that's the invitation for all of us in fact John tells us near the end of his book what the purpose of the entire book is all the things that he writes all the stories about the life of Jesus he records so that you may believe John 20 31 these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name that you may believe believe what that Jesus is the Christ John wants you and me to know that this man Jesus is really God and he's really become flesh so that you can see and truly know God that is the meaning of life that true life when you embrace that reality when you believe into Jesus when you become a child of God and have life abundant life free life fulfilling life

John says even eternal life that's why John writes and that's why we're studying John for the next 78 years I haven't decided when we're finishing yet we're just starting today okay I was going to tell you why we're studying John theoretically but I think I'll tell you why personally based on my experience this week Tuesday was a rough day it started bad and just got worse had a day like that of course it started with no one sleeping well because the kids were all coughing through the night so that's always you know the day is going to be good when you start with no sleep a small leak in the kitchen was becoming a big problem here messy and expensive the car wouldn't work people I loved shared some heavy news other beloved people I was supposed to meet with got COVID then I wasn't thoughtful trying to talk with my wife about these things things

I tried in effort to save the day to take the family out to dinner both avoiding the kitchen which was not a good place and salvaging the day and it didn't go well no details we got ready for bed and I just wanted to put the day behind me I had failed life just felt all too dark too too heavy life was just bad when I woke up the next morning none of the circumstances was different but part of the grace of my calling such a gift is that I really needed Wednesday morning to spend some time in the gospel of John I started reading in him was life the light of man that darkness has not overcome Jesus has shown me the glory of God Jesus has made me a child of God Jesus has given me grace upon grace he understands the pain of yesterday but that pain doesn't make life all bad that's not where life is found life doesn't consist in the abundance of my possessions life's not about

spending my resources the way I planned life's not about performing well enough as a husband or a father certainly not as a handyman life Tuesday and every day is in Jesus and so it is abundant and free and fulfilling and eternal and I started believing that and I got to feel light shine into my darkness to have hope meet me in despair to have life be fulfilling even in my failures and my frustrations we're studying

[ 31 : 27 ] John because I need it because you need it religious people irreligious people we need to believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God and find life in his name nowhere else the ultimate meaning of life in Christ alone knowing him trusting him talking to him relying on him and John is one of the easiest places to encounter the person of Jesus the eternal word made flesh so it is good for each of us and it's good for friends and neighbors that we're praying for that we're wanting to talk with God about perhaps longing to point them to Jesus John helps John holds out for all of us Jesus as the meaning of life he's right it's true

I've lived it this week many of you have lived it on good days and bad days and maybe the gospel of John will be a tool that will help you believe and find life for the first time or believe again and live life with the true meaning reset maybe it'll be a tool you can use to offer someone else the joy of believing and finding life that's the preview John's giving us of where we're going in the months ahead we're going to encounter Jesus and a wide range of responses to him my prayer is you'll not only believe but also assent not just to the theoretical truth but truly believe and find life with him like you've never known it to be fulfilling abundant and free and I want to close with the grandest possible words to highlight the glory and grace of Jesus so now that we've meditated on some of what this prologue means in spite of what time it is

I want us to read it together one more time I want you to hear these words maybe in a fresh way in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God he was in the beginning with God 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 the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it there was a man sent from God whose name was John he came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him he was not the light but came to bear witness about the light the true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world he was in the world and the world was made through him yet the world did not know him he came to his own and his own people did not receive him but to all who did receive him who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God 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

John bore witness about him and cried out this was he of whom I said he who comes after me ranks before me because he was before me and from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace for the law was given through Moses grace and truth came through Jesus Christ no one has ever seen God the only God who is at the father's side he has made him known let's pray Jesus we thank you for giving us what we most desperately needed we needed to know God we need to know where life was found we've looked for it in lots of places we still do would we see you this morning and in every page of this book as beautiful and glorious and life-giving might we find our life in you help us by your spirit we ask it in your name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org a free for more information from to to