

Christ Before All

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[0 : 00] Amen. Well, it is a joy to open up God's Word with you this morning as we begin a new series in the Gospel of John. And I hope that many of you grabbed one of those scripture journals on your way in. That's not just for today.

Lord willing, we're going to walk through this entire gospel together over the coming months. And our hope is that you will fill those things up with notes and observations and applications to your life as we study this gospel together.

So let's open up our Bibles now to the book of John. The book of John. If you are using the Bible in the pew back in front of you, if you didn't bring your own Bible, there's a Bible under your seat.

And you can find this passage on page 833 of that Bible there. We always tell everyone who comes that you're going to need your Bible open. We're going to be talking from the Word of God this morning.

So have your Bibles open to page 833. And we'll begin this morning with John chapter 1 verses 1 through 5. Follow with me as I read. In the beginning was the Word.

[1 : 13] 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.

Would you please pray with me? Lord, as we open up this gospel this morning, as we open up Your Word, we pray simply again that You would speak through the preaching of Your Word, that it would land on fertile soil this morning as we look to Christ.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, a proper introduction goes a long way. I grew up just south of the city of Atlanta, Georgia.

And so naturally, Chick-fil-A was just a normal part of life for us. But in my hometown, we had the extra blessing of being able to be a part of some of Truett Cathy's additional unique food experiments.

[2 : 21] So there was, of course, Chick-fil-A's everywhere. But we also had the Chick-fil-A Dwarf House. I don't know if you've ever heard of this. You can get a breakfast buffet. You can even order a hamburger or a steak, believe it or not, at the Chick-fil-A Dwarf House.

There was a restaurant called Truett's Luau. Only one in the entire world. Well, Truett's Luau, where you can go get Hawaiian-themed dishes. You can get waffle fries and fish tacos at Truett's Luau.

But I will never forget when Truett Cathy opened up his pizza restaurant in my hometown. It's called Upscale Pizza. So just dream with me for a minute at the prospect of getting a pepperoni pizza with Chick-fil-A service and then finishing it off with a Chick-fil-A milkshake.

It was absolutely incredible. Well, I was going to meet some of my friends for the grand opening of Upscale Pizza, and it just so happened that I had had Chick-fil-A for lunch.

And so I emptied the trash out from my car, gathered it up, walked up to the front door, threw my bag in the trash can. There was an elderly man there holding the door open for us as we went in, and we locked eyes, and he complimented me on my trash.

[3 : 37] He said, a Chick-fil-A man. I like to see that. And of course, I was polite enough. I thanked him for opening the door for me, but I didn't think much of it. Went inside, sat down, ordered my food.

And it wasn't until after we finished, after we had sat for about an hour having a good time together, after the old man at the door had long gone, before the waitress came and cleared our table and asked us if we had had a chance to meet Mr. Truett Cathy.

I said, no, I don't think so. Where was he? And she said, well, he was at the door, holding the door open as new customers came into his new restaurant.

And as you can imagine, my heart just sank. I had passed right by him and not even noticed. The man who had perfected the chicken sandwich didn't invent it, only perfected it.

He was a celebrity in my hometown. And at that moment, I just wished that someone would have given me a proper introduction.

[4 : 44] I wish that somebody, anybody would have prepared me beforehand, told me who he was, that someone would have prepared me for that encounter so that I could respond to him appropriately and give him the respect and the admiration and the gratitude that he deserved.

Well, as we begin our time in the Gospel of John this morning, the Apostle John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, he wants to make sure that all of us are given a proper introduction to Jesus.

He doesn't want us to do as so many people do and just pass right by him without recognizing who he really is.

He wants us to know and to consider who Jesus is so that we might respond to him appropriately. In fact, that's exactly why he wrote this book.

John tells us in chapter 20, verse 31 of the book of John. In chapter 20, verse 31, this is his purpose statement for the book. He says in chapter 20, verse 31, he's written this book, 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.

[6 : 06] See, he wants to introduce us this morning to Jesus. And what we're going to see in verses 1 through 5 of this introduction this morning is that Christ Jesus is before all.

Christ is before all. And because he is who he is, because he is before all, we owe him everything. So what we're going to see this morning is three ways Christ is before all.

If you're a note taker, we always encourage our people to take notes. This helps us to follow along with the sermon this morning if you have a pen and paper. There are three ways that Christ is before all.

First, you see, Christ is before all in time. He is before all in time. He's before all temporally.

So there's four gospel accounts in the Bible. There's Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And out of the four, John is the weird one. He's kind of the oddball.

[7 : 11] The first three, they call them the synoptic gospels. And that's because although they do have their own unique flavors, they often tell similar stories in similar order in similar ways.

But then you get to this oddball John, and his gospel account is totally unique. But his gospel is often called the spiritual gospel. Kent Hughes, he says that Matthew emphasizes his kingship.

Mark emphasizes his servanthood. Luke emphasizes his manhood. And John emphasizes his godhood. And we see some of that spiritual bent to the gospel of John here in the beginning, where Matthew and Luke both generally start with the birth of Christ.

And Mark starts at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. John goes all the way back to the beginning of the beginning. And he says, as far back as you can imagine, as far back as we can trace the origin of all things, this person that I'm introducing you to here, he was there.

So right off the bat, we're seeing that this man, Jesus, is not like anything else or anyone else in all of creation. He is before all of it.

[8 : 30] He is utterly unique. And he points us to that uniqueness of Jesus by calling him the Word. Look there to verse 1 with me.

John says here in verse 1, he says, In the beginning was the Word. John is cluing us in here to the identity, the unique identity of Jesus.

He calls him the Word. What does this tell us about who Jesus is? Well, the Word, we see here, does not have a beginning. He was there in the beginning.

He's not a part of creation. Verse 3 tells us everything that was made was made through him. He was there in the beginning. And as you hear this, if you're familiar with the Bible, your mind ought to immediately jump back to the beginning of the Bible in Genesis.

Genesis chapter 1, it starts the exact same way. If you're familiar with this, it says, In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And as the story goes on, we see that the way God creates all things, it's not with tools or materials.

[9 : 43] He creates all things. He says, how? With his Word. That he speaks and it comes into existence. He says, let there be fish and animals and creeping things, and there they are.

He says, let there be trees and flowers and plants and shrubs and bushes, and there they are. He created all things by his Word. The Word of God is his creative instrument.

It's his vehicle for creating all things. And so John is intentionally drawing our minds there back to Genesis to say that this Word, this life-giving Word of God has a name, and his name is Jesus.

All things were made through him. Isn't this what we saw last Sunday evening from the book of Colossians? For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.

All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. See, the eternal Word of God creates all things.

[11 : 01] He is before all things. But you know what else it does? The Word of God also reveals. The Word of God creates, and the Word of God reveals.

And really, this is how all words work, isn't it? When you and I speak in a very real way, we are communicating who we are. And so if you want to know what I think, what I feel, what I'm like, if you want to know who I am, just spend some time listening to me speak, listening to my words, and I'll tell you.

And of course, you and I do this imperfectly. We often speak without thinking. We misspeak. We say things that we don't really mean, but not so with God.

God's Word perfectly communicates God's heart. God does not misspeak. God's Word perfectly communicates God's will.

God's Word perfectly communicates who God is. And ever since he spoke the world into existence, God has been sending forth his Word from heaven down to earth through prophets, through angels, through visions, through this inspired Word of God that we hold in our hands this morning to communicate who he is.

[12 : 22] But John says something unique here, doesn't he? He says that this man, Jesus, who I'm introducing you to this morning, is the Word of God.

In other words, he says that he has been with Jesus, and he's convinced that this man is the perfect, the ultimate communication of who God is.

Everything about him, not just what he says, but who he is. He is the eternal Word of God, sent forth from heaven down to earth.

And he and he alone perfectly communicates who God is in a way that can be heard, yes, but now also seen. And touched and known and believed.

He's telling us the one who was before all in time, stepped into time and into history, the creator of all entered into creation to reveal God.

[13 : 30] So if you want to know what God is like, look to Jesus. You look to the Word. The author of Hebrews, he says something similar.

We read this passage this morning in Hebrews chapter 1. He says, Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. And he upholds the universe by the Word of his power.

See, Jesus, John wants us to know he's unlike anyone you've ever met before. This is the eternal Word of God. When you trace all things back to their beginning, Jesus was there.

All things are from him, so he deserves the credit and the glory. When you wonder how all things got here, it is through Jesus.

[14 : 37] All things were made through him, so he deserves the wonder and the admiration and the praise of your heart. When you wonder why all things exist, it is all for Jesus.

All things in heaven and on earth, even you and me were made for him. So he deserves your entire self. For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be the glory forever. But he's not just before all things in time. Second, we see he is before all things in being. He is before all things in being.

Look there again to verse 1. And brace yourself, because this is going to get maybe a little confusing, but we're going to do this together, I promise. Verse 1, John says, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. So we're talking about Jesus here. So John says, In the beginning was Jesus. Jesus was with God. Jesus was God.

[15 : 47] Jesus was in the beginning with God. Not only was Jesus before all things in time, he is before all things in being. This passage is some of the richest language that we have concerning what we call the Godhead, the Trinity.

And it is also a theological minefield. And the early church often would go back and refer to this passage over and over and over and over again to refute several heretical teachings about who God is.

We sing the song often, Holy, Holy, Holy. I know you know this song. What does it say? God in what? God in three persons. Blessed Trinity.

That's correct theology. Not three gods, one God. Not one person, three persons. Not one God showing up in three different ways at three different times in three different modes.

It's one holy God in three distinct persons. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. And you may not think that this matters too much for you.

[16 : 57] Let me tell you something. This matters more than you can possibly imagine. It matters how you think about God, how you think about the person of Jesus, because right understanding of God breeds right response to God.

If we're going to rightly respond to who God is, we have to understand correctly who he is. So John here, he says, this Jesus, who I'm introducing you to, is before all things because he is before all things in being.

He is God in the flesh. I see at least three essential facts about the Trinity here that we need to get.

Three essential facts about the Trinity. From the beginning, the Godhead has been clearly distinct, perfectly one, and happily together.

I'll say that again. From the very beginning, the Godhead has been clearly distinct, perfectly one, and happily together.

[18 : 06] All of this in just two verses packed into John's introduction here. We see the persons of the Godhead are clearly distinct. What does he say? In the beginning was the Word, that's Jesus, and Jesus was with God.

There are two distinct persons represented here. The Word, who is Jesus, and God, meaning God the Father. They are distinct. And so they do different things.

God the Father did not come into the world as a baby. Jesus did that. God the Father did not die on the cross. Jesus, the Son of God, did that.

God the Father did not rise up from the grave. Jesus did that. So we see they are clearly distinct. But then he goes on to say that they are perfectly one.

And here's where our minds can't totally comprehend. The Word was God. God, they are distinct in person, yet in some way that goes beyond our comprehension, these distinct persons are perfectly one in essence.

[19 : 18] And we need to try to track here because John is telling us what is probably the most important thing to know about who Jesus is. That he's not just another teacher, not just another religious figure, he's not just a good moral example, he's not just another leader, he's not just another prophet, he is God.

I wonder if any of you have ever had a Jehovah's Witness come knock on your door. Most normal people either politely tell them they're not interested or pretend like they're not home.

I am not a normal person. So I love when they come to my door and it's my goal when they come knocking on my door to show them what John is showing us right here, that Jesus, this man Jesus, is God.

The Jehovah's Witnesses, of course, they disagree strongly with what I'm saying here. They do not believe that Jesus is equal with God the Father. They believe that God created Jesus.

And so in their false translation of the Bible, you can look this up, they have a false translation that throws everything off with just one letter. Their version of John chapter 1, it goes like this.

[20 : 36] It says, in the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was a God. You see the difference?

That one additional letter is an eternity of difference. when I was in seminary, we had to learn the basics of biblical translation, learn how to read and understand and translate biblical Greek, and I knew just enough to be dangerous.

And in God's wise providence, we lived in an apartment complex right next door to the Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall. And as you can imagine, they came knocking on our door, and immediately I sprung up off the couch and ran to the door, opened it up, invite them in.

Come on, let's sit down and talk. And they were excited, surprised, excited, but not for long. Because I was prepared to show them and to make this the main piece of our conversation, to not let them get around this fact that the Word was not a God, the Word was God.

This is John's whole point here. If you miss this, you miss the entire gospel. He doesn't just speak the words of God. He doesn't just look like God. He doesn't just sound like God.

[22 : 00] He doesn't just remind us of God. He is God in the flesh. And if He's not God, take Him or leave Him. Who cares? But if He is who John says He is, we had better pay attention.

And unless you know Him as He is, and love Him as He is, and trust Him as He is, you cannot know God.

John says in verse 18, if you look down on your page, no one has ever seen God, but the only God who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known.

See, if this man, Jesus, is just another teacher, we might listen to Him, we might reject Him, we might appreciate Him, we might not. But if He is God, we'd better pay attention.

There's a third essential fact about the Trinity that we see here, and it's that from the beginning, they have been happily together. Happily together.

[23 : 13] Twice here, John tells us that Christ, the Word was with God. He was in the beginning with God, and the Word here in English, it can't really do it justice, but it communicates a sort of movement towards one another.

So from the beginning of all eternity, God has existed within Himself in perfect, all-satisfying community.

Have you ever thought about this? That God the Father has always enjoyed the infinite depth of perfect, all-satisfying relationship with God the Son, and God the Spirit, which tells us that for whatever reason, God chose to create the world, whatever reason He chose to create me, and to create you, it was not because He needed us in order to be satisfied.

He did not create all things in order to fill a void in Himself. He doesn't seek out relationship in order to fill a need from all time.

He has been totally, perfectly satisfied in community within Himself. So why did He make you? Why did He make me?

[24 : 36] Why did He make anything at all? Many reasons. Here's one. One reason God made you is so that He might draw you in, that He might share in this perfect, limitless, all-satisfying relationship that can only be found in God, that He might share that with you for the rest of eternity.

You know, that's why Christ came. The Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us, stepped into His own creation in order to redeem it, in order to bring us into fellowship with God Himself through His blood, in order to share with you and with me the limitless depth of intimate knowledge of God for the rest of eternity, that He would share with us His unending goodness.

Which, church, is the third and final way. Christ is above and before all. Christ is before all, third, in goodness.

Look there to verse 4. John says, 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. R.C. Sproul rightly, I think, observes that this is the exact opposite description of the world in which we live, isn't it?

[26 : 25] And when you look around the world at all the wickedness all around us, it's obvious, isn't it? I don't have to tell you, our world is not characterized by life and light.

It is characterized by death and darkness. Things are not as they should be. You read the news, you see the headlines, you see the stories.

This world is a mess. This world is in darkness. But it's not just darkness out there. We need to realize that there is darkness in you and in me that ought to tell us that something is not quite right with us.

Things are not the way they should be with us. Every one of us says things and does things we ought not to say and do. If our thoughts were made visible, we'd be ashamed.

All of this, the Bible tells us, is the disastrous result of sin. It is sin.

[27 : 30] It's that rebellion against God that brings the curse of death. And it is sin that corrupts and stains and darkens everything. And it is sin that blinds us to the truth and the glory of God.

And until this sin problem is dealt with in each one of us, none of us can enter into fellowship with God. So where do we turn? John tells us we must turn to the one in whom there is life and light.

To the word who creates and who reveals. To the one who is before all in goodness.

What does Jesus say in John chapter 8? He says, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

Think back again to Genesis 1. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was without form and void and darkness was over the face of the deep and the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters and God said what?

[28 : 44] Let there be light. And there was light. And God saw that the light was good and separated the light from the darkness and Paul picks up on this theme in 2 Corinthians and he says for God who said let light shine out of darkness has shown in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Are you tracking here? He says that same light shining darkness defeating life giving power of God that we see in the beginning of all things in Genesis happens in you and happens in me when we are given eyes to see the goodness of God in the person of Jesus Christ and love him for who he is and know him and worship him for who he is.

the light's come on and we are able to see we are made alive to the goodness of Christ we are brought out of darkness and into his marvelous light out of spiritual death and into his perfect eternal life that is what it means to be a Christian is that by the grace of God we see by the light of Christ that he is good that he alone is God and that he alone is worthy of your worship it's to enjoy fellowship with God through faith in his life giving word you want to know why Christians worship Jesus not just respect him or admire him but worship him it's because we have tasted and seen that he is good by the grace of God we have realized that in him and in him alone there is life and there is light well even as

John introduces us this morning to the most glorious man in the history of the world he can't help but give the ending away can he he says the light has come into the world and the darkness has not overcome it the darkness cannot overcome it not for a lack of trying when Christ was born the enemy raged and sought to destroy him he sent Herod and his minions to kill him but the darkness could not overcome him and Christ was tempted and tried in every way as we are yet without sin the darkness could not overcome him he never sinned when Christ suffered and died upon the cross it looked for a moment as if the darkness had won you remember the story what happened the whole the whole earth for three hours the land was covered with darkness but we know the end of that story don't we

Christ didn't remain in the grave the darkness did not overcome he rose up from the grave and he conquered sin and death and darkness for any who would come to him in faith and as we look around the world and see the effects of sin all around us know this for certain it may look for a moment as if darkness has prevailed but one day he's promised he will come again and finally put an end to all the sin all the death all the darkness in all the universe and Christ will triumph over the darkness but church the good news is if you know this man Jesus we don't have to wait if you know this man if you've met

[32 : 56] Jesus he can put an end to your sin right now there is no darkness in this room there's no darkness in your heart there's no darkness in all the universe that can triumph over the goodness of Christ so as we close the application for us here in this introduction to this man Jesus Christ is would you turn to him would you look to him for the first time or for the thousandth time would you turn to him what sin is there in your heart that needs to be brought into the light this morning what are you turning to to give you the life and the light that only Christ Jesus can provide would you turn to him again and again and again and again and taste and see that he is good church a proper introduction makes all the difference doesn't it

John knew Jesus Christ personally he was an eyewitness to the things that we'll study about through this gospel he was was eating with Jesus sitting with Jesus he was there at the cross and there at the empty tomb if this man is who John claims he is he deserves much more than just our passing attention and when you come face to face with with who this man is we have to recognize Christ Jesus demands not only your respect but your life and not just your casual acknowledgement but your deepest sincerest devotion he deserves not only your attention but your worship let's pray Lord Jesus you are good above all and you've shown us in your word today that in you and in you alone there is life and there is light we pray father father if there are any here who have not received the life of

Christ would you now open their eyes to see and Lord if there are any here who are struggling with sin discouraged feels like the darkness is overcoming father would they turn to Christ and know that the darkness can never prevail against him Lord we ask now in all things that you would be exalted and that we would be changed further and further into your likeness we pray this in Jesus name amen