

John 1:1-5

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. Would you turn with me in a Bible to John chapter 1? If you're looking in the Pew Bibles, it's on page 886. For the next three weeks, we'll be doing an Advent series looking at the prologue to John's Gospel.

As you're doing that, just one more thing that I wanted to mention about the carol service. Tonight, downstairs, along with the reception and lots of food, there's going to be a table with some books. We'll have The Reason for God.

We'll have other books that we'll be giving out for free, some shorter booklets for introducing people to Christianity. So if that would be helpful for you or for anyone that you bring with you, bring them downstairs and make sure they know about that.

We'll announce that tonight as well, but just wanted to let you know we'll be making those available as a resource. John chapter 1. This morning, we're looking at verses 1 through 5, but I'm actually going to read the whole prologue, which is verses 1 through 18.

We'll be looking at this over the next three weeks. So let's read together John chapter 1, starting at verse 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[1 : 20] 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.

[2 : 25] 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. Amen. Lord Jesus, this passage says that You have made known the true God to us.

And we pray that as we look into this passage today, that You would open our eyes and our hearts, Lord, to know You, to love You, to trust You.

Lord, we pray that You would reveal Yourself to us even as we look into these words written so long ago. In Your name. Amen. Well, one of the aspects of preparing sermons, which I find most challenging, is preparing introductions.

[3 : 34] In general, a good introduction is supposed to engage the audience and capture their attention and somehow bring them, direct them toward the main idea or at least the first major point of the sermon.

That's what you're told in preaching classes, if you ever take those. And some people say that you either gain or lose the audience's attention in the first two minutes. So the introduction either makes it or breaks it.

Well, I hope that's not completely true, but still, introductions are important. And they're not only important in sermons or lectures or talks to make a connection to a main idea, but also in relationships.

Right? If you're trying to introduce someone to someone else that you know and they don't yet know. It's always sort of fun to ask married couples, how did you first meet each other? How were you first introduced? And you find all sorts of interesting stories.

And it's also interesting, in different settings, we introduce people in different ways. So if you go to an academic lecture, the speaker is usually introduced with a list of their professional accomplishments, all their degrees and awards and titles and positions.

[4 : 40] But in other settings, to do that would seem artificial or even pretentious. You want to introduce someone by telling them how they've made an impact on your life or the personal relationship that you have with them and what they mean to you.

And in some cultures, you might introduce someone by hardly talking, by not speaking hardly a word about them as an individual, but talking about their family and their parents and their grandparents and the people they're connected to and where they come from.

And that defines who they are. You see, the way that we introduce ourselves and the way that we introduce other people usually shows what we value most highly.

Well, the New Testament Gospels were written to introduce us to the person of Jesus Christ. And each of them introduces Jesus in a slightly different way. It's interesting to look at the introductions. So Mark begins with John the Baptist, a well-known figure in those days, publicly announcing the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Luke begins a little further back with angels, announcing the conception and birth of John the Baptist as well as Jesus and fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

[5 : 53] Matthew opens with Jesus' genealogy, going all the way back to Abraham, the patriarch, the father of the Jewish people. But the Gospel of John, what we're looking at today, goes back the farthest of them all, before the creation of the world.

It 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. What John is telling us is that Jesus is the Word who created the world.

Now, John doesn't actually mention Jesus by name until verse 17. So if you're just reading these opening words, they're somewhat mysterious. He's describing this unnamed being.

But as he goes on, it's increasingly clear who he's referring to. But in verses 1 through 5, what we're looking at today, John uses three images. And he puts three images before us. The Word, life, the light.

Now, each of these images would have deeply resonated with thinkers and scholars in John's day. The Word, or in Greek, logos, from which we get the word logic, could also be translated reason, or knowledge, or speech, or message, or even science.

[7 : 06] So the Stoics talked about the logos as the ordering principle of the universe, or the essence of the rational human soul. Now, Philo, a Jewish philosopher, following in Plato's footsteps, described the logos of God as the ideal world, of which the physical world in which we live was only a copy and a shadow.

Or Plato himself, perhaps the most influential of all the Greek philosophers, compared the human condition to living in a dark cave. Outside there is light and life and beauty, but we're trapped inside in darkness and shadows and death.

And it's possible that John was intentionally making a connection to some of these ideas that people had talked about and discussed. But even more than these potential philosophical connections, John's primary point of reference is the Old Testament.

And it's certain that John was making a connection to Genesis 1, the creation story, which we read earlier in the service. Genesis begins by saying, In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

And John begins his gospel with those very same words, In the beginning was the Word. You might even say that John is writing a new Genesis, a new book of beginnings, in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus.

[8 : 29] But you know, there's even more. If you look back at Genesis 1, we see God creating the world through his Word. Ten times in Genesis 1, God speaks. And each time, exactly what God says happens.

And it was so. Everything that God creates, he creates through his Word. This is what John says in verse 3. All things were made through the Word. And without the Word, nothing was made that was made.

And this is the theme that goes throughout the whole Old Testament. So if you read Psalm, Psalm 33, verse 6 and 9, says, By the Word of the Lord, the heavens were made. By the breath of his mouth, all their hosts.

For he spoke and it came to be, he commanded. And it stood firm. If you read Proverbs chapter 8, it gives a picture of God fashioning the world through his wisdom. Now in the Old Testament, God's Word is not only the agent of creation, it's also the source of prophetic revelation.

So the prophets say things like, The Word of the Lord came to me. And also the means of salvation. Psalm 107 says, God sent out his Word and healed them and delivered them from their destruction. [9:39] God's Word is powerful, active, and life-giving. We also see the themes of life and light in the Old Testament. Again, in Genesis 1, the world begins formless, empty, and dark.

And the first thing God does is he creates light. And then he forms and shapes the world and fills it with living creatures and commissions them to spread life throughout the whole world, to be fruitful and multiply.

God called Israel to be a light to the world, to the nations, to spread his Word to the world. And so these images of life and light and the Word would have resonated not only with John's Greek and Roman readers, but also with his Jewish readers who knew the Bible.

Now, maybe you're thinking, Well, I'm neither Jewish nor Greek nor Roman. I've never read a word of Greek philosophy, or maybe you've never read a word of the Old Testament. But you know, aren't these three things, the Word, life, and light, aren't they some of the greatest mysteries of human experience?

The Word, language, communication, life, being, existence, light, hope, truth. Don't we all wonder, does this world have meaning?

[10:57] Is there a word behind all the words that we speak? Or is it just ultimately random and chaotic? Is there truth? And if so, can we know it?

Is there life beyond the death that all of us will one day face? Is there a light that shines more brightly than all the darkness that we experience?

Don speaking to these deep existential questions that every human being experiences, that resonate within our minds and hearts. For years, many scientists have made it their ambition to find a grand unified theory, or a theory of everything.

So Stephen Hawking wrote in 1988, the eventual goal of science is to provide a single theory that describes the whole universe. And if we found such a theory, it would be truly elegant.

But what if, behind all the processes and regular operations of atoms and molecules and subatomic particles, what if there is not just a very complex set of mathematical equations, but a living being, who holds the whole universe together?

[12:10] What if ultimate reality is not a theory, but a person? That's what John's saying. He's saying the word behind all things, the light of the world, the source of all life, is Jesus.

Ultimate reality is not an abstract principle or a mathematical equation, not a philosophical ideal, but a person who has revealed himself to humanity. He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through him, in him was life, and the life was the light of all. You know, when John says in verse 1, the word was with God, that preposition, with, is almost always used in a context that refers to a person being with another person, even a person facing another person, in close relationship to another person.

What John is saying is that from eternity past, from before the beginning of the world, at the heart of ultimate reality is a personal relationship. The word was with God, and the word was God.

And there was never a time when he was not. You know, John isn't inventing a totally new idea here. There are hints of this idea in the Old Testament, even as far back as Genesis chapter 1.

[13:31] In Genesis 1, there is God who creates all things, but there's also the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters. And then there's the Word of God.

God creates everything through his Word. God, God's Spirit, and God's Word. Now, there are not three different gods. Of course there's not.

There's only one God. And yet, God's Word and God's Spirit aren't created beings. They're within the essence of God himself.

And this is a mystery. And in the Old Testament, there are only hints of this. But John picks up on those hints. And throughout his Gospel, the reality behind those hints is gradually unveiled. at the end of the prologue, down in verse 18, John says, no one has ever seen God, the only God, or the only Son, who is at the Father's side.

[14 : 31] He has made him known. John describes Jesus as the only Son who is at the Father's side, or literally, in the Father's bosom. Intimate relationship between Father and Son.

and in John 17, Jesus speaks to his Father. And he says, Father, you loved me before the foundation of the world. Father, I had glory with you before the world began. Before the world began, God was not like most of us when we're all alone for a really long time. Right? We become self-absorbed and self-pitying and longing for someone to love us and know us. But no, God wasn't like that at all. From all eternity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were delighting in each other, glorying in each other, loving each other.

God the Father was pouring out his Spirit of life and blessing on his Son. The Son was dwelling in eternal harmony and joy with God the Father and the Spirit was resting on the Son and making known the love of the Father.

[15 : 41] From all eternity, God is love. In his very essence, in his very being, he is holy, glorious, loving relationship.

You see, God didn't create the world because he was lonely or bored or needy. He created the world out of his overflowing love and glory so that he might share the love and glory that he had for all eternity within himself with creatures like us.

And what John's Gospel is written to say is that this is the love and glory and fellowship that Jesus has come to bring us into for all eternity.

What God the Father and Son and Holy Spirit enjoyed. The Word was with God. And the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

This is how John introduces his Gospel. Jesus is the Word who created the world. And if you consider them by themselves, that's basically the main point of these five verses. But as we've said, these five verses are an introduction.

[16 : 52] They're meant to point us forward and bring us into the rest of the book. They're setting the stage for what John shows us in his Gospel. What John shows us in his Gospel is that the same Word by whom all things were created is the one who has come to redeem and renew and recreate us.

Jesus was the one through whom all things were created and He has come to make us new. He has come into our darkness and sin and death to bring a new creation, to be a new beginning. Verse 5 says, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Again, back in Genesis, the world was formless and empty and dark.

And the first thing God did was create light. And then He brought order and beauty to the chaos and fullness in place of emptiness. And finally, He looked at it all and said, it's very good.

And He rested. And throughout His Gospel, John shows us that Jesus is the Creator who has come to redeem and renew His creation, to bring, to shine His light in the midst of our darkness and make something new and good in our lives.

[18 : 11] To bring us back into that fellowship with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit that we were made for. And in particular, if you look in the Gospel of John, Jesus' miracles are signs of this reality that He's the Creator come to renew His creation.

Jesus' first miracle comes in chapter 2. He turns water into wine, 150 gallons of water into wine at a wedding in Cana. Now, you might think, boy, that sounds sort of fun.

Or you might think that sounds rather scandalous. And either way, you think, but what's the point? Why would He do that? Well, think about it this way. Every year, God turns water into wine or grape juice if you prefer grape juice.

Right? Through the normal processes of nature, God sends water from the clouds down into the soil, up into a vine, which causes the vine to produce grapes, and then over time they ferment. But once, when Jesus came to the wedding in Cana, the Creator Himself was present, and He chose to bypass all the normal indirect processes and do it in an instant.

[19 : 20] You see, He's the Creator come to renew His creation. Or in chapter 9, Jesus comes upon a blind man, a man blind from birth.

And Jesus says to His disciples, as long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. And He goes to the man and He spits on the ground and makes some mud and smears it on the guy's eyes and then says, go wash in the pool.

And the guy comes back and he can see. You might think again, well, well, that's really neat. He brought sight to a blind man, but why the whole thing about spinning in the mud?

What's that all about? Well, it's very similar to what God did when He created Adam. Genesis chapter 2, verse 7, a mist was going up from the land and watering the face of the ground.

So in other words, the ground was wet, maybe muddy. And the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living creature.

[20 : 25] You see, God shaped and fashioned us from the beginning. And Jesus was coming to this man and reshaping and refashioning him and giving him sight where he had been blind so he could come into light.

And you know, the blind man gets it because he says in chapter 9, verse 32, he says, never since the world began has anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. He gets it, that Jesus is the creator who's come to renew and restore his fallen creation.

And we could look at almost all of Jesus' miracles in this light. You see, Jesus' miracles aren't random tricks. They're not meaningless displays of raw power.

They're signs. They reveal his true identity and purpose. They reveal that Jesus is the author showing up in the middle of his own story. He's the creator showing up in the middle of his creation.

And Jesus says the same thing in his words. He says in chapter 8, verse 12, I'm the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not work in darkness, but will have the light of life. Chapter 11, verse 25, Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life.

[21 : 40] Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Then in John 15, he says, I'm the vine, the source of life.

And you, my disciples, are the branches. If you abide in me, you will bear much fruit. You know, you can read through the whole gospel of John and see in almost every chapter this theme coming out that Jesus is the creator who has come to renew and restore his fallen creation.

He's the same word who created the world and by his word and by his works he has come to redeem and restore us. And yet, if you read the gospel of John, it all leads up to one climactic moment.

And in that moment, everything seems to completely fall apart. The light is engulfed by darkness. The life was overcome by death and the new creation that Jesus had brought into being seemed to fall apart.

One of Jesus' disciples betrayed him, another denied him and the rest ran away. The world, the religious and political leaders spurred on by the crowd sentenced him to death.

[22 : 54] He hung on a cross in the middle of the day and the sun stopped shining and his last words were, it is finished. And he bowed his head and died and his followers buried him in a tomb.

It all seemed like he had completely failed and fallen apart. But no, Jesus' death was not the end because on the third day the women who had buried him went back to the tomb to pay their respects and the tomb was empty.

Jesus' body was gone and later that very day he appeared to them in person and despite their shock and their disbelief he demonstrated that it was him and he had come back to life.

So John and the other gospel writers point out that Jesus' resurrection took place on the first day of the week. John chapter 20 verse 1. And as we've seen in the first day of creation, of the week of creation, in the framework of Genesis 1 God's first act was to create light out of darkness.

And John's saying just as God brought light out of darkness in the creation, in the resurrection of Jesus, the light has conquered the darkness. His light, Jesus' light had not been and could not be put out by the darkness.

[24 : 15] And in the light of his resurrection Jesus' death takes on a whole new meaning because Jesus' death is not a shameful failure but actually it was a glorious victory.

When Jesus said it is finished finished, it wasn't a cry of defeat and resignation but a cry of triumph. He had accomplished the work of recreating his people.

He had accomplished the work of redemption. The darkness had not swallowed up the light, rather the light had swallowed up the darkness. He had taken our sin and evil and death into himself so

that he might destroy it once and for all time.

You know, think about it. how can light overcome darkness? If you're in a completely dark room and there's bright shining light outside but there are no windows into your room, you'll remain in the darkness until someone brings a light into the middle of that room.

Until the light comes in and shines in the middle of the deepest darkness. That's the only way that light truly conquers and overcomes darkness is by going right into the middle of the deepest darkness and shining.

[25 : 35] And that's what Jesus did. He went right into the middle of our sin and darkness and death and took it into himself that he might overcome it.

You know, there's even a parallel to this in the Harry Potter series of all places. Harry's on a mission to destroy the evil in the world and in the story the evil is resident in seven hidden horcruxes and so he and his friends face great dangers to find and destroy these horcruxes which are scattered throughout the world but in the last movie he finds out that the final horcrux the one that must be destroyed in order for evil to be overcome has become attached to his own soul and it's not because he made a pact with the evil one but rather because long ago Lord Voldemort had placed a curse on him and so he realizes that he carries around this weight of evil in his own body and the only way to destroy it is for him to die there's no other way you know it's not an exact parallel but it's striking because the Bible says that Jesus

Christ the righteous one the perfectly righteous one took our sin and evil and curses and death into himself that in his death he might destroy them once and for all and in his resurrection we might be created anew it's the only way it could have been done but he did it Jesus is the word through whom the world was created through whom life and light and order were spoken into formless dark chaos and he is the light and life the creator who's come to renew our lives and his whole creation he's come to bring us into the love and glory which he had with God the Father and the Holy Spirit for all eternity the apostle Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians chapter 4 verse 6 he said for God who said let light shine out of darkness has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus

Christ let me conclude with three specific ways that Jesus shines his light into our darkness so first perhaps you're in the darkness of not knowing God the darkness of ignorance we might say maybe you're paralyzed by doubt and you wonder can I ever really know God and not always have a sinking feeling in the back of my mind that I'm just deluding myself or perhaps God seems far away and has been that way for a long time and you've begun to wonder is he even really there does he really love me maybe you feel like the man born blind spiritually in the dark for as long as you can remember well Jesus brings us from the darkness into knowledge of God true knowledge of God look into the face of Jesus listen to his words his life giving words observe his miracles the signs that reveal his identity and purpose look to him dying on a cross taking our sin and darkness into himself and examine the evidence for his resurrection and what convinced his disciples who were initially skeptical that he truly had risen and as you look into the face of

Jesus you are seeing the face of God himself that's what John's saying when you look into the face of Jesus you see the face of God himself Jesus is the exact representation of God's very being he's not merely one of a long series of prophets messengers who are saying here's the way to get to God try and follow it if you can but no he says I am the way if you've come to me you do know the father so if you aren't sure what you believe let me encourage you to read through John's gospel or one of the other gospels this Christmas season read it from start to finish maybe discuss it with a friend as you're going through it and ask yourself as you read who is this Jesus and is he who he claims to be the word the light and the life second perhaps you're in the darkness of sin and guilt actually the bible says that all of us are in the darkness of sin and guilt

[30 : 27] John chapter but John chapter 3 speaks about how we respond to that John chapter 3 verse 19 says light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil for everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come into the light lest his deeds should be exposed the invitation for you and me for all of us who are under the darkness of sin and guilt is to come into the light is to stop hiding from God and running away from other people because that's futile it's foolish it's like Adam and Eve being in the garden and trying to cover themselves up with fig leaves when the God of all creation sees and knows already Jesus invites us to confess our sin first of all to God and perhaps also to a brother or sister in Christ who can pray with you and assure you that Jesus died on the cross to forgive you

and heal you and then let's walk in the light not in hiding and pretending but in honesty and openness with one another and with

God because Jesus promises that if we walk in the light as he is in the light that we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses us from all sin or finally third perhaps you're facing death itself and again all of us will one day face death maybe we all live in the shadow of death maybe you're grieving the death of a loved one or maybe in this holiday season it's difficult because you remember someone who's no longer with you you know each of us in the end we will all die alone even if you have someone holding your hand as you pass away we will all go into death naked and alone bringing nothing and no one with us except there is one person there is one person who has faced death and come through it Jesus himself and Jesus promises that if you come to him and believe in him that he will be your shepherd and he will carry you even through that final darkness that you will never be alone forever and that just as he died and was raised again that you too will die and be raised again by his power so call upon him and he will not abandon you in this life or in your final moments and he went to his death in the

Nazi Germany concentration camps he was a German Lutheran pastor he looked at his friends and his last words were this he said death for me is not the end it is only the beginning of life and he could say that because he knew Jesus because he knew that Jesus had died and risen again and that that was his comfort in life and in death so brothers and sisters wherever you are today whatever the darkness that you might be facing I pray that you would be encouraged I know that it seems like many of us are facing grief or pain chronic illness or depression or disappointment or even despair and I pray that this message would encourage you Jesus the son of God was there ever since before creation began he created all things he holds them in his hand in him all things hold together and he has come to renew and recreate us and one day he will come and complete that work and create a new heavens and a new earth he's been there ever since the beginning and he will be with you every step of the way to the end so be encouraged my brothers and sisters Jesus light has shined in the darkness and the darkness has not and will never overcome it you know as we have this light of Jesus Christ shining in our hearts let's pray that we would have opportunity this Christmas season to introduce others to Jesus the light and life the word who created the world and who's come to redeem and recreate us let's pray God we praise you for creating all things and making them very good and we thank you that when we had fallen to sin and darkness and death you did not abandon us but you came all the way to take those things into yourself in your death on the cross that you might destroy death and bring life and immortality to light that we might in you be made new

Lord so often those images can seem like merely wishful thinking in a cold and hard world but Lord Jesus you have risen it is a fact you are alive and you have promised you have fulfilled many of your promises and Lord we look forward to the day when you will fulfill the ones that remain yet unfulfilled Lord we pray that we would shine with your light that your light would shine in our darkness and that we would shine as lights in this world with the hope of being made new in Jesus Christ and the promise we have on him in Jesus name Amen