

The Word of God

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

Date: 10 January 2021

Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0:00] Good morning, church. It's good to be with you all this morning. Well, we are beginning a new teaching series this Sunday in the Gospel of John. So if you have a Bible handy on your phone or the old-fashioned version, you can turn there with me. Our reading will also be on the screen when we get there. So let me encourage you to turn to the fourth gospel with me, the Gospel of John. Now, one of the great things about John's gospel is that John is very clear why he wrote it. At the end of the book, actually, in chapter 20, verses 30 through 31, John writes this. He says, Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written 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. So John's gospel is about these three interrelated things, displaying who Jesus is. He's the Christ, the Son of God, explaining what it means to believe in him, what the nature of faith is, and then showing us the life that Jesus came to bring, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you might have life in his name. Dorothy Sayers, the 20th century mystery author and kind of public intellectual in the 20th century, once observed that the church in her day was getting a lot of bad press.

And the problem, according to some, why it was getting all this bad press is because some people were saying that churches were spending too much time preaching dull dogma. But Sayers writes an essay in response to this, and in reply to that bad press, she kind of turns all of it on its head. She says, the fact is the precise opposite. It is the neglect of dogma that makes for dullness. The Christian faith, she says, is the most exciting drama that has ever staggered the imagination of man. And the dogma is the drama. In other words, what the church professes to believe about Jesus, its dogma, that is its teaching, its doctrine, its beliefs, that is the real excitement. That is the drama.

Or as John puts it in his gospel, that by believing, you might have life in his name. You know, the world around us, for all of our social media and endless entertainment options, doesn't it seem at times surprisingly devoid of life? Real life, lasting life, satisfying life, or as Jesus will put it in this gospel, eternal life, life to the full.

And John is saying, if you want life, and who doesn't, then it's found in who Jesus is. The dogma is the drama. Jesus, the Christ, is life.

And so our preaching series this winter and spring is going to follow the first half of John's gospel, chapter 1 through chapter 11. And with John, we're going to dive into the deep wells of what's called Christology. That is the theology, the doctrine, the dogma, the teaching of who Jesus Christ is, Christology. And this won't merely be an intellectual enterprise. John promises that this will be the gateway into real, lasting life in its fullness.

[4:02] So, with that all being said about John's gospel in general, let's jump in to our text this morning. I hope you found your way to John's gospel. Let's begin with these opening verses, the prologue, verses 1 through 18. And before I read this text for us, let's go ahead and let's pray that God would bless the reading and the preaching and the meditation on his word. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, you indeed were the word in the beginning, one with God most high. And we pray that as we come to your word this morning, that you've inspired by your spirit, that you've preserved down through the ages, that you've continued to use to speak to your church, that you would do the same thing this morning to us, Lord Jesus, that you would speak to us, that you would open the eyes of our hearts that we might behold you in fresh ways and so know this life that you've promised to give us. Lord, we need life and we need you. So, come, we pray, in mercy, in grace, and in power.

In your name we pray, Jesus. Amen. All right. John chapter 1, verses 1 through 18. Let me read this for us. 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 he came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to 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 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. For 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. Now, St. Augustine apparently once said that John's gospel is deep enough for an elephant to swim in, and shallow enough for a child not to drown. So, as we navigate these first 18 verses this morning, we want to try to plumb the depths, but we don't want to lose the forest for the trees. And the central thing John wants to say about Jesus here is that he is what he calls the Word, the Word of God, the Word who was with God, the Word who is

God, who became flesh and dwelt among us. The Word is Jesus. Now, in John's day, the idea of a word, or the logos, which is what the word is in Greek, was to the Greek mind, the word, the logos, was sort of the rational principle underlying everything. To speak of the logos was to speak about, in some ways, the grain of the universe. And if we could just align ourselves with that, then, well, life would be good, at least as good as we could get. We'd find harmony, we'd find peace, we'd find wisdom, we'd find resilience if we sort of got in tune with the Word. But the Hebrew idea of the word, or the logos, the biblical idea throughout the Hebrew Scriptures is much richer than that, even. For the Word of God in the Bible was God's own personal, dynamic self-expression in creation and in redemption.

The Word of God was God in action, creating, revealing, saving. And to be encountered by this word, this word was not just to find sort of harmony with the universe, but to encounter one's creator, the very glory of all being, and the very end and goal of all human existence.

[8:47] So John wants to tell us that this word, that for both the Greek secular mind and for the Hebrew biblical worldview, which meant life, John wants to tell us about this word. He wants to say, here's the word. But like a good writer, he keeps us in suspense about who this word is until the end of verse 17, where he finally says, this word we've all been looking for is Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the word. What you're looking for, it's him. What the Greeks have been searching for, what the Hebrews have been waiting for, it's here. It's now. We've seen him. It's Christ.

Now, what does John want to tell us about this word of God, who is Jesus? What does he want us to see? What does he want us to know about the word? Well, this prologue that kind of sets up all of John's gospel and lays down a lot of the themes that we're going to unpack over the coming months, this prologue kind of falls roughly into two halves. There's verses 1 through 13, and there's verses 14 through 18. And we're going to look at each of those halves this morning and see what John wants to tell us about this word. And the big idea of the first half, verses 1 through 13, is this.

John is going to say, because the word is fully God, because this word is fully God, we can enter into God's family. Because the word is fully God, we can enter into God's family.

So let's notice how John goes about saying this. Verses 1 through 5 are a clear statement that the word is fully God. First, notice that the word shares God's eternity. In the beginning, John says, was the word. Now, that reference in the beginning, that's a reference to the very opening line of the Bible, right? Genesis 1.1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And in that timeless eternity, in the beginning, where God always is, there too, John says, in the beginning was the word. The word shares God's eternity. Second, John says, the word is an intimate relationship with God. The word was with God. Now, that preposition with here means something like toward. And a lot of scholars see that as indicating something like a face-to-face intimacy. The word was with God.

[11:18] But then third, John will say, the word is one with God. The word was God. God. And this is an unambiguous, straightforward, clear-as-day affirmation of the word's full deity.

Now, some groups who deny that Jesus is fully God, like the Jehovah's Witnesses say, have tried to translate this phrase of John's prologue a little differently. They try to translate it as if it says the word was a God. Because in the Greek, there's not actually a definite article there. There isn't a the before God. So they think you can translate it, the word was a God. But in fact, when you do a proper study of the Greek grammar, it shows that John isn't merely saying that the word is merely a God or divine. There were lots of ways John could have gone about saying such a thing. And in fact, just the opposite is true when you look at the grammar. The Greek construction here implies emphasis, the word was God all the way. It's actually the same kind of Greek construction found later in chapter 1 in verse 49, which everyone, including Jehovah's Witnesses, ironically, translate, you are the king of Israel, not a king, but king. So we can be abundantly confident what John means to say here. The word was God, fully God. Now, of course, as we think about all that John's saying about the word here, this is where the waters start to get deep. And this is where the elephants start to swim. And our minds start to move from analysis to worship. The word who was with God in the beginning is God from the beginning. In other words, the one true God eternally exists in distinct persons.

In verse 14, these persons are called Father and Son. The Father is fully God. The Son is fully God. But the Father is not the Son. And here you see are the building blocks of what will become known as the doctrine of the doctrine of the Trinity. For as the Old Testament unfolds, we find that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all fully revealed, fully spoken of as fully God, but distinct from one another.

There is one and only one God who eternally exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now, does all this make your head hurt a little bit? That the word was with God and wonder of wonders, the word was God? Does that sort of make you want to scratch your head and get a little bit of a brain cramp? Well, if that's true for you, that's okay. You should be getting a brain cramp right now.

The doctrine of the full deity of the word, friends, is not an intellectual puzzle to figure out. The fact that the godness of God is Trinitarian isn't a problem to solve, but it's a reality to worship. The one in three, the three in one.

[14:50] And after all, when you think of it, it's a bit comforting, isn't it, to think that God is bigger and more mysterious and more full of wonder than our finite little minds can wrap themselves around, isn't it? We're talking about God, after all. And not just an attribute of God, but God's own identity, who He is. Surely, if God's identity, His tri-unity is a bit beyond our grasp, that's okay.

You know, we shouldn't expect to catch a hurricane like we might catch a football, right? And so we shouldn't expect to figure out God the way we figure out a math problem.

But you know, if in the opening of John's prologue here, the elephants are swimming, let's not forget that we, the little children, aren't meant to drown. Having driven home that the Word is fully God, John goes on to tell us the good news. Because the Word is fully God, we can now join the family of God. In verses 6 through 13, we hear of, we hear of John the Baptist bearing witness to the coming one who brings life and light. In our reading earlier in the service, let us hear some of what John the Baptist's witness was like. And then in verse 9, this light comes into the world. The Creator comes into creation. He's in the world.

He's here, but something goes wrong. The world didn't know Him. He comes to His own people, the people of Israel, and even His own people don't receive Him. What's going on here? Why do we not receive the Word? Life and light have just shown up on our doorstep, and yet we don't receive it. Why?

But is this not the sad truth, friends? Our natural inclination, this side of the fall, is not to welcome God with open arms, but to push Him away. Light shines, and we pull down the shades.

[17:02] Life comes, and we cling to ashes and dust. This is the tragedy of human sin. And you're the heart of sin. And you're the heart of sin. Isn't merely just breaking some rules.

The heart of sin is pushing God away and being a God unto ourselves. The heart of sin is relational. We don't want God in our life.

But notice verse 12. But our rejection of God is not the end of the story.

God overcomes our resistance and makes us not just subjects, but children. What amazing grace. We rejected God flat out, and yet God makes us His family.

And how does that come about? Not of blood, John says. That is, it's not your biological family heritage that makes you a child of God. Nor is it the will of the flesh that is your hard work or your determination that can earn you the right to become a child of God. It's not that. Nor is it the will of man. It's not someone, it's not something someone else can decide for you.

[18:21] But it's of God. God makes it happen. He gives sight to the blind. He gives life to the dead. Resisters become receivers because of God. All who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God. Why is this so?

Why is receiving the Word, believing in the name of the Word, why is that the thing that gives us the right to be children of God? Well, because of what John has just been telling us. Because the Word isn't some philosophical principle. The Word isn't some great spiritual idea that we have to put into practice. The Word isn't even some wonderful religious teacher whose teachings we have to follow. No. The Word Jesus Christ is God. Fully God. And if His name is now your name through faith, then you have the right to enter into that intimate relationship with God that existed in the very beginning, where the Word was God. You enter in. The communion of love in the Trinity is open for us because the Word who has come for us is fully God. The church fathers used to say over and over again, because the Son of God has become a Son of Man, the sons of men can become sons of God.

Now, we'd probably use more inclusive language to say such a thing today. I get it. But you see the point they wanted to make. We humans can be ushered in to fellowship with the inner Trinitarian family of God, Father, Son, and Spirit, because Jesus isn't just some mere teacher, but God Himself come for us.

You know, if I walked around my neighborhood, picked a random house, and around dinnertime, knocked on the door and said, hey, I'm here for dinner. Where's my seat at the table?

You could probably guess how they would respond. Our neighborhood's pretty nice, so they'd probably assume I found the wrong house. But then after I persisted, they would probably tell me politely to get lost, right? But if one of my friends invites me to family dinner, it's totally different. He greets me at the door. He invites me in. The rest of the family welcomes me.

[21 : 02] Why? Because I'm with Him, and He's part of the family. And because He's part of the family now, so am I. I get to sit down at the table and join the meal. Friends, because the Word is fully God, all who receive the Word are welcomed into the family of God.

But John has more, even more to tell us about this Word. The Word isn't just fully God. John wants us to know that the Word is also fully human.

The second half of the prologue tells us this. Because this Word is fully human now, because this Word is fully human, we can now see God's glory.

Look at verse 14. Now, you see, up to this point, we might be tempted to think of Jesus as merely maybe just sort of an appearance of God, sort of a theophany, like an angel of the Lord in the Old Testament, someone who just sort of zooms in, sort of comes to us in a human form, seems to be human.

But no, John says, the Word doesn't, Jesus didn't just seem to be human. The Word became flesh. And this is where we get that wonderful word, incarnation.

[22 : 39] The Word became flesh, incarnate. Jesus, who was fully God, was not also just partially human.

He wasn't sort of human. He wasn't half God and half human, like some kind of mermaid. He was fully human. He became flesh.

But how, we ask, how can God become a fully human being without losing His Godness? And here again, the pool deepens and the elephants start to swim.

C.S. Lewis once said that the incarnation is the grand miracle. In one person, Jesus, are two natures, the fullness of humanity and the fullness of God, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.

Beautiful language, isn't it? Fully human, fully divine, without confusion, without change, without division, but without separation.

[23 : 58] And this again, friends, is where our biblical analysis needs to give way to worship. Again, Dorothy Sayers writes, From the beginning of time until now, the incarnation is the only thing which has ever really happened.

We may call this doctrine exhilarating, or we may call it devastating. We may call it revelation, or we may call it rubbish. But then she says, but if we call it dull, then what in heaven's name is worthy to be called exciting?

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Now the implications of the incarnation are limitless. The implications that God has become a fully human being are limitless.

It takes the whole New Testament to begin to define it, and for all eternity we will plummet steps. When it comes to the atonement, when it comes to human suffering, when it comes to everything, the incarnation is the only thing that has ever really happened.

But here in John's prologue, he points to one, just one, of these massive implications. Because this Word is fully human now, we can at long last see God in His glory.

- [25 : 25] God, without mediation, without reserve, dwelt among us. The word dwell here in verse 14, it's the same verb that was used for the tabernacle in the Old Testament.

That physical place where God's glory dwelled among the people of Israel. Where is that place now? If we want to know what God is like, where do we look?

Do we look to the tabernacle or the temple? Do we stop there? Do we scour the religious sites strewn around the world? Do we try to find and see what God is like there?

Do we pore over religious texts and all the writings that have been stored up and handed down throughout all the great world religions? Or perhaps do we forsake all that, head out into nature, look at the stars, look at the mountains, where do we go now to know God and what He's really like?

The answer that John gives in his prologue is as scandalous as it is wonderful.

- [26 : 33] And this is what the church has proclaimed from the very beginning. If you want to know God, if you want to really know Him, then you must look in the face of the man, Jesus Christ.

Here, God has become flesh and made Himself fully known. Yes, the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

And that means, brothers and sisters, we don't have to guess anymore. We don't have to grope in the dark anymore.

In the flesh of Jesus, we see the glory of God, the mercy of God, the justice of God, the gentleness of God, the firmness of God, the faithfulness of God, and supremely on the cross, in the flesh of Jesus Christ, the self-giving love of God.

If you want to know God, look no further than the person of Jesus. And it's no wonder that John says that this is grace upon grace.

- [27 : 51] It's just a piling up, a super abundance of grace. You know, when I want to really connect with my children, what do I do? I get down low, I get next to them, I try to speak in words they can understand.

I stoop down to try to meet them. And God, who once thundered on Sinai, God who stretched the heavens and galaxies into place, this God has gotten down to our level.

God has stooped. Not just to take up symbolic residence in a tent or a temple like the Old Testament. No, in the very flesh that we inhabit, in our very human nature, God has stooped down to our very level.

He's shown himself to us literally face to face. God's love. God has stooped down to our God. No one has ever seen God. But, but, the only God who's at the Father's side, the Son, He has made Him known.

To wrap things up then, let me put it this way. The life we were created for, the life that we long for behind every desire and every longing of the human soul, that life, friends, is to know God and to be known by God.

- [29 : 23] To see God's glory and to join His family forever. And the good news is this. Because Jesus, the Word, is fully God, He can bring us up with Him.

And because Jesus, the Word, is fully human, He can bring God down to us. In the Word made flesh, we can know God and we can be known by God forever.

So do you know this Word, this Jesus? Have you received Him and believed in Him? And is your spiritual life completely centered on Him?

A soul without Jesus is like a ship without a sail. It just drifts with the tides, never reaching the harbor. But make this Word, this Jesus, the heartbeat of your life.

And then you and I will know life and we will know it to the full. Let's pray together. Our Lord Jesus, we give You praise.

[30:36] You are fully God and You have become fully human for us. O Lord, by Your Holy Spirit, this week, kindle within us the embers of faith.

Fan them into a burning flame of love, devotion, service, and sacrifice for You. Would we be simply enraptured by the wonder of who You are?

and would everyone we encounter this week in this broken world that needs Your mercy and grace so much, Lord, would they see in us a little taste of glory and a family that You have provided for us in Him.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.