

Jesus and His Glory!

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everybody. It's nice to see you. A crisp... Is it autumn still or is it winter now? Winter, I guess. November, is it winter?

! It's still autumn. Still autumn. Well, it's confusing, isn't it? I tend to judge it by how it feels. So in July, it still feels like autumn. And in August, it feels like winter again. But there we go. Sometimes we get heat. We're going to start a series in John's Gospel. And I've been away, as you know, we've been away as a family all week to see our new grandson, Henry, down in Birmingham and their family. And it kind of disrupted my week somewhat in terms of preparation. And when I kind of came back to it on Friday, I was thinking, wow, I left this one too late. And what is probably one of the hardest passages in all of the Bible to preach on. So we'll see how we go. If it's a disaster, blame the holiday. All right.

John chapter 1, verses 1 to 18. It's commonly called a prologue. It means words before, literally words before. And it means words, literally words before. Everything else John wants to tell us about Jesus. But it serves as a kind of summary. Or as one commentator has said, a foyer that you enter before you enter into the big house or the hotel. It's going to introduce you to Jesus. And it's going to answer the question, who is Jesus? What is he like? And what has he done? And so they're the big questions that are going to come out in summary form in these first 18 verses. And then the rest of John's gospel is an exposition or explanation, literally an exegesis, which is a word that's used here in verse 18, that describes the work and person of our Lord Jesus Christ. So keep that in mind as we read.

Chapter 1, 1 to 18 will come on the screen. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God. His name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he give the right to become children of God. Children born not of natural descent, nor of a human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, This was he of whom I said, He who comes after me has surpassed me, because he was before me. From the fullness of his grace, we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God, the one and only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. Amen, and the Lord will bless to us the reading of his Word.

[4 : 22] Did you notice how different it sounds to the other Gospels? The other Gospels open either with genealogy, which explains the kind of list of descendants and forebears that Jesus had, and then Mark's Gospel opens with just the beginning of his ministry. But John takes us way, way back, way beyond time, before the beginning of time, to tell us about Jesus, who was there before time, although he didn't mention his name till toward the end of that prologue. He described him rather differently as the Word, and we'll come back to that in a moment, the idea of the Word.

And he describes him as the Word who was with God and who was God, this Word who came into the world in flesh and dwelt or tabernacled for a while among us. So we've been told some quite

amazing stuff here about God, and it would be absolutely mind-blowing for any Jewish reader who was brought up with the impression that there was only one God. It was an article of their faith. Here, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Perhaps you know that verse, but the kind of key thing there is the unity of God. God is one, and there is no other beside him. And John, a Jewish man who became a follower of Jesus, tells us that this one God has revealed himself to the world in the form of Jesus. And that's absolutely remarkable. That is a statement that would get you stoned to death in Jewish society. And again, we'll come back to that in a moment. He knew exactly what he was writing about, but he wants to blow your mind. Now, for us, it doesn't blow our mind in quite the same way. The only way you could kind of get a sense of this is if I stood up and said this in a synagogue or something. I'd be in serious trouble probably, although they will have heard it by now. But you've got to get your head around that. That what is revealed in the gospel is not just the story of a remarkable man, but the story of God coming to us in human flesh.

C.S. Lewis addressed this question of incarnation in this way. Speaking of Jesus' incarnation, he wanted to get his listeners to hear this. It was on a radio program way back in about 1955.

[7:19] He says this, Lying at your feet is your dog. Imagine for a moment that your dog and every dog is in deep distress. Some of us love dogs very much. If it would help all the dogs in the world to become like men, would you be willing to become a dog? Would you put down your human nature, leave your loved ones, your job, hobbies, your art, and literature, and music, and choose instead of the intimate communion with your beloved, the poor substitute of looking into the beloved's face and wagging your tail, unable to smile or to speak? Christ, by becoming man, limited the thing which to him was the most precious thing in the world, his unhampered, unhindered communion with his Father. Well, it goes somewhere, doesn't it?

Awkwardly as it is to kind of think of it in those terms, to think of dogs in those terms, nonetheless, it goes some way to explain the amazing wonder of the incarnation.

That Jesus actively and voluntarily gave up his place in heaven, gave up his place at the right hand of the Father, give up his intimate communion with his Father to become man in order to save man from their sin. And that's what we've got to get our head around. So the Gospel of John addresses itself to this question, who is Jesus? Where did he come from? What does his remarkable manifestation, his life, his teaching, his miracles, etc., show us about him? And what does he teach us about the way of salvation? For John's gospel has a purpose, John 20, 30, 31. Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But 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. So there you go. John tells us exactly what his purpose is. He wants you to see that salvation, eternal life, is available to you in Jesus. You need to see Jesus in all of his glory, to understand him not just as a good man, but as God manifest in flesh, to see his glory, to follow his glory, to follow his teaching, to surrender to his claims upon your life, to be forgiven by his sacrifice, in order that you might share in his glory.

In a nutshell, that's what John's intention is, that you may come into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus manifests the presence of God to us in the world. John says it like this, we have seen his glory.

Now, glory means the manifest presence of God. It's what Isaiah saw when, in chapter 6 of Isaiah, he suddenly saw a vision of open heavens. He saw angels, seraphim, cherubim, worshiping around the throne of God, and he hid his face in fear and in terror. He said that the place was so bright that he just fell down on his knees, and he heard the cry of the angels, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. The whole earth is full of his glory. And Isaiah could only filter that through his hands until God spoke to him, cleansed him of his sin, and allowed him to stand up and see the glory of God.

[11:16] And throughout the Old Testament, that is the impression that the writers want us to have. When you try to look at God, you cannot see him with sinful human minds and eyes.

You can only ever see God in a filtered way. Moses, for example, asked to see God's glory, and God said to him, you cannot see my glory. You can only see my back parts. So he put him into a crevice in the earth, and then he passed by. And Moses was overwhelmed, as it were, only seeing a shadow of the glory of God. When it comes to the New Testament, Paul says, we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We cannot look upon God and live, the Bible says, but we can see God in the face of Jesus Christ. That's how we can see God and live. So we are not just looking at a man, we are not just looking at a good man, a moral man, a great teacher. We are looking at

Almighty God when we look into the face of Jesus. And when he came to this earth to manifest his glory, he was determined to set up a kingdom that was not of this world. So twice in John's Gospel, there was an attempt to associate Jesus with a kingdom. For example, he knew in chapter 5 of John's Gospel that the crowds wanted to make him king by force. And so he left and went away. He wouldn't allow himself to become a king of an earthly kingdom. That was not his purpose. Pilate, before his death, asked him, are you a king then? And he said, my kingdom is not of this world. If it was, my servants would rise up and fight for me and get me out of this mess. But I'm not of this world. I did not come from that world to this world to merely become a human king of a worldly kingdom. I came to set up a kingdom that is not of this world.

[13 : 25] See, language is very important. And John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is using words that get repeated again and again in his prologue. The contrast between light and life, for example, light and darkness, sorry, life and death. They're very important words to John. And he repeats them again and again throughout this Gospel. This is a key to understanding the whole of the Gospel and its intention, that we might see God in the face of Jesus Christ, and that we might then share in his glory.

You have that wonderful prayer in John chapter 17, which is all about Jesus coming from the Father, revealing the glory of God to men, and then returning back to God to be glorified again with his Father.

The descent, the ascent. He describes himself as Jacob's ladder. He said, on my flesh you're going to see angels of God ascending and descending. He became the bridge or the ladder that Jacob saw back in Genesis 28 at Bethel, that stairway to heaven. Jesus is the stairway to heaven. He is the way, the truth, and the life. It's a remarkable book, this. It's got so many allusions to Old Testament ideas about God. We see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. So what do we learn in this passage, quite quickly, about Jesus and his glory? Well, first of all, in John chapter 1 and verse 5, we're told that he existed before he was born. Jesus existed before he was born. Now I've got news for you, you may not know this, you did not exist before you were born. If you did exist before you were born, you're quite a remarkable person. There is only one who truly existed before he was born, and that is our Lord Jesus Christ. But he existed in another form or in person, yes, but not in the way that he revealed himself to the world. Notice the language of verse 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Now that word, word, is logos in Greek. You might have heard of that phrase, logos. If not, you've heard of logic. Now logic derives from the word logos, and it speaks of communication. God is a logical, if you like, a reasoning person. He reasons with our mind. Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. He applies himself and appeals to our intellectual faculties. He wants us to understand something, not just to feel something, not just to experience something, but to understand truth. Now Pilate is skeptical about the idea of truth. What is truth?

He lived in a world where everybody had their own versions of truth. The Romans had their gods, the Greeks had their gods, the Jews had their god, there was all kinds of gods everywhere, there was all kinds of reasoning, all kinds of philosophies, you paid your money, you took your choice. Jesus comes along as God manifests in the flesh and says, there is only one way, one truth, and one life that takes you to the Father. Only one way, one truth, and one life. I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me. I have words to speak to you, to apply to your reasoning faculties, your God-given reason faculties, that I want you to take on board and understand because these words are life. They will lead you to eternal life. You can have a knowledge of the true God and that knowledge will lead you to eternal life. Jesus says in John chapter 17, this is eternal life. What is eternal life?

[17 : 33] This is eternal life that you may know God, the true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. So here's a big claim, one not popular in the modern world, but one that is true, I would submit to you nonetheless. There is only one truth that will lead you to God, and it is expressed through the Word, Jesus Christ. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Jesus is speaking to us the mind of God.

You think about words. All right. Now, a little test for you. What is the person next to you thinking right now?

You don't know. How would you know? How would you know? You have to ask them. And if you ask them, what do they have to do?

They have to tell you. Why? Because the only way you can know what's going on in the mind of the person next to you is if they communicate words to you to explain what they're thinking. Now, we don't get too sophisticated. I can sense their body language and all of that. You'd still have to explain it at some point, and you could make a little video about how you're feeling too, but that would take some time. But at the time John was writing, the only way you could express something and communicate the mind of somebody else is if they give you words.

You see what I'm saying here? How do we know the mind of God? How do we know the manifold wisdom of God, as Paul puts it? We know it through the expression of that mind in the words of Jesus Christ.

[19 : 27] So when he says, I am the Word, he is revealing to you the very words of God. And if God is going to speak, we have to listen. So the first thing we know here is that Jesus perfectly knows the mind of God, and nobody can perfectly know the mind of God unless they themselves are God. Every word that I speak is somewhat hindered by my own flawed and fallen intellect, because there are some things I just don't know. And however clever people feel, that's true of everyone, isn't it? But to infallibly speak without error the very words of God God requires the mind of God, and it is communicated through Jesus. So he says, not just in the beginning was the Word, but he says, because this is the implication, and the Word was with God, he must be in order to know the mind of God, and the Word was God, he must be in order to speak the words of God and to understand the mind of God perfectly. But of course, that presents us with a challenge.

Secondly, Jesus, the Word, pre-existed with God and as God. He pre-existed with God and as God. So there is a distinction in the Godhead. They believed in only one God, so did Jesus. There is only one God, he said. But Jesus exists, sorry, God exists in what seems here to be two persons. But we know from John chapter 14 through 16, three persons. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One God who exists in three persons, who reveals himself in three persons. Now, the Father is not the Son.

The Word is not the Father. They are distinct persons. The Spirit is not the Son, nor is the Spirit the Father. They are distinct persons. All right? So it's not one God revealing himself in different kind of forms, so that at one time he's the Father, at another time he's the Son, and at another time he's the Holy Spirit. It is one God who ever and always exists in three persons, and lives in divine communion within that personhood of God, and we call that Trinity.

Try unity. We bless one another in the words of the grace. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. We are Trinitarian believers. God exists and reveals himself in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And John is clear here. The Word who was with God is also God. All right. Now, that's hard, isn't it? I get that. That's hard.

[22 : 35] Words are inadequate to express all that we could say about this, and there is no kind of perfect explanation of how that can be. You can kind of liken it to your nature, your personhood.

Your personhood is body, mind, spirit. You can liken it to kind of to H₂O, you know, that it can exist in different forms, water, and so on. But all of those are inadequate. This is not something, thankfully, we have to be able to explain perfectly. It is something we're asked to believe.

It is an article of our faith. Jesus existed before he was born. All right. That's the point.

And he existed as the eternal Word who was always with the Father, but always distinct from the Father as well. And the third thing to notice here is Jesus, the Word, pre-existed with God, as God, and is the creator of everything that exists. Through him, verse 3, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. Now, if you were reading John's gospel and you were familiar with the Old Testament, what now would you be thinking of? Genesis chapter 1, verse 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And then what did he say? What did God say in Genesis chapter 1, verse 1? What's the very first thing he created?

[24 : 09] Let there be, come on, stir, light. Let there be light. And there was light. Isn't John very clever? Through him, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. John is alluding to Genesis chapter 1, and he's telling us that when God said, let there be light, that was Jesus speaking. Jesus was speaking everything into the world's existence.

He is the creator of all things, and all of our lives, and all of life in the universe, derives from him and is dependent upon him for its existence. Paul in Colossians says, he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him, all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or their authorities, all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Notice the language. He is the image of the invisible God.

He is reflecting the invisible God to you in the world. If you want to know who God is, look at Jesus. Do you remember in chapter 14 of John, when Philip said to him, show us the Father, then it will be enough for us? What did Jesus say? If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.

There is nothing else to see. You want to know God, you know him through Jesus Christ.

Mind-blowing stuff. Jesus is the creator of all things, and our life is absolutely dependent upon his continuing to uphold the universe by the word of his power.

It's an interesting thing, isn't it, to think, who holds my life? Who is in control of my life? It's an interesting thought, isn't it? Is it you?

[26 : 22] Well, you say, I eat well, and I exercise well, and I look after myself, and I make sure nothing calms me in any way, and I do my best to keep myself as healthy and fit as I can, so I'm keeping control of my life. Well, it's better than not doing that. It really is.

But are you in control of your life and destiny, really? Is your life being upheld by your fitness regime or your good living, your carefulness?

Well, not according to Paul, it's not. Everything, our life, and all that we are, is being upheld by Jesus. We are in his hands. Whether we know it or not, even whether we like it or not, it is true, for he upholds all things by the power of his might, and that includes you.

But you know, I find that incredibly comforting. I find it incredibly comforting to read the life of Jesus, the story of Jesus, to hear his words, think about how wonderfully loving and gracious he was, and think, oh, my life is in his hands. Do you remember when, back in the 1980s, they used to sing a song. It was probably before the 1980s, wasn't it? He's got the whole world in his hands.

It was a nice little song that all we used to love to sing, and everybody kind of held hands and swayed a little bit. It's true. He's got the whole world in his hands.

[27 : 57] Remember when Pilate, in John's Gospel, thought he had control of Jesus. He said to him, do you not know that I have the power to decide whether you live or die? How did Jesus respond?

You would have no power over me unless it were first given you by my Father who is in heaven. It's an illusion to think you're in control. We are entirely in the hands of Jesus.

Okay, so he is, he existed in his pre-existence. The second thing here is, he is light in the darkness. Notice verses 5 to 13.

In him was life, the life was the light of men. Light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. Now, darkness is one of John's words to contrast with light, of course.

Darkness is not just like the stuff that happens at night when it's black. Darkness is the stuff that happens in our hearts when we are black. Darkness is our moral failure. It is our moral disease. It is our shame and our guilt. It's the stuff we want to hide away, we feel we would like to be rid of. And the problem with darkness, John says, is that men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.

[29 : 19] In fact, the Bible says, you know, we as Christians, we shouldn't even kind of discuss what people do in darkness because things in darkness are meant to be hidden away. So you think about your life, you think about the darkness that is in your life or has been in your life, and I pray that you know you're forgiven for it if you know the Lord Jesus Christ and it no longer holds you in its grip and sway. You think of that darkness, the stuff that makes you want to hide away, and then you listen to that statement again. Jesus is light who shines in your darkness. Why? To reveal it.

And that makes us really uncomfortable, doesn't it? We don't want to have our darkness revealed. But the problem is, if our darkness is never revealed, it is never confessed, and it cannot be forgiven.

But have you noticed something about light, which is really, really powerful? You don't have to have much light to dispel the darkness. Strike a match. Get the little light on your phone, and you illuminate the darkness because darkness cannot hide from light. And when Jesus, the light of the world, came into the world to reveal the light of God to us, he dispels the darkness.

The darkness tries to overcome it, John says, but it cannot. It cannot. He is the light in the darkness. And he's always been the light in the darkness, even before he came, because do you notice that his incarnation takes place only in verse 14?

But he is already shining light into the world before the incarnation. For God has always been shining light in this world. He revealed himself at creation. He revealed himself at the fall in the Garden of Eden.

[31 : 22] He reveals himself again through the commandments. He reveals himself through the prophets. He keeps shining light into darkness. He keeps trying to get our attention. But the people in darkness don't like it. Go away. We don't want to see your light.

We would rather stay in our darkness. But he keeps shining. He sends John the Baptist, who doesn't mince his words, even with a king.

It's not lawful for you to have her. You must repent. You are not living according to God's law. You must repent. And some people are saying, yeah, thank you for that light. I want to be baptized. I want to escape the darkness.

But other people are saying, get away from me. And they chop off his head. For people who hate light and love darkness can become quite violently opposed to light.

If the light exposes them too much. But he is ever shining as light. But here's the tragedy, John says.

[32 : 25] He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. He created the world full of light.

But the people who love darkness in that world turned against their creator. What would you do if you could get your hands on God?

You would murder him. You would put him on a cross. And you would drive nails into his flesh. That's what you would do.

That's what I would do. And that was the tragedy of what happened to Jesus. Remember when Peter got up and preached at Pentecost?

You, by wicked hands, have taken him and nailed him to a cross. You have taken God's best gift. God's great light.

[33 : 26] God's great word to you. You have taken him. And you have driven him into wood. And murdered him. That's what we will do in our darkness.

We might pride ourselves that we're very humane and very good. But when the world got its hands on God, it murdered him. And that is the tragedy of this world. He keeps shining his light in the darkness.

But the darkness keeps rejecting. Now, are you in light or in darkness today? When that light shines into your heart, do you thank God that though you don't like the darkness in there, you're really, really grateful that you have a Savior who died to cleanse you from that darkness?

Or do you just try to hide away? Are you in light? Or are you in darkness? Jesus said, I am the light of the world.

The one who follows me will what? Never walk in darkness, but have the light of life. He is light in the darkness. And then, thirdly, let us notice, he is full of grace and truth.

[34 : 39] The word became flesh. There was a great momentous moment in human history when the word, the eternal word Jesus, took upon himself human flesh and made his dwelling among us.

He took all the hallmarks of temporariness. I'm not sure I've made that word up. I think I've made that word up.

I couldn't think of another. He became temporary. He limited himself to time and space. He humbled himself and became like a servant in order to save us, in order to deliver us.

The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We've seen his glory, the glory of the one and only of the Father who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. I love that language. It wants you to see, it wants you to go to the beach.

Go to the beach. When the tide is coming in, and watch the waves. How do they roll? Well, they roll so powerfully that if you try to stand against them, they're going to knock you over and soak you.

[35 : 53] Think about it like that. Grace and truth. Full of grace and truth. Oh, as the NIV puts it, one blessing after another. It just rolls on you again and again and again.

This grace and truth that comes from Jesus rolls on you again and again and again. So that though in your darkness you try to resist it, yet the power of that grace, the power of that truth overwhelms

you if you will let it.

Jesus has come into our darkness to bring grace and truth. And to change our lives so that we no longer recognize ourselves because the grace of God has transformed us into the likeness of his glory.

John testifies concerning him. He cries out saying, This was he of whom I said, He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me. Again, that's different in John.

Because in the other gospels, John the Baptist keeps saying, He's the one coming after me. But here, John says, He even said, He was before me. He was before me because he is my God.

[37 : 01] He is my Savior. He is my Creator. And again, this is so important to understand the key to John. How does John end up with the disciples? Well, it ends up with Thomas.

Doubting Thomas who said, Unless I put my fingers into the wounds in his hand and my hand into his side, I will not believe. And so he does all that. Then what happens? He falls down on his knees and he cries out, Jesus, you are my Lord and my God.

You're not only after me, you're before me. Because in you there is life and there is light. In you there is salvation. And you have not understood Jesus unless you fall down on your knees and say, You are my Lord and you are my God.

For he is full of grace and truth. We're going to start singing carols. So I thought I'd quote one. Oh, holy night, the stars are brightly shining.

It is the night of the dear Savior's birth. Long lay the world in sin and error pining. There is its darkness. Long live the world in sin and error pining.

[38 : 21] Till he appeared. And the soul felt its worth. I love that. Till he appeared. This momentous, punctured part of history.

When Jesus manifested himself and revealed the glory of God. He appeared. And when we look upon him. When we think of him.

We just fall on our knees and say, My Lord and my God. A thrill of hope. The weary world rejoices. For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

What do you do? Fall on your knees. Oh, hear the angel voices. Oh, night divine. Oh, night when Christ was born. But we're not to think of him as a little baby.

He was a little baby and that was very precious. But we're not to think of him and look at him and Google and gaga like we do little babies. And get all silly. We are to fall upon our knees and worship.

[39 : 27] We are to see him in all his glory. The glory at the cross. He said, he said it was glory. He said, when I am lifted up. I will draw all men to myself.

See, we don't weep at the cross. We rejoice. We don't kind of wonder at the empty tomb. We rejoice. Because we know this Jesus. The word became flesh.

Is alive and lives forever. And not only is he alive and lives forever. But he is my Lord. And my God. What do you think about when you think about Jesus?

What do you see? What do you hope for? Is he your everything? You see, our faith is not a belief in doctrinal statements as wonderful as they are.

It's not belief in a creed or formula as wonderful as the creed may be. It is a relationship with the risen and living Lord Jesus Christ.

[40 : 35] Who is my Lord and my God. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.