

Light and Logos **John 1:1-5**

Well, I trust you had a good Thanksgiving, but with Thanksgiving behind us we immediately turn our attention to Christmas. For many perhaps, you did that long before Thanksgiving. It was October, or earlier, and you put the tree up, you've been listening to Christmas music, and watching Christmas movies. And I know that is a controversial issue among many whether that is ok to do or not, so I won't spend time laboring on why you were wrong to do that.

But for our Sunday services, today is the first Sunday of the Advent season. Advent comes from a Latin word meaning "coming" or "arriving", which historically, *at least* from the time of the Middle Ages, was celebrated the four Sundays leading up to Christmas. It is a time to both look back at the coming of Jesus in his incarnation - his birth - as well as look forward to the second coming of Jesus.

And this year, our advent theme is "The Word Made Flesh" and we will be giving attention to the opening verses of John's gospel. So, with that, let me invite you to turn in your Bibles or in your apps to John chapter 1.

As you find your way there, Alexander Pope, the famous English poet, once wrote, "Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed." This extra-biblical beatitude might apply to many situations in life, however, what we will see in the opening verses of John's gospel is that this advice is just the opposite of how we should view Jesus and his work in the world. Rather than avoiding hope in order to avoid disappointment, the person and work of Jesus is a solid rock on which we can place our hope, never to be disappointed.

So, this morning we are going to be looking at the first five verses of John's gospel, and John begins his gospel at a very different point in history than the other gospel writers. Matthew begins his gospel with a genealogy of Jesus, going back all the way to Abraham. Mark begins with John the Baptist. Luke, as we saw a few years ago, begins with the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus. However, John begins much further back than them all - in the beginning before the creation of the world. And he does this because before John tells us what Jesus *did*, he wants to make sure we know who Jesus *is*...

John 1:1-5

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. **4** In him was life, and the life was the light of men. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

I. Jesus is the "Word" - v. 1

There is a lot to unpack in these verses, but the first verse alone is incredible because in it, John, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, crafts a statement that teaches massive, theological truths to his various readers.

And the first thing we should note is the title of “the Word.” What or Who is John describing there? And what does that mean?

Well, first we know that John is describing Jesus when he uses this title. He makes this plain later in this passage, where we get the title of our sermon series from...

John 1:14

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.

So again, John makes it clear that this “Word” that he is describing is none other than Jesus, but it is Jesus even *before* he took on flesh, *before* his incarnation. Again, he said “In the beginning was the Word” which speaks to the eternity of Jesus, something we will look at in a moment, but he goes on to say, “the Word was *with* God...”

“with God”

This speaks to the distinct Persons of the Trinity. The Trinity being that impossible to fully grasp doctrine that God is one, yet eternally exists in three Persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. This Word was in the beginning, but being “with God,” is also distinct from the Father and Spirit.

However, John then makes clear that though Jesus is distinct, he is not inferior to the other members of the Godhead. He says, “The Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

“was God”

So not only is the Word a distinct Person, but He is also fully God. Now, if you’ve ever engaged with a Jehovah’s Witness, this a major point of contention. They believe and teach that God is not a Trinity, but is one, and that God created Michael the Archangel to be the savior who was born as Jesus. But, of course, this verse causes problems because John is clearly saying that the Word was God.

Well, in their version of the New Testament, the New World Translation, they translate this verse to say, “the Word was a god,” with the added “a,” which does not exist in the Greek, the original language of the New Testament.

But, again, John says, this Word who was with God was God.

The rest of the New Testament would affirm this truth as well. Jesus himself would affirm this throughout his ministry, and certainly his resurrection from the dead. The apostles would affirm this as well.

For example, Paul in writing to the church in Colossae wrote...

Col. 1:15, 19

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation... **19** For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

So understand, Jesus is not a little god. Jesus is not God Jr. He is not inferior to the Father in essence, will, or activity. Jesus is fully God.

Why the “Word”?

But with that understood why not just say “In the beginning was Jesus, Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God”? Why the title of “the Word”? There are a number of reasons for this title in this opening section of John’s gospel...

First, Jesus can be called the “Word,” because he has revealed to us the glory of the Son and the Father. We saw that in verse 14. But also later in verse 18, notice John writes...

John 1:18

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

So Jesus, in the flesh, has revealed the Father to us. Again, as Paul wrote, Jesus “is the image of the invisible God.” He is the ultimate revelation of the Father.

Greek Logos

But the title given to Jesus here also communicated something of importance to the Greek audience who might be reading this gospel. The Greek word for “Word” is the Greek word “logos.” And in Greek philosophy “logos” was a very important concept and idea. It was used to describe the “reason” or “logic” that brought order and harmony to the universe. It was the impersonal and abstract idea that was used to try and give meaning and understanding to life and history and all of creation.

So, we have to catch what John is doing here. John is taking this impersonal, abstract idea and declares that all of what that term was supposed to represent is found not in a theory, but in a Person, Jesus Christ.

And this is important for us to realize today as well even though we are not steeped in Greek philosophy. What John wants his readers to understand is that Jesus is not just a historical person, but the One through whom we should view all of life. Making sense of history, where we’ve been and where we are going, making sense of the problems in

the world, making sense of the problems in our personal lives, the way of finding hope and progress and peace and fruitful living is ultimately found in Jesus, the “Logos,” alone.

Again this is important, because we are not short of theories and ideologies and worldviews that try to interpret life for us and offer us hope and meaning. However, it is ultimately the gospel story that gives us the answers we need as we look around the world and try make sense of both the good and the craziness we see every day.

And the gospel story can be summed up in four big picture concepts. Again, understanding these will not only help you better grasp the storyline of the Bible, but in doing so, you will better grasp life and history...

And maybe you’re familiar with these, but first big picture concept is **creation**. That God created all things from nothing. That he created humanity in his image and likeness to walk in fellowship with him, sharing his goodness with us as we know him and enjoy him forever.

If you’ve ever asked or wondered, who is behind this world and what is the meaning of it all, the creation story gives you the answer.

Second, after creation is the **fall**. Adam and Eve, deceived by Satan, rebelled against the Lord which brought devastating effects on all of creation. The fall of man is the reason behind mankind’s rejection of the Lord, the reality of spiritually dead and selfish hearts that lead to the strife, tension, and evil deeds done to one another, and is the reason behind even the groanings of creation itself.

If you’ve ever asked or wondered, how could people be so evil and selfish, why is there so much destruction and pain and brokenness, the fall gives you the answer.

So, creation and fall. However, the gospel story doesn’t end there. Third, is the glorious truth of **redemption**. Despite the effects of the fall and deserved punishment for our rebellion, God promised to make all things new, to reverse the effects of the fall. Throughout history, God promised to bring to us a Savior, this “Word” who would reveal him to mankind and work to reconcile us for all time. He did this through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

If you’ve ever asked or wondered, is there any hope for the devastation we see in the world, is there anyone who can mend the brokenness, has God done anything to heal the deep wounds that exist in the world - the work of God in redemption gives you the answer.

However, despite the great work of Jesus, not all things are made new yet. Pain still exists, suffering still exists, evil still exists. But the fourth big idea is that of **consummation or restoration**. There is a day coming when Jesus returns and finishes

the work began in his death and resurrection, renewing all of creation, glorifying his people, and bringing judgment on all of those in opposition to him.

If you've ever asked or wondered, is this all that there is, is life just about trying to enjoy each moment the best that we can in the little time that we have - the consummation gives you the answer.

Understand, it is through this framework of the gospel (creation, fall, redemption, and consummation) that we can look at the world at large, look at our personal lives specifically, and make sense of what is happening and what will happen one day. And all of this is accomplished by and through the "Logos," Jesus Christ.

II. Jesus is the Eternal "Word" - v. 1-2

But notice again an important truth regarding Jesus here we've already mentioned but is important to see once more...

John 1:1-2

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was in the beginning with God.

Again, Jesus, the Word, always was. And this is important for us to remember because though we celebrate the birth of Jesus during this season, we understand that the birth of Jesus was not the beginning of Jesus. As God, he always existed.

Now think about that in light of the framework of mankind's problem and mankind's needed solution. Just as there are many theories and beliefs about the root of the problems that pain our society and our world, there are just as many theories and beliefs about the ultimate solutions to the problems of our society and world.

But the gospel shows us both the depth of the root of the problem and the extent of the solution that is needed. A broken world needs more than education. A spiritually dead person needs more than a pep talk and a hug. All good things, but we needed a Savior. We do not need a new solution or novel idea or groundbreaking word. We needed an ancient one, eternal even.

The writer of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes says that God placed eternity in our hearts. And mankind is constantly trying to fill that void with temporal things like money, possessions, titles, relationships, experiences, and more. But again, the void is eternal, so it should come as no surprise when we are left unsatisfied with temporal things.

However, if we grasp something, rather, *someone* who is eternal, then we find the peace and life we so desperately need and long for.

The church father, Augustine, famously wrote in his *Confessions*, “You move us to delight in praising You; for You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

You might feel this restlessness in your heart today. Trusting in and hoping in things to fulfill you and give your life meaning, only to instead leave you just as empty and unsatisfied as ever before, you are searching for something or someone greater than what your money can buy or you can attain with your greatest efforts. Know that Jesus, the eternal Word, came to give you life and in him and him alone will you find what your heart has been longing for all of this time.

Jesus was the solution 2,000 years ago and further. He is the solution today, and should the Lord delay his return for another 2,000 years, Jesus will be the solution for the world then as well. He is the eternal Word.

III. Jesus is the New Creation Story - v. 1-5

But I want us to notice another important truth that John points us to in these first few verses in his gospel. Not only does John’s language appeal to his Greek readers, it would have also appealed to his Jewish readers as well, and all those who are familiar with the Old Testament.

One more time, let’s read this passage...

John 1:1-5

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. **4** In him was life, and the life was the light of men. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John begins his gospel with words that are all too familiar to those familiar with the Old Testament. He writes, “In the beginning...” Where else are those words found? They are found in Genesis. The first words of John’s gospel are the same as the first words of the entire Bible.

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

And it goes on to give the creation account in chapters 1 and 2.

Well, what is John doing here? He is referencing back to the creation story to tell us a few things about Jesus.

First, Jesus, as God, created all things. Again, he is more than a historical figure or created being, He is the One who created all things.

Again, Paul...

Col. 1:16

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.

So Jesus is the agent of creation - all things were created through him. Jesus is the goal of creation - all things were created *for* him. But John is saying even more than that. John refers to Jesus as the “light of men” that shines in the darkness. Now, think back to the creation story. What was the first thing that God created? Light. And how did He create the light? Through the power of His word. God spoke, “Let there be light” and there was light. All of a sudden the darkness was overtaken by the light.

And so John says, Jesus, the “Word,” in his coming has shone in the darkness.

In fact, Jesus said of himself later in John’s gospel...

John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

And Scripture speaks of our salvation in creation terms...

2 Cor. 4:6

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Understand, that by calling our attention to the opening of the creation story, John is wanting us to see that **Jesus is the new, spiritual, creation story.** He is the One through whom the world will be remade. It is through Jesus that what was lost at the fall will be restored. It is through Jesus that our hearts of stone are replaced with hearts of flesh.

And so the opening verses of John’s gospel are more than pertinent as we consider the advent theme of hope. With the coming of Christ is the dawn of hope. We are not left on our own. God is remaking all things.

However, it is easy to read Scripture, read about the life and ministry of Jesus, participate in corporate worship week in and week out, and still feel overwhelmed by the darkness and pain that is undeniable in the world. It might even be tempting to

think that as great as the stories are and as great as God might have worked in our own personal lives, things don't seem to be getting better.

But notice John's point of encouragement at the end of our passage this morning...

John 1:5

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The use of the term "overcome" brings to mind hostility and enmity. There is real hostility between Jesus the light and the forces of darkness, but John is careful to say, take heart, the darkness has not overcome the light - because it can't, right? Darkness doesn't have that kind of power.

Unless you have faulty wiring in your home, when you flip on the light switch you don't have to cheer on the light to overcome the darkness. It simply illuminates the room. There is no real battle that could go one way or the other. There is light over darkness every time.

And what is amazing is that John, the author of this gospel, would later be treated with a glimpse of the end of this age and the dawning of the age to come when Jesus comes again, finishing his work of re-creation. And with that vision, he and we, can say more than the darkness "has not overcome" the light, we can say the darkness *will* not overcome the light.

Listen to John's description of his vision of the New Jerusalem, that place we will dwell with the Lord for eternity...

Revelation 21:22-24

22 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. **23** And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. **24** By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it

You see, that light began to shine when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, continues to shine as the gospel is preached and hearts are brought to life, and one day that light will flood the earth in unending glory putting away the darkness for all eternity.

As we celebrate Christmas, let's remember the light and logos that would lay in the manger, and would one day go to the cross, raise to new life, ascend to the right hand of the Father, and will one day come again. We can set all of our hope on him.

One last thought from JC Ryle, the great 19th century British theologian, on these first few verses of John's gospel:

“Would we know, for another thing, the strength of a true Christian’s foundation for hope? Let us often read these first five verses of St. John’s Gospel. Let us mark that the Saviour in whom the believer is bid to trust is nothing less than the eternal God, one able to save to the uttermost all that come to the Father by him. He that was ‘with God’ and ‘was God’ is also ‘Emmanuel, God with us’. Let us thank God that our help is laid on one that is mighty (Ps. 89:19). In ourselves we are great sinners. But in Jesus Christ we have a great Saviour. He is a strong foundation-stone, able to bear the weight of a world’s sin. He that believeth on him shall not be confounded (1 Peter 2:6).”¹

We remember today that our greatest need was salvation. To be rescued from our sin and death. And God showed his love by sending his Son to take on flesh and take the punishment we deserved on the cross. And now by faith, trusting in Jesus as our only hope, we find eternal hope. If you’ve never trusted in him, we call you to do that today.

If you have, continue to rest your hope on Christ. The world feels dark, but the darkness has not and will not overcome the light of the gospel.

VERSES

John 1:1-5

¹ JC Ryle, *Daily Readings*.

John 1:14
Colossians 1:15, 19
John 1:18
John 1:1-2
John 1:1-5
Genesis 1:1
Colossians 1:16
John 8:12
2 Corinthians 4:6
John 1:5
Revelation 21:22-24

SERMON DISCUSSION

1. How is biblical hope different than the way we typically use the word hope?
2. What does it mean that Jesus is called “the Word”?
3. What are the four big picture concepts of the gospel and how do they help us make sense of history and life?
4. Augustine famously wrote, “You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” In what other things or people are we tempted to find meaning, peace, or satisfaction?
5. What is the connection between the creation story and the opening of John’s gospel?
6. How would you explain the hope found in Jesus to someone without hope?