
The gospel, as we saw last week, is very simple

Matthew 11.28–29 NIV “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

That's the gospel - that's the good news

Come to me, says Jesus... follow me, and I will give you life

And we saw a simple pattern in the life of Jesus himself

He was focused on around three categories of relationships... His Father, those who were following him, and the world

And so we've adopted that same framework - moving toward our God in worship; toward one another in community; and toward the world around us on mission

So that's what we've been talking about for a while...

We're seeking to encounter Jesus and surrender to his love

We're anchoring ourselves in genuine healing and loving friendships

And we're focused on reconciliation and on being a witness to the love of God in Jesus wherever we find ourselves

That's what Joining the Movement is all about, you know?

By joining the movement, all we're saying is that we're agreeing to follow the Jesus way - together, here at Heritage

That's really all there is to it - if you've still not joined in, you can do so right now - there are cards... I myself need to, actually...

Anyhow, as you know, we've a Gathering this weekend

We'll be discussing one of the most crucial steps we can take in following Jesus practically... If you're at all able, please come

OK. Last week we talked about centering our lives on Jesus

And how diving deep into the gospels is perhaps the best way to get started

And so I thought it would be helpful for us to do just that today - to get started in on doing what we've been talking about

The NT, of course, contains four gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke & John

They are thoughtful and well-researched historical documents containing trustworthy eyewitness accounts of what went down

Listen to Peter, who was the source for Mark's gospel

2 Peter 1.16 NIV For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about ... our Lord Jesus Christ... but we were eyewitnesses ...

Listen to Luke describe his approach

Luke 1.1–4 NIV Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

You may be utterly confident in the historicity & reliability of the gospels

And if you'd like to study this out further for yourself, let me recommend one book, to get you started...

Richard Bauckham's "Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony"

So let's dive in - we'll be reflecting on John's gospel today

Let's begin with a vignette from the end of the first chapter

John 1:43–46 NIV ...[Jesus] said to [Philip], "Follow me."

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

We have found the One, says Philip to his friend Nathanael

The One that Moses wrote about... the one the prophets spoke of

Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph

Philip clearly knew the OT well - the Law of Moses, and the Prophets

And in Jesus, he sees the fulfillment of everything that the Hebrew Scriptures had spoken of

But his friend Nathanael is skeptical...

I mean, those are grand claims to be making of a construction worker from Nazareth - a tiny village in the back-country of Israel

At the time of that conversation, Bethsaida was a small village of about 1500 inhabitants

But Nazareth was even smaller - it was about 500 at most

And so Nathanael says... can anything good come from Nazareth?

And I simply love Philip's response : Come and see

That's exactly what John is saying to us in his entire gospel

Come and see... Jesus

And as you begin to see him, you will learn to trust him, says John

John 20.30–31 NIV Jesus performed many other 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 Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

And that's precisely why each of the gospels are written - to help us see Jesus, and in seeing him, learn to trust him...

And in trusting him, enter into life

Now each of the gospels have a different starting point in time

Mark is a man of action, and starts his story straightaway with Jesus

Matthew wants to make it clear that Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel's hopes, and so goes back to Abraham, the father of Israel

Luke is a historian, and so he begins at the start of all human history

But John - he reaches all the way back... to the beginning of time...

To the beginning of creation, before there was life, or a universe to contain it

John takes us back to the very beginning of time, and then brings us all the way forward to the coming of Jesus

We'll be considering the first 13 verses of John today

So keep in mind, as we read, that John is speaking of Jesus all the way through

And he uses very simple words to help us see Jesus clearly - simple words that contain the most profound theology, insight & wisdom

First, he speaks of a Word through whom the World is created

And then we hear of a **Witness** to this Word

And then the Word enters into the **World**, to a mixed welcome

And finally we see the **Wisdom** of God as the Word is revealed to the World, and in the revealed Word, God is revealed to us

So let's dive in: (John 1.1 ESV)

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

Instantly we are transported back to the very first words of the Bible

Genesis 1.1–3 NIV In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

Let me make just three comments on this text

First, we discover that God is the creator of all there is

Second, we hear of the Spirit of God, brooding over all creation

Third, we learn that God creates by speaking everything into existence... God creates through Word

Now this phrase translated Spirit of God - the Ruach Elohim - could equally well be translated as the Breath of God...

There's a beautiful and profound metaphor here...

God creates with a Word, and the breath with which he speaks the creating Word is the Spirit of God

So John takes us back to the very beginning

But he takes it a step further than Genesis does

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

He was with God in the beginning.

John is telling us something new

This Word - through whom God created everything - was with God in the beginning, and is God himself in some mysterious way

And John makes it clear that this Word is a person... not simply a mystical sound or a magic mantra

The Word is a person, and the Word was with God in the beginning

The Word, in fact, is both **distinct from God** and at the same time **is God** in some mysterious way...

John will soon reveal the identity of the Word as Jesus himself

And knowing this, we realize that John is saying some pretty mind-blowing things about his friend Jesus

John is asserting that Jesus, the fully human Jesus, who he followed around Galilee for three years... who died on that cross... who was resurrected on the third day...

That fully human Jesus is God himself - the eternal Word through whom God created everything

Jesus was there in the beginning with God, and Jesus was God from the beginning... and the Holy Spirit - the Spirit of God, the Breath of God - was there in the beginning

And so we get a first glimpse of the deep mystery of the Trinity...

Our God is one God in three persons - the Father, the Son (who is the Word), and the Holy Spirit

And then we learn that all things have come into existence through the Word

John 1:3 NIV Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

You could say that the Word of Creation that God spoke... was Jesus

And the breath with which God spoke Jesus... was the Holy Spirit

There is much here to ponder and reflect on

That's how John rolls

He tosses off incredibly profound insights in very simple language

And if we don't take the time to go slow and ruminate on every word, every phrase, every sentence, every story... we'll miss all kinds of revelation and wisdom

A side-bar: there is a residue of the creative power of the Word of God in our own words, in our own speech

We too create things with our words, don't we?

Certainly not in the same way or with the same power that the Word of God possesses

But we do create, with our words

Our words can bring comfort, and our words can create conflict

Our words can encourage, and our words can tear down

Our words can hurt, and our words can heal

This is why the Jesus way has much to say about our speech, our words

James 3.5–6 MESSAGE A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything—or destroy it! It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.

Ephesians 4.29 MESSAGE Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.

So be careful with your words...

They can create beauty and wonder and love... or they can divide and damage and destroy...

Say only what helps, each word a gift

OK, let's keep going

John 1.4–5 NIV In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

All that has life has life through Jesus

Science is absolutely wonderful, and does a fantastic job of researching and describing all that it has access to

My own education was in science and engineering, and I absolutely love math & physics & chemistry... and all the marvels of creation that science opens our eyes to

But science has limits - which any thoughtful scientist will affirm: it is unable to tell us anything conclusive about how it all began

And science has an incredibly hard time trying to explain life

John tells us - and this is revelation - that all life comes from Jesus

The life that you now experience - that's a gift from God in Jesus

Every breath you take, every beat of your heart pumping blood through your arteries, every single one of the 100 billion neurons firing in your brain - that's a gift from God in Jesus

And the gift of light in the darkness... peace in your crisis, provision in your need, refuge in your storm... that too is pure gift from God in Jesus

And the life of the kingdom, eternal life, the abundant life filled with forgiveness and redemption and restoration and grace and love - that too is a gift of grace from Jesus

And Jesus holds it all together... listen to Paul

Colossians 1.16–17 NIV For in [Jesus] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Jesus is holding it all together right now

Whether it is the chair you're sitting on, or the seemingly impossible difficulties and challenges that you're facing... he's holding it all together

You might feel like things are falling apart on you, but Jesus is right now holding it all together... he has you

Deuteronomy 33.26–27 NIV "There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides across the heavens to help you, and on the clouds in his majesty. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

Perhaps you feel like you're falling right now

It's ok - underneath you are his everlasting arms, and if you are falling, you are only falling into his love for you

As you begin to see Jesus like this, you find yourself joining Paul in heartfelt worship

Romans 11.33–36 NIV Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! ... For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

So that's the first part - we've encounter the Word - Jesus

And then we hear of a Witness to the Word

John 1.6–9 NIV There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

And John wants to make it clear that the witness isn't the light - it is the Word who is the Light

And that is always the heart of genuine witness - we point to the Light, not to ourselves

So the Word, and then the Witness... and now the World

And you'd imagine that this would be a wonderful moment - when the Word through whom the World was created ... enters into his World

And yet it is here that a dark strain enters into the story

John 1.9–11 NIV The true light that gives light to everyone 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.

This true light that gives life and light to everyone - Jesus - had now come into the world he had created

...and the world did not recognize him... or receive him

There is a grief in John's heart about this darkness...

And it is to dispel this darkness and bring light that he writes this gospel - so that you and I may believe in Jesus, and move from darkness to light - as we recognize him, and receive him

And in those two words we understand two essential elements of true witness...

Our witness - in our words and through our lives - must help the world **recognize** this Word... who is at the heart of all reality

And our witness must help the world **receive** this Word who is God

There's a deep and profound irony within the gospel

Those who had received life as a gift from Jesus, chose to take his life away on that cross

Listen to how Peter puts it...

Acts 3.15 ESV "...and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses."

We have abused the gift of life to bring death upon ourselves... and in a final act of death, we have crucified Jesus, the author of life

And in giving up his life for us, the one who gave us life to begin with, now offers us life again

John 1.12–13 NIV Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

That... is amazing grace!

Romans 5.8–10 NIV God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Well... there's much more here to reflect on

The next few verses in John 1 are some of the most wonderful

John 1.14 ESV 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.

This is perhaps the most remarkable moment in John

Every phrase is filled with profound depth...

But we're out of time, so we'll pick it up in a few weeks...

One final word

John 1.9–11 NIV The true light that gives light to everyone 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.

When you and I don't see Jesus clearly, when we don't recognize him for who he is, we then cannot receive him as our Lord - as the One who gives us life... as the One who is our Light

The Muslim community worldwide deeply respects and honors Jesus

I have close Muslim friends who - along with all Muslims around the world - hold Jesus in high regard as a great prophet, and as the Messiah who is to come on the last day

But they have not yet recognized Jesus in the ways that we've been hearing from John - and because they do not recognize Jesus as God, they do not receive him as God

The Muslim holy month of Ramadan is coming up soon

Ramadan is sacred to Muslims because they believe it was during that month that the Qur'an was first revealed to Mohammed

In fact, Muslims believe that during the month of Ramadan in 610AD, Mohammed received a revelation of Abraham's writings, then the Torah, then the Psalms, then the Gospels, and finally the Qur'an

So all Muslims fast during Ramadan

... and renew their focus on the Qur'an - seeking to understand God and his way better

So I wonder, if perhaps during Ramadan, we too could pray with our Muslim friends... for our Muslim friends

That they - and we - would come come to know God and see him ever more clearly in Jesus

Jesus, who gave his life for us that we might be forgiven

We've a guide here...
