



John 1:1-18
The Expression of God

This morning, we will be examining how Jesus is the Expression of God in John 1:1-18. As you turn to John Chapter 1, I would like to start by posing a question. Why do we *worship* Jesus?

I think we sometimes tend to look at Jesus more narrowly than we should. We think of Him as the model of human life and, maybe, the answer to all of life's problems. Then immediately wander around looking elsewhere for the answers to all of life's problems. It may be that we view Him, too much, as a perfect man. There is not enough underneath Him, if you understand what I mean. We have the ideal without the full substance of who He is. "Look to Jesus" or "what would Jesus do" loses its meaning after too much repetition.

It is especially troubling when I teach the teens and hear how *tiresomely* they respond when the answer to a Biblical question or the example we are supposed to follow is "Jesus." "I get it!" "Be like Jesus!" Oh really? That was quick, and at such a young age!

A student, who had spent all his life faithfully attending Sunday school, once told me that if he was not listening and was asked a question, the answers, "Jesus, The Bible, or sheep" were most likely going to be correct.

The problem may be that as a Bible-believing church, the barrier to entry into our body is that we must accept that Jesus is the son of God: fully God, fully man, and our Savior. Maybe it becomes too much of a check box or, maybe, because some of us accepted it at such a young age we have internalize it without really thinking about it. Or the concept is too big, I cannot even comprehend it, so I latch on to things I can comprehend, like. . . Jesus did miracles. He was born of a virgin. And, most importantly, he is our Savior!

I want to be very clear; we do not worship Jesus because He is our Savior. We do not worship Jesus because He did miracles or because He was born of a virgin. Christopher Hitchens, a famous atheist, said, "I don't care if you can prove he was born a virgin. That doesn't move me." He's right.

I will add to that. I do not worship Jesus because He died for me. And, truthfully, neither do you. Soldiers and police officers die for people every day and receive extraordinarily little worship for it. Even if a person were to specifically die for me or save me from death. . . I might say, "you saved me." I may even call the person "my savior," But I am not going to worship him.

We worship Jesus because He is THE God! He was with Him in the beginning, and He was Him!

The miracles were signs that informed the Israelites that Jesus was the Messiah. The fact that He was born of a virgin was prophesied as a sign that He was the Messiah. Isaiah 7:14 says, "The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin will conceive and will bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel," and that means, God with us! But even so, the Israelites never expected a true manifestation of God. For Jesus to be able to say, "before Abraham was, I AM," the priests tore their

clothes at that proclamation. Nobody expected it. Try to understand their viewpoint, they could not even comprehend it. And we can join with them in asking what does this mean?

John uses some very peculiar language to help us understand. He uses primal language. I do not mean primitive. I mean core concept words, like “Word, Light, and Life.” But before we look at those words we need to briefly look at the structure John uses.

1-5: Who Jesus is/What He did

14: Who He is/What He did

6-8: John the Baptist

15: John

9-13: What Jesus’ presence does (also, the human response)

16-17: What Jesus’ presence does

18: Summary

19: The narrative starts

We are going to spend the bulk of our time this morning examining the first five verses and verse 14, about who Jesus is and what He did, because they are so foundational. Then we are going to look at the third section. We will close with why John the author, put John the Baptist right in the middle, not once, but twice.

Verses 1-2. Put simply: Jesus is the Word

But not just *a* word. The Greek here is *Logos* and it is so much bigger than the word “word.” *Logos* is an idea, spoken into reality. It is a concept made material. When God spoke He created the universe; He turned His ideas into physical form. By thinking what He wanted to make and speaking it, the thinking thing materialized into existence; and it was through His word, through God’s *Logos* that His idea became a solid created thing. That is Jesus at the beginning. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God.

But now, John is saying it is more than that. Jesus is the expression of God into that reality! “*Ex-press*,” comes from the Latin, “*ex*” meaning out, and “*press*” meaning . . . press. It is where we get the word espresso.

When you express, you are thinking thoughts and pressing them out into reality. Just like when a baby is born, a baby is pressed into the world. The doctor says, “Push!”

This is what you are doing when you express yourself. You are creating something in your head and making it real by saying it out loud. And there is no reason to see it as any less miraculous than childbirth. Just because we do it all the time—speech, I mean, not childbirth—it passes into the realm of the mundane. Everybody talks. . . right? There is nothing special about it.

But stop and consider what you are doing when you talk. Consider that God, in making us in His image, retained the ability to communicate meaningful, esoteric, and complex ideas, solely to humans. It is no accident that the world constantly wants to prove that some animal has the same ability, but they are nowhere close. We create with our words!

I use this example with the teens when we are talking about truth and logos. I have a bag and I tell them that there is a little, white and pink, stuffed, bunny in the bag. I have even used this example in other

Sunday School classes and once, seven years ago, in a sermon in this room. It is amazing after all that time, I can still ask people about it and they will remember that bunny!

If you have never heard of this example but you are paying attention to how the example is unfolding, you will quickly realize that there is nothing in the bag at all. It is just an empty bag that I brought for a powerful illustration that will hopefully stay with you forever. Because from now on, when I ask, “What *wasn't* in the bag?” the answer is a little, stuffed, white and pink bunny.

There is no bunny! There never was. I created it in my mind, I expressed it into reality, and now it is a shared reality.

Words matter! Think about that next time you are careless in how you speak. Think about that the next time you see the definition of a word being tampered with.

How we use words controls reality. Because it is the only way to get anything from the mental/spiritual/ethereal realm into the physical realm. Even art and music must be explained using words. And we live in a very interesting time, relating to this passage; because we, as a culture, are much more interested in another form of “expression.”

We are interested in self-expression. And if you are understanding the idea of what God was doing calling Jesus the *Logos* of God, then you can better understand how dangerous and potentially sinful our desire for self-expression is. Self-expression is all about imagining yourself in your head and pushing *that* out into the world.

I need to stop here and say that the individual—the idea of the importance of the individual—came out of Christian thought. It is a very Christian philosophy. We are made in the image of God. We are each unique creations and we each have the divine imprint. Therefore, we all have equal value despite our gender or our race. And we all have immeasurable *individual worth*. We can all say, “Jesus died *for me*.” If saved, we possess not a communal spirit but the Spirit of God rests in each of us, individually.

After 1700 years of wrestling with what Christianity should mean to the individual we arrived at this, “We hold these truths to be *self-evident*. That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights.”

And then, the very first freedom secured for us in the Constitution: the freedom of speech. To express myself. This is all very good, and it comes from a proper understanding of what it means to be created in the image of God.

But gradually, over time, our society has begun to teach and believe that our individuality defines reality. We have even gone so far as to say that our perspective on the world can be in direct opposition to someone else’s perspective and still be true. That there is no blueprint of actual truth. There is no pattern to follow, there is only the pattern you create!

And, potential silver lining here, maybe we are fortunate to see where this philosophy has carried us. You see it very practically when discussing a book with someone and hearing the question, “what did that mean to you?” It is great to know what something meant to someone, but meaningless if I do not know what it actually meant. The better question is, “What does the author mean by this?” Then if we move on to what that means to a person we actually have something with which to work.

So, when John says that Jesus is the *Logos* of God, that is exactly what he is doing. Jesus IS, “This is what THE Author means.” Jesus is how the Architect of our universe would live. And it would never be

different. When Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane, we see an example of what Jesus does. (Remember, we are in the section of who the Word is, What God did expressing Himself into the world.)

“My father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

There is no other way. In every way, Jesus is the fulfillment of how God would exist in the form of a man. He will glorify the Father (i.e. Himself, because He is the highest aim for glory), He will stand against sin in all its forms, and He will sacrifice Himself for the people He created. He will do whatever it takes to bridge the separation between us and Him. And in any story, in any reality, that is how our God would express Himself. “What am I? I am love, and love is you before me.”

C.S. Lewis knew this. In the Narnia book, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, what does Aslan do? He stands against sin and sacrifices himself for the people he created.

Jesus is that expression of God. John says it very clearly in verse 18. And now is the best time to jump to the end of this passage and look at John’s summary. “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.”

John writes these words with intentional overlap. It is confusing. Some texts attempt to simplify what he’s saying to more accurately portray the relationships here.

ESV says “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made Him known.”

NKJV says “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the father, He has declared Him.”

But in the Greek there is an intentional incongruity of the terms used. Listen to it with the Greek syntax, “God, no one has seen ever yet, The only begotten God, the one being in the bosom of the father, He has made Him known.

Hear what he is saying here in all its conflicting language and it makes sense. No one has seen God, but the only Begotten God. Begotten is the idea of off-spring, but also unique. The Greek word here is *monogenes* (“mono”-“genus”) You can hear the two words there. “Mono,” meaning singular, and “genes.” It is genetic. He is a singular class of genus. He is the only God-Man!

I grew up hearing “only begotten son” and always thought of Jesus as an only child. But that is completely backwards. He is not an only child; he is the only genetic imprint, physical representation of the Spirit of God.

Why does it matter that we get this right? Well, because of What John says about this *Logos* of God

Let us take this enormous concept of the Word being God expressing Himself into the universe and see what John says in verses 3-4. “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

So, in this being who embodies all that God can press into our reality... is life. What does that mean? Does it mean He is the source of life? Yes! Verse three says all things were made through Him. But remember, this “Him” is the Word of God. Jesus’ name has not been mentioned yet. We are still talking about the *Logos*, so all things were made through God’s words, but this is now God’s Word made flesh.

We see it in verse 14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory.”

Yes, Jesus is the source of life. In Him is the power over the grave. In Him is the power to heal all the sin and corruption and death in the universe; because, in Him is all the creative force of God for life. He IS the creative force of God for life. But then that life is light? How is life light?

Because light illumines. It lets us see.

I'll say it again. How is He Life? Because He is the embodiment of all of God's creative force, expressed into reality.

How is that life. . . light? Because it allows us to see God more clearly! I would argue it allows us to see God exactly as clearly as he wants to be seen. Psalm 119:105 "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." John has another way of looking at it in verse 14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Grace and truth are connected to Life and Light. You cannot separate grace from life, because life is the ultimate expression of grace. I mean, both physical life and spiritual life. Grace is unmerited favor.

Before I exist, I merit nothing. Existence is the ultimate grace. Take time to just thank God; be grateful that you are alive. In Jesus is life, and He shares that life with everyone, saved or not. You cannot exist without it and you do not deserve to exist at all!

But then there is also eternal life with God. Salvation from the eternal separation from God. Jesus provides that life, too, but only to those who believe. You see, the Word provides grace to all, but more to those who believe.

And you cannot separate Light from Truth. You turn on the lights to see clearly. People don't get tired of light. And People will always want truth

You may get tired of seeing the same things every day. You may get tired of how your bedroom looks, looking at dead trees late into the winter, or seeing millions of dead cicadas... ever. But you do not get tired of light.

Light shows us things as they are. And, while it stays constant, the things we see change. You do not get tired of light because it is constantly feeding you information you crave. And it goes the same for truth. There may be truths you are tired of hearing and there are definitely truths we completely ignore; but humans will always crave truth! No matter how many lies they swallow, no matter how far from truth they wander, everyone craves the stability of a solid fact from which they can move. A north star, as it were. A compass needle.

If you believe that Jesus is the manifestation of God into this world and that in Him is all of God's creative force and life, then that means that we are in Him as well! That we can find our identity in Jesus Christ. That the things we learn from Jesus will give rise to high ideals and lifestyles that resonate with us because they are true and good and we sense that!

This is not a theory. You can see it in practice. Jesus has transformed some core ideas with His life. For example, what it means to be a hero-leader. Look at the legendary heroes from before Christianity. Gilgamesh and Hercules are both very similar. Half god-half man, their lives were about adventure and power. Both were warriors, cruel, selfish, power-hungry. The good things either of them did were for glory and renown. They were the idea of the hero-leader type. Heroes were out for their own ambitions. If you could hitch your wagon to a hero, you could benefit, too. So in that way, heroes were good for the people . . . on their side. But it was not because they cared about you.

It was the same with ancient leaders, who would instill their family line as the only source of future leadership and create a lore that implied or outright declared their deified status as fast as they possibly could. Even the pagan gods, the highest expression of ancient existence, were greedy, shameless self-promoters who wielded their power as a means to better their own position.

Then John 1 happens. God comes and lives His life clothed in human flesh. He shows what it means to lead. He portrays the importance of being a servant. He defines love for us in terms of service and sacrifice; in terms of doing what you do not want to do because it benefits others. Enduring the cross, despising its shame.

This is truth! This is what a leader-hero actually is! And it left its mark. What did the Romans call their leader? "Princeps civitatis" (first citizen). What did Jesus say? The last shall be first. Now what do we call our leaders? "Public servants."

Why should that happen? Why should the idea of what makes a good leader-hero so drastically change? Did the church force it because we are pedaling our idea of reality and we had the strength to do it? Did we force the world to conform to our personal truth? That's what Post-modernist think. That's what is being taught in many schools.

Did we force this reality on the world? Are we part of the problem? Or, does this reality have so much force because it sings out like a tuning fork. It resonates with *reality* and is in harmony with the universe because it aligns with God's creation?

Stand bold on the truth of the WORD. Even if it is a struggle most of the time, when chaos strikes, people want to know truth. And it is those people who stay firmly planted because of their deep conviction that resonates with others in time of trouble.

As the cultural lily pads of what you can and cannot say, think, or talk about disappear and people are looking for someplace more solid to jump, they are not likely to look to you if you've been jumping around with them. They are going to be looking to those who managed to stand firm under assault, because they have the full force of life, light, grace, and truth on their side.

And that is who Jesus is. He is the full force of God's creative expression. He is a sure foundation.

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth."

That is who Jesus is and that is what Jesus, the Word of God, did.

But what does His presence in the world do? Remember we are skipping past the verses about John the Baptist for now. Let us look now at verses 9-13 and 16-17 and ask the question, "what did it do?" Well, it gave us a choice.

Verses 9-13, "That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

I had a friend at Cedarville College, a close friend, he was a year ahead of me. He got his diploma and told me that he was not sure he believed. Keeping in mind that a Christian testimony was necessary for admission and for graduation, you can forgive that my first comments to him were pretty insulting. But what followed was a great two-week debate, as we packed up and planned to move on. I hit him with

everything I could think of. Every verse, every philosophical argument, every personal argument (“you’re just doing this because you want to. . .”). I found out later that it was our final drive together that got under his skin and plagued him for days. All I said was, “You can argue against God, and you can argue against the Bible, but you can’t argue against Jesus. After creation, signs, pillars of fire and smoke, miracles, earthly visitations by majestic heavenly beings, burning bushes, His written law. . . after all that, God came Himself and lived among us. I believe that, in a cosmic sense, it says, you can deny me in theory, but here I am in the flesh.”

It’s the choice. That is what John says, “He came to his own and his own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him. . .” Jesus—in the flesh—is not an abstract idea, but a man. A man we can follow; a man we can emulate. A man that has the power to change our relationship with God.

Verse 12, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God.” Now we have the right to be called children of God.

Have you noticed that people always called God “The one True God” or “The God of my fathers” when talking about Him in the Old Testament? Yes, they had many names for God, but when they were introducing Him in a basic way.

We do not talk about God that way. He is *my* Heavenly Father. Why? Because Jesus’ presence in the world changed the relationship. Jesus had to teach His disciples to pray a new way. “Our father, who is in heaven.” Our Father? But Jesus, He’s *your* father. Not anymore. We are joint heirs, and now you see it in John 1 verse 16, “we received, grace upon grace.”

Because, while the law was given through a man, Moses, the *Logos* of God can bridge the entire gap. The law can tell us how sinful we are, but only a completely manifested God has the power to show us the truth of the law (in His life) and give us the grace of forgiveness (through His death). This is the grace and truth that comes through Jesus Christ. This is what God’s expression into the world does for us!

But what of John the Baptist? What of the verses I skipped over? Verse 6-8 and 15?

Verses 6-8, “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through Him might believe. He was not that Light but was sent to bear witness of that Light.” Verse 15 “John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’ ”

John the Baptist stands between who Jesus is/what he did, and what Jesus’ presence does. All the way back at Mt. Horeb, God told the Israelites that He wanted them to be His priests. A priest stands between God and the world and connects the two. A mediator between God and man. The Israelites failed. Jesus succeeded. That is why He is known as our High Priest. But we are all priests as well, as many as call on His name and follow Him!

So just like God wanted the Israelite nation to stand between Him and the world, John the Baptist stands between who Jesus is/what he did and what Jesus’ presence does. Just as John, the author places, him in the text, that is his place in the world.

That was John the Baptist’s place and it was John the Apostle’s place. From verse 19 and on, he is a witness. He writes near the end of this very book, “but these have been 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.”

And it is where we are supposed to stand. We are to bear witness, that all might believe through us. We are the witnesses who cry out. We use our *Logos*.

And it is why we want to be so careful about expressing ourselves! Because what does God want us to *push out* into the world? What does He want? He wants Himself expressed through us!

That is why we have to use death and sacrificial language when talking about *spiritual* growth. Sacrifice is letting go of *self* and expressing more and more of Jesus out of us every day. Sanctification is the unmaking of our core sin nature, which can often manifest as our most beloved attributes, for the sake of God to manifest Himself in us. It is not a one-and-done bit of knowledge; it is a gradual transformation through analysis, meditation, prayer, action.

But most importantly we have the reason – the Creator stepped into His creation, His life is *Logos*. It is God speaking, “this is how I would do it, take up your cross and follow me.” This is the “grace upon grace!” That we do not speak from the law written from Moses; we can speak from the law written on our hearts.

When Peter and John spoke to the religious leaders we learn that “they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.”

When people see your confidence, you may be uneducated and untrained, but they can still be amazed recognizing that Jesus is in you. Because He came into this world and shared His Spirit with us, we can now express the truth back into the world. When we are expressing His truth, how powerful it is to know that God promises us His truth will not return void.

He is the full expression of God. Because we can partake in that life, light, grace, and truth, we can stand between God and the world and connect the two! That’s what we are doing when people believe through our testimony. We connect them to God, and God wouldn’t have it any other way.

He wants *us* to be the bridge between who He is and what He can *do*.



Application and Discussion Questions

John 1:1-18

The Expression of God

Summary: Knowing Jesus is the full expression of God gives you a solid foundation for how to live your life.

- Why is it so important that we understand the word “*Logos*” in relation to John 1?
- What historical or modern moments in science, news, politics, or entertainment stand out to you as the world declaring that its expression of reality superseded God’s.
- In the book, *Mama Bear Apologetics*, Hillary Morgan Ferrer says, “According to postmodernism, all truth claims are repressive attempts to control others. Claiming that something is truly true, like *for reals* true, is a microaggression at best, and forceful oppression at worst.”
 - Is Jesus, and the truth He represents, an attempt to control others?
 - Is the truth ever bad? (For reals?)
- I only gave one example of how Jesus’ life changes how humans look at the world (in reshaping how we think of heroes/leaders), but there are so many more. Discuss how Jesus’ life affected any of the following: (Dig deep!)
 - Charity
 - Caring for the helpless
 - Science
 - Punishment
 - Love
 - Ethnicity/Race
 - Social structure
 - Religion
- In what situations or social circles do you tend to express yourself more than God? Why?
- For fun, see if you can recall how Thor (in the movie *Thor*), emulated Christ-like attitudes or values, more than the Thor of antiquity ever would.