

“Word”

John 1:1-18

4/15/18

This morning we are beginning a preaching series in the gospel of John. It may continue all the way to Advent, or it may end in three weeks, depending on how things go! We encourage you to read the passage for each sermon in advance, and we've listed the passages for next couple weeks in your bulletin. You'll notice that John is different from the other three gospels. The other three share much of the same content. For example, over 90% of what is found in Mark's gospel is also found in Matthew or Luke! But over 90% of what is found in John is found nowhere else! It is from John that we learn about the Samaritan woman at the well, the story of Nicodemus and Jesus, the woman taken in adultery, and the raising of Lazarus from the dead. And, without John 3:16, what would Christians hold up on posters in the end zone at football games?! The style of John is also very different from the other three. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke Jesus teaches mostly in parables, but in John he teaches in long discourses. John just gives us a different perspective on Jesus, but a very important one.

So, let's jump right in. In John, there is no birth story about Jesus. In fact, John begins long before the birth of Jesus. I'll read the entire passage, and then we'll look at it piece by piece.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one

has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. (John 1:1-18)

So, no baby Jesus lying in a manger surrounded by shepherds or wise men! This is a much more cosmic vision of Jesus coming into the world! And this prologue or introduction sounds many of the themes we'll hear throughout of the whole gospel- sort of a preview of coming attractions!

Look again at the first few verses.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.
(John 1:1-5)

Notice the first three words: "In the beginning." They are supposed to remind you of another story that begins that way. Genesis 1, the story of creation begins, "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" For John, the coming of Jesus is a kind of new creation story. And then John talks about Jesus as the "Word." What's that about? Why does John use this kind of language? The Greek word "logos," translated "word," had

a long history in Greek philosophy. Around 560 BC, Heraclitus taught that the world in its natural state was in flux, in chaos, and yet there were signs of order in the world- the stars and planets stay in their courses, and there is a regularity to the seasons, and the tides. How was that possible amidst all the chaos? Heraclitus taught that there was a rational, unifying force behind this order called the Logos, the Word, that brought order to the world. This concept was picked up by other Greek philosophers and was widely believed in John's day. So John used it. He said in effect, "Let me tell you more about this Logos, this force you believe gives order to the universe." And that would have made his gospel immediately understandable and interesting to Greek and Roman Gentiles.

Look at what John says about the Logos, the Word. The Word was with God and was God. How can the Word be with God and be God at the same time? That's a paradox, isn't it? We'll come back to that later. The Word is also involved in the creation of all things, including life itself! And it is light. Light and darkness are themes throughout John's gospel. And, we should probably issue a spoiler alert for verse 5. The light will encounter darkness in John's gospel, but the darkness will not overcome it!

Let's keep going. ⁶*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.* ⁷*He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.* ⁸*He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to*

the light. ⁹*The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.* (John 1:6-9) This, of course, refers to John the Baptist. Next week's passage focuses on John, so we won't say much about him this morning, but notice that his role here is as a witness to the light which has come into the world. Also notice that the light has come to enlighten everyone, not just the descendants of Abraham, the Jews. This is another theme of John.

¹⁰*He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.* ¹¹*He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.* ¹²*But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,* ¹³*who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.* (John 1:10-13)

The Word, the one who was with God from the beginning, the one through whom all things were made, came into the world, but the world didn't know him and rejected him. Specifically, his own people, the descendants of Abraham, did not accept him. As biblical scholar N.T. Wright puts it, "John's gospel isn't about Jesus speaking the truth and everyone saying: 'Of course! Why didn't we realize it before?' It is about God shining his clear, bright torch into the darkness of our world, our lives, our hearts, our imaginations- and the darkness not comprehending it. It's about God as a little child, speaking words of truth, and nobody knowing

what he's talking about." There's a sadness to verses 10 and 11 as the world rejects its Creator. But there is good news in verses 12 and 13. Again, anyone who believes can become a child of God, and John will tell us more about how to become a child of God in chapter 3. Let's finish the passage.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. (John 1:14-18)

Verse 14 comes as close as we get to the Christmas story in John. "And the word became flesh and lived among us..." Eugene Peterson's translation reads, "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood." I like that! But look at the rest of the verse, as well as verse 18. "*and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth...No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.*"

As long as there have been human beings, we have wondered about the One who has created us. What is our Creator like? And what does this Creator expect of us? The answers to these questions have profound implications for how we live and what we think of ourselves. The problem today is the same one that John points out; No one has ever seen God. That can lead to a lot of different ideas as to what God is like! A survey done by sociologists at Baylor University in conjunction with the Gallup organization, found Americans divided among four primary views of God.

- 31.4% Authoritarian God, who is “angry at humanity’s sins and engaged in every creature’s life and world affairs.”

- 23% Benevolent God, “who is forgiving and accepting of anyone who repents”

- 16% Critical God, who “has his judgmental eye on the world, but he’s not going to intervene, either to punish or comfort.

- 24.4% Distant God, who is more of a “cosmic force that launched the world, then left it spinning on its own.”

The way you relate to God is shaped by your view of who God is. You probably wouldn’t want much to do with an Authoritarian God; It would be too risky! And it would be pointless to try to connect with a Distant God!

But John wants us to know that we don't have to guess anymore about what God is like. He says that if we want to know what God is like, we only have to look at Jesus, God's Son! That's right. John says, *"It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known."* So, I hope you'll come along for the ride in John's gospel. For as we get to know Jesus through this book, we'll be getting to know the God who has made each one of us. And we'll learn what he expects from us and how to relate to him.