

Gospel of John Study Session 2

Last week we began our study in the Gospel of John and looked at the purpose of the book. From our study it appears that the Gospel of John was written primarily to evangelize the lost but as we saw it also provides edification for believers. Jesus Christ, His nature and work, are the central focus of the book. There were three questions we answered last week that came from our study of the purpose of John's gospel. 1) What do we need to believe? 2) What does it mean to believe? 3) Why do we need to believe?

In this session we are going to begin to delve into the gospel by looking at the Prologue to John's gospel. Unlike the Synoptics, John spends the first half of the first chapter with a prologue to introduce us to Jesus Christ. It's essential to understand the prologue because it introduces and lays the foundation for the teaching about Jesus Christ that John does in the rest of the book. We will break the prologue into three sections (1:1-5, 6-13, 14-18). In the first section we will attempt to answer the questions, "Who is Jesus?" and "Why did Jesus come to earth?" These questions are critically important to our study because as we noted last week, salvation comes from believing in Jesus Christ and to believe means to make a conscious commitment to Jesus and trust Him with your entire mind, emotions and will. This is very important to us as in modern American culture, we find ourselves living with many who are increasingly spiritually minded yet hesitant to commit to saying that there is one absolute truth.

Q: When you talk to people and they offer their opinion on who they think Jesus is, what do they say about Jesus? (*that He's a good man, a teacher, a fraud, a fabricated ideal of a person, He was a nice or kind man, etc.*)

[Read John 1:1-3]

The clear teaching of the New Testament is that Jesus of Nazareth was more than just a good man or a wise teacher.

Q: What was with God in the beginning? (*the Word*)

This is a unique title in Scripture. Everyone who has ever lived through Jr. High knows that words are powerful. During WW II, Winston Churchill said these words, "*Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will say, "This was their Finest Hour."*" His words rallied England to stand firm and fight against the Nazis. Yet, these words, while powerful, do not contain anywhere near the power of the Word who was with God in the beginning and was actually God Himself.

[Psalm 33:6]

Q: What created the heavens and the earth according to this verse? (*the word of the Lord*)

[Genesis 1:3]

Q: What did God do to create light? (*He spoke words*)

In **Psalm 107:20** God sent His word and healed people and rescued them from the pit. In other words creation, revelation and salvation come through the power of the word of God. So what is this Word that John speaks of here? John will give us a full picture of the Word later in the prologue. The Greek word used for “word” is logos. This word has a multitude of definitions and was used in Greek culture incredibly frequently. John didn’t use the word in the sense that his culture used it but rather his use has its roots in the Old Testament. However, John’s use transcends the themes presented in the Old Testament (such as “wisdom” as presented in Proverbs, and others).

A word is a verbal or written expression of a person’s thoughts and their will. In this instance, since we are talking about God, the Word reveals God’s thoughts and His will and does so perfectly.

As we will see, the Word is God’s powerful title for His ultimate self-expression. When God wanted to disclose who He was to mankind in His fulness, He revealed the Word, Jesus Christ, His own Son to us. The main thrust of the word here in John is that it represents not just “a word” but rather “a message”.

As we will see later, the Word is John’s title for Jesus Christ in this prologue. In this there is no greater revelation of The Heavenly Father than His only Son, Jesus Christ. Later in **John 14:9**, Jesus told Philip that if a person has seen Jesus, that he’s seen the Father.

[Hebrews 1:1-3]

Q: What does this passage teach us about Jesus, the Son of God? (*He is the exact representation of God’s nature and is the radiance of God’s glory*)

Q: What do the first three words of v.1 remind you of? (*Genesis 1:1*)

John is connecting the Word, Jesus Christ, with the creation. However, John is claiming that Jesus Christ existed before the word began and before there was time. Notice that there is no hint or mention of the creation of the Word. He has always existed. It’s interesting that in both this verse and Genesis 1:1, there is no hint of the creation of God. It is just assumed that God always existed. Jesus shares His nature and existence with God - “the Word was God”. Everything that can be said about God can be said about Jesus Christ. This is one of the foundational verses in our belief in a Triune God, the Trinity. There is but one God but He reveals Himself to us in three persons.

[John 17:5]

Q: Why do you think that pre-existence of Christ is important for us and the rest of modern man? (*It sets our God apart from the gods of human imagination and any other so-called god.*)

This is important when distinguishing Biblical Christianity from all other faiths and religions. The Jehovah’s Witnesses call Jesus “a god” - one of many. The Jews and Muslims believe in one God but it is not a triune god. They both miss the fulness of God’s revelation of

Himself in Jesus Christ.

Q: According to v.3, what did the Word do? *(He created all things)*

The way John describes the creation is interesting. Instead of taking us to a huge warehouse and opening the door and saying God created everything inside of it, John opens the door to the warehouse and then takes us down each row pointing out individually all the God made. That's the way the verse reads (all things - rather than everything).

[Colossians 1:16] - The "all things" wording is used by Paul as well.

[Revelation 4:11] - One day Jesus will be worshiped in heaven with these words. Again, note "all things".

Q: Why do you think God has revealed to us that He created "all things" as opposed to "everything"? *(It focuses our attention on the detail He provided in creating the world. He didn't just make the big things and then leave it to the processes of "nature" to fill in the gaps. All things are the product of His mind and creative will.)*

Q: So from these first three verses, what do they teach us about Jesus Christ? *(that He has always been, He is God, He is the agent of creation of all things, He is the ultimate and final self-revelation of God Himself)*

Our next question to answer is why did Jesus come to earth.

[John 1:4-5]

Q: What are the two reasons given in these two verses as to why the Word came to earth? *(to give life and light)*

Q: Why would Jesus come to give life when we were already alive? *(The life He came to give us was eternal life, spiritual life. We did not and could not possess this before God gave it to us through Jesus Christ.)*

[Ephesian 2:1-3]

Q: According to these verses, what is the natural state of all mankind? *(We were all dead in our sins.)*

Death means to be fundamentally separated. If we are talking physical death, it means to be fundamentally separated from those things which kept us physically alive. The soul (his mind, will and emotions) are separated from his body. We can go to his funeral and see his body lying in a casket but it's just the shell of the person. His body is no longer functioning and he, the part of him that is his character and essential personality is separated from his body. If we are talking about spiritual death, we are talking about being fundamentally separated from God. The problem with sin is that it separates us from God who is true life. The problem is that this

separation becomes permanent once the body of the person dies. It is at that point that God will judge the person and the person will end up in hell forever.

However, Jesus came to reconcile us to God, changing both our present condition and our future destination. The question then becomes, how do you receive this spiritual life?

[John 11:25] - The person puts his faith in Jesus Christ as the payment for his sins.

According to the Ephesian passage, a Christian is a person who was once dead in sin but has now been made alive by receiving Jesus' life, a Christian was once cut off from God but now has been reconciled to Him, and is someone who was once a spiritual corpse but now has the life of God flowing through Him (in the person of the Holy Spirit).

[Ephesians 2:8-9] - Putting our full faith in the grace of Jesus Christ saves us from the wrath of God to come.

Q: So what is the first reason Jesus came to earth mentioned in vv. 4-5? (*He came to give people His life so that they would have a vibrant, eternal, loving relationship with God.*)

Now John uses a different metaphor to describe the same truth. The Word was the Light of men. In the following passage, Paul is giving his testimony before King Agrippa. He is describing his conversion along the Damascus road and here he relates to us the words of Jesus to him on that day.

[Acts 26:14-18]

Q: What is Satan's dominion called in this passage? (*a domain of darkness*)

As we will see through the rest of the book of John, this darkness is not just the absence of light but actually it is positive evil. Positive evil is evil that is active and purposeful in nature. The problem with this spiritual darkness is that there is nothing we can do ourselves to overcome this darkness. Jesus came because only He could meet this need of ours as we were powerless. We would be staggering around in the darkness of our own opinions and speculations if Jesus didn't reveal light to us. This light is not just bound up with creation, but is rather it is also bound with salvation. Apart from the light brought by the Messiah, people would continue to love the darkness. Listen to the prediction of Jesus entering the world from Isaiah.

[Isaiah 9:2]

Despite the shining of the light, the darkness didn't understand the light. This word "recognize" can mean seize, take possession of, understand, overtake, or comprehend. In other words, the darkness did not overtake the light. Thus Jesus is both the light of creation but also the light of redemption. It is important to note that light and darkness are not equal opposites. Darkness is always overcome by light. No matter how dark some place is, one light is all it takes to shatter the darkness. The problem is that this light brought by the Word isn't always popular.

[John 3:19-21]

Q: According to these verses, why do those in the darkness hate the light? *(their evil deeds will be exposed and they love their evil deeds)*

Q: What do the works of those who live in the light do? *(They point to God)*

The gospel is good news in that man no longer needs to wander around in darkness of despair and sin. Instead, a person can enjoy the light of righteousness through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. An important side note here is that John is not telling a world that is already overly saturated with religion that they need more religion. The Jewish leaders were as religious as anyone in all of history. Yet, they were stumbling around in the darkness of sin attempting to please God with their own self-righteousness. The good news about the Light is that it takes all the guess work out of salvation. We don't have to stumble around and grope and guess how to be saved. The Light has shown us the way to God.

Later in the book of John, if we quit reading in chapter 19, we'd be tempted to tell John that he was wrong. Jesus, the Word, was crucified by these men who lived in darkness and they overcame Him. In fact, on that day, we are told that there was an unnatural darkness that fell over the land as Jesus was dying on the cross. It appeared that darkness (active evil) and its forces achieved the final victory. Yet then in chapter 20, at the break of day, at the first light, Jesus rose from the dead. Life could not stay dead and buried and light would break and overcome the darkness. Notice how John described this in **1:5** - *"The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it."*

In the realm of our personal experience, at times when we are anxious, afraid, overwhelmed or confused, it is important to remember that Jesus is both our life and our light. he will be the One to shine on our path and illuminate hope.

Before moving on, let's review with a few questions.

Q: Why does John call Jesus "the Word"? (Because Jesus is the message from God)

Q: What does John want us to believe about Jesus through this passage? *(That He is the ultimate revelation of God, that He is the agent of creation, revelation and salvation, He has always existed, He is the Life of God and the Light of God)*

Q: Why did Jesus come to earth? *(To bring the Life and Light of God to mankind)*

In this second section of John's prologue, John focuses on the fact that God sent a man named John the Baptist to tell us that we need to make a life-defining decision about Jesus Christ.

Before we read this passage, I need to ask you all a question. What do Alexander the Great, John the Baptist, and William the Conqueror all have in common? *(They all share the same middle name. Bah-bah-buski. I'll be here all week.)*

[John 1:6-10]

It is important to keep in mind as you read the book that the apostle John who wrote the

book never refers to himself or calls himself by name. Anytime he uses the name “John”, he is referring to John the Baptist. What is passage is discussing (and it goes through v.13) is that there are decisions we make in life that come to define us. Think back to our founding fathers. When they signed the Declaration of Independence, they rightly saw it as them signing their own death warrants as they were openly declaring treason against the crown of England. Their action that day, defined them as founding fathers. Likewise, as John will point out time and time again, each person faces a similar decision that they make which will come to define them through eternity.

Q: What does this passage teach us about John the Baptist? (*He was sent from God, his name was John, he was a witness to testify about the Light, He was not the Light.*)

Q: What is the role of a witness? (*testifies to what they have seen or experienced*)

The reason John is given the title “witness” is so that John can take the witness stand and give us specific information. In his case, information about the Light. We then are like the jury and after hearing John’s testimony, we are placed in the position to render a verdict - make a decision about this Light.

Q: According to this passage, what does the True Light do? (*it enlightens every man*)

The theologian A.W. Pink says this about the Light, “*When the sun is shining in all its beauty, who are the ones unconscious of the fact? Who need to be told it is shining? The blind! How tragic, then, when we read that God sent John to “bear witness of the Light”. How pathetic that there should be any need for this! How solemn the statement that men have to be told “the light” is now in their midst. What a revelation of man’s fallen condition.*”

Jesus came into the world as the Light but the world was blind. John was not the Light but he came to bear witness to it and reflect it. In John 5:35 Jesus calls John the Baptist a “burning and shining lamp”. This was a testimony to John’s life pointing others to the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

Q: According to this passage, what does John say about the Light? (*The Light was in the world and the world was made through Him yet the world did not know Him.*)

Think of this. It would be easy for the Gentiles to miss the Light God sent. They did not have any prior revelation of God or of Him coming to be the Life and Light of the world. They had always lived in darkness and didn’t know anything different. However, think of the Jews. The Jews had been chosen by God to be His people. They did have specific revelations about God sending the Light into the world. (Just think back to the Isaiah passage from earlier in the lesson.) The Jews were Jesus’ people. They should recognize Him and rejoice. Right?

[John 1:11-13]

Q: How was Jesus’s reception by the Jews? (*The rejected Him*)

Q: Did everyone reject Jesus? (*no*)

Let's examine v.12. The word "received" means to "take possession of something offered". If you come to my house and I offer you a cup of coffee and you take it, then you have received what I offered. The tense of this word is in the aorist tense which means that those who did receive Jesus's offer will remain in that state perpetually.

Q: How does one receive Jesus according to this verse (and all the others we've read)? *(by believing in Him)*

Q: What does it mean to believe in Him? *(to put your whole trust in Him for your salvation and life; you are making a whole-hearted commitment to Jesus as your sole Savior and sole Lord)*

Q: What is the result of receiving Jesus? *(these people have the right to become children of God)*

[Ephesians 1:3-6]

Q: Who is the apostle Paul talking to in this letter: the lost or the saved? *(the saved, the church at Ephesus)*

Q: According to this passage, what has God our Heavenly Father blessed all believers with? *(With every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ)*

Q: Before the foundations of the world, what did God chose for those who are saved? *(to be holy and blameless before Him)*

Think about that for a moment. God has made all believers to be holy and blameless before Him.

Q: If we, as believers, are holy and blameless before God, what does God hold against us? *(nothing, no condemnation, no wrath)*

Q: According to this passage, what are all believers predestined to become? *(to become adopted into God's family as His sons and daughters)*

Link this with **John 1:12**. Once we receive Christ, it sets off a cascade of wondrous, amazing, incredibly, transformations in our nature and identity. These get summed up by Paul often with the short phrase "in Him" or "in Christ". Only Christ has the authority to declare a person who formerly was a sinner by nature and choice, to be accepted into God's family. Let's look at the whopping huge deal this is in our daily lives.

[John 14:1-4]

Q: Since believers are part of God's family, what do we no longer need to fear? *(death and/or the future or our eternal destination, it will be with Jesus)*

[Matthew 6:30-33]

Q: What fear is Jesus putting to rest in these verses? (*fears concerning our physical needs, things pertaining to our lives here on earth*)

Next John discusses the nature of this adoption.

Q: How are God's children NOT born? (*God's children are not born through the normal means of humanity. They are not related by blood to any other person nor are they born by parents deciding that they want a child*)

In our world, there are three ways people often think that they can be saved which are dangerously wrong.

1) Some think God saves people because of their racial or ethnic background. This was huge in Jesus' day as the Jews thought this way. Today it might come across as America is a Christian nation and I'm an American so I'm a Christian by default. Wrong.

2) Some think God saves people due to their sincerity. The phrase in John 1:13 that says "will of the flesh" pictures a man and woman coming together in passion to conceive a child. Think of it this way. If I get the notion that I can power my toaster oven by plugging it into my cat and I believe it sincerely, then it will happen. We all know this is boloney. It doesn't matter how sincerely I believe my cat will generate enough electricity power anything; nothing is going to happen through my sincere belief. Believing in nonsense gets you nowhere. Your sincerity or passion about spiritual things does not make them true or beneficial.

3) Some think God saves people because of their effort. Go back to v.13 and the husband and wife carefully planning their lives around the time so that when they come together, it will produce a child. They see this as their efforts pay off, yet that is said not to be of any value here. God specifically says that our efforts are useless when it comes to obtaining salvation. People will only experience the new life as a child of God when they chose to receive the gift God has given them in Christ.

Q: How are God's children born? (*By the activity of God. Specifically when a person believes God and receives the offer to become His child they are re-born*)

Q: In what ways are our lives radically altered when we become a child of God? (*we no longer need to fear death or the afterlife, we can rest in our Father as the One who will provide for our needs, so many others - give time for others to give answers*)

After introducing us to John the Baptist and his ministry's role in bearing witness to the Light, John returns to his original discussion concerning the Word. What we are going to see in this last section of the prologue is that Jesus Christ is not the beginning of the gospel but He is its next and last chapter. We need to be looking to how Jesus Christ fulfilled the promises of God in the Old Testament to complete and make available the gospel for mankind.

[John 1:14-18]

Q: According to v.14, what happened to the Word? (*It became flesh and dwelt among humans*)

Q: According to what we've read in this prologue, is Jesus God or man? (*He is both, point out v.1*)

and v.14)

In this short prologue we have everything we need to show that Jesus Christ is both God and man at the same time. He did not give up His divine nature when he took on flesh and He did not give up His human nature after He took it upon Himself.

[Philippians 2:5-11] - Jesus was God and man simultaneously. While the Spirit of Christ always existed, in Bethlehem in a manger one night, the eternal Son of God wrapped Himself in flesh and became a man and was named Jesus.

[Colossians 2:9]

Q: What does this verse teach us about Jesus? (*that the fulness of God dwells in Christ*)

The question is why does that matter? What is so important about Jesus being man? Three big points here.

1) If Jesus were not man, he could not be tempted.

[Hebrews 4:15-16] - Since Jesus became man and shared in our experience of being tempted, He knows exactly what we are going through when we are tempted. Thus, God can sympathize with us in our weakness and assure us of His ability to give us victory over sin and temptation. Jesus gets us.

2) If Jesus were not a man, He could not be our example. One of the wonders of Jesus becoming a man was that He could live in this world and show us how we can live in it as well. How can respond to certain circumstances? How should we love others? Jesus provided the perfect example for us as He never sinned.

3) If Jesus were not a man, He could not have died for us. The incarnation, Jesus becoming human, is important because of the reason He became man. It was to die on the cross at Calvary. God could not die ever but a man could die and die in our place.

By the end of the prologue, if there were any doubts as to who John was referring to as the Word, there are no doubts by this point. The Word is Jesus Christ. Only He was God who became man.

However, as mentioned before, the gospel, at least the shadow of it was predicted by the Old Testament. From the seed of the woman in Genesis 3 crushing Satan's head, to Rahab the harlot's salvation to the words of the prophet Isaiah, God promised good news repeatedly. However, it was not fully revealed until Jesus came. He alone is the full revelation of the gospel message. In the rest of this prologue John gives us five other gospel relationships between Jesus and the Old Testament.

1) In v.14, John uses the word "dwelt". The only other time John uses this word is in John 7:2 when he is speaking about the Feast of Booths. The word means to "pitch a tent" or "share an encampment with someone". This brings back the memory in the Old Testament of the Tabernacle. The Tabernacles was the pre-Temple and it was the place where God resided among His people. It traveled with the Israelites during their days before the Temple was constructed and was called the Tent of Meeting. It got this name because within it was the holy of holies, a place where the ark of the covenant was kept, which signified the presence of God and it is where

God would meet with man.

Just as God would meet His people in the Tent of meeting in the Old Testament, He would meet with man in the person of Jesus in the New Testament. The Jews' center of worship was the Tent of Meeting (or later the Temple - where the ark, thus presence of God was located, was kept). However, once Jesus came, He became the center of worship. There was no longer a need for a physical location. Only through Jesus could man be brought to God.

Q: In v.14, what did mankind see when they saw Jesus? (*the glory of God*)

Q: What is the glory of God? (*Glory is the "shine" or "brilliance". When you look at the sun, you don't see hydrogen undergoing fusion, instead you see the light or shine of the sun. In the same way, God is invisible and unknowable by our human senses. However, His glory is His action which causes the invisible God to become visible - the actions prove His presence.*)

2) Back in the Old Testament, one could not think of the Tabernacle without being reminded of the glory of God. Often the shekinah glory fell upon the Tabernacle to show God's presence in the Tabernacle at that time. This signified God's greatness and His presence with His people. As Israel wandered through the wilderness, God led them with His glory - a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When the Jews would look at the Tabernacle, they would see an incomplete or partial picture of God's glory - a shadow of His greatness, goodness and holiness.

Q: What happens when a shadow is exposed to light? (*It disappears*)

John's point in v.14 is that when Jesus, the Word came to earth to dwell with man, the glory of God was seen clearly and in its fulness. In Jesus, the Light, the shadow disappeared to reveal the true nature of God visibly. In essence John was saying, "*Our fathers experienced the grace and faithfulness of God, but if you want an even greater demonstration of it, look to Jesus.*" Listen to this passage about this same thing in Hebrews.

[Hebrews 8:1-7]

3) (v.15) John the Baptist's testimony was that Jesus was superior to him because Jesus existed before him. This is an odd statement concerning John the Baptist was born six months before Jesus (Luke 1). John was declaring that Jesus was eternally existing. John the Baptist was considered the very last of the Old Testament prophets. His role was to prepare the hearts of the people for Jesus' ministry. The only difference between John the Baptist and the Old Testament prophets was that he could physically point to Jesus and say, "*Here He is!*". God has been telling you that He is going to send a Messiah and now He is here - it's Jesus. Jesus was the fulfillment of everything the Old Testament prophets preached and dreamed to see happen.

4) Next John shows us that Jesus is the only source of grace. However, we don't need to fear that there is only one source of grace because Jesus's grace is inexhaustible. The focus in vv. 16-17 is that Jesus' grace is fuller and more complete than anything available to humans in the Old Testament.

The giving of the Law was an act of grace on the part of God.

Q: In what way could the Law be seen as an act of grace? *(It points out God's holiness and our sin and thus our need for a Savior and repentance.)*

God was showing how people were to respond to Him by faith through the old covenant. The Law was given to show the people the holiness of God and point out their sinfulness. The Law was never intended to be nor was it ever able to save anyone. The Law was not an end in itself. It was not an instrument of grace. It merely pointed out that a person needed grace.

[Romans 3:19-24]

[Galatians 3:13-14]

Q: What was the purpose of the Law according to these verses? *(to point out sin, to identify people as sinners, lawbreakers)*

All the things of the Law pointed to Christ. They were merely shadows of the good things to come. Once Jesus came, the shadow no longer mattered. What mattered was that Jesus Christ had been fully revealed and the grace of God was now visible to all mankind. This is what is meant by grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

5) (v.18) One of the single greatest revelations that Jesus brought was that the Father was revealed in a new way - in a depth previously unknown. The word translated "explained" in v.18 is fairly rare, only showing up in the New Testament six times. It means to "relate something new", "to reveal" or "to explain". It means that the whole story has now been laid bare and is out in the public. Jesus has shared the entire story of God to us and part of this revelation is that God is our Father. While in the Old Testament the Israelites were considered the "children of God", they didn't see God as their Father in the sense we usually think of it. However, Jesus revealed to us that as children of God, we can now see God as our Heavenly Father, who loves and protects us like an earthly father. This is a much more full revelation of the Father than before.

Q: How is grace made full in Jesus Christ? *(Under the old covenant, the Law was only a shadow of what God wanted for mankind through grace. Even the notion of grace itself was shrouded in the Old Testament, peeking out from time to time. Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the Law and promises made to mankind by God. He is the gift that brings salvation that the Law could not accomplish. Jesus made grace fully available to all through His death on the cross.)*

Q: In what way is the gospel of Jesus Christ a hope in your life today?

Q: Are there any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?