

September 7/8, 2019

The Word Became Flesh

These Things are Written that You May Believe Series

John 1:1-18

Pastor Bryan Clark

The one thing every single one of us has in common as people, is that we are made in the image of God. And as people made in the image of God, we all have legitimate longings and desires. In a sense, there's something within us that feels like we were made for something more than this. We long for the world as God intended it to be. One of the big challenges is that many people, in seeking to satisfy those longings and desires, drift down a path that only leaves them wounded, disappointed, broken, disillusioned, confused, or bored. Those longings and desires can lead us into disaster because we're seeking to satisfy them with the things of this world. John writes in his gospel:

These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and in believing, you may have life in His name. (*NASB, John 20:31)

In other words, the only way to ultimately satisfy these legitimate longings and desires that we all feel, is to satisfy them in Jesus. I don't know where you find yourself this morning; you may be happy, joyful, on top of the world. If that's you, that's awesome! But then again, maybe not. Maybe what you're feeling this morning is confusion or hurt or pain or disappointment or struggle or loneliness or anxiety. There's something deep within you that cries out, asking God, "*Certainly this isn't the way it was supposed to be?*"

John offers us what our soul is longing for—that we might understand it, that we might believe it—that we might find life. My prayer over the next weeks and months is that our hearts and our eyes will be open to see and understand and believe things we've never really understood before and in believing, we might find life. I invite you to turn with us to the Gospel of John, chapter one, as this morning we begin our study in John.

So as most of you know, there are four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Three of them are called the synoptics: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They're very similar. There are differences in the intent of the writer, but very similar. John, on the other hand, is different, and dramatically different. So, for example, the Gospel of John does not record the genealogy of Jesus. It doesn't record the birth of Jesus, doesn't record the baptism of Jesus, doesn't record the transfiguration of Jesus, doesn't record the parables of Jesus. It doesn't record the Lord's Supper in the upper room, doesn't record the Garden of Gethsemane. It doesn't record the ascension of Jesus. It's not that John thought these things were unimportant, he just knew they were already recorded. About ninety percent, maybe even a little bit more of John's material, is unique to John. John was the last of the four gospels written. There's a lot of conversation around the date of John's gospel. Opinions range from about AD 70 up to 90-95. Probably most scholars are somewhere between AD 80 and 95, but we're not completely certain.

John's gospel has been described by New Testament scholar Leon Morris as "...being like a pool that is so shallow, a child can wade in it, and so deep, an elephant can swim in it." It's a pretty good description, and it's a really good description of what's called the *prologue*. The prologue is the first eighteen verses, and it has the potential to be extremely complex.

The best way, I think, to think of the prologue is that John is introducing themes that will play out in his gospel. So, he's not trying to answer all the questions. He's not even trying to have a big discussion of these things, but just introducing the themes, and they will get unpacked and talked about as we go through the gospel of John. The first three verses can get really complex, but they're very important, so hang with me here. Verse 1:

In the beginning was the Word, (*NASB, John 1:1a)

As soon as we hear that, that language is familiar if we've read our Bibles. It's almost identical to Genesis, chapter one, verse one. As a matter of fact, in the Hebrew Bible the name of the book of Genesis is actually named *In the Beginning*. So John is referring to the fact that before there was time, before there was a universe, before there was anything, there was God. Genesis 1:1—*In the beginning, God,*

The universe did not self-create. Just that language is nonsensical. If you don't exist, you can't create yourself. There has to be some sort of a cause that has just always been, that has caused all else to be. We refer to this as the *uncaused cause: In the beginning, God.*

If you think of Genesis chapter one as the language of creation, then you might think of John chapter one as the language of the new creation or the re-creation, which will be a major theme in John's gospel. **In the beginning was the Word**, the Greek word *logos*. There's a lot of discussion about this word; some of it gets really complex and confusing. The Greeks had a concept of the *logos*, and so did the Hebrews. Without getting into all that, I think we can be pretty confident that John's background for the term was Hebrew, and specifically the Hebrew Old Testament. The idea is that the word—just words—think of it that way, are an expression of me. If I speak words, that means I exist. So, there's already this concept of self-existence. And because I exist, I express myself. That's the Word. So, forever God has existed; He expressed Himself in the word, in the *logos*.

In the Old Testament, Genesis one tells us God spoke the universe into place. The Word of God is not just God offering His opinion. It actually has causal power. There was nothing. God spoke, and there was something. So that's the Old Testament Hebrew understanding of *logos*, and I think that's what John is referring to.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. (1:1b)

So, again, very carefully worded, literally could be translated, *the Word was face to face with God*. There are two parts to this. One would be *equality*. It's not saying the word was hanging out *with* God. *Face to face* means equal with God, but distinct from God. You don't stand face to face with yourself.

So, we understand that the Bible teaches this wonderful, mysterious, confusing doctrine of the Trinity. God is one God, manifested in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. For eternity past, for all eternity, there was just God, living and delighting in relationship with Himself, until the Word of God, when God spoke the universe into place. At this point, we would have a clear understanding that this word, this *logos*, has to be one of the members of the Trinity.

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

(Vs.1c)

Some false teachers say the word was “a” god, implying one god, among many. It’s helpful to understand: first of all, the Greek language has no indefinite article; it has no “a”. So that’s not what it says. It also has the definite article “the” but it’s not used here. The language is very careful, and it’s very precise. **And the Word was with God and the Word was God.** So, if it said *the* God, that’s not the point being made. The point being made is the Word was **with God** and **was God**.

So again, if you think of the concept of the Trinity, it’s a complex discussion. There is one member of the Trinity that’s described as the Creator God of Genesis one, equal with God, with God, fully God in every way, which then he summarizes in verse 2:

He was in the beginning with God.

(So, it’s a discussion about one particular member of the Trinity, who **was in the beginning**, and is fully God in every way.) Verse 3:

All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

So again, you think of Genesis one language: *the Word of God spoke the universe into place*. There’s nothing that exists that was not created by *the Word*. The language here when he says **all things came into being**, again is very precise language. It’s not saying this was a creative process by God; it’s talking about an event, a moment in time. So think about it this way:

There are people who create who are artists, who are construction workers, who are architects, who are cooks and chefs. However that makes sense to you, that creative expression. Essentially what you’re doing is you’re taking material that already exists, and with that, you’re creating something more. That’s not what this is saying. God did not take something that already existed and make it into something else. The idea is there was nothing, and He made something. Something came out of nothing other than God. That’s what he’s saying there. He is the origin of everything. That’s really important because he’s going to talk about: He is the origin of life; He is the origin of light; He is the origin of everything that exists, which will be a significant part of his argument. Verse 4:

In him was life,

This is what we’re talking about. It’s not saying He was alive; it is saying He is the origin of **life**. Wherever life is found anywhere in the universe, it has to have a start; it has to have an origin. And the origin ultimately is in God as the origin of life. When you feel that longing or that struggle or that desire deep within you for something different, for something more, essentially what your soul is longing for is **life**. It’s the world as God intended it to be; it’s the world as it will one day be, and there’s something in me that says I was made for something different, and something more. What you’re longing for is that **life** that ultimately originates in God, so God is the only one that can ultimately satisfy that longing or that search.

In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. (Vs. 4a)

So that’s what he means by that. This is a common theme in the Scriptures. In the ancient world, without all the artificial lighting that we take for granted, it was just dark. So life was lived in the light; it wasn’t lived in the darkness. This becomes like a metaphor. If you want to find life, life is going to be found in the light, and the light originates in God. Again, these are major themes that will be unpacked and discussed as we go. Verse 5:

The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

So, the **Light** shined into the darkness, *comprehends it* could be translated *overpowers it*. So what this is telling us is there's going to be a cosmic war between light and darkness, but the darkness will not win. Again, think of it as a theme to be unpacked. Verse 6:

There came a man sent from God, [that would mean he's a prophet] whose name was John [John the Baptist]. He came as a witness to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. (Vs. 6-7)

So God sent a prophet. The original promise—Genesis chapter three, verse 15—*through the seed of a woman, God would send a solution to the sin problem*. It's developed; it's prophesied all through the Old Testament. After hundreds of years of that, God even sends a prophet whose only responsibility was to announce that the Messiah has come.

Think about how committed God was to making sure people didn't miss it—an announcer to say, “He has finally come; He is here!” He says *in order that people might believe*. This is John's big message. This word **believe** is used ninety-three times in John's gospel. He told us in chapter 20, “*These things are written that you might believe, and in believing, you might have life in His name*.” Verse 8:

He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.

Some scholars think the reason John put that in there is even by the time John wrote his gospel, there were still those who were followers of John the Baptist, not yet believers in Jesus. That may be the case; there are hints of that in the Book of Acts. So just a reminder, *John wasn't the Light*. He came to announce the Light. Verse 9:

There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

This is not to say every person believed. It's to say the **Light** was there for those who choose to believe it. Very similar to Paul in Romans chapter one when he says that God has made Himself evident through creation, and because God is so evident in creation, no one can ever say they didn't know there was a God. Very similar, Jesus came to earth—God in the flesh—in order to shine His light. The evidence, the message: It's there, for those who choose to believe it. That's what he means there.

He was in the world [it's a bit of a play on words], and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. (Vs. 10)

So it's the world He made, and the world of people, essentially, **did not know Him**. He entered into the world He created, but the people He created did not know Him. He essentially then says it again. Verse 11:

He came to his own [grammatically meaning His own possession], and those who were His own, [people] did not receive Him.

So, again, He came into the world that He made and owns, but the people in the world simply did not receive Him. Again a key word for John, **receive** simply means *to invite in*. Think of the imagery of Jesus standing, knocking at the door. The door needs to be opened, and Jesus is invited in. That's the word **receive**. Verse 12:

But as many as received Him, [some did] to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

Children, literally *born one's of God*. Again, if you think of Genesis one as creation, then think of the gospel of John as new creation, or re-creation—born again—which again is a theme that will be unpacked in John's gospel.

This idea of **He gave the right**—it's not the power. That's not really a good translation. He gave the right or the *authority*. Think of it this way: There are many religions all over the world, and many of them use the language that they are *children of God*. You hear people say, "I'm not religious; I'm spiritual." They often use the language they're *children of God*.

I can tell you this morning that I'm a child of an alien; I can tell you I'm...anything. But that doesn't make it so. What John is saying is there are people whom God has given the right to call themselves God's children. Who are those people? **Those who believe**—there's John's word—**in His name**, His name would be like the sum total of His person and work—everything that he is going to talk about in this gospel. Verse 13:

...who were born [so how does this happen?] **who were born not of blood,** (Vs. 13a)

Blood, meaning *nationality* or *ethnicity*. The Jews thought they were children of God because they were Jews. He is saying, "*No, it doesn't work that way.*"

So in essence, it doesn't matter this morning if you're black or white, doesn't matter if you're Middle Eastern, or Asian; it just doesn't matter, has nothing to do with that.

...not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, (Vs. 13b)

Meaning human effort, not by religious activity, not by good works, not by good performance—it doesn't have anything to do with that.

...nor of the will of man, (Vs. 13c)

Man there is male, so it's referring to a husband. A husband wants offspring; a man wants offspring. He gets married and has offspring with his wife. John is saying, "No, it's not like that either." How does it happen? There's nothing you can do to make it happen. How does it happen?

but of God. (Vs. 13d) [And John will unpack that as we move through his gospel.]

Now, I want you to get this in your head of what we talked about in the first three verses: *Before there was anything, there was God. God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, living and delighting in Himself as eternal God. And then the Word spoke the universe into place.*

So, there is nothing that has been made that was not made by this God.

Then verse 14:

And the Word became flesh,

I'm sorry, what? The eternal Creator of the universe, a God so powerful He spoke the universe into place, took on human flesh and became a man? The first big thing John is asking you to believe—and he will make his case through his gospel—is that the God of the universe, at a point in time, actually entered into human history and became a man.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. (Vs. 14b)

Literally the word **dwelt** is *pitched a tent*, could be translated *tabernacled* **among us**. It's a reminder of all these old covenant pictures reminding us of the promise of a Messiah. We talked about this when we went through Hebrews. The tabernacle sat in the middle of the Hebrew people, and the glory of God rested in the Holy of Holies. It was about the bread; it was about the light; it was about the incense; it was about the altar. There were all these images and shadows within the tabernacle, that weren't the means of salvation. They simply were a shadow of the One who would come that would be salvation. *The Word became flesh and He tabernacled among us*. The Jewish readers would have clearly understood what he was saying.

And we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

(Vs. 14c)

Again, a critical term of John that has to be unpacked. What does **begotten** mean? There are false teachers that seek to tell you that Jesus isn't the eternal God but He actually, at some point in time was born, and then will live forever. So that would be the same as us. At some point we were born, but will live forever, and they teach that out of this term—well, He was **begotten**—which means He had a starting point. But it's not what the term means at all. It's a compound Greek word. It's two words: *mono genus*. *Mono*, you know that means *single*. *Genus* is like in the scientific world. Genus is like a *species* or a *kind*. It's a category only species. So in essence: unique, one of a kind, only one eternal Son of God—the Word that was made flesh—as **of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth**.

John testified about Him and cried out saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’” (Vs. 15)

And if you go back and read the synoptics, what you find out is John the Baptist was older than Jesus. They're actually cousins. But John is older. John was born; then Jesus was born. So what does John mean? John is referring to what we referred to as the pre-existent Christ. In other words, John's already told us this. The beginning point of Jesus was not when He was born from Mary. He is the eternal God of the universe, the Word that created all that is. So, John the Baptist is saying He is greater than me because He existed before me. He's the eternal Creator God, now having taken on human flesh.

For of his fullness, we [that would be all of us who have believed] have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. (Vs. 16-17)

Again, a major theme will be this collision between those of the old covenant that won't let it go, and the grace and mercy of Jesus as He ushers in the new covenant. This clash between the old and the new will be a major theme. Verse 18:

No one has seen God at any time; [meaning God in all His glory] **the only begotten** [there's our word *mono genus*, the only, one of a kind, eternal Son of God], **who is in the bosom of the Father,** [equal with God], **He has explained *Him*.**

That word **explained** is the Greek word from which we get our English word *exegete*. We talk about the *exegetical* idea; we talk about *exegetical* preaching. It just means to interpret or to reveal out of the text. So, the eternal Son of God, the Word of God, took on human flesh in order to exegete God to us—to reveal God to us. Again, a major theme in the gospel of John.

So, this is the introduction of many of the major themes that will be unpacked and talked about in John's gospel. The first big thing that John is asking us to believe is that the eternal God of the universe—the Creator of all that exists—at a point in time actually took on human flesh and became a man in order to reveal God to us, that we might have the life that our souls long for. It's a remarkable opening to the gospel.

My prayer is that in the weeks and months ahead—for all of us—that our eyes will be open to things we've never seen, we've never understood, that we might experience life in a deeper, fuller way than we've ever known before.

One additional note is: one of the highlights every year is our baptism service. It happens typically once in the fall and once in the spring, so it's coming up October 12 and 13. If you've trusted Jesus as Savior, if you believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sin, that Jesus has given you life, but you've never taken that important step of baptism, I would strongly encourage you to do that. What better way to enter into this study of the Gospel of John than to take that step of obedience and publicly celebrate this new life that you have in Christ?

There's a class coming up next week and the following week. If you have questions, that class would be very helpful. You can ask someone at the information center or just jump on the website to find out a little bit more about the class. If you have questions, you could ask one of us as the pastors, or you can just ask a friend—somebody that you think might be helpful, who can explain some things you have questions about—but if you desire to be baptized, you need to contact us and call the church office and they will connect you from there. It'll be a great weekend together! And I encourage you, if you've never been baptized, to really take advantage of this opportunity.

Our Father, we are honestly a bit overwhelmed by this opening chapter with our puny brains, trying to comprehend how it could be possible that the eternal God of the universe, who, with a spoken word created all that is, actually took on human flesh, became a Man and walked on this earth. God, give us the eyes to see; give us the ears to hear, that we might believe, that we might find the life that our souls long for. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Opening Discussion

1. Share your own spiritual journey. Where have you been and where are you right now?
2. What would spiritual progress or growth look like to you? Try to get as specific and practical as possible.

Bible Study

1. Read John 20:30, 31. What does John say about his Gospel?
2. Read John 1:1-5. Compare some of the themes with Genesis 1. What does he mean by the word “Word” and what does he say about the Word?
3. Using Genesis 1 as a background, what does John mean by “in Him was life, and the life was the Light of men?” Where does life and light come from?
4. Read John 1:6-13. What was John the Baptists role? Why would God send John to do that?
5. John 1:9-13 are filled with themes that will be unpacked further in John’s Gospel. Identify as many themes as you can.
6. Read John 1:14-18. Connect 1:14 with 1:1-3 and Genesis 1. What is John saying? How is this a fulfillment of Genesis 3:15?
7. What is the contrast between Moses and Jesus? How will this theme play out in Jesus’ earthly ministry?

