

John 1.1-18 / COB / 01.12.14

[This version is designed to follow the sermon on John 1.1-2.]

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Jordan]** We are beginning our study of the gospel of John, so you can turn there in your Bible, if you will. The Greek word we translate as “gospel” means “good news.” One of Jesus’ closest friends and students, the apostle John, wrote to share the good news about Jesus. An “apostle” is a messenger: John is God’s messenger who wrote this gospel.
- † 400 years ago, it was 1614. Think about how long ago that seems! That amount of time covers not only all the history of the United States, but also almost the entire colonization period in North America. We have to go back past when all your technological gadgets were invented, past World War II, the Great Depression, the rise of communist nations, past World War I, the rise of unions and money barons, the Civil War, the Napoleonic Wars, the Constitution, the Revolutionary War, the coming of the Pilgrims, and more... it’s a long time, 400 years.
- Now imagine you are a Jew living in Israel just before Jesus was born. It has been over 400 years since God intervened in your people’s history, over 400 years since God spoke through his prophets. That’s a long time. And things have not been going so well: the last prophets indicted the people for not being any better than their forefathers whom God had exiled in the first place; and since then, one nation after another has controlled Israel’s destiny, one army after another has marched through the land.
 - There has been some excitement and hope. There was a rebellion, but it was crushed. Now lately, there has been a lot of talk – a lot of chatter! – a lot of teaching and writings about the coming Messiah, God’s anointed one who would deliver his people.
- † You see, the Jews back then prayed to God, but hadn’t heard from him in hundreds of years. They had returned from exile to the promised land, but had not gained their freedom, and now were in the grip of mighty Rome. They had religious activities, but for most of them it was legalistic and dry. God seemed distant and faith had become more about ritual and obligation, rather than empowerment and blessing.
- Into this context, Jesus was born, which we believe was one of the most significant events in history. But “Who is Jesus? Why is he important? What does God reveal, what does the Bible really say about him?” Let’s pray, then we’ll find out.

[Slide 2: 1.1-2] John 1.1-2 [NET]: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was fully God. The Word was with God in the beginning.

- † As I said last week, we have here one of the most elegant statements in the Bible, but if you are new to the Bible, then these verses will take some work to figure out.
- Who is this Word? He is not God the Father, because he was with God; but he is just as eternal as God the Father, since he was with God in the beginning, a reference to Genesis 1.1, which talks about the beginning, the creation, of the universe; and John says this Word is divine like God the Father! The Greek text emphasizes the divinity of the Word.

† **[Slide 3: God graphic]** How could this be? How can anyone but God be eternal and divine? We went over this in depth last week, but I will speak briefly about it today.

- We believe there is only one God, but we believe that God has revealed himself to be three individuals – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – who are distinct from each other in their personalities and in how they function, yet are so unified in their essence and their will that they are considered one God.
- This graphic depicts what the Bible reveals about the triune [three in one] nature of God. God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not the same as each other, yet each is all of the one God. We call our belief about God “Trinitarianism.” This is what the Bible teaches and what the church throughout history has always believed as orthodoxy.

† If this is a new concept to you, then you probably find it to be mind boggling! I encourage you to use the devotion we handed out with the bulletin today. The first day deals with these questions about the nature of God.

- We also have a full five day devotion just on these two verses from last week. If you want one, raise your hand now, and someone will bring it to you. We’ll also have them out at the welcome center as you leave.
- You also can listen to last week’s sermon either online or with a CD. If you want a CD, talk to our sound guys back there and tell them whether you want it to play in your stereo or in your MP3 player.
- It is important to understand the nature of God, so please see me if you are confused.

† **[Slide 4: vv. 1, 14, 17]** That’s what we covered last week. Normally, we would jump right to v.3, because I like to read each verse in turn and let you discover what the author was saying just like an original reader. But there is no doubt that John’s original readers would have read this passage again and again trying to figure out exactly what John was saying, so I want to help us get one concept first, and then we will go verse by verse.

- You see John begins this introduction with an obscure reference, talking about the Word. I want to clarify who the Word is before we look in more detail at this passage.
- In V.1, we see that the Word is divine, he is fully God. Look down at v.14 for a moment – you have it? – you’ll see that the Word became flesh. Now look farther down at v.17... you’ll see that this Word who became flesh is Jesus. So we will be talking about the Son of God, coming to be born as the baby Jesus. Keep that in mind as we continue.

[Slide 5: 1.3] John 1.3 [NET]: All things were created by him [the Word], and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.

† Most other English translations say, “All things were created *through* him.” The way the Greek reads, this Word was the *intermediate* agent in creation. What I mean is that elsewhere we learn that God the Father initiated creation, but here we learn that God the Father created all things through the Word.

- For example, in the Old Testament, it often says, “God spoke through the prophet”: God does the speaking, but he does it through the prophet. Here God the Father did the creating, but he did it through the Son of God, the Word.
- † We saw last week that using the term “The Word” allowed the apostle John to connect with both Greek and Jewish ideas. There is another significance to this terminology.
- We’ll see as the weeks go by that the apostle John likes word-play – it is one of his favorite types of humor – and here we have some. We know from Genesis that God *spoke* the universe into creation. Now John says God created everything through this *Word* that is the Son of God. That’s the humor of the apostle John.

[Slide 6: 1.4-5] John 1.4-5 [NET]: In him [the Word] was life, and the life was the light of mankind. And the light shines on in the darkness, but the darkness has not mastered it.

- † Being eternal, the Word had life in him, and he was able to give life to those he created. This is both the animation of physical life and the kindling of spiritual life that is a relationship with God himself.
- † This life in the Word was the light of mankind. It is difficult to know exactly what the apostle John means by this, but since the context is creation, maybe we should think of the fact that God, through the Word, made us in God’s own image, which empowered us to have spiritual life and spiritual awareness, to have the spark of light and life within us.
- † In v.5, we see a transition into the time after creation. There is a spiritual darkness now that encompasses the earth. We know from the Old Testament, that the earth is under a curse from God because sin has corrupted all people. Into this darkness, the light, the life, in the Word shines on, and the darkness has not mastered it, oh no! and will not master it.
- **[Slide 7: καταλαμβάνω]** Some translations read that the darkness has not “comprehended” it, but this is not the best interpretation of the Greek verb καταλαμβάνω. I translated “this light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not *overcome* it,” which agrees with translations like NIV, ESV, and HCSB.
 - Now I know you like to be stoic and not react to anything I say, but if this verse doesn’t move you, then there is something wrong in your heart. I am going to read it again, and I want you to try reacting, at least say, “Amen!”
 - This light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not *overcome* it!

[Slide 8: 1.6-8] John 1.6-8 [NET]: A man came, sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.

- † Now we have two Johns. I hate when there are two characters in a story with similar names: one is named ooga ooga and the other is named ooga nooga, and for the whole story I will have trouble keeping them straight. I yell at the author in my head: you have ten characters and a thousand names from which to choose, and you chose ooga ooga and ooga nooga? Come on! Anyone else have this problem?

- Now God gives us two Johns, and we are not allowed to complain about it. The apostle John is writing our narrative and will be in our narrative later, but here he introduces another character, one we know as John the Baptist, because he had a baptizing ministry in the Jordan River.

† The Greek text emphasizes that John the Baptist was created by God, sent by God, for a testimony: in other words, his purpose in life was to testify about the light, about the Word, so that people would have a better opportunity to believe.

- As an aside, think about what an honor it is to be memorialized forever in scripture as the one God sent to shine light on the light of the world!
- I was thinking this week, if we are God's representative people in this time period, isn't this one of our purposes also? So as I have been asking you off and on for six months, do our lives reflect this purpose or do we need to do some adjusting? Food for thought as the new year begins...

[Slide 9: 1.9-11] John 1.9-11 [NET]: The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was created by him, but the world did not recognize him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not receive him.

† Here we have both the potential promise and the tragedy: the true light, the Son of God, came to us! The one who created the world came into our space-time continuum, but people failed to recognize who he was.

- **[Slide 10: γινώσκω]** Some translations read the world did not "know" him; that is a possible translation of the Greek verb γινώσκω, but in the context, not knowing the light, the Word, was to not recognize him.
- The light came into what was his own, the world, but his own people did not accept or receive him. Most people, even most of the Jews, who were God's chosen representative people, did not recognize the Son of God when he came. Think of the tragedy of that.

[Slide 11: 1.12-13] John 1.12-13 [NET]: But to all who have received him— those who believe in his name— he has given the right to become God's children – children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband's decision, but by God.

† While most did not recognize the Son of God, there was a true believing remnant who did, and who received the light by believing in his name.

- Believing in his name is more than just believing he was named Jesus. In this culture, to believe in his name meant to believe in who he was and in his character.
- Scholar D.A. Carson says, if you believe in the name of Jesus, then you trust in him completely, you pledge your allegiance to him, you believe his claims and trust his promises. This is what it means to receive him.
- Throughout this book, the apostle John will emphasize the continuous present nature of believing. If you believe in Jesus, it is an ongoing, continuous thing.

† To those who are believing in the Son of God, this light, he gave the right or capability to become God’s children, and here we see a foreshadowing of a teaching Jesus will give later in the book, that this is not a physical birth in view, but a spiritual rebirth, out of darkness and into the light, out of death and into life, out of the world and into God’s family. How great is that?

[Slide 12: 1.14] John 1.14 [NET]: Now the Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We saw his glory– the glory of the one and only, full of grace and truth, who came from the Father.

† Like the first verse, this is a scandalous verse, which would have upset everyone! John tells us the Word, the eternal and divine Son of God, became flesh. Most Greeks held to a view that flesh was inherently evil, so it was incomprehensible that a god would want to become flesh!

- And the Jews, still struggling with v.1 that declares the Word is divine, would here throw up their hands in confusion. I have Jewish friends, and I could imagine them saying, “Oy! first you say this Word is God and then you say he is man, which is he? Don’t try telling me he is God who wanted to become man, I’m not that gullible!”

† And yet, this is exactly what we are saying. This is part two of our difficult to comprehend lesson on God. Not only is God one God who is revealed as three individuals – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – but Jesus is revealed to be both divine as the Son of God and human, both God and man.

- **[Slide 13: dual nature]** Jesus has a “dual nature”: he is fully divine and he is fully human, but these natures do not mix or conflict within him. Let me say it again: Jesus is fully divine and he is fully human, but these natures do not mix or conflict within him.
- Every part of this belief was important enough theologically, that the early church gathered from all over the Roman Empire to ensure everyone agreed.
- The Word, the eternal Son of God, came to be born in our space and time as a baby human. This baby, who grew to be a man, whom we call Jesus, was fully the Son of God, even while on Earth. And he was fully human, it was not just the Son of God appearing in human form, he was a real flesh and blood person, just like you.
- So he had a divine nature and a human nature, and they were not mixed within him, but they also were not in conflict within him. There was never a time when he stood arguing with himself, with his human nature wanting to do one thing and his divine nature wanting to do another. As a person, he was tempted, but his human will and his divine will were both in favor of resisting temptation. No conflict.

† **[Slide 14: μονογενής]** The Word, the Son of God, became flesh and dwelled among the Jews, including the apostle John. John and others beheld his unique glory as the one and only who came from God the Father.

- Some older translations say “only begotten” instead of “one and only.” This is a mistranslation of the Greek word μονογενής, which we now know means “one and only.”

- More importantly, John points out that the Word came from God the Father, and was full of a glory comprised of grace and truth. The Son of God came to reveal God to us, to show us how to live as God’s image, and to give us the truth of the gospel of grace, which allows us to have spiritual life with God even though we could never deserve it.

[Slide 15: 1.15-17] John 1.15-17 [NET]: John [the Baptist] testified about him and shouted out, “This one was the one about whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is greater than I am, because he existed before me.’” [Then the apostle of John elaborates] For we have all received from his fullness one gracious gift after another. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came about through Jesus Christ.

† John the Baptist had been preaching to the masses that the promised Messiah was coming. Part of this teaching apparently alluded to the eternal nature of the Messiah, as the Son of God. John the Baptist said this Messiah was coming after him, but was greater than him [or, I would say had proved to be ranked ahead of him], because he existed before him. Apparently John the Baptist was playful with his speech, which probably is why the apostle John wants to share what he said.

† Most Americans don’t know much about the Messiah. I am not sure I ever heard the term mentioned in a sermon in all my years in Florida. I was quite startled a couple of weeks ago to see a billboard from a Christian church on US-30 declaring Jesus is Israel’s Messiah. I totally agree, but I had never seen this idea promoted so publically!

† **[Slide 16: Messiah]** One thing we want to make clear is that Messiah and Christ are synonyms: they are derived from different languages, but both refer to God’s Anointed One.

- As we discussed just before Christmas, over the course of many centuries, God had revealed through many prophets that a Messiah would come to speak as God’s greatest prophet, to mediate between God and mankind as God’s eternal high priest, and to reign on the throne of Israel and over the whole world as God’s chosen king.
- God also revealed that this Messiah would help flawed and sinful people – like you and me – to reconcile with a perfectly pure God, that this Messiah would forgive our sinful mistakes and cleanse us by dying to pay the penalty for our sins.
- And God revealed that the Messiah would be both divine and human, which we will see later is terribly important; even in Old Testament times it was vital that this Messiah be not only human, but also divine, because only God could save, and God demanded absolute and exclusive faith in himself.

† **[Slide 17: grace and truth]** So the apostle John here is both foreshadowing what he will teach us in this book and building on what the Old Testament authors taught: Jesus is the Christ, the promised human Messiah, and he also is the Son of God in the flesh, who came to bring us grace and truth so we could be saved from our corruption and just punishment, and be reconciled with God in true spiritual life.

- Notice John said grace and truth “came to be” or “came about” through Jesus! That’s because if the Son of God had not come to be born as the human Jesus, and if he had not then lived a perfectly pure human life, or if he had not paid our penalty for sin when he

sacrificed himself on the cross, or if he had not victoriously risen from the grave on the third day, then salvation would not be possible, and we would still be in darkness, not fully experiencing grace or truth.

[Slide 18: 1.18] John 1.18 [NET]: No one has ever seen God. The only one, himself God, who is in closest fellowship with the Father, has made God known.

- † The apostle John ends his introduction by reiterating some of the important concepts: That this Word, this Messiah, is unique, is himself the divine Son of God, and thus is the unique light who can reveal God the Father and reveal the path to salvation by God and relationship with God. We now can know God intimately, through Christ.
 - By coming as a person, Jesus showed us God's qualities in a way we could understand; he showed us how to live as a person created and transformed to be God's image [not that Jesus was created or transformed, right? but we have been, and he was the perfect image of God the Father as the Son, so he showed us how to live as that image]; and he showed us how to know God intimately.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 19: summary]** So, who is Jesus?
 - He is the he Son of God [vv.1-2, 14, 18].
 - He is the full revelation of God [vv.1, 18].
 - He is the eternal creator [vv.1-3, 10-11].
 - He is the promised Messiah/Christ and Lord [vv.11, 17].
 - He is the Savior [vv.12-13, 16-17].
 - He is the Light that is Life [vv.4-5, 9].
- † Each of these concepts will be important in the narrative the apostle John wants to share with us. In an introduction, the New Testament authors usually summarize what their book is about. This is a lengthy introduction with numerous important beliefs, several of which are challenging to comprehend when first learning them.
 - As we go through each portion of the book, John will explain and illuminate these concepts further. So if you are confused today, or even after trying the devotion, don't worry: John will guide us into discussing the same concepts from fresh perspectives each week. And don't be afraid to call or email me either: I am very willing to discuss these concepts with you: they are among the most important in the Bible!
- † As I said last week, the application for a teaching like this is not to go out and do something, it is to be still and reflect on each aspect of this message. It is to allow God to change the way you think, and thus allow God to change who you are, by growing you to be more like him and to know him better. So please give the devotion a try, and spend some time thinking through these concepts this week. Read this passage every day and reflect on what it says and what it means for you. Give God the opportunity to enlighten and sanctify you! Let's pray...