



The Gospel of John

Session One: Introduction

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

Today we begin a multi-week study on the ministry of Christ through the Gospel of John. This fourth Gospel, written by the apostle John between AD 60's and early 90's, is unique from the other three Gospel accounts.

First, John wrote mostly to a Gentile audience, so he spent a lot of his book proclaiming that Christ is the Lord, not just of the Jews, but of the world. Second, while the other Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are primarily presented in chronological order, John tells his Gospel story not in *chronos* time, but in *kairos* time, meaning, he tells the stories of Jesus in a more fluid order, to highlight important themes or make certain philosophical arguments. Understanding John's literary approach can be helpful when identifying accounts that appear in a different order in the other Gospels.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

John 1:1-18

THE MAIN IDEA

Jesus—the Word and second Person of the Trinity—dwelt among His people, bringing light and life into darkness. Through Him, we are invited to become children of God.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

In John 20:31, the apostle tells us why he wrote his gospel book: “But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). How does the belief that Jesus is Messiah give us life in His name?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

John 1:1-5 John opens his gospel book with a bold statement: Jesus is the Incarnate Word of God. Jesus is eternal. All of creation was made by Him and through Him. He alone secures eternal life for His people.

John 1:6-13 Jesus is light, and Jesus is life. His light shines in the darkness, and His life paid the price for our eternity with God. Jesus is the Light of the world, making salvation possible for Jews and Gentiles alike. While many of His own people, the Jews, rejected Jesus, salvation is possible for everyone who believes, regardless of ethnicity or ancestry.

John 1:14-18 Jesus came in flesh and dwelt among His people. He is full of grace and truth. Because He is full of grace, we can experience forgiveness of sins. Because He is truth, we can know how to live. Jesus did not come to abolish the law of Moses; He came to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). Jesus's sacrifice ushered in a new covenant where we are made right with God by grace through faith in Jesus.



START HERE

In John 20:31, the apostle stated his purpose in writing his account of the life of Jesus. He said, “But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Today we will examine the first 18 verses of John’s Gospel, which serve as a prologue and thesis statement for the rest of the book. As we examine today’s text, look for ways these verses help us see Jesus as the Messiah and how we can experience life in Him.

DISCUSS

Other than looking ahead to our eternal life with God in heaven, how does belief in Jesus lead us to experience life today?

ADDING CLARITY

John’s prologue presents Jesus as the eternal, preexistent Word-become-flesh (vv. 1,14) and as the one-of-a-kind Son of the Father who is himself God (vv. 1,18). Jesus brought God’s plan of salvation to a culmination. Previous to Jesus, this plan included God giving the law through Moses (v. 17), His dwelling among His people in the tabernacle (v. 14), and the sending of John the Baptist (vv. 6–8,15). The prologue introduces several themes that are emphasized later in the Gospel, including Jesus as life, light, and truth, believers as God’s children, and the world’s rejection of Jesus.

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. The Word—Present in Creation

John 1:1-5: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

Unpacking John 1:1-5

Who invented electricity? If you said Benjamin Franklin, or anyone else for that matter, you would be incorrect. Electricity wasn’t invented; it was discovered, and many people before Benjamin Franklin contributed to our understanding of electric currents. The ancient Egyptians first observed small electric fish that produced a shocking and numbing effect. The ancient Greek philosopher Thales of Miletus, in approximately 600 BC, noted that fur rubbed with amber created static electricity. Ask any child who has ever worn flannel pajamas to bed, and they can tell you they’ve “discovered” the same thing! Electricity has always been, but it has been revealed and harnessed throughout history by various scientists using new technologies. There are virtually no parts of our world that haven’t been affected by the progress of understanding and using electricity.



As we begin our year-long study of the ministry of Christ through the Gospel of John, you might note John begins his account unlike the other three. While Matthew and Luke began their story of the life of Jesus at His conception and birth and Mark started at His baptism, John takes us back to the beginning—to creation. He wanted the reader to understand something vitally important—Jesus wasn’t created or invented. Jesus, like the Father, is eternal, and He is God. “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*” (John 1:1). If we miss the divinity and eternity of Jesus, we fail to know Christ in His fullness. John would later quote Christ own words: “*Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.*” (John 8:58). Christ’s divine and eternal nature are foundational pillars of our faith. As we study the book of John this year, look for ways the writer reinforces this truth, including his recording of Jesus’s seven “I Am” statements throughout the book.

“*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created*” (John 1:1-3). John begins his account of the life of Christ not in a manger, but in the heavens. Compare his words to Genesis 1:1: “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” John wasted no time establishing Jesus’s divine nature. This is an important distinction because it articulates that (1) Jesus is eternal, (2) Jesus is God and (3) Jesus is distinct over all creation. John’s introduction sets Jesus apart from pagan gods created by human hands, or earthly men believed to became “gods” through their own effort. Jesus is God, and His divine nature is eternally pre-existent.

It is also noteworthy to examine the name John used for Jesus—*the Word*. The Greek word, “*logos*,” means “word,” and conveys both written and oral communication, as well as a conveyance of thought and personality. For the Hebrews, they viewed the “*logos*” as God’s divine speech and thought. The same word is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, when it says, “*The heavens were made by the word of the Lord, and all the stars, by the breath of his mouth*” (Psalm 33:6). The Greeks, however, viewed “*logos*” as the rational wisdom that establishes and holds together the universe. John’s use of *the Word* to describe Christ pointed both Jews and Gentiles to a new reality in which God’s eternal Word became flesh, dwelt among us, and ushered in a kingdom in which people from all nations can respond to Him in faith.

“*In him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it*” (John 1:4-5). John testified that life is found in Jesus. This word for life, “*zoe*,” expresses the fullness and abundance of life as God designs it—the good life, you might say. Jesus is the source of abundant life. This foreshadows an “I Am” statement Jesus would later use to describe Himself: “*I am the way, the truth, and the life (zoe). No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6). Not only is Jesus the life, but He came that we might have life in Him. “*I have come so that they may have life (zoe) and have it in abundance*” (John 10:10).



Not only is Jesus the Word and the life, Jesus is the light of men. John said the light of Jesus shines into the darkness but is not overcome by darkness. Here John introduced an important theme we'll notice throughout his Gospel—light versus darkness. Do not confuse this theme with the false belief of moral dualism, the philosophical concept that good and evil are two distinct, opposing forces or principles that shape human morality. (“Star Wars” would be a good example of a moral dualism framework). No, when Jesus said in John 8:12, “*I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life,*” He claimed a unique status as the light who overcomes darkness and gives life (zoe) to those who believe. There is no room for dualism among followers of Jesus. As John wrote in verse five: “*That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.*”

In these first few verses of John, we receive a power-packed lesson on Christ the Messiah. We are introduced to three names of Jesus we will see implicitly or explicitly used throughout John’s Gospel—Jesus is the Word, Jesus is life, and Jesus is light. This reminds us of Christ’s divine and eternal nature. He is life that was not invented but has always been and He is light that will never be extinguished but always will be. Jesus is unique and separate from all creation, and salvation is found in Him alone.

DISCUSS

- *Why is this a helpful place to start to understand who Jesus is?*
- *Which description of Jesus—Word, Life, Light—speaks most to you today? Why?*
- *Why is dualism an incorrect view according to the Bible? How can knowing Jesus triumphs over darkness help us when we feel uncertain about the future?*

2. The Word—True Light and True Life

John 1:6-13: *There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.*

He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.



Unpacking John 1:6-13

Every summer in South Texas, they prepare for hurricane season. As summer begins, Texans on the Gulf Coast are sure to check on their generators, fill the gas cans, and make sure to find emergency candles, flashlights, and sources of heat to cook meals. They will also make sure there's plenty of bottled water to get through a few days. If you are one of the unfortunate ones who fails to plan until a storm is in the forecast, you can expect extra-long lines and dwindling supply as the storm approaches.

When a hurricane hits and the lights go out, Texans get creative in finding alternate sources of power. You'll see people boiling water on their gas grill, sitting in the cars to charge their phones, and using precious generator power to run a box fan. It's all a poor substitute for real electricity, and you can be assured that the moment the power comes back on, people are ready to plug back in to life as usual. These backup power sources are helpful, but they are not long-term solutions. If anything, they point out just how much people need electricity after all.

In verses 6-9, John introduced the reader to an important, but secondary character in the story—John the Baptist. (Not to be confused with John the apostle, the writer of the book of John.) *"There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world"* (John 1:6-9). Who was John the Baptist? We know from Luke 1:36 he was the cousin of Jesus, miraculously born of elderly parents a few months before Christ. The angel who announced John's impending arrival to his father described him this way—*"He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people"* (John 1:16-17).

The author John was clear that John the Baptist was not the light, but he pointed people toward Jesus, the Light of the world. We will look at John the Baptist's story more next week, but for now note that his role was to testify to the arrival of the Messiah: *"The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world"* (John 1:9) Don't miss the inclusivity of John's words. This true light would give light to everyone. As God spoke through the prophet Isaiah more than 700 years before Jesus's birth, *"It is not enough for you to be my servant raising up the tribes of Jacob and restoring the protected ones of Israel. I will also make you a light for the nations, to be my salvation to the ends of the earth"* (Isaiah 49:6). Is it any wonder that God used a star to point people to Christ, the Light of the world, at His birth? *"Wise men from the East came to Herod asking, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him"* (Matthew 2:1-2). Jesus's birth was not simply good news for the Jews, but for the world.



“He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him” (John 1:10). Though Jesus was present in creation, and everything we see was made through Him, many rejected Him. Even the Jews, who had waited expectantly for the Messiah for hundreds of years, were blinded to His arrival. *“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him”* (John 1:11).

Verses 12-13 contain one long run-on sentence. The NASB translation gives a close word-for-word translation from the original Greek: *“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 a man, but of God”* (John 1:12-13). It’s as if John’s message was so exciting he couldn’t stop writing! While the Jews might have rejected Jesus as Messiah, God’s expanding kingdom included anyone who believed. Citizenship in the kingdom would not be a birth-right but a belief-right, and any who believe in Christ and call on His name will be called children of God!

Jesus is both true light and life. The right to become children of God would no longer rest on ancestry or ethnicity. It would rest solely on belief in Jesus as the Messiah and placing trust in Him. Just as people during a hurricane look for substitute sources of power, people look for substitute ways to earn salvation. For centuries, the Jewish people put their faith in their family tree. They believed that being Abraham’s descendants assured them of salvation. Later, they found their confidence in their own good works and ability to keep God’s law. However, in Christ, a new covenant was made. All who receive Him are welcomed into the family of Christ.

DISCUSS

- *What was the purpose of John the Baptist’s ministry? What responsibility do we have today to testify of the light of Christ?*
- *Look back at verses 12-13. What details did John include in this robust statement?*
- *Have you ever been tempted to think of someone, a friend of a family member, as being “too far gone” for salvation? How can John’s enthusiastic proclamation encourage you to keep praying and sharing?*

3. The Word—Dwells Among His People

John 1:14-18: *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John testified concerning him and exclaimed, “This was the one of whom I said, ‘The one coming after me ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.’”) Indeed, we have all received grace upon grace from his fullness, for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father’s side—he has revealed him.*



Unpacking John 1:14-18

Have you ever attended a candlelight service? As the entire congregation holds unlit candles, someone in the front starts with a single flame that is passed throughout the church until the entire worship center is filled with light. As the light grows, the congregation worships God and is reminded to take the light of Christ with them out into the world.

After John spent three paragraphs describing the Messiah as the Word, light, and life, he made the most provocative statement of all: “*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us*” (John 1:14a). This Savior who is the Living Word, offering salvation to all who believe, put on flesh, and lived among His people. If you’ve been a Christian for many years, this statement may have grown familiar. But consider it from a first-century Jewish perspective. The God who dwelt in the tabernacle, the God who established the law and sacrificial system, the God who is unsearchable and unknowable (Romans 11:33), came and lived among His people. John’s claim expanded their understanding of the Messiah exponentially.

John wrote about Jesus not from a philosophical perspective, but from a personal one. “*We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14b). Jesus perfectly embodies the intersection of both grace and truth, so that we might have an accurate picture of the heart of the Father.

ADDING CLARITY

“Full of grace and truth” recalls “faithful love (Hebrew, *chesed*) and truth (Hebrew, *emet*)” in Ex 34:6 (cp. Ex 33:18–19), where the expression refers to God’s covenant faithfulness to His people Israel. According to John, God’s covenant faithfulness found ultimate expression in His sending of His “one and only Son,” Jesus.

“(John testified concerning him and exclaimed, ‘This was the one of whom I said, “The one coming after me ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.”’)” (v. 15). John the apostle reminded his readers that John the Baptist had proclaimed Jesus at his baptism, something we’ll see next week. This seemingly out-of-place sentence reinforces John’s argument. First, he reminded the people that John the Baptist, a prophet many acknowledged, believed in Christ. He also restated Jesus’s eternal nature: “*The one coming after me ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.*”

As we reach the end of the prologue to the Gospel of John, the last few verses concisely summarize John’s profession of Christ as Lord: “*Indeed, we have all received grace upon grace from his fullness, for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father’s side—he has revealed him*” (John 1:16–18). John expanded the idea of God’s grace to the Jews and declared, “*we have all received grace.*” Christ’s invitation to salvation is open to the world. We will never exhaust His supply of grace because it flows from His fullness as Messiah. While the Jews received the law through Moses, Jesus inaugurated a new kingdom, based not on man’s ability to keep the law, but on Christ’s sacrifice and His loving desire to



extend grace to all who come to Him. Finally, John ends his prologue by reminding readers where Christ dwells today—God the Son, crucified, risen, and coming again, is the only One who has seen God the Father. Indeed, he is at the right hand of God. He completed His mission, revealing God to humanity, and now invites us into an eternal relationship with Him.

DISCUSS

- *Have you ever experienced a candlelight service? How does it illustrate the power of the gospel going into the world?*
- *How is it a benefit to us that Jesus came in both grace and truth? How difficult is it to live in that intersection in our own lives?*
- *How did John expand people's thinking on Jesus? Is there an area in your life in which you need to expand your belief in who Jesus is or what He can do in the life of someone you love? How can you praise Him for "grace upon grace" even as you wait?*

DEEPER FOCUS

Our words reveal our heart and mind to others, and God's Word is no different. Choose one verse or phrase from 1:1-18 that stands out to you—something that intrigues, puzzles, resonates, or something you would like to examine further. Spend the next week reflecting on what this phrase reveals about God's heart and mind. Take notes or journal any new insights.

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

Like spreading flames in a candlelight service, believers are called to share the light of Christ with others. What is one takeaway from today's text you could use in sharing your faith?

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

How does God demonstrate His glory to the world through Christ?

APPLY

In what area of your life do you sense God calling you to carry the light of Christ in a more intentional way this year?



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