

# The Word became flesh

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I said that we've just begun a new series in the gospel according to John, and what John wants to do in his gospel is introduce us to Jesus. And you may have lots of ideas about who Jesus is, but what John does in a sense is give us Jesus unfiltered, the original Jesus.

Now, last time when we looked in the gospel of John, we looked at the end and his purpose in chapter 20, verse 30 and 31. Let me just read those verses to you.

This is why John wrote. He says in John 20, verse 30, Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Okay, so there's a simple order to John's words here in his purpose. He says there are signs, miracles, things that Jesus has done, and those signs should lead to belief.

And then the belief then leads on to life, to eternal life. And so what John wants to do for us is to take us from where we are, whoever we are, as his readers, help us to see all that Jesus has done so that we might believe in him, and then in believing in him, we would have life.

[ 1 : 31 ] And it sounds straightforward, doesn't it? And it is. But as I've been studying the gospel of John over these past couple of weeks, reading the text of the gospel of John itself, and also consulting the commentators, I kept coming upon this really brilliant comment on John.

And it's this, the gospel of John is shallow enough for a child to wade in, but it's deep enough for an elephant to swim in.

So that Augustine, the early church father, is the one who said those words. But whoever said those words, I think it's a fantastic description of the gospel according to John.

Because it's saying that John is profoundly simple, and yet it is also simply profound. So John presents Jesus to us in a really clear, plain, straightforward, simple way.

He introduces Jesus to us so that we would believe in him. But at the same time, John shows us there's so much more that we can learn about Jesus Christ.

[ 2 : 44 ] There's a depth to his gospel. And so you know what this means, right? It means that wherever we are when it comes to Christianity, the gospel of John is for all of us.

And so if you're here this afternoon and you're exploring Christianity, if you're curious, if you're learning about Jesus, or perhaps if you're a new Christian, a new believer, then every week when we study the gospel of John, we get the basics for what we need to know about Jesus.

Which just incidentally should be an encouragement to us to invite people along to church that we want to introduce to Jesus. Family members, colleagues, friends, neighbors, and so on.

But if you've been a Christian believer for ages or a long time or much of your life, then you'll know that there are great riches here in the gospel of John about Jesus.

And so today what we're going to do is look at what is known as the prologue, these first 18 verses of chapter 1. And this is basically John's introduction to Jesus, where he highlights the main themes and the key words that he'll pick up again and again as he works his way through his gospel.

[ 3 : 59 ] And that's why sometimes the prologue to John has been described as being like a musical overture. And you'll know better than I do, but in a musical or maybe in an opera, the orchestra would introduce the performance and it would be blended with the key melodies just by way of a preview of what is to come.

So everything that comes is kind of picked up in this overture at the beginning. But what John does here is he introduces the key themes of his gospel, the key words in what he has composed for us about Jesus.

And so essentially what John is saying is that Jesus has come from the Father into this world. To reveal the Father, reveal God to us, and to give life to those who believe. And essentially the rest of the gospel of John is an explanation of what's here at the beginning. So I'd like us to look at three things this afternoon. Quite simply, first, who Jesus is. Second, what Jesus gives. And third, what Jesus reveals. So first, who Jesus is, verse 1 to 8. Do you have your Bible open in front of you so you can look at these verses with me? [ 5 : 15 ] So Jesus here is introduced in John's opening words. And what he says about Jesus, it blows our minds and it stretches them because it's bound to.

If God has come to us in the person of Jesus, then this is a life-changing event for all of us. And so what John does is he takes us further back than the birth of Jesus, and he takes us to the very first words of the Bible. If you remember way back in Genesis chapter 1, verse 1, it says, In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. But instead, notice what John does. He writes, In the beginning was the Word. And it becomes clear that the Word is Jesus. He says this basically in verse 17 of our passage. And so John begins his account before the life and ministry of Jesus, even further back, before the birth of Jesus, in fact, even further back than that, before the creation. [ 6 : 23 ] He tells us about Jesus. Verse 1, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Now for John's Jewish readers, who were familiar with the power of God's Word, they knew that God's Word creates. Remember the creation in Genesis. God rules by His Word. God reveals Himself by His Word when He speaks. God rescues us by His Word. And so all the way through the Old Testament part of the Bible, God's Word is basically His self-expression. We know who God is because God speaks. And so by calling Jesus the Word, John helps us understand that Jesus is God's ultimate self-disclosure. God reveals Himself to us in the person of Jesus. And so this is a momentous revelation of who Jesus is.

[ 7 : 31 ] But when God calls Jesus the Word, He's not only appealing to His Jewish readers, He's also appealing to His Greek readers as well, because He uses the Greek word logos to refer to Jesus.

So the word here is the Greek logos, which is a word that carries huge significance for John's Greek readers. It's got a background in Greek philosophy. And it means logic or reason. Logos, word, means logic or reason. And it's obviously where we get our word logic from. And so for the Greeks, it described the logic behind the whole universe. The reason and purpose for why everything exists. Just put it like this. Unless we know the reason why something exists, maybe like a tool, for example, then we'll use it for the wrong purpose. So if I use my butter knife to try and cut down the tree in my garden instead of my chainsaw, then I'll be there for a long time. And if I use my chainsaw to cut some cheese on a plate on my kitchen counter, then it's going to be a disaster if I use the chainsaw to cut the cheese. [ 8 : 50 ] Because unless I'm aligned with the logos, with the reason, with the purpose for why that thing was designed, then it's just not going to work. And so what John is telling us here is there's a reason, there's a logic behind this whole universe.

And so by calling Jesus the Word, he's saying that Jesus is that reason. And so I'm sure John wants all his readers to come to this term, the Word, with all that it means to help us understand the brilliance and the beauty and the power of Jesus. Stephen Hawking, who was a theoretical physicist, he wrote a really, remember the guy in a kind of chair with the electronic voice, he wrote a book called The Brief, A Brief History of Time. And in the book he says this, the eventual goal of science is to provide a single theory that describes the whole universe. Well, John's telling us, it's not a single theory, it's a person. Jesus is the one who describes the reason and the purpose for why we are here. And so see what John says, look down at your Bible. He says, the Word is distinct from God. [ 10 : 09 ] The Word was with God. The Word is also identified as God. The Word was God. He's not saying here that Jesus is a God, but Jesus is God.

And so don't miss this astounding claim that John makes right off the bat at the beginning of his gospel. In fact, the claim that Jesus is God is what sets Christianity apart from every other religion,

every other belief system, and every other philosophy is this claim that Jesus is God. And you'll know if you've ever had a conversation with a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness or a Muslim, that when it gets to the point about who Jesus is, they cannot accept that Jesus is God. They don't believe Jesus has always existed as God, like John is saying to us. A few years ago, when I lived along the road in Weedend Drive in Jordan Hill, a couple of Jehovah's Witnesses came to the door.

I remember it really clearly one Wednesday morning. And it was one of those mornings where I had a meeting at lunchtime and they came about half past 11. So I did what everybody does when Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses come to the door.

[ 11 : 32 ] I said, I'm too busy, can't talk. And that was it. But I did say to them, I said, but next week, same time next week, if you come, then I'd be happy to chat with you then.

And I thought I'd never see them again. But fair play to them. They came back, and they turned up next week. I love a young couple from Clydebank, as it happens, late 20s, I guess, maybe early 30s.

And they sat down, came, sat down on the sofa, and then they proceeded, I guess, just to go through their script of what they ought to say when somebody invites them into their home. And we were talking. And it wasn't long before we got to Jesus and who Jesus is. And so they said that Jesus was created by God, so He was a lesser divine being.

And I said, well, the Bible explicitly states that Jesus is God. And then eventually, we got on to the opening of the Gospel of John.

[ 12 : 34 ] So these words we've just been looking at in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And they said to me, they didn't know what my day job was, they said to me, that's not what the original Greek means.

I said, ah, okay. And I guess that's what they're programmed to say, of course. Because in the original Greek, there's no definite article before God, and so they take that to mean that Jesus is less than God.

So I said, okay. You want to look at the Greek? Let's look at the Greek. Wait a sec. I'll go and get my Greek New Testament from next door, and we can look at it together. So I asked them, just show me, please, in the text where you get what you're saying from.

Which, of course, they couldn't do. And so I read the Greek to them, and I explained, there is no doubt that this says that Jesus is God.

And so they said, okay, we'll maybe check that with our leader, and we'll get back to you. But I never saw them again. They made a sharp exit for the door.

[ 13 : 42 ] And because Jesus is God, then it changes everything for everyone. And that's the point of contention with every other religion, because people don't want to accept that Jesus is who he says he is, who the Gospel of John and the rest of the Bible says he is.

And it's because Jesus is God that he is the creator. So look at verse 3. Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made.

All things were created through him, and nothing was created apart from Jesus. And so it follows that the word is the origin and the source of life and of light.

Verse 4 and 5. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. So the word has life in himself.

He's the origin. He's the source. But he also has the ability to give life, not just physical life, like we all have, we're living and breathing, but also spiritual life, eternal life.

[ 14 : 57 ] And he's also the light, able to give us spiritual illumination in our darkness and inner confusion. Because for John, darkness, when he uses that word, it describes the world that is separated from God because of our sin, human sin.

And this world is in darkness because it is under the dominion of Satan, the devil. And yet the darkness is not equal to the light.

Because Jesus is the supreme light who cannot be overcome. And John later goes on to speak about how death cannot overcome Jesus Christ.

Through his death and resurrection, Jesus has overcome the world. And so having established who Jesus is, John now points us to John the Baptist, who is a witness to the light that is Jesus.

So look down at verse 6. This is a different... There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light so that through him all might believe.

[16:03] He himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light. So John the Baptist was the forerunner to Jesus. John tells us that this John, John the Baptist, was sent from God and his mission from God was to bear witness to Jesus.

So John's job was basically to shine the light on Jesus, who is the true light, to help us see him in all his glory and believe in him.

Okay, so Jesus didn't just turn up, show up in Bethlehem just over 2,000 years ago. He is the eternal Son of God who has always existed.

He is our creator and the source of light and life. So that's who Jesus is. Second, what Jesus gives, verse 9 to 13.

John moves from John the Baptist back to Jesus again to say that he gives the right to become children of God to all who believe.

[17:12] And for this to happen, Jesus came into the world. So verse 9 says, the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

That's a nice, subtle way of describing the incarnation, isn't it? Jesus came into the world. Why did he come? Well, John's saying in these verses that he came to give us new life in relationship with God.

In other words, Jesus shows the meaning and the purpose of our existence. And so how do we then receive this new life, this eternal life Jesus gives?

Well, John highlights two responses to Jesus. I wonder if you spotted them. And there are only two responses to Jesus. You can either reject Jesus or you can receive Jesus.

So first of all, let's think about the reject in verse 10 and 11. He was in the world and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

[18:19] He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. That is the shocking rejection of Jesus. He made everything, but the world didn't recognize him.

He was rejected by the world that was made through him. And he was even rejected by the very people who were specially chosen by God to be his own.

Israel. And it's tragic. So when Jesus showed up, not only did his world fail to recognize its creator, but his own, God's covenant people, Israel, didn't even recognize their Messiah when he came and lived among them.

The Messiah, the one that they'd been longing for. And the appearance of Jesus is described a bit like a homecoming here. It's saying that he came to his home, just like you will leave here and go to your house.

So Jesus walked into the house that he had designed and built and made to the people he let live in that house, rent free. And he had blessed them in every way.

[19:34] He'd given them food in the fridge, like you do when people come and stay in your house. You leave the fridge full of food for them. And so, when he arrived, he should have been welcomed with open arms.

But instead, the world he made, the people in it, said to him, get lost. We don't want you in our lives. And still, today, that same attitude towards Jesus exists, doesn't it?

We don't want you. He's rejected. Because if we don't want the darkness in our hearts exposed by his light, he is light in life and he comes to show and shine into our darkness.

If we don't want that to be exposed, then we will push him away. We won't want to receive him. And yet, it is the biggest mistake that we could ever make in our lives.

But there's another response. It isn't rejection, but it is to receive Jesus. Look at verse 12 and 13.

[20:44] Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave their right to become children of God. Children born not of natural descent nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

So, John says, some did receive Jesus by believing. And it's interesting, receive and believe are two ways of basically describing the same thing.

To receive Jesus is to believe in Jesus and to believe in Jesus is to receive Jesus. It is to personally and wholeheartedly make Jesus our Lord and Savior, to embrace him and everything that he has done for us.

And it's when we do this that we have this privilege that John speaks about of becoming children of God, of being adopted into God's family.

Because when we receive Jesus, we receive all that he gives. We're born of God, which is obviously different to being born into a human family, isn't it? It's a natural family.

[ 21 : 55 ] He's talking about a work of God whereby we get this new birth, a spiritual birth into the family of God, welcomed as one of his children, known and loved and accepted.

No matter what the past was, no matter who we are and what we have done, he takes us. He brings us into his family. If you've ever known a family or been adopted or known someone who has been adopted, you know that it's not the adopted child who ever chooses the family, is it?

It's the family who choose the child. And this is the great thing about what Jesus Christ does for us. He brings us into God's family. And when we're in God's family, our greatest need in life, which is the forgiveness of our sins, has been met by Jesus.

And we discover that the deepest longings of our hearts are satisfied by Jesus. And it's because we have entered into this relationship with God that we were created for.

That's why we're here. It's why we exist. It's to be in relationship with the God who made us. And only as this happens do we grasp the true meaning of Christianity.

[ 23 : 17 ] In fact, the true meaning of life itself. And it's all possible. It all happens. It's all because Jesus came into this world.

And so our relationship with God is all dependent on whether we receive Jesus or reject Him. So who Jesus is, firstly, secondly, what Jesus gives, and then thirdly, what Jesus reveals.

in verse 14 to 19. These verses together basically say that Jesus reveals God the Father to us.

So verse 14 says, the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father full of grace and truth.

in this profound and yet simple way. This isn't just the Christmas message. We hear this reading at Christmas, but this is the Christian message that Jesus, God the Son, took on our human nature.

[ 24 : 28 ] He became a man and He made His dwelling among us. It's saying here that He pitched His tent here, alluding to the tabernacle in the Old Testament which was a huge, massive tent.

So before the temple was built, the tabernacle would be in the desert or wilderness and God would come and dwell among His people and the glory of God would fill this tent, but nobody could go in. So when Moses asked if he could see God's glory, he was told it would kill him. And here is John saying that the Word, Jesus, has made His dwelling among us.

Saying we have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father full of grace and truth. And so John testifies to seeing in this man, Jesus, the glory, the grace, and the truth of God.

Verse 16, Out of His fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

[ 25 : 41 ] This phrase here, grace in place of grace, is discussed at length in all the commentators because there's uncertainty about what it actually means. But I think it probably is saying, and best to read it, as grace upon grace.

Because God's grace was already displayed in the law, but now His grace has come in all its fullness in the person of Jesus Christ.

And so for the first time in the history of the world, God has been fully revealed to us in Jesus. So verse 18 says, No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son who is Himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father has made Him known.

The best way to see, understand this close relationship with the Father is the literal reading, which is in the bosom of the Father. That Jesus was with God for all eternity and Jesus has come into our world.

And so we should never, ever think that God is hiding from us or that God is distant from us. God the Father wants us to know Him.

[ 27 : 01 ] And we can know Him and we can relate to Him in a personal way through Jesus Christ because Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God.

And that's what John is emphasizing here in his prologue and then throughout the rest of his gospel. just look at the parallels here between verse 1 and then verse 18 about who Jesus is.

So Jesus, the Word, is God's self-expression in verse 1 and that's paralleled with making God the Father known to us in verse 18.

And then verse 1, Jesus, the Word, who was with God, is then paralleled with this being in the bosom of the Father. Verse 18. And then Jesus, the Word, who was God, in verse 1, is paralleled

with the one and only Son who is Himself God.

See, they're like bookend statements that basically encompass everything in between to say to us, God has come to us.

[ 28 : 09 ] You know, when people discover that I'm a minister, it kind of goes one of two ways. One way is that they run for cover and change the subject just as quick as they can.

Or, the other way it goes is that they're just really curious and want to talk further. And so a comment I often get is that, well, if you believe in God, I don't believe in God, but if God could just make Himself a whole load clearer, then it would be far easier to believe.

And yet, can you see what John is saying here? He's saying Jesus has made God known in a clear and in a definitive way in human history.

The Word became flesh. The light shines in the darkness. In Jesus Christ, the overwhelming glory of God has come near to us.

and not just to stoop down to the level of our humanity, but to stoop further still by dying on a cross.

[ 29 : 19 ] So the eternal Son of God who has always existed became flesh because only by taking on a physical human body could He die.

And so just think how astounding this is. The logos of the universe, the reason, the logic, the purpose becomes a fetus in the womb of a woman.

The unapproachable becomes personal. The eternal becomes killable. But why did Jesus need to die?

Well, it's because we have failed to align ourselves with the reason for our existence, which is to worship and to love and to obey God.

We're out of kilter because the darkness of our sin separates us from Him. It pollutes our hearts, it damages our lives, and it cuts us off from God eternally.

[ 30 : 25 ] And God, because He is just, must punish all sin. But He is able to punish our sin without punishing us.

Why? Because we read Jesus came full of grace and truth. And so as the light, Jesus was plunged into darkness on the cross so that we can enter the light without fear of being exposed.

I was reading a book called An Immense World by a man called Ed Young. It's a best-selling book, and it's basically about the wonders of the animal kingdom, which I'd never been interested in until I got a dog and tried to figure out why your dog did the stuff that it does.

And there's a section in this book, not the bit about dogs, but there's a section about deep-sea creatures. Really interesting. Because you can't see deep-sea creatures unless you shine light on them.

Anyone ever thought about the exploration of deep-sea creatures? Nobody? No, I didn't think so. But here's the thing. Light, for creatures who have adapted to life in darkness, is dangerous.

[ 31 : 42 ] It can blind them. They either freeze or they flee, which means any kind of exploration of deep-sea creatures only shows terror and blindness.

You don't see them as they really are. And so the solution in this book, it speaks about this stealth camera called the Medusa, and it films deep-sea animals with red light that most of them can't see. And it attracts them using this ring of blue LEDs, so they're attracted by it. And the book says that once you do that, then really big stuff shows up.

That's a science, geek, nerdy way of saying this is brilliant. So it's a way of getting down to their level. The level of the deep-sea creatures connecting with them in their world of darkness.

And now in just a tiny way, I think this helps illustrate something of what God has done to accommodate Himself to us.

[ 32 : 48 ] The true light has entered into our world of darkness, not to scare us away in terror by overwhelming us with His glory, but to draw us to Himself.

When the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us, He stooped stooped to our level. He has come to us and He is for us.

God is for us. He wouldn't have come to us if He wasn't for us. And so there's no way we can ever enter into a relationship with God except through Jesus Christ.

And that's why our response to Jesus could not be more important. because if we reject Jesus and what He gives, then we miss out on life, eternal life, and we're separated from God forever.

And so we must receive Jesus to have this life and to become a child of God. And so my final question to you is, have you done this yet?

[ 33 : 59 ] Have you received Jesus by believing in Him? Believe in His name and then bow before Him as God. Let's pray.