
**LIFE IN HIS NAME
THE WORD MADE FLESH**

John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

We begin our study in the gospel of John today. It will take us quite some time, but we have timed this so that we can enjoy the Christmas story according to John. The Christmas story according to John: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

John does what the other gospels do not -- what Matthew and Luke, in particular, do not. They each tell the story of Jesus -- the life of Jesus, and especially the ministry of Jesus. But Matthew and Luke -- when they tell us about the Christmas story and the birth of Jesus, there is a sense of progression as you go from beginning to end, an unfolding of the mystery regarding who Christ is. Certainly, there are signs. There are symbols from the very beginning: the star, the angels, the announcement of the angels, the worship of the angels, the shepherds, the wise men, the gifts, that

which is declared to those who participated and were witnesses of the birth of Jesus. And yet, there is this sense in which you come to the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke and you hear said of Mary that she pondered these things. She treasured them in her heart. There is this sense of, “Wow, there is so much that seems to be happening, yet I don’t really understand it.” There is this progressive unfolding of the story.

John goes about it completely differently. He attempts to tell you who Jesus is in his first 18 verses. So, the prologue of John is this incredibly rich and massive passage in terms of its eloquence and its importance. It is no easy task. If you think about it, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ and you are given the assignment: “I want you in 18 or 20 sentences to tell all about Jesus,” it is not easy to do. John tells us from the beginning about who Jesus is, then comes to this thundering statement in verse 14: “The Word was made flesh.”

What he has set up for us here is that the wonder of Christmas, the miracle of Christmas is not simply in the circumstances surrounding Christmas, but in the fact that in light of who Jesus is, he was born at all. The miracle of Christmas is that Jesus was born, made flesh. When we understand who he is and a little bit about the nature of who he is, the fact that he was born is just amazing.

So we begin our study of John. John is the apostle of this gospel, of the Revelation, and of the letters First, Second, and Third John. He is called in this gospel, “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” Five times that description is given of John in his own gospel, and in Chapter 21 he identifies himself with that title. He is the one at the Last Supper who leans on Jesus’ shoulder as he places his head, resting there. He is giving us a very personal, very real account as an eyewitness of the last three years of Jesus’ life, of his ministry.

He gives us his purpose. It is found in John 20:30-31. In John 20:30-31, John tells us exactly why he is writing. He writes, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

He tells us this is not a comprehensive account. It doesn’t pretend to be. Jesus did many other things that are not recorded here. These are selected portions, pictures of Jesus’ ministry, but there is a clear purpose, a very clear purpose in mind: these things are written so that you may believe. Believe that he is the One sent from God. He is the Messiah. He is the Christ. He is the Son of God. John is making an astounding claim here. He is saying, “I am telling you here about

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the One that answers all of what the Scripture is about. He is the fulfillment of all that's gone before. It is through Christ. It is in seeing him, believing in him, and understanding him that you come to understand everything else in God's story. He is the One. He is the Son of God. He is the Messiah, the Christ. There is life in his name for all who believe." There is life in his name for all who believe. He wants us to see Christ as Christ reveals the Father, reveals God, so that we might believe and have life.

For John, the word "sign" is important. It is his word for "miracle." He is teaching us that miracles tell a bigger story. They point to something more important. They teach us something. They are not just miraculous in the sense of being miraculous -- they are lessons for us. They are not just wonders to behold, but we see Jesus. He records seven signs, the first of which is the turning of water into wine at the great wedding feast, the last of which is the raising of Lazarus from the dead, which is in a very real and understandable sense the culmination of his seven signs. The implication is that if you don't comprehend this last sign -- Jesus raising the dead -- then you will not really ever understand who Jesus is and what he is about. John gives us these signs and he is telling us here in this introduction, verses 1-18 and through his whole book, that Jesus is life-giving. He illuminates. He enlightens. In Jesus we behold the glory of God, full of grace and truth. He is revealing, as you come to see him and experience him through faith, you come to experience life.

This is for nonbelievers. It's a portrayal -- if you don't know Jesus Christ -- of Christ, with the intent that you will see him very clearly and be able to come to a place of faith. Let me just say for a moment here that when the Scripture talks about faith, it is talking about following Jesus Christ with a full trust as his disciple, giving yourself completely to him, receiving the gift of forgiveness by repenting of your sin before him, believing that he has paid the penalty of your sin. I am trying to emphasize the point, and we saw it even in the verses that we read today, that it is coming to life. It is being completely alive in God. It is not a trivial moment, or even just a simple prayer. It may begin with that. Conversion may come in a moment where you cry out to God in a prayer, confessing your sin, and your trust in Jesus, and then a profound transformation takes place in your life. It may begin in a moment. You may be aware of it. You may not be aware of it, but soon there is the knowledge within your own heart that Jesus Christ is your savior and the Lord of your life.

John is writing to those who don't believe, but he is also writing to those who already believe, giving for us the simple point that growth comes by faith. He wants to help us as believers to grow in our knowledge of Jesus, and in our faith in Jesus.

I am going to break down this prologue under four headings. I am not going to be able to explore all four in depth. I am going to try to hit the first one hard today, to give you all of the first three today, and then to do the fourth next week, if God permits. Here are the four headings:

1. Logos
2. Uncreated
3. Life and Light
4. Full of Grace and Truth

Those are the four headings: Logos, Uncreated, Life and Light, Full of Grace and Truth. Next week we will focus on that last one: Full of Grace and Truth.

Let's start with Logos. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This "Word" translated "Word" is the Greek word "Logos," and it was full of meaning for the first readers. In fact, there have been simply volumes written on what this concept meant to those initial readers. The Greeks taught that there was a purpose, a design, an order to life and to everything, and that that reason or design or purpose was the "Logos." It meant more than just the word "word" but it carried with it the idea of purpose, meaning, design. Tim Keller, borrowing from the work of French philosopher Luc Ferry, summarizes it in the following fashion: "The Greeks believed that the universe had a rational and moral order to it, and this order of nature they called the Logos. For the Greeks, the meaning of life was to contemplate and discern this order in the world. They defined a well-lived life as one that conformed to it."

So, there is this meaning of life. This is what life is about, the Logos, this order. You come to understand it. You align your life to it, and that's what a good life is. That's a well-meaning, well-lived life. There were various schools of thought within Greek philosophy. For example, the Stoics would say, "Well, here is what it means to live in harmony with the Logos: that whatever happens is intended to happen. It is meant to happen, so don't fight it, don't resist it. Don't go too high. Don't go too low. Kind of detach yourself from it. Through this kind of indifference, you will have a great

life.” Then Epicurus -- about 300 years before Jesus -- had a different school of thought. He was kind of a materialist. He believed in atoms and he said we shouldn’t be superstitious. We shouldn’t believe that the Greek gods interfere in life. Instead, we should be hedonists. The key to life is pleasure. But he didn’t mean that in this kind of debauched way that we might think he meant. He taught: “Live a simple life, avoid pain as much as possible, and you will live a good life.”

There were these various schools of thought that were trying to identify the Logos. Now, here’s John, writing his essay. He wants to summarize God -- the Son of God becoming a man -- down into a few short sentences, and he imports this idea of Logos. It is very powerful, full of meaning.

To really grasp this, think about hurricane season. We are just coming out of hurricane season, and we celebrate another season survived without a hurricane. It is always amazing -- when we get hit with a hurricane, of course we lose power, and then we begin to look for a generator. At least that’s what I always did when we lost power. A generator is not something I use at any other time in life. Every time this happens, it seems that there are these mishaps, that people actually take the generator right into their living room and fire it up, and then the fumes make them sick, or even in some cases kill them. There are individuals who put the generator right by the screen door or right by the window. It’s not just that we don’t in those cases understand the logos of a generator -- its design, its purpose, how it is intended to be used -- but many times the way we use it, even if it’s safe -- we don’t understand: “Okay, listen, this thing cannot generate power for my entire apartment or my entire house. I have to figure out how much fuel I have, and how much I am going to use the energy here.” We need to align ourselves with the design and purpose of this machine, the logos of the machine.

That’s the mental picture that John is employing here. He is saying that the Greeks believed the universe has a Logos, and they are right, building on that idea. Obviously, he is saying more than that. The Jews would have said that the Word of God -- a very important concept in the Old Testament -- that the Word of God was powerful. Words carry more than a designation of meaning. Words make things happen. They are powerful. And God’s Word is powerful. This understanding of the spoken word we see when Isaac blessed Jacob and not Esau. Once he was deceived and it was done, it couldn’t be taken back. Words have power.

So John begins his gospel: “In the beginning was the Word.” The Hebrew bible begins in Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning, God created...” John is deliberately bringing to mind this image of creation.

You remember the account there, perhaps, in Genesis 1. God spoke, and things were made out of nothing. “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” For the Jewish reader there was an understanding of the Word of God as powerful.

Then you need to just bring alongside that the understanding of Old Testament wisdom. Throughout the book of Proverbs we see the concept of wisdom personified as a person, and this personification of wisdom showing us that God’s Word creates this beautiful, perfect, matchless design. John is borrowing these images for the Jewish readers. I think sometimes there is a debate, “Well, did he have more of the Greek concept in mind, or more the Jewish concept, or something else?” I think he had it all in mind.

We have been reading as a leadership team David Platt’s book *Radical*. It’s a good book and I recommend the message. It’s an important message for us, and I have mentioned it in a couple of messages. In the book, he takes the idea of the American dream and he challenges the modern Christian. He says, “Listen, God has more for you than the American dream. In fact, the kingdom of God is different than the American dream.” He makes his point by breaking away from how we would define the “good life” typically, as Americans. It’s a good book with a good message, a helpful message. It’s not a perfect book.

John employs a completely different strategy. Instead of saying, “Let’s break away from your understanding of a good life,” he takes that and imports all that’s good of it and says, “Listen, here is that good life. And it’s better than anything you imagine, better than anything you ever dreamed possible. There is a Logos.” In some ways, he is going to now fill that up with very clear content. There is a certain idea, but also some deliberate ambiguity, so that John can define it precisely how he wants to.

Just consider this for a moment. John is saying from the outset, “There is a purpose to the world. There is purpose to your life.” We live in a day where prevailing worldviews deny that there is purpose. This creates a tremendous, chaotic tension within us, because everything we do builds on: What is the purpose of what we are doing? When you sever that from ultimate purpose, we are adrift as people.

John’s gospel begins with good news: There is purpose. There is ultimate purpose. But then, very radically, he makes this claim: Purpose is a Person. Purpose is found in Jesus Christ. It is defined by Jesus Christ. In one sense, you would say that it is the Son of God. He is the Logos. The

ramifications of that are radical for you and me, because whereas Greek philosophy, or even the understanding of the Old Testament scriptures -- these claims to understanding the key of life were held by certain privileged individuals. Everyone else is just fighting to survive.

So when John comes along and he says, "Listen, this is a Person, and he is available to everyone," there is now an availability of this good news so that it is no longer for the elite or the privileged. Purpose is found in a Person and if you will see him and believe in him as you behold him, you will know ultimate purpose. He says that this light gives light to everyone. It's an astounding claim of the accessibility of Christ.

What does it mean, this idea of Logos? There is purpose. It is found in a person. It is accessible to all. It is a magnificent claim. I want to say to all of us present that I am aware that a number of you are Christians. You are followers of Jesus Christ. May God today plant a seed of anticipation in your heart as you read through, as we study through the gospel of John -- to behold Jesus in the words and the works that are recorded here -- that in seeing him you would believe him, and that your knowledge of him would dramatically increase as a result; that this would not be just a perfunctory exercise, but that you would grow dramatically in your knowledge of Jesus.

Just consider in the book of John the seven "I am" sayings. Seven times Jesus links himself to the unspeakable covenant name of God, to Yahweh. Do you remember when God revealed himself to Moses and the children of Israel in the wilderness, specifically, in Exodus, Chapter 3, verse 14? Moses is having this conversation with God: "Who are you, and by what name do I call you?" And God reveals himself to Moses as the "I am." "I am who I am."

John now brings us forward, all of this time, to Jesus, who emphatically says, "I am" on two occasions in the gospel, and then on seven occasions completes the sentence. On two occasions he just says, "I am." One is before the guards who have come to arrest him. They fall back and fall down at this flash of his glory. On the other seven occasions, just listen to these statements. We will get there as we study through the book of John. These are the words of Jesus:

- John 6 -- I am the bread of life.
- John 8 -- I am the light of the world.
- John 10 -- I am the door for the sheep.

- John 10 -- I am the good shepherd.
- John 11 -- I am the resurrection and the life.
- John 14 -- I am the way, and the truth, and the life.
- John 15 -- I am the true vine.

John wants us to see Jesus, and these astounding claims are made regarding who Jesus is from the very first sentence in the gospel of John. He is the Logos.

#2 - He is uncreated. Jesus is uncreated. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." John is telling us that Jesus is divine. Here we have in these opening two verses, the mystery of the trinity pushing through. He was with God. He was God.

You may be aware that the Jehovah's Witnesses sometimes will come to your door. They will knock on your door, and if they discover that you are a follower of Jesus Christ and a Christian, will quickly go to these verses. They will say something along these lines: that Jesus was not God in the sense of being uncreated. He was an angel. And they will say that when Scripture says that he was God that there is no article there in front of "Theos," in front of the word for God. So they say it has to be indefinite. He was a god, and from that flow a plurality of doctrinal errors.

I won't take you through the Greek arguments as to why that's not true. It might help you to know that many times when well-meaning, devoted individuals who are standing at your front door are telling you this, they don't know Greek and they are telling you what they have been told. But even apart from going to the Greek text, the content of these verses makes it absolutely clear that Jesus is uncreated. Look at the next verse: "All things were made through him." That really says it. That makes the claim. But the next phrase removes all doubt: "...and without him was not any thing made that was made." He is uncreated and through Christ, all things that were created were created. Jesus is uncreated.

Remember, we are thinking about the amazing, stunning truth of Christmas. Jesus became a man. The uncreated took on flesh. The Logos of the universe was made flesh.

Third, Jesus is life and light. There is a lot that we could say here. I am not going to take the time to go through both of these points. But it is very clear, if you listen carefully to the references to

Jesus' life, his light, the interaction of that, and our response to that light. Throughout the gospel and throughout our study, we are going to come to these two terms over and over again. Just to illustrate that, and to again build some anticipation for what's coming, let me share a few of those regarding life. Here are just a few of the references regarding life.

- John 14:6 - Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.
- John 17:3 -- And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.
- John 4:36 -- Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.
- From John 5, portions from verse 21 through 25 -- For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will... Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.
- John 10:10 -- The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.
- John 11:25 -- Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live...

John has written these things so that you and I might believe, and by believing, we might have life in his name. Life and light. It is abundant life. It is eternal life. It is connected (John 17:3) to knowing Christ. "This is eternal life," Jesus says, "to know me, to know you, by knowing me." There is a quality, and a duration, and an eternal life that is available to all who believe in Christ.

Light speaks of purity and understanding, an absence of darkness, an absence of sin, an absence of evil; all that is good, all that is whole, all that is right, an understanding, and enlightenment -- these things are promised in Christ. Jesus Christ: He is life. He is life giving. He raises the dead. He gives abundant life. He gives eternal life. Life is found in knowing him. Do you see John's words?

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Will you see him in the signs that are recorded here? We know him. We believe in him. There is life in his name.

I am going to take a little bit of a risk and conclude my message by telling you something humorous that happened here in our shopping center. It illustrates in a very unusual way part of the point that we want to make as we get ready to start the Christmas season. We rent out the shopping center, as you know, and we have a tenant that is a Seventh-day Adventist church. They meet on Saturday, then on Sunday they allow a Pentecostal church to use their facility. Last Sunday, they were singing and dancing as part of their worship, and a guy got so excited that he crashed through the front window and completely broke it out. He danced his way right through the window.

That's amazing, isn't it? I bet he was on time. I bet he got there on time. I don't know how factual this story is. I wasn't there, obviously. I was here. This is what was conveyed to me. I am not advocating for a lack of self-control at all in worship. This is not about public demonstration of worship. But there is this sense in which we need a revelation of Jesus Christ to get in us, that we just can't contain it! God! Uncreated! The Son of God became a man to die for you! That he might live in you! This is Christmas!

Let's pray.