

GOSPEL OF JOHN 1

Jesus, “The Word”

John faced one of the most unique challenges when writing the fourth gospel, presenting the Christian faith in such a way that it would commend itself to the Greek world in which Christianity spread, all the while

combating heresies and false ideas that had increased in the church. “Christianity began among the Jews and therefore it spoke in the Jewish language and used Jewish categories of thought, yet by AD 60 there were around 100,000 Greeks in the church for every Jew who was a Christian.”¹ Furthermore, Jewish ideas were perplexing to Greeks and other cultures. For example, the Greeks had never heard of the Messiah. The normal way a Jewish Christian would have presented Jesus, “the Messiah we have been waiting for” did not make sense to those outside the Jewish tradition.

John lived in the Greek city of Ephesus and was constantly dealing with Greeks to whom Jewish ideas and customs were unintelligible. When it came to writing a gospel that could reach the Greek and Gentile world, (non-Jewish world) John truly was the perfect person chosen by God to get the job done. This gospel is distinct and fascinating. First, it is the most theological of all the Gospels with the largest amount of teaching on the Holy Spirit, a heavy theological prologue, and a larger amount of didactic and discourse material as opposed to narrative.² John’s gospel is the only gospel that contains a precise statement regarding the author’s purpose, “These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”³ The Blackaby theologians write that John’s gospel, “...focuses on the divine nature of Jesus. The miracles of Jesus are not regarded as demonstrations of power as much as they are “signs” that point to Jesus’ heavenly origin and authority. John’s purpose was to present Jesus in a way that convinced readers of His deity.”⁴

John’s gospel is not a chronological account of Jesus’ life like the others, but a thematic account. His gospel is a unique contribution to the record of Jesus’ life and is to be supplementary as well as complementary to Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Biblical scholar MacArthur states, “John supplied a large amount of unique material not recorded in the other Gospels...he often supplied information that helps the understanding of the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, Luke).” The Synoptic gospels begin with Jesus’ ministry in Galilee yet they imply that Jesus had a ministry prior to that (Matt. 4:12; Mark 1:14). John’s Gospel gives the answer with prior information on Jesus’ ministry in Judea (chapter 3) and Samaria (Chapter 4). Clement of Alexandria (AD150-215), wrote that John, aware of the facts set forth in the other three Gospels and being moved by the Holy Spirit, composed a “spiritual gospel.”⁵

Although John’s name does not appear in the Gospel, early church tradition strongly and consistently identified him as author. The traditional view places the date of the gospel to be written towards the end of the first century A.D. 80 or a little later while John was in Ephesus, 50 years after witnessing Jesus’ earthly ministry.⁶

Pre-Article Questions:

1. What do you believe about the power of the spoken word?

1. Barclay, William, The New Daily Study Bible Volume One: The Gospel of John

2. MacArthur, John, John: Jesus-the Word, the Messiah, the Son of God

3. Gospel of John, 20:30-31

4. Blackaby, Henry, Richard, Thomas, Melvin & Norman, John: Small Group Study

5. Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 6.14.7

6. Zondervan TNIV Study Bible, Intro to John

“John wrote this gospel rooted not only in His eyewitness experience of Jesus’ life and ministry, but also his first-hand experience in how the church lived out the life and ministry of Jesus for more than half a century.”⁷

Moving into our first Chapter of John we are hit immediately with a powerful reference to Christ as, “The Word.” From the time of Abraham, throughout the life of the Apostle John and beyond, Jewish people regarded the spoken word as a deed. They believed the spoken word had power. They believed words not only had power in the natural realm to hurt or help people but also in the supernatural realm.⁸ William Barclay states, “The spoken word to the Hebrew was fearfully alive...It was a unit of energy charged with power. It flies like a bullet to its billet.”

In Greek thought, the idea of the word began in 560 BC with the Ephesian philosopher named Hericlitus. This philosopher brought about the idea that the word, logos in Greek, was the principle order under which the universe continued to exist. He taught that everything happened according to the Logos. To Greeks, logos was the reason or mind of God; it was much more than a sound.⁹ Therefore, in writing that Jesus was the Word in Chapter 1, John was making a bold claim to Jews and Greeks. They understood when he wrote this he was saying Christ, the Word, is the reason of God, the mind of God, the power of God. He is God.

For centuries, many have questioned the deity of Jesus. Some have said He was a good teacher and others have said He was a great prophet. Many will say he was simply a liar. The Gospel of John is undeviating in its claims about Jesus. This gospel boldly and with the breath of the Spirit gives us the assurance that Christ was no ordinary man; He was not just a prophet or good teacher. He was not a liar. He was Lord. He is God.

John 1:1-18, NIV

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. 6 There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. 9 The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’” 16 From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.

Study Questions:

1. Underline, highlight, or list all the descriptive words used to describe Jesus in this prologue. Are there any words or phrases you really appreciate about the person of Jesus or would like to understand more about?

7. Blackaby, Henry, Richard, Thomas, Melvin & Norman, John: Small Group Study

8. Blackaby, Henry, Richard, Thomas, Melvin, & Norman, John Small Group Study

9. Barclay, William, The New Daily Study Bible Volume One: The Gospel of John

Study Questions:

2. According to John in vs. 17, how was the arrival of Christ into the New Testament world different from the coming of the law into the Old Testament world?
3. Read Romans 3:19-20 and Galatians 3:10-14, how is the purpose of the law different from the purpose of the coming of Christ?
4. In what ways are you impacted by your new understanding of what John meant when he called Christ the Logos, or Word, of God?
5. Read John 1:14. Jesus was full of grace and truth. How would you define grace and how would you define truth? Are you a person of one more than the other? How can you grow in becoming more like Christ in both of these areas?
6. Read John 1:12. What do you think it means to believe in God and be His child? Would anyone like to share their personal story of believing in Jesus and what it is like to be His child?
7. Based on John’s prologue, how would you answer the person who claimed that Jesus was just a good man or a wise teacher? Check out this C.S. Lewis quote:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about (Christ): ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.’ That is one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, The Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool; you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great moral teacher.”

Prayer Partner Assignment:

Meeting with a brother or sister from your small group over a meal to get to know one another more and answer a few questions:

1. Read John Chapter 1 again
 2. What does this chapter teach us about Jesus? What does this chapter teach us about Jesus’ Kingdom?
 3. What specifically from this chapter challenges you and why?
 4. What questions or comments do you have for Life Group next week about this chapter? (Make note of them to ask at the beginning of next week’s study)
 5. Work together to find any other verses in the Bible over this next week that state that Jesus is God or strongly imply it. You could use the concordance in the back of your Bible, biblegateway.com, or blueletterbible.org to help in your search
- End your time in prayer for one another if possible and set up another time to meet again outside of small group.