

In the Beginning Was the Word

John 1:1-2

Turn with me in your Bible to the gospel of John.

“You can say almost anything you want about Jesus today except that He’s God.” So begins one commentary on the gospel of John. Call Him a good man, an example to be followed, call Him a wise man, and many will agree with you. They might even praise you. But you call Him God and you’ll invite trouble. There have been many doubters and skeptics throughout the centuries who have viewed Jesus differently than as someone other than God. But then God’s Spirit breathed life into that doubter and that skeptic and awakens a dead heart and they become like the disciple Thomas who initially doubted Jesus’ resurrection. But then Jesus invited him to touch Him and see that it was truly Him, and Thomas cried out, “My Lord and my God!”

This is the purpose of John’s gospel: that we would believe in Jesus. John writes in 20:31:

“These things...”

All the stories, all the miracles, all the scenes of Jesus’ life and death and resurrection.

“These things 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.”

Believe that He’s the Christ, the Son of God, and that you may have life. Not just being awakened from a dead heart to a heart that beats for God but that as a Christian you would have life – *zōé* – life to the fullest and everlasting life to come.

This portrait offered by John of Jesus’ life and saving work is designed – every story, every miracle, every teaching, every step along the way that Jesus takes – is designed to cause you to believe in Jesus, both for the unbeliever and the believer. For unbelievers to see the witness of Jesus’ words and works and to be caused to believe in Jesus and for believers to see the witnesses of Jesus’ words and works and to grow in belief and trust in Jesus.

So we begin this verse by verse study of the gospel of John written by the apostle John and the last of the four gospels we study that all of us might believe in Jesus. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who (literally) [is believing].” Not just for salvation to start but is believing the power of God for all who are currently, right now, believing. And John has something similar to say as we look at Jesus. We would see such a magnificent, beautiful portrait of the God-man who came and witnesses to God Himself and that we would believe and trust in Jesus.

This morning we study only the first two verses of John’s gospel. We’ll move slowly through the first eighteen verses of chapter 1 because they contain profound truths that set up the rest of the gospel. The first eighteen verses are often called the prologue. They’re theological, highly theological, to set up the context for everything else that John speaks of, and as we move through the book, we’ll pick up speed. But John’s aim in this opening section is to reveal to us who Jesus is. Before he tells us the story of Jesus, he wants to make sure that we know

who Jesus is. So what does John reveal to us about Jesus? Let's read the opening paragraph, but we again will focus in on the first two verses:

"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."

Now in simple language, John reveals three attributes of Jesus that reveal who He is in these first two verses, three attributes of Jesus that reveal who He truly is. And the first attribute of Jesus that reveals who He is, is that Jesus is preexistent. And you see that in the very first verse in the very first line:

"In the beginning was the Word."

The Word is Jesus and we know that for at least three reasons. First, in verse 14, John makes the connection between the Word and Jesus plain. Look with me at verse 14:

"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."

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us," that is, the Word became a man.

This is the great doctrine we celebrate every Christmas, the doctrine of the incarnation. The Word became a man and we know that Word then has to be Jesus.

And then it goes on:

"...and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father."

So the Word is the only Son from the Father and we know from passages, for example, Mark 1:11, that Jesus is called God's Son. At Jesus' baptism, Mark records, "a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'" There's the Father shouting from heaven to the crowd as a witness – it's not as if Jesus didn't know this – shouting to the crowd as a witness, "This is My Son, in whom I am well pleased," the Father delighting in the Son, even in His incarnation.

The second reason we know that the Word is Jesus is that if we keep reading in verse 1, we find that the Word is God:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

So the one who is God and took on flesh can only point to one person and that's Jesus. Jesus alone.

The third reason we know that the Word is Jesus is that the apostle John also wrote Revelation and there is a passage in Revelation describing Jesus' second coming where he writes, Revelation 19:13, "The name by which he is called is The Word of God." And it's very plain that that's Jesus.

So the Word is Jesus. But why does John call Jesus the Word? *Ho Logos* – the Word. No other author in the New Testament calls Jesus the Word. So what is John telling us by assigning, by giving Jesus that name, or that title? What's he telling us about Jesus? And there have been many theories but the only theory that makes any sense is the one John himself would have come up with. Does that make sense? We should remember that fundamentally John's worldview was Jewish more than it was Greek, even though he lived in a Greek culture. So he's not pulling from Greek philosophers who may have used the term *logos* to refer to divine wisdom or rationality or something like that. Rather, we should expect that he's drawing from the Old Testament. In fact, frequently in this opening

section of the gospel, John alludes to the Old Testament. For example, the verse starts in the same way as Genesis 1:1 does – “In the beginning...” That’s not by accident. Verse 14 says He dwelt among us, this Word does, which translated literally is He pitched a tent, or He tabernacled among us, which reminds of us the tabernacle, the dwelling place of God that went with the Israelites in ancient days. Or verse 17, John positions Jesus as a better Moses. And then you’ve got the words *light* and *darkness* and *life* as key terms in this opening section of the gospel which are also key terms in the opening section of Genesis. So you can see that he is already drawing down Hebrew allusions to make his points, his theological points.

So then what role does God’s word play in the Old Testament? If he’s drawing from a Hebrew background, a Jewish background, then we should look to the Old Testament and say, “Is there any connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament that would connect this to Jesus, which is why he would call Him the Word?” What role does God’s word play in the Old Testament? And most obvious is that God’s word reveals God’s will and God’s thought. We find many statements such as Isaiah 7:3, “The Lord said to Isaiah...” and then He gives His instruction. He reveals His will. Or Isaiah 38:4, “Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah...” and we could do this with Ezekiel and Amos and Jeremiah and many of the other prophets, right?

God’s word also comes in judgment. Amos 3:1, “Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel.” Then we also find that God’s word doesn’t just come in judgment, doesn’t just give instruction, that God’s word heals and delivers. Psalm 107:20, “He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.” Aw, that’s good news. Just at His word. He says it and it’s done.

And then we find in the Old Testament God’s word is effective to bring about whatever He intends. Effective to bring about what He intends, meaning He speaks it and it’s done. Isaiah 55:11:

“So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

Infallibly it operates. The purpose that He intends for His word to achieve, it achieves every single time without fail. He’s always successful in His speaking of His word. God’s mere speaking of His word accomplishes His desire. You remember in Genesis, right? Genesis 1:3, “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” Then you look at the other days and God said this and God said that and how does it always conclude? “And it was so.” His word brings about what He requires.

Now even that Genesis 1:3 passage, “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light,” shows us that God’s word is powerful, so powerful that He creates. He creates out of His word, creates from nothing just by speaking. Psalm 33:6 says something similar: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.” By His word. Now we understand that that phrase “the word of the Lord,” like “by the word of the Lord the heavens were made,” is kind of a personification of the word. You understand personification? That’s to assign person attributes to something that is impersonal. Like if I were to say, “The tiles in that room had mold like a man’s fingers growing out.” Okay, that’s personification of the mold. Well, in the same way, as we look through the Old Testament we find the personification of the word so that the word and God become, though distinct, inseparable. So to say that the word of the Lord created the heavens, as the psalmist does in Psalm 33, is the same thing as God Himself created the heavens.

So we know that God’s word and God Himself are not the same thing but they can also not be separated and that makes sense because words do two things. The first thing it does is it expresses our thoughts, emotions, and will.

And that's true whether you're in a closet alone by yourself or you're in a crowd of people. They express our thoughts, emotions, and will. And the second thing our words do is that when others hear our words, they reveal to others our thoughts, emotions, and will. So they express our thoughts, emotions, and will, and they reveal to others our thoughts, emotions, and will. And in the Old Testament God's word expresses God's thoughts, emotions, intentions, His will, and they reveal to man His thoughts, emotions, and will. And moreover, His words carry with them the power to bring about what He has said.

Now, with that Old Testament background in mind about "the word of the Lord," John writes that Jesus is the Word. So what does he mean? He means that Jesus as *the Word* – the Greek is clear emphatic – Jesus as the Word is the perfect revelation of God. If you want to know about God, look to Jesus as the perfect, final, message, word of God. Jesus reveals God perfectly. So he calls Jesus the Word. And we'll see in just a little bit that the reason He reveals God perfectly is that Jesus Himself is God.

Listen how the author of Hebrews puts it, in chapter 1, verses 1-3:

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He (the Son, Jesus) is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power."

So Jesus is the perfect imprint. That is, He is the exact representation of the nature and the essence of God. It's not simply that Jesus' teachings reveal God, although that's true. It's that Jesus Himself, all of His teaching, all of His witness, all of His ministry, all of His life, all of His dying, all of His rising, all reveal God. "In the beginning was the Word..." So just the name Word itself tells us a lot about Jesus. He is the Word because He perfectly reveals God.

But we're told something else about Jesus here. "In the beginning was the Word..." As I said earlier, John echoing Genesis 1:1, and Genesis 1:1 also wrote, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." So what John 1:1 reveals is that at that point of beginning, when matter was created, when time was created, when space was created, at that time, before any of that was in existence, at that point of beginning, Jesus already was. When the beginning began, Jesus the Word was already there. At any point of beginning in the past, Jesus already was. Before there was a succession of moments, the creation of time, before that began, Jesus was already there.

Well, what a profound truth that John makes using the simplest of language. He writes in the simplest of Greek. Every beginning Greek student translates either the gospel of John, sections of it, or 1 John, and both are written with incredible simplicity. But in his simplicity, he expresses unfathomable truths. He means there was never a time when Jesus wasn't. He was before it all and indeed before time itself. Now surely we're to make the connection between God as the "I AM," the preexistent One, the self-existent One, the name that God revealed Himself to Israel and Jesus as the One who was in the beginning. Just a different form of the word *be. I am* and *be*, right?

So Jesus, too, is preexistent. I mean, what a person to put your hope in, the preexistent One. No mere man can exist above space, time, and matter, but Jesus was before them all. He had no beginning, therefore, time won't age Him and make Him less strong or useless. Time won't change Him. He will not change His mind about you tomorrow. He's before all things and therefore above all things, so He is a sure foundation, the God you can trust. If you hope for a glad eternity, then you have to have a foundation of One who Himself is eternal otherwise you outlast Him. If you hope for a glad eternity, then you put your hope in the One is Himself eternal.

A second attribute of Jesus that reveals who He is, is that Jesus is united with the Father yet distinct. Jesus is united with the Father yet distinct. The middle of verse 1:

“...and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”

Now once again using simple language, John writes the most profound truths and I want you to focus your attention on the statement, “The Word was with God.” This tells us that Jesus, the Word, is both intimately united with God the Father and yet distinct from the Father. There is an eternal union with God the Father and Jesus the Word, yet from all eternity the two have remained distinct persons. We hear their union yet distinction even from the very beginning pages of Scripture. In Genesis 1:26, “Let us make man in our image...” Well, who’s the plural? The members of the Trinity not yet revealed in the early pages of Scripture but progressively revealed over the course of Scripture as God progressively revealed Himself.

So this unity yet distinction within the Godhead is one of the deepest and most mysterious truths in all of Christianity. There’s no analogy. There is no analogy on earth that can describe this mystery. All attempts to illustrate this mystery of the union yet distinction of the Father and the Son fail and really can only express some form, maybe not full-on form, of false teaching or heresy. We can’t say, as it’s popular to say, that the Trinity is like the three states of water, solid, liquid, and gas, because that actually illustrates that water changes forms and the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are not changing forms, changing from one period of time to another. This analogy only illustrates the ancient heresy of modalism which taught that the Trinity is not three distinct persons but instead is just three different modes (from which we get *modalism*), three different modes or forms that God reveals Himself progressively over time, at one point as the Father and then later He puts on a different mask called the Son, and later on He puts on a different mask called the Spirit, but they aren’t one and the same, one person. That’s not what we’re talking about.

We can’t say as it’s popular to say that the Trinity is like a man who is at the same time a father to one, a son to another, and a husband to yet a third. This too illustrates modalism where the distinction of the persons in the Godhead is not maintained. The persons of the Trinity don’t merely take on different roles. They are themselves distinct, distinct persons.

We can’t say as it’s popular to say that the Trinity is like an egg. In one egg you have the white, the yolk, and the shell composing one full egg. This illustrates the ancient false teaching of tritheism, that God is not one but three separate gods. The shell, the yolk, and the white are all three different substances but the Godhead is one substance, one essence.

And we can’t say as it’s popular to say that the Trinity is like a three leaf clover with each clove representing a person of the Trinity. This too illustrates tritheism because the cloves are distinct and do not illustrate God’s unity. And you could come up with some other analogy and with thought we’d blow up that analogy too, because listen, the Trinity is unlike anything else in the created world and so it cannot be illustrated.

Instead, we seek only to state the truths of the Triune God. They are too great for us to fully understand but yet God has revealed Himself enough for us to understand the truths that He would have us to understand. We understand first that God is three persons, three centers of consciousness with distinctions between each. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Father is not the Holy Spirit. And second, each person of the Trinity is fully God. None are only partly God. Full deity is within each. And then third, there is but one God. There is but one God. They are one in essence and one in substance. God is three persons, each person of the Trinity is fully God, and there is but one God. Distinction, deity, unity. That’s the teaching of the Trinity. Distinction, deity, unity.

Now as between the Father and the Son, we have the clearest, simplest statement expressing these truths here in verses 1 and 2 and the Holy Spirit will be introduced later on in John's gospel. But here he's dealing with the Father and the Son.

"In the beginning was the Word..."

That's an expression of Christ's deity because only deity could be preexistent.

"and the Word was with God..."

That's an expression of His distinction from the Father yet intimate union.

"...and the Word was God."

That's another expression of His deity and also an expression of His union with the Father. So in these first two verses, there is distinction, deity, and unity, the full headings of the teaching of the Trinity. So these are the truths given to us and there we tread not much farther. There are more depths to explore. Don't want to intimate that that's all there is on the Trinity, but let's consider what else we might glean from these verses. He says:

"the Word was with God..."

The key word in this statement is the preposition *with* in the Greek *pros* transliterated. *Pros* is not normally translated "with" except it means "with" when a person is with another person and then you translate it "with" if the context makes sense. So the persons are distinct but they have some connection, whether good or bad. for example, Mark 6:3:

"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?"

With us, sisters with us, person to person, with us – some connection there, whether for good or bad, but a connection made. Mark 14:49, Jesus says:

"Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled."

There, same preposition used person to person, "I was with you," and there was some connection, whether for good or for bad. Philemon 13:

"I would have been glad to keep him with me," Paul says, about this slave, "in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel," this freed slave. "Him with me," a connection that's been made.

So here, "the Word was with God." So this speaks of their connection. The fellowship that the Father and the Son enjoyed throughout all eternity was a sweet, intimate fellowship. This is speaking of, not just He was proximate to God, but that He enjoyed an indescribable closeness with God the Father. And verse 2 repeats the same idea but advances it slightly. It really combines the first two statements of verse 1. Verse 2 says, "He was in the beginning with God." So this close relationship existed before there was a beginning. From all eternity, this relationship existed, this close union. No one else except the Spirit can be said to be with God like this.

It also tells us that the Word is not God the Father. He is distinct. John does not write, "God was with God," although in a sense that would make sense, wouldn't it, because Jesus is God as the next phrase tells us? But he doesn't write that. And the reason he doesn't do that is that if he wrote, "God was with God," rather than, "The Word was with God," here, you may have mistakenly concluded that there are in fact two Gods. God A and God B.

But as he states it, there are two persons, three within the Spirit, in the one Godhead, each distinct from the other. Three persons within the godhead, each distinct from the other. In fact, you can't take a single Greek word in these first two verses and change it or change their order and not get to heresy. Every one of these words matters and they're the simplest of words. In two months you would know in your Greek class all the words in this section – in one month. These are very simple words. And yet you change one of them, or change the word order of one of them, and you get heresy. These are all designed.

So the persons in the Trinity are not the same. They don't morph into each other. God is not the Father in the Old Testament and then becomes the Son in the New Testament and then becomes the Holy Spirit in the church age. In the Old Testament and the New Testament, all three persons of the Trinity are present. So what comfort we Christians can take in the fact that the members of the Trinity enjoy sweet fellowship with each other and have done so for all eternity. They are united. They've always been in perfect harmony, always loved each other, that intra-Trinitarian love and happiness between the members of the Trinity is the Christian's ultimate source of joy and happiness. And the reason I know that is because of the way Jesus prays to the Father in the great high priestly prayer in John 17. He says in verse 26:

"I made known to them your name (this is Jesus praying to the Father), and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me..."

"The love which you have loved me" – that's the intimate fellowship between the Father and the Son, that intra-Trinitarian love and joy – "may be in them, and I in them."

Wow! The love of the Father for the Son to be in us so that we love the Son with the love, the very love, of the Father. That's amazing. This love is a joyful love so that we would also take joy in the Son the way the Father takes pleasure in the Son. This is unfathomable. Even now, though dimly, God is answering this prayer in the hearts of Christians, that we would experience the very love that the Father has for the Son which is infinite and that we would love the Son with the love of the Father for the Son. And one day in heaven, when we are glorified, this capacity to love and delight in Jesus will be perfected so that we will love the Godhead in some way with the love the Trinity has for each of the other members of the Trinity. What a blessing, Christian, you've been given. This is a deep well of joy. It is the source of our joy as Christians. It blows your mind.

It blows Paul's mind too. He wrote in Ephesians 3:19 that Christians would "know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge." So he prays knowing that we've got to pray for this kind of love, to know this kind of love. You only experience this kind of love by prayer. This is supernatural. To even begin to comprehend this kind of love, you've got to pray for this. "Know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge," and that we would "be filled with all the fullness of God." All of us filled with the fullness of God? Well, now you know at least one piece of that, the intra-Trinitarian love between the members of the Trinity and that Paul prays that we would be filled with that.

Amazing!

Finally, the third attribute of Jesus' identity is that Jesus is very God. Last part of verse 1:

"...and the Word was God."

I use the term *very God* because that's the term the Nicene Creed uses which is a good statement on Jesus' deity. Here's what it says in part:

"We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being in one substance with the Father."

Now that statement, that Nicene Creed that I just read, is essentially John 1:1-4. It's essentially what it is, repackaged. And what I'm getting at by saying that Jesus is very God is that He's truly God. He is God in His essence. He is fully God. "And the Word was God." And so here we've reached the high point of the passage. How could the point be stated more simply and yet what a weight these words carry? If John is right, that the Word, that is, Jesus Christ, is God, then we've got to read his gospel with the understanding that we're reading the story of God on earth. This is clear statement of Jesus' deity. Throughout the ages, the various heretical groups, the Arians and the Jehovah Witnesses, have tried to pervert this very simple truth. They say it doesn't read, "the Word was God," but "the Word was a god," and then they try to say something about the Greek which they know nothing about.

Look, biblical Greek in the hands of a novice is a terrible thing. But even first year Greek students study this passage and learn that John's construction of this statement throws the word God to the front for emphasis. Jesus is not something inferior to God. Even if this verse weren't here, you could realize from the rest of the gospel that Jesus is in fact God and Jesus Himself claims that He's God multiple times in this gospel. For example, in John 10:30, Jesus says, "I and the Father are one." This isn't a statement of Jesus that the Father and Jesus are the same person. It's that they have the same essence, the same nature, the same substance, the one Godhead. Or, in Jesus' prayer in John 17:11, "Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one." Or consider John 8:58: "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'" There Jesus takes for Himself the very name of God that God disclosed for Himself in the Old Testament. He's either blaspheming right at that moment or He really is who He said He is. He's saying that He's God in the flesh. When they see Jesus, they're seeing God.

So Jesus is not something inferior to God. He's not an angel, He's not a specially empowered man, He's not a spirit, He's not merely a holy man. He is what John says He is, right here, He's God. If Jesus were someone less, or something less than God, then Jesus is still buried in some unmarked grave, probably nearby Jerusalem. But no, He was who He said He was. Colossians 2:9 is right: "In [Jesus] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." Just as the Father is God, so the Son is God. Just as much God as the Father is God, Jesus is fully God.

So say what you want to about Jesus but know this: He is God. He is God. No amount of political pressure or social pressure or ridicule or shaming or bullying will cause us to deny Him. We know who Jesus is. We at Treasuring Christ Church affirm, along with Thomas, Jesus, You are our Lord, You are our God. Who is Jesus? He's preexistent, He's united with the Father yet distinct, and He is God.

For those of you who have given your life to Jesus, you've placed your faith in the solid foundation. But those of you who have not given your life to Jesus, Jesus is alive today. With His life, He gave witness in His words and works that He is God and then He died as a payment for the penalty of sin, sins not His own. He died for the sins of all who would believe in Him. To believe in Jesus means more than you simply acknowledge that He exists. It means to trust that He is God who takes away sins, not because we've done good, but because He alone is righteous and He died in our place. So if you turn from your sin and receive Him, embrace Him, you'll be saved. So won't you come to Jesus? Won't you embrace Him? Won't you take hold of the eternal Word by faith? Won't you trust in Him to forgive your sins, even yours, and lay down your life in worship for Him? Won't you do that this morning? You don't need to wait. You don't need to try to get better. You just need to go in your heart, on your knees, in faith, trusting, all you know of yourself to all you know of Him and believe in Him. Won't you do that? Won't you do that this morning? Won't you just put your faith in Christ?

Let's pray.

Father, thank You for this Word. Your Son died and we are thankful. Thankful for a death, a gruesome death, a death that He didn't deserve, but we're thankful because on that cross Jesus took our sin. And He paid the penalty for us for all who have appropriated that penalty payment by faith. We trust in Jesus. Jesus, You are God and You are our Savior. Father, we look forward to what You will teach us in this gospel of John. Protect this word in our hearts and may it bear great fruit, a harvest of righteousness. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.