

Sunday, December 3, 2023 | The Light Has Come

Week 1 | John 1:1-5 | “The Light of Men”

Ask someone to tell you about the Christmas story, and they'll likely begin with Mary and Joseph. And while that's not a bad starting point, the gospel writers start *earlier*. For instance, Luke begins with John the Baptist *nine months* before Jesus' birth, Mark starts with Isaiah *seven hundred years* earlier, and the Gospel of Matthew kicks off with Abraham in the *twentieth century B.C.* But of all the gospel writers, John starts the *earliest*. In fact, he begins in *the beginning*, like the beginning of beginnings—i.e., before the world was created. In doing so, the Beloved Disciple shows us that the *actual* start of the Christmas story (aka the Gospel story) predates the creation of the universe.

In this four-week series entitled *The Light Has Come*, we'll explore what is called the “prologue” of John’s gospel account. Those first eighteen verses show us that the same Light that first illuminated the world was also wrapped in swaddling clothes. And just as He lit up Bethlehem, the Lord shines bright today.

I want you to notice three things:

i. **The eternality of the Word (vs. 1-2).**

READ: John 1:1-2 (ESV)

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God.

The phrase “In the beginning” recalls the opening lines of Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Thus, where every other gospel writer started within human history, John begins before the beginning.¹ Unlike creation, God has no beginning or end; He is an *eternal* being. Scripturally, this is the foundation upon which existence rests: *before the beginning, there was God alone*. No one else was there. Just God.

But here, in John 1:1, our author shows us that, surprisingly, God (at least as he was understood in the O.T.) was not alone before creation. Something called “the Word” was present in the

¹ Klink, Edward W., *John*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan Academic, 2016), p. 87, “The context in which the Fourth Gospel begins is not Palestinian but primordial.”

beginning with God. Thus, whatever assumptions we can make about this “Word,” one thing is sure: *it is divine*.² Just as God was unbound by time, so too is this “Word.”

But what does the term “Word” mean? John uses the Greek word **λόγος** (*logos*). And throughout the N.T., it is translated in various ways: “word” (218x), “saying” (50x), “account” (8x), “speech” (8x), “thing” (5x), etc. Carson goes so far as to say it could be translated as “reason” or even “science.”³ But, generally speaking, *logos* refers to any kind of utterance; it is *thought* given expression.⁴ But, as *logos* is used here, it cannot mean mere sound in this context. After all, nothing really happens when we speak, but when God speaks, things come into existence (e.g., light, sky, land, plants, stars, etc.). Thus, God's Word is his creative overture, his outstretched arm reaching into time and space to create and interact with that creation. When John uses the word *logos*, he is trying to convey the notion of God's self-expression—no one has revealed God but God himself (cf. Prov. 8:22-31).⁵

Now, if you're somewhat lost, that's okay. Though the background of *logos* is vast, John's use is unique. So, as Klink points out, “The entire Gospel is needed to explain this term.”⁶ We must continue reading to discover precisely what John means when he says *logos*. But, suffice it to say, this Word has a unique relationship with God.

But who or what could John refer to when he spoke about the “Word”? In verse 17, John equates the “Word” with “Jesus Christ.” the Son of God is the “personal embodiment of all that he proclaims.”⁷ He co-existed alongside God in the past and is in active relationship with God in the present.

Notice that Jesus, as “the Word,” is described as *separate* from God but still in a close personal relationship with God: “**The Word was with God.**” Though this “Word” was in the beginning, it is distinct, in some way, from God. Herein is the groundwork for the doctrine of the Trinity.

But, also, Jesus, as “the Word,” is described as being the *same* as God: “**and the Word was God.**” As Barrett explains, “John intends that the whole of his gospel shall be read in light of this

² Kruse, Colin G., *John*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentary, Revised Edition, (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press, 2017), p. 55.

³ Carson, D.A., *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Cambridge, U.K.; Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), p. 115.

⁴ Köstenberger, Andreas J. (2008) *John*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker), p. 25, quoting Calvin, “For just as in men speech is called the expression of the thoughts, so it is not inappropriate to apply this to God and say that He expresses Himself to us by His Speech or Word.”

⁵ Köstenberger (2008), p. 25.

⁶ Klink (2016), p. 89.

⁷ Köstenberger (2008), p. 25.

verse. The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true, the book is blasphemous."⁸ No other N.T. writer is as explicit regarding the deity of Christ as John.⁹

This "Word" has a *dual* nature: itself and God. Jesus is the "I am" (8:58). "It is one thing for the Word to be *with* God (see Isaiah's personified Word and Wisdom); it is quite another for the Word *to be* God."¹⁰ One theologian said, "What God was, the Word also was."¹¹

Thus, in the first verse alone, John describes "the *preexistence* of the Word (1:1a), the *presence* of the Word (1:1b), and the *person* of the Word (1:1c)."¹²

John then rounds out his introductory statement by saying, "He was in the beginning with God." "Word" went from being something *separate from* God to being something that's the *same* as God and then back to being *different* from God; but, this time, in the place of "Word," we find the term "he." The Word went from being described as *something* to being described as *someone*. Just as God *spoke* the universe into existence, He *speaks* to us through His Son. Jesus, as the very *Son* of God, is the supreme *commentary* of the Father.

READ: Hebrews 1:1-2 (ESV)

¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² 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.

Do you want an explanatory word about who God is? Look to the Word incarnate, God's only Son, Jesus Christ.

ii. **The artistry of the Word (vs. 3-4).**

READ: John 1:3-4 (ESV)

³ All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Jesus is the maker of *all* things. Or, as Carson puts it, "the Word was God's Agent in the creation of all that exists."¹³ And just so we don't miss the point, John states this principle both

⁸ Carson (1991), p. 117.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Köstenberger (2008), p. 28.

¹¹ Kruse (2017), p. 36.

¹² Klink (2016), p. 92.

¹³ Carson (1991), p. 118.

positively (“all things were made”) and *negatively* (“and without him was not anything made...”). Life sprang from the Word.

This does not reflect Gen. 1:1. God is God, whether in the past, present, or future. He does not change (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8). But our understanding can be *enlightened* to better understand what has *always* been the reality. Thus, in light of John 1:1, we now know that the creation narrative is an account of God the *Son’s* creative work (cf. Heb. 1:2; Rev. 3:14). Jesus brought something from nothing. He did not bring order from chaos but from utter oblivion.¹⁴ He brought existence from nonexistence, fullness from a vacuum, and light from the dark.

Paul, writing to the church in Colossae, puts it this way:

READ: Colossians 1:15-17 (ESV)

¹⁵ He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Flip a mountain on its side, and you will find "Made by Jesus" stamped with indelible ink by its roots (cf. Ps. 19:1-2). He is the one by whom the worlds were created and by whom we continue to exist (Heb. 1:3). Jesus is *the first mover*; he sets into motion movement; he puts the planets into orbit. The Lord is *the first cause*; he tips the first piece in a chain reaction; he lights the match that ignites stars. Gravitational forces persist because the Lord has not given them leave to stop. Every atom owes its existence to Jesus.

And just as a plant will not survive long without the sun’s light, if we do not have the light of Jesus, we will not live for long. This is why John says, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” Through Jesus, a man can become a new creature; He is the Author of Life. Later, the Lord will say in 5:25-26, “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. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.” God’s first act in the old creation was to bring forth light (cf. Gen. 1:3). Jesus’ first act in the new creation was to bring forth light for men.

When John says Jesus is “the life and light of men,” he is saying that the only meaning that has any real meaning is to be found in him. One cannot truly exist apart from him. Whatever a person might be without Jesus, they are not their truest selves as they were meant to be (cf. Ps.

¹⁴ Klink (2016), p. 93.

139:13-16). Like a candle without a flame, life has no light if Jesus is absent from our lives. The Lord alone animates and energizes our very essence. Without him, we become lifeless husks, ghouls who experience a dull and listless existence. But with him, we become children again, adolescents who experience a vibrant and driven life (cf. Jn. 3:3). "Life" and "light" are found at the hand of the Son of God, and he gives them freely to all those who put their faith in him. He gives us breath and keeps us breathing (cf. Gen. 2:7). He gives us thought and keeps us thinking (cf. Psa. 139:13-14). He gives us life and keeps us living (cf. Deut. 32:39). Listen to a baby's first cry, and you will also hear the Life-Giver singing. Smell the first flowers of spring, and you will breathe in his sweet fragrance. Savor a season's first fruit, and you will delight in Jesus Christ, the Life incarnate.

Just as the tethers of reality were woven together by the hand of Jesus, the Son of God weaves life back into man, making all those who believe the children of light (cf. 1 Thess. 5:5).

iii. **The supremacy of the Word (vs. 5).**

READ: John 1:5 (ESV)

⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Prophesying about the messiah, Isaiah said, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone" (Isa. 9:2).¹⁵ But, make no mistake, whether in Isaiah's day or John's, the term "darkness" is shorthand for spiritual helplessness and ignorance. Without the Word, men walk in darkness. They have no light to see their way. They are blind.

In a few verses, John speaks about how "He [Jesus] 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" (1:10-11). And throughout the rest of John, we'll see how Jesus is rejected. Yet, before all that drama, John states at the onset that the Light is not "overcome" by the darkness. "In John, light and darkness are no equally matched duality, but in the battle between Jesus and Satan, Jesus, "the light," is the overwhelming victor."¹⁶ If a sole match can turn suffocating darkness into mere shadows, how much more can the light of Jesus overcome the darkest night? He could walk into the heart of a black hole and make it shine.

A significant theme throughout John's account is the battle between forces of darkness and the Light (cf. 3:19; 8:12; 12:35, 46; 1 Jn. 1:5-6; 2:8-11).¹⁷ In fact, the crucifixion was the glorification

¹⁵ Kruse (2017), p. 57.

¹⁶ Köstenberger (2008), p. 32.

¹⁷ Carson (1991), p. 119.

of the Son. Even on the darkest day in human history, John insists that Jesus never shined brighter.

READ: John 12:32 (ESV)

“...when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

Like a lone light on a dark horizon, Jesus stands in striking relief against the backdrop of our hopeless existence. Though only a few may find it, he beckons all to come to him. And those who find him will be given the glorious light of Jesus Christ.

So, what’s the takeaway?

The **Word** is the **light** of men.

READ: John 3:16-21 (ESV)

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

There is no light apart from Christ. There is no life without Jesus.

Video Description

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SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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Pastor’s manuscript can be found here: <https://docdro.id/fn2QFRU>

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