

The Word – *John 1:1-5*

Introduction – The Gospel of John opens very differently than the other three gospels. The “*synoptics*” have much in common with their narratives; very few events and discourses in John’s gospel overlap with the others. What is called “*the prologue*” (vv1-18) sings like the overture of a musical or opera, touching on multiple themes that will be unpacked throughout the book. Deeply profound, yet simple to read (one of the easiest New Testament books to translate), it is often offered as the first gospel to read to those questioning who Jesus is, and at the same time is full of deep, cosmic truths that require long marinating and meditating over. John makes clear his intentions – “*...but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name*” (20:31). Considering the course of human history over the last two thousand years, it can be said that John has and is accomplishing his goal. In fact, even in these first five verses we can see the confident optimism of John as he proclaims Who Jesus is, Where He has come from, and What He was sent to do.

A Bit About John – We’ll save an outline and overview of the book for later, but a bit here about the author, John. He names himself as the “*disciple whom Jesus loved*” (21:7, 20, 24). Interestingly, a comparison of Mark 16:1, Matt 27:56, and John 19:25 gives good evidence that John was the Lord’s first cousin, the son of Mary’s sister, Salome. This helps make sense of the fact that Jesus turns over the care of his mother to John as He dies on the cross (John 19:25-27).

While John was a fisherman, he probably was not a “poor” fisherman. His father had hired servants (Mark 1:20) and his mother was one of the women who financially supported Jesus’ ministry (Luke 8:3). John seems to have respectable connections, being known to the high priest (John 18:15-16) so well that he was able to get Peter into the area where Jesus was being tried.

John probably remained in Jerusalem for at least fourteen years following the resurrection (Gal 2:9). Irenaeus, an early church father, records that John later moved, with the Lord’s mother, to Ephesus, where he wrote his gospel and later was exiled to the island of Patmos during the tribulation of the church (Rev 1:9).

Opening Words About the Word (vv1-2) – John is choosing a title-name for Jesus carefully, using Genesis language to declare who the Word was before creation and what the Word did in creation (vv3-4). The term, “*logos*,” in Greek thought, indicates the principle of reason and a transcendent logic over mankind and creation. However, John throws this into a Hebraic context with his “*in the beginning*.” There are four things we learn about the Word in verse 1. The Word, just like God, was preexistent (he already existed) before creation. The Word was “with” God – and the preposition does not denote simply “alongside” or some casual contact. He was intimately communing with God. But it also distinguishes the Word from God. “God” (as used here in v1, meaning “the Father”) was not the Word and the Word was not God (meaning, “the Father” – as so much of John will make clear in chapters to come). Finally, “the Word was God.” The Word shared the essence of the godhead with God. Distinct and yet fully God. And so, in Genesis, “*Let Us make man in Our image*” is profound, and yet makes total sense. It also hints as to why God “*spoke*” the creation into existence (Gen 1:4, Heb 11:3, Psalm 33:6, 9). After “the Word was God,” John reiterates these essential truths: the Word that was God was also with God and was there with God before the creation of anything (v2). “*The Logos is the final and absolute revelation of God, embodied in God’s own Son, Jesus Christ. Christ is the Logos because in Him all the purposes, plans, and promises of God are brought to a final focus and an absolute realization*” (Lenski). Our words are personal. God’s Word is a Person. Our words are distinct from us and imperfectly represent us. God’s Word is distinct from Him and is “*the exact imprint of His nature (hypostasis)*” (Heb 1:3 ESV).

Creation by Word (v3) – And so God did not simply utter words as when a man utters a command and we hear the sound of words. God speaks and the Son is revealed in His omnipotent and creative personal power. Jer 10:11 says that the false gods have not created the heavens and the earth. Only God creates. The Word created all things. Therefore, the Logos is God. What did the Word make? “All things.” How were they made? “through Him.” What was made without Him? “nothing.” Let that sink in. Paul says the same thing in Col 1:15-17 and in Heb 1:2.

Salvation by Word (v4) – From the creative work of the Word, John turns to the life-giving (and life-saving) work of the Word. John will use “*zoe*” (life) multiple times in his gospel. This is not “*bios*” (biological life) but more than that, life in its fullest sense, the eternal and blessed life which is and comes from God – and comes from being “with” God. And the life that is in the Word is light to the souls of men. And “light” will be prominent throughout this gospel. Light, life, word-command – these are all reflective of the powerful creating purposes of God – and His powerful recreating powers of salvation as well (2 Cor 4:1-6, esp. v6).

What Can Stop This Creative Word, Life, Light? (v5) – Darkness is introduced in this verse, again reminding us of Genesis (Gen 1:2-3). When God said, “*Let there be light*” there was light and there was no stopping it. So what hope are we to see in this verse? Notice he does not say that the light “shone” but rather the light (presently) “shines” in the darkness (this present situation of a sin-infested world). I prefer the translation for the last phrase “*and the darkness did not overcome it*” to “*did not comprehend it*” although both are possible, and both can make sense. John uses the same word in 12:35 “*A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you.*” Sit in the darkness of pre-dawn and watch a sunrise. You might think for a few minutes that the darkness can hinder that light, but what always happens every day? “*And the darkness did not overcome it.*”

Darkness is a metaphor for sin and for a sinful walk (John 3:19-21, 8:12, 12:35). John is describing here a New Creation by means of the same Word that first spoke creation into existence. In a world of darkness and death, the Word brings light and life because He is light and life. His first creation was perfect. It was very good (Gen 1:31) and brought great blessing (Gen 2:1-3). Nothing stopped the first creation. Certainly nothing will stop the new creation. To be a Christian is to believe that God has brought life and light, forgiveness and salvation to you – and to the world (John 3:17). Meditate in this gospel and find the deepest confidence in the omnipotent Creator of the New Life. This is gospel salvation. It is both declared and offered. It is declared objectively and without our permission. It is offered in time and space here and now to you – and to our generation.

This Present Darkness – Well then, why is there so much darkness in the world two thousand years after the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us? Let’s use the pre-dawn illustration again and then consider some verses. If you were sitting in near complete darkness, with only a hint of light on the horizon, you might think that the darkness had overcome the light. You might think that the darkness was winning. That is what many Christians think. But what if I told you you were facing east when you thought you were facing west? What if we are still in the pre-dawn, the future ancient church?

A Blessing through Abraham to All Nations – Gen 12:3 – we’re not there yet

A Child Would be Born to Rule the Nations – Isaiah 9:6-7 - we’re not there yet

His Death Would Draw All Peoples to Himself – John 12:31-32 - we’re not there yet

The Kingdom Will Progressively Grow – Matt 13:31-33 - we’re not there yet

Finally – “*If no one less than the Eternal God, the Creator and Preserver of all things, could take away the sin of the world, sin must be a far more abominable thing in the sight of God than most men suppose*” – Ryle. But then, “*We are great sinners – but we have a great Savior.*”

Throughout the next few chapters, John will show forth seven signs to reveal who Jesus is, followed by an eighth. Each sign will have discourses with Jesus as men are forced to encounter Him, like darkness encountering light. Many will believe in Him and many will hate Him. Jesus will declare Himself to be the “I AM” in seven metaphorical pronouncements. John writes all of this, he says, so that we would believe and have life in His name. The Spirit blows where it wishes, just like the wind (John 3:8). He has every intention of bringing life to the world. And that means, by faith, you are commanded to know that He has the audacity of bringing you out of darkness and sin and into that life and light that is our great Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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