



INTRO:

Ya Ready? I am BECAUSE it is not an exaggeration to say that THE most important person in human history/regardless of what you think about Him...is Jesus Christ - this guy who was born into poverty and obscurity in every way, BUT who throughout His life was: witnessed to have done miracles which created huge buzz...Was able to convince those closest to him that he was God, when mind you, those closest to Him were 1st century Jews, and therefore the LEAST likely of all people to believe such a thing, given their OT, monotheistic mindset...He was witnessed to have resurrected in a way in which had just ONE of the witnesses ever recanted, it would've rendered Christianity fraudulent and never let it get off the ground...AND in between it all had what Dr. Peter Kreeft over here at Boston College called a kind of "shocking" effect on people. As he says, *"Those who met Jesus always experienced either joy or its opposites, either foretastes of Heaven or...Hell. Not everyone who met Jesus was pleased, and not everyone was happy, BUT everyone WAS shocked."*...It's one of the many reasons why historian Huston Smith noted that, only two figures in history have ever lived so radical a life that it caused people not to ask WHO they were, but WHAT they were. Those two figures being Jesus and Buddah. The difference though being that, as people worshipped Buddah, he wouldn't accept the worship and instead pointed people to his teachings; WHILE JESUS, not only accepted people's worship unequivocally, but did so saying that He was God and worthy to BE worshipped!

There's no doubt that Jesus is THE most important person in human history, which MEANS, perhaps THE most important thing YOU could ever do is dedicate yourself to taking an honest look AT Him...WHICH...is exactly what we're gonna do this next season together! We're gonna take an honest/no-holds-bar look at the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Gospel of John. *You say why John vs Matthew, Mark, or Luke?* Well, because John's Gospel is not only the most famous account of Jesus, but the last written BY, as it's name implies, the Disciple John, who was not only in Jesus' inner circle and therefore a witness to Jesus' life, BUT recorded his gospel later IN life. And so really, its an account by one who'd not just witnessed Jesus, but with time, maturity and wisdom learned how to UNDERSTAND the things he'd witnessed ABOUT Jesus. And so John is really the best person to give us advice and help us on our respective spiritual journeys, because he's someone who's traveled the road before us¹ and even his 21 chapters, to help YOU come to your own conclusion ABOUT Jesus.

So here's how you gotta think about this series: I want you to treat it like you would a great TV show that you're just getting into...meaning, bare minimum, ya need to be here each week ready to check out the next "episode"/next passage, cuz each new passage is gonna shed a little more light on the whole series...So really, think of THESE gatherings like you'd think about going to the theater. When we open with our Welcome and Call to Worship, that's as if someone is dimming the lights, opening the curtains, and inviting the actors on stage. THEN when we open the Gospel of John each week together, we're getting to watch the drama of Jesus' unbelievable life and ministry unfold...UNTIL at the end of each of our gatherings, we're sent out together - like you might be sent out during an intermission between acts...You do that/commit like that,

¹ William Barclay

and I PROMISE/by the end of this series, you will not only have encountered the most important person in the history, you very well may have been encountered BY Him... So without further adieu: Let's STAND and follow along as we hear the reading of our first passage in this Gospel: **John 1:1-5**. Follow along together... **(PAUSE RECORD)**

TEXT:

There's an oft-repeated story of a mother, who approaches her 4-year-old son who's drawing a picture. She says, "*Sweetie, what are you drawing?*" And the little boy says, "*I'm drawing God.*" So his mom, with one of those "oh that's so cute but naive" smiles says, "*Sweetie, that's great, but you know: No one knows what God looks like.*" To which the little boy without missing a beat says, "*They will when I'm done.*"² And of course, the reason we think, "*oh that's cute*" is cuz like that mother, we assume that if there IS a God, at best we have to IMAGINE what He's like. And at worst we could never know. And sure, you might be able to know some things ABOUT God - ya know through observation - just like you can know some things about people by observing em. But the truth is: unless someone tells you who they are, you can't really know em. BECAUSE it's someone's WORD that's the clearest expression of who they are!

When **v.1** begins here saying, "*In the beginning was the Word...*," which later **v.18** names as Jesus/Jesus as "the word" - what John is kicking off with is an utterly radical claim that Jesus Christ is THE clearest expression of who God is. He's "the word!" Now, in Hebrew thought the idea of "The Word" was evocative for divine power. God created the world by His word right, according to **Genesis 1**? He spoke through the OT prophets by His word/gave Israel the Law by speaking a word to Moses. Every time God did something of significance in the OT, it was through His...word. John's drawing on that understanding here. BUT He's also drawing on the Greek thought of his day too. And not to get overly academic here, but there was a philosopher who predated Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, named Heraclites. And being Greek, Heraclites didn't have a concept of a messiah like the Hebrews did. So HE taught that the world was full of chaos and disorder - woulda made a great pundit on Fox or CNN. BUT he said, even though the world's filled with tremendous chaos, there are, of course, traces of harmony and order throughout the world. So what he postulated is that there had to be a governing force/a LOGIC keeping everything together - something he called, "the Logos," literally translated, "*The Word.*"³

And so what John's doing at the beginning here is, not only, bringing these two seemingly opposite worldviews - the Hebrew and Greek worldviews - into harmony, BUT He's taking it a step further and saying that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of both/represents God's creative power, but also His sustaining force! Jesus is the clearest expression of God. ***He's the word!*** So what do we learn about Jesus AS the word? Or to use the analogy of the little boy drawing, what kind of picture can we accurately put together of God. Well, I think ya see **3 Things here:** ***First***, ya see that Jesus...is fully God! It says, "*The Word WAS God,*" was "*WITH God,*" and was "*IN the beginning.*" I've heard a lot of messages about God creating the world, but how

² Story cited in D. A. Carson, "Jesus Christ the God-Man," in *D. A. Carson Sermon Library* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2016), Jn 1:1-18.

³ Insight about Heraclites from "JESUS THE WORD - 10-1-2000 - Gospel of John: John 1:1-18, *Mark Driscoll Sermon Archive 2000-2004* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2000).

often do we talk about Jesus being the one who actually put pen to paper and brush stroke to canvas? Cuz that's what it says. "*Jesus was in the beginning and all things were made through him, and without him nothing was made.*" Fully God! So we're not talking about merely some **enlightened sage**, ya know, on par with like Deepak Chopra, or Elon Musk, or...the great Nicolas Cage...And nor are we talking about someone, who as Thomas Jefferson said, was merely a great moral teacher, who did well to "*spread the gospel of liberty, fraternity, and equality across ancient Palestine.*" No! We're talking about One who, as Dallas Willard said, "*literally knew how to transform the molecular structure of water in order to make it wine. (One who could) create matter from the energy that He knew how to access from the heavens where he was...Could transform the tissues of the human body from sickness to health and death to life. Could suspend gravity, interrupt weather patterns, eliminate unfruitful trees without an ax, but only a word.*" Willard says, "*Jesus has got to be amused at what we award Nobel prizes for today.*"... The first thing we see here is that Jesus is God!...And **Friends**, if that's true, then it means, "you can't have halfway measures following Jesus."⁴ It means it's not enough to simply believe-in or obey Him like you might believe-in gravity or obey the speed limit. No, if He's fully God, He's to be worshipped and savored. Given central priority in your life - priority in your decisions, desires, where ya live, what you do with you money, who you date/don't date, how you treat your body...all of it!⁵...***Do you see Jesus as fully God like that? Would the way you live evidence that you believe Jesus to be fully God and God to be expressed in Jesus?***

Second, you see He's not JUST God! Jesus is a real, flesh-n'-blood person too! Notice the word "*He.*" "*HE was in the beginning... All things were made through HIM... Without HIM was not any thing made. In HIM was life.*" He's a real, flesh-n'-blood person. And I know that might sound elementary - like, of course Jesus was a person. But understand, if God became truly human, then among other things, that means you have a remarkable resource IN Jesus, with which to face pain and suffering...Back in the 60's there was a well known violent crime in New York City against a woman named Kitty Genovese. Sadly, she was going home to her apartment late one night, and was assaulted on the street. And so as it's happening she's crying out, "*Help. Help. He's stabbing me!*" And there was a lot of debate about what happened, but the one thing that seemed clear is that as she was yelling, people in their apartments above, heard her. Many flipped on their lights and looked out to SEE her being attacked...But no one came down to the street to help/incredibly sad!...And ya know WHY no one came down? Because that woulda required risking THEIR life/making THEMSELF vulnerable/putting THEMSELF in harm's way. In saying that Jesus is not just fully God, but fully human too, what John's telling you is that God has come down to the street. Come down the ladder into humanity as it were. Made HIMSELF vulnerable...to save you! Cuz of course, Jesus didn't just come down to you and me the way those people in their apartments could've come down to that lady at the risk of their lives. No! He came down knowing it would COST His life. He became vulnerable/even...killable.⁶ So as

⁴ The Word Made Flesh - Christmas—December 13, 2009 - John 1:1–14 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

⁵ Explanation about worship and priority adapted from article "Christmas: So What!" - By Dr. Timothy Keller

⁶ NYC Crime story cited in and adapted from The Word Made Flesh - Christmas—December 13, 2009 - John 1:1–14 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

Don Skinner says, *“It’s not that God SENT Jesus to you, but rather God CAME to you IN Jesus. Came from “His side” to “your side” without ever leaving “His own side.”*

Think about how tremendous of a resource that is for when you face pain and suffering. Cuz it means that no matter how dark things might get for you, you have one who in being fully human, understands you, gets you, knows everything about you, AND has been where you’ve been but come out the other side! The famous British poet Dorothy Sayers put it perfectly. She said/*listen*, *“This means that for whatever reason God chose to let us fall into a condition of being limited, to suffer, be subject to sorrows and death - He has nonetheless had the honesty and the courage to take His own medicine...(To) Himself (and for YOU) go through the whole of human experience - from trivial irritations of family life; cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money...to the worst horrors of pain, humiliation, defeat, despair, and death...AND He thought it well worth his while.”*⁷ Knowing that God isn’t some distant divine, but rather a real flesh-n-blood person gives you real courage and fortitude. Cuz as the Apostle Paul said in **Romans 8:31**, *“if God is for (you), who (or what) can be against (you)?”* **Do you know Jesus like that?** Or maybe better said, **do you see Jesus not merely as one who might help or love you, given that He’s God, but one who actually LIKES you, since He was willing to become just...like you?**

And then **Finally**, we see here that Jesus as this uncreated/divine, but also flesh-n’-blood person...is the source of all your life and happiness. It says, *“In him was life.”* So NOT He HAS life and then distributes it out, as if God is some cosmic vending machine, but *“in Him IS life.”* So we’re not talking about some theologically shallow, therapeutic Jesus, who’s merely out to give you what you want apart from Him...but rather is out to give you...HIM! Cuz as C.S. Lewis famously said, *“God can’t give you peace and happiness apart from Himself, because there’s no such thing.”* And even if that’s hard for us to admit - especially in our “Bachelor/Bachelorette” culture in which joy, happiness, passion, and life is just one date/one experience/one promotion away, I think we all get it - GET that true life and happiness apart from the One in whom all life exists...is a myth! Heck, that great prophet from the early 2000’s - the Notorious B.I.G./Biggie - told us as much when he rapped, *“no money, no problems!”* Before him the German Philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer said, *“Man is never happy, but spends his whole life striving after something he thinks will make him so.”*

In Greek Mythology, there was a figure known as King Tantalus, who was thought to be the son of the god Zeus. And in the myth, Tantalus was found guilty of having given the “secrets of the gods” to mortal men. And so his punishment was to be placed in the river Hades with the water coming up to his chin and delicious fruits dangling on branches above his head. But every time Tantalus got thirsty and lowered his chin to drink, the water would recede. And every time he reached out to grab a piece of fruit, the branch would rise. So “TANTALIZINGLY-SO” refreshment and fulfillment for his eternal thirst and hunger were always just out of his reach. The moral being that when you reach for fulfillment in things outside of Jesus, you’ll soon

⁷ Quote cited in article “Christmas: So What!” - By Dr. Timothy Keller

discover, it's always just outside your reach.⁸ Precisely BECAUSE of what John says here: That its In JESUS - not your job, marriage, health, hobbies - but Jesus that life is found!

So here's the good news in all this: When you see that/believe that Jesus, as this uncreated, divine, but also flesh-n'-blood person, is the source of all your life and happiness, you...can take an early retirement. By which I mean retire from the never-ending, exhausting, and ultimately unfruitful hamster-wheel of looking for that perfect spouse, perfect job, perfect body, perfect work-life balance, perfect anything you think might bring you happiness. It's not there! BECAUSE it's in Christ. Again, it says, "*In Him was life.*" And Friend, in being in Christ, that means the life OF Christ is both offered TO you, AND can never be taken FROM you. That's what John means when he says, "*The light - the light of men - shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*" It doesn't say, "*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness WILL NOT overcome it,*" but rather "*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness HAS NOT overcome it.*" It's a fixed reality! All life/all your happiness wrapped up in the One in whom IS all life and FROM whom all life comes...And that's regardless of whether you believe it or not...***Remember the Christmas movie Elf?*** Will Ferrell/Zoey Deschanel? At the end, Santa can't get his sleigh to fly unless all the folks in Central Park really believe right? And that's because Santa's ability to fly wasn't a fixed reality. It was conditioned upon belief and a "Christmas spirit."⁹...Friends, this might be obvious...but Jesus ain't Santa. He doesn't need your belief to do anything. Rather, your belief simply awakens you to what He's already done/ allows you to enjoy the fixed reality that is the light, life and happiness that's already IN Him!

So ***don't you see?*** Not only do we NOT have to imagine what God is like, but John begins his gospel by giving us this eye-witness, historical, beautiful picture...in which we see on the one hand, that Jesus is God, which quite simply means God has landed and demands your worship today. But also that Jesus is man, which means He cares for and comes alongside you to the uttermost...And as the God-Man - the One who was in the beginning; through whom all things have been made; and in whom is all life - you're simply invited today to - like a rebel laying down arms - surrender all your efforts at finding life and happiness outside of Him, and open yourself TO Him - the Word who desires to flood your life with a light that NO darkness can or has overcome! ***Will you open yourself to Him?...Let's Pray!***

⁸ Story cited in *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations: Stories, Quotes And Anecdotes from More Than 30 Years Of Preaching* - p.194

⁹ Illustration cited in podcast "#45. What's The Word" - May 17, 2022 - Larkcast