

Who is Jesus? Part 1 (John 1:1-5)

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From the earliest years of life, we learn to ask questions. The first time a toddler says, "Why, Daddy?" it's cute. We celebrate their newfound power of inquiry and are happy to reply. When they ask for the 10th time in as many minutes other words start coming to mind and we say things like, "Because I said so." On the whole, our questions start out innocent enough: "Daddy, where did Mommy go?" Daddy, why is the sky blue?"

Before too long, however, the difficulty level begins to creep upward, "Dad, why did my fish have to die? Hey Dad, where do babies come from? When can I have a smart phone? Can I go to prom? What should I write on my financial aid application? Where should I work? Where should I live? Who should I marry? The list goes on.

We ask questions to gain understanding. We ask questions to express sorrow. We ask questions to demonstrate care for someone. We ask questions to voice wonder and amazement. Some questions are rather trivial. Some questions really matter. Many of the most important questions we ask are rarely spoken aloud: "Who am I? What's my identity? What's wrong with the world? Why is my life so messed up? What will make it right? Where will I place my hope for the future?"

Take all the questions you have ever asked. Consider all the questions you will ever ask. There is one among them, friends, that matters more than any other. It's easy to ask, harder to answer, and yet you are functionally answering it every moment of every day: Who is Jesus?

When you're trapped in a dead-end job or can't make ends meet, who is Jesus? Non-existent, unconcerned, or faithful provider? When you feel stuck in a joyless marriage, when you've been on 100 dates or no dates and still aren't married, who is Jesus? Wringing his hands? MIA? Or sustaining you morning by morning? When your family disowns you, when your relative abuses you, when your friend disappoints you, who is Jesus? When you're changing another diaper, resolving another conflict, or anticipating another medical bill, who is Jesus? When you're scrolling through Netflix, or deciding what to wear, what to say, how to spend your weekend, or how to spend your money, who is Jesus?

If you're a non-Christian, the honest answer might lie somewhere between irrelevant and an inspiring example. Or maybe you've recently started reading God's Word with a Christian friend and are beginning to wonder if he matters more than you once thought he did. Your conscious answer could be biblically correct. Maybe you grew up in church

and think you know all about Jesus. Or maybe there was a point in your life where you grasped your need for deliverance from sin and death and trusted Jesus to save you.

If you consider yourself a Christian, remember this: "Who is Jesus?" isn't a question we settle once and for all and then move on. It's not a test we pass to get a green stamp on our passport to heaven, "Oh yeah, I figured out who Jesus is. I'm good to go." No, it's a question we're answering every moment of every day whether we realize it or not. The gospel of John was written to help us get the answer right.

John 20:30-31, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these 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."

From turning water into wine in John 2 to raising Lazarus from the dead in John 11, the seven formal "signs" or miracles Jesus performs in John reveal the truth of his identity – he is the Christ, God incarnate, our only hope for salvation from sin and the death our sins deserve. The proximate goal of the gospel, however, is not the mere acquisition of knowledge about Jesus. John isn't a biography in the traditional sense where the author's singular mission is to help us grasp the course of a historical figure's life. What does verse 31 say? "...These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God..."

Wholehearted reliance on Jesus in light of who he is – that's the proximate goal of the gospel. Yet faith in him is never an end in and of itself. It's a means to a greater end. The ultimate goal of the gospel is that by believing Jesus we may "have life in his name" – an abiding joy, peace, and satisfaction that no suffering or sorrow can ever take away. As Jesus himself declares in John 10:10, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

A deep and abiding faith in Jesus producing an enduring and abundant life in Jesus is the goal of the Gospel of John. It's all about finding life in the Son of God, which is why I'm excited to spend the next eighteen months or so preaching through John on Sunday mornings. Because every moment of every day, the most important question we're answering is, "Who is Jesus?"

The Fourth Gospel is formally anonymous, though all the historical evidence points to the Apostle John, and most scholars date John to the latter part of the 1st century. John readily divides into 4 sections. The prologue (1:1-18) introduces Jesus as the main character of the story. The book of Signs (1:19-12:50) establishes his identity as the Eternal Son of God. The book of Glory includes Jesus' farewell discourse (13-17) and the



passion narrative (18-20). The epilogue in chapter 21 concludes with Jesus commissioning his followers and John confirming his purpose for writing.

Perhaps my favorite verse in the whole book is found at the very end. John 21:25, "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." How could John say that? Because the glory of Christ in his person and work is inexhaustible. Psalm 145:3 is right. "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable."

And consider this: Jesus didn't stop doing things when he ascended to heaven. He's still working and moving all over the world today. The story he's writing in your life right now, the work he's doing in our church right now, that too is part of the books that could be written. John 21:25 reminds us that no matter how we've been following Jesus, we'll never outgrow your need to understand who he is, what he's doing, and why we should trust him.

The prologue introduces some of the key themes in the gospel of John, concepts that we'll return to again and again. For the sake of time, we'll limit our attention this morning to the first 5 verses where we discover six of the most important answers to the question, "Who is Jesus?" So let's turn our attention to verse 1, "In the beginning was the Word..."

Later in verse 14 John will explicitly identify the Word as Jesus. Up to that point, however, he simply refers to him as the Word or the *logos*. He's not borrowing from Greek philosophy. He's drawing from the Jewish Old Testament where the Word of God is connected to God's self-expression in creation, revelation, and salvation.

By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made. By the Word of the Lord God disclosed himself to his people. By the Word of the Lord God accomplished salvation for his people through judgment on their enemies. The Word of the Lord is so intimately associated with God's person and work that to reject or oppose his Word is to reject or oppose him. We don't intuit God's existence, nature, or will for our lives through some sort of 6th sense. He confronts us and makes himself known to us through the power and majesty of his Word.

The God of the universe is not a God who hides or waits to be discovered by men. It is of his very nature to reveal himself. What a gift that is, my friends! The weight of initiative, the weight of determination, the burden of discovering and ascertaining the truth about God does not rest on you. We don't survey assorted religious teachings

from various corners of the world and piece together our own "take." We don't construct God or invent God. God makes himself known to us. We don't create the truth. We receive the truth.

And John calls Jesus "the Word" because he is the climactic and definitive revelation of the person and glory of God. Hebrews 1:1-2, "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..." Even more literally, long ago God made himself known to us in a prophet kind of way, but now he has made himself known in a Son kind of way.

If you want to know God, you must deal with the Word of God. You look to Jesus. And when we do, what do we discover?

1) THE WORD IS ETERNAL

Verse 1, "In the beginning was the Word..." That's a deliberate echo on John's part of the very first words of the Bible. Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Before the universe was created, before the stars were born, before the earth appeared and history began, Jesus existed. He transcends the created order because he preexists the created order.

When we look back to the absolute origin of the universe we do not find primordial matter. We find the eternally self-existent Son of God. John 8:58, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." What do the very first words of the Gospel of John accomplish? They decisively banish from our minds all small thoughts of Jesus.

We are finite and mortal. In the beginning, we were not. But Jesus was! He is eternally begotten. And the degree to which we struggle to believe as much is the degree to which we have arrogantly enthroned our own experience as the measure of reality. Everything in our world is governed by time. It had a beginning just like you had a beginning. Jesus doesn't. He isn't bound by time. He created time. Isaiah 57:15, "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity..."

It is good for us to feel small, my friends. It is good to meditate on the ways Jesus is immeasurably greater than we are. It is good for him to increase and us to decrease in the estimation of our feeble minds. The Word is eternal.

2) THE WORD IS ONE WITH GOD

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God..." The word "with" in verse 1 is not a description of proximity or presence. It refers to an intimate personal relationship or close communion. It's John's way of telling us the Word is both personally distinct from God and inseparably unified to God. It's a picture of what theologians call the "Trinity." God is one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit.

The word we translate as "God" in John 1:1, *theos*, is the primary Greek word John uses throughout his gospel to refer to God the Father. So verse 1 tells us the Word, or Jesus, has always been "with God" in the sense that he has always existed in the closest possible relationship with the Father. From eternity past, the person of God the Father has enjoyed the self-expression of his glory in the person of God the Son.

The origin of the universe is not a sea of chaos or rival gods. At the root of all things is eternal, unbroken fellowship within the godhead. It's why Jesus could pray in John 17:5, "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." The Word is one with God.

3) THE WORD IS GOD

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In other words, the Word is both distinct from God and identical to God. Here's where John decisively shatters any Greek notion of the *logos* as some kind of impersonal force of reason or personification of wisdom. John doesn't say the Word is divine or reflects the attributes or likeness of God. He says the Word is God in a qualitative sense – the nature or essence of the Word is the very nature and essence of God.

John is remarkably careful with the grammar of verse 1. He doesn't say, "All that God is the Word is." as if the essence of God were encapsulated or exhausted by the Word. As Edward Klink rightly observes, "The Word is fully God, but God is not fully the Word." Why not? Because God is Father, Son, and Spirit. The nature of God isn't limited to the second person of the Trinity. Yet the Word is fully God because he "contains all the attributes and qualities that God contains."

John is crystal clear about something from the outset of the gospel. When he's talking about Jesus, he's talking about God. He's consciously and explicitly including Jesus within the worldview of Jewish monotheism. Why is that important for us as a reader? Among other reasons, it reminds us we can't just pitch what Jesus says or does into the heap of inspirational teaching from a major religious figure. When Jesus speaks, God is speaking. When Jesus acts, God is acting. When Jesus weeps, God is weeping. The Word

doesn't just show us things about God or reveal the character of God. The Word is God.

Michael Reeves, "God cannot be Word-less, for the Word is God. Here then is a God who could never be anything but communicative, expansive, outgoing. Since God cannot be without this Word, he simply could not ever be reclusive. For eternity this Word sounds out, telling us of an uncontainable God of exuberance and abundance, an overflowing God of surplus, a glorious God of grace...[Jesus] does not merely unveil some truth for us, some other principle or system of thought. Like light going out from its source, this Word actually brings God to us."

We must pay attention to Jesus accordingly, brothers and sisters. We're not reading a biography of a religious figure. In the Gospel of John, God himself confronts us with his manifold excellencies in the person of Jesus.

4) THE WORD IS THE AGENT OF CREATION

Verse 3, "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." Both positively and negatively, what does that tell us? First, it tells us the universe is neither eternal nor accidental. Jesus created it. Second, it tells us Jesus is most definitely not a created being. Why not? Because he's the Creator. Everything that has been made – everything that has been created – has been created by him.

1 Corinthians 8:6, "...There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." If God the Father is the source of creation, God the Son is the agent of creation.

Why is that important to remember as we jump into the Gospel of John? Because sometimes we're tempted to think Jesus doesn't really get the reality of life in this world. He seems distant and removed. We're living in the physical world. He exists in some kind of spiritual neverland. Conclusion? He might have some helpful things to say, but ultimately, I have to decide what works for me.

Friend, Jesus understands. He "gets" the world you live in immeasurably better than you do because you didn't make it. He did! Nothing in your world – no aspect of your embodied existence – falls outside the borders of his perfect wisdom because he created the world. He knows what is good because he created what is good. He knows how things are supposed to be because he created them the way they were supposed to be.

And he's not combating evil alongside us like some sort of Middle Earth ally confined to a universe that dwarfs him no less than the rest of us. The one who walked the dusty streets of Jerusalem was, at the exact same time, upholding the universe by the word of his power. Colossians 1:16, "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." All that you see, every place you will go, every person you will encounter, it's all his, for the Word is the agent of creation.

Michael Reeves, "Sadly, so many Christian have a background virus in their understanding of the gospel here. It's not easy to spot, but it eats away at their confidence in Christ. It's this: the sneaking suspicion that while Jesus is a savior, he's not really the Creator of all. So they sing of his love on a Sunday – and there it is true – but walking home through the streets, past the people and the places where Real Life goes on, they don't feel it is Christ's world. As if the universe is a neutral place. As if Christianity is just something we have smeared on top of Real Life. Jesus is reduced to being a little more than a comforting nibble of spiritual chocolate, an imaginary friend who 'saves souls' but not much else. The Bible knows of no such piffling and laughable Christlet. 'Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made' (Jn 1:3)."

5) THE WORD IS THE SOURCE OF LIFE

Look back at verse 4, "In him was life..." Tomorrow morning, I'll take my oldest son to Chick-fil-a for breakfast because that's what we do on the first Monday of every month. We go Chick-fil-a because in the kitchen of that restaurant are mouth-watering bites of lightly breaded nuggets with an assortment of tantalizing sauces.

But think about it. The chicken didn't start there, did it? It started on a farm, was shipped to a meat processing plant, then it went to a food distributor, who eventually delivered the uncooked pieces of chicken breast to our local Chick-fil-a. The chicken is in the restaurant, but it didn't originate in the restaurant.

Not so with the life that is in Jesus Christ. "In him was life," not because he found life or acquired life from somewhere else, but because life has always resided in him. He is self-existent. No one gave him life. He has eternally possessed life – not only in an existential sense, but also in an emotional and affective sense.

Jesus has, from eternity past, been infinitely joyful, infinitely content, and infinitely at peace. He has never been unsatisfied. He is the giver of life because he is the source and

fountain of all life. He gives us life in a physical sense as our Creator. And he gives us life in a spiritual sense as our Redeemer.

The fact that life is found in him tells us just how different Jesus is from all the spiritual gurus out there who claim to have discovered the path of health and prosperity. Jesus doesn't stand in the marketplace of religious figures calling out like the beer guy at a Flying Squirrels game, "Life here. Life here. Get your life here!" No! He gives us life by giving us himself. Why? John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life..."

Sadly, many professing Christians talk about and treat Jesus as a means to another end. Follow Jesus and he'll make all your material dreams come true, your kids will start behaving, your bills will get paid, your health will improve, your self-esteem will grow, your spouse will move back in. You name it, Jesus can deliver it. Don't call Grub Hub. Call Jesus!

What's the great lie behind that way of thinking? That life is something outside of Jesus that he merely delivers to us. That's impossible. Why? Because life is found in him. He is your life, Friend. In him is fullness of joy. At his right hand are pleasures forevermore. Don't reduce him to a vending machine. Come to him, trust him, cast yourself upon him as the only source of life.

6) THE WORD IS THE LIGHT OF MEN

Verse 4, "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."

What did God say at the beginning of creation in Genesis 1? "Let there be light," and there was light. Do you realize that was Jesus speaking, friends? He created the sun. He created the stars. He created the moon. But he doesn't just create light. He is the light. The life in him was and is the light of men. Life emanated from him in creation and life continues to emanate from him in redemption.

How does Jesus give light to men in redemption? He teaches us to see the depth of our sin and rebellion against the Lord, that we all deserve his judgment. He shows us that no one is good enough to earn God's love and acceptance. He tells us that he came to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He lived our life – perfectly obeying the Father. He died our death – atoning for all our transgressions. Even now, he holds forth his nail-scarred hands to you, my friend, inviting you to turn from your sins and follow him.

And for all who have made that choice, he continues to shine forth in all satisfying splendor through the pages of his Word, drawing our hearts away from the vanities of this life to trust and obey him more and more. Jesus is “the light of men” because he delights to enlighten our hearts and help us see that no one is more beautiful, valuable, or satisfying than him. He is all that we need. And it’s only when we see Jesus for who he really is that we can see anything else in this world for what it really is. You’ll never see, feel, or think about anything else rightly until you see it in light of Jesus.

Jesus is the light of men and he shines his light, he manifests his triumphant power and glory, in the darkness of our sin and wickedness. And to this day (verse 5), “the darkness has not overcome it.” Tolkien’s novel, *The Return of the King*, finds Frodo and Sam in the evil land of Mordor. As night begins to fall, they collapse under a curtain of brambles, weary and exhausted. Sometime later Sam crawls out of their hiding place and looks up.

“There, peeping among the cloud-wrack above a dark tor high up in the mountains, Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty forever beyond its reach.”

How do we know that? How can that be true amidst all evil and suffering in our world today? It’s true because 2,000 years ago, the crucified Son of God walked out of the tomb alive. Death could not hold him. The weight of our sin could not overcome him. He rose – the firstborn of the new creation. And ever since, the Spirit of God has been in the business of opening spiritually blind eyes to the transcendent beauty and power of the Son of God, seated in heaven, waiting for his enemies to be made a footstool for his feet.

No matter how much the church has been persecuted and oppressed, it has continued to grow. Why? Because the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Christian, the darkness around you, even the darkness within you, is no match for the piercing, redeeming, and restoring power of Jesus. The day is coming. Indeed, in the resurrection of your Savior it has already dawned. Because he rose, you too will rise. Malachi 4:2, “But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.”

CONCLUSION



Jesus is eternal. Jesus is one with God. Jesus is God. Jesus is the agent of creation. Jesus is the source of life. Jesus is the light of men. The gospel of John will return to those themes again and again. Why? John 20:30-31, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these 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."

That's my prayer for this sermon series, brothers and sisters. I'm praying that we would know Jesus, believe Jesus, and find life in Jesus. May the Lord help us, even in the midst of great darkness, to turn our eyes to him.