

Sermon Series: *The Gospel of John*

The Word Was and Is God

John 1:1-5 (ESV)

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

I sense the beginning of these verses are like calling a cab to get a lift to the airport and walking out the front door and seeing the space shuttle parked and waiting. The apostle John is the driver and he's waving out the small window with this huge smile on his face. And you explain, "I just need a ride to the airport, it's just a few miles down the road." And John grins and says, "I'm not taking you to airport, I'm not even taking you to the moon, I'm not even taking you to Mars. I'm taking you on a tour of 127 galaxies and then I'm gonna drop you off in heaven." These opening verses make me feel like we're getting way more than we need! These are sentences. These are linguistic doorways into eternity.

What a strange way to begin the story of someone's life? If you were writing a biography about someone's life, would you begin this way? Who writes like this? This is a completely unlike the other three gospels. None of the other three gospels begin with such a profound and sweeping prologue.

Matthew begins with an extensive genealogy of Jesus. Mark points to the prophecies about John the Baptizer and his role in introducing Jesus. Luke begins with an explanation for why he is writing and then jumps in with the miraculous events surrounding the birth of Jesus. However, the author of this gospel departs far from what we might naturally expect. Why? Why would the author do this? What is he up to?

Who is the Author?

Perhaps we should first answer the question, "Who is writing this?" Who is the author of this letter? We are not explicitly told. The author is not specifically named. However, five times¹ in this gospel, the author refers to "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

Then in the final verses of the letter we get a hint. Peter was walking on the beach talking with Jesus and looked at the "disciple whom Jesus loved" and asked Jesus, "What's going to happen to him?" Jesus replied, "Don't worry about him. He's not your concern." The author then states,

John 21:24 (ESV)

24 This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

¹ John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20; cf. 21:24–25.



The author is “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” He is also one of the Twelve Disciples and therefore an eye witness to all of the events that unfolded surrounding the life of Jesus. It was the “disciple whom Jesus loved” who “leaned on Jesus’ shoulder” (Jn 13:23) at the Last Supper. This disciple is most clearly, John, the brother of James, and the son of Zebedee.

The authorship of John is confirmed by many of the early church fathers, some who were his contemporaries. For example, Polycarp, who lived from c. A.D. 69-155, was a disciple of John, Papias of Hierapolis (c. 70-155 A.D.), Irenaeus (c. 120-202 A.D.), Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 A.D.) and Eusebius of Gaul (c. 263-339 A.D.).² All of these men affirmed Johannine authorship.

John: The Disciple Who Cared for Mary

It was this John to whom Jesus, in His final breath, entrusted the care of His mother (Jn 19:26-27).

John 19:26-27 (ESV)

26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!”

27 Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

Imagine for a moment how that relationship added to this disciple’s understanding of who Jesus was? John had already spent three years with Jesus and personally witnessed all that Jesus did and said. He then took Mary into his home. Presumably, she remained in his care the rest of her life. How many conversations over tea did they have in which Mary poured out to him all the pondering of her heart? Did she not share with him and recount all the wonderful amazing things that she had witnessed about Jesus, a few of which the Scripture tells us she “treasured up in her heart?” Did she bring out her treasures and show them to John?

This Is Not A Biography

So who begins a biography in this way? John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” does. John, one of the Twelve, does. John, the eye-witness of Jesus’ life, does. John, the brother of James does. Except this is **not** a biography, primarily. We can say this is a partial biography.

One of the difficulties of this letter is that John is not primarily concerned about chronology. Completing an unquestionable and cohesive chronology of Jesus’ life through this gospel is a difficult and frustrating task. But this is not John’s purpose. His purpose is not to offer you an unblemished timeline of all the events of Jesus’ life. John is not a historian in that sense. **He is an evangelist.** He is a man whose life has been completely changed by meeting Jesus and he aims to show forth the glory of Jesus so that your life too will be forever changed.

He is a disciple of Jesus who is focused on one task: **awakening faith in and deepening worship of Jesus of Nazareth as the one and only Son of God and the one and only source of eternal life.** He has both in mind: awakening faith and deepening worship. He writes to bring unbelievers to faith and to deepen the worship of those who already have faith. John wants you and I to meet the same Jesus

² Colin G. Kruse, *John: The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Vol. 4, Gen. ed. Leon Morris. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 24-25.

he met. John wants you to believe in Jesus and be convinced that He is the unique Son of God and the unique source of eternal life.

Therefore, John begins the way he does because it accords with his purpose. His point is very clear. He states his entire goal from the very beginning. This is why he writes the way he does in the first eighteen verses. He does not make you wait until the end to give you the punch line. He unfolds it all at the very beginning. The identity of Jesus is the central issue. Every sentence of the book is pointing to illustrating the true identity of Jesus. You cannot read the gospel of John and avoid the question, “Who is Jesus?” Let’s watch how he does this.

Four Facts About the Word

John begins his gospel with a discussion of the Word. He points out four facts about the Word.

1. The Word’s relation to time (v. 1-2).
2. The Word’s relation to God. (v.1-2).
3. The Word’s relation to creation (v.3).
4. The Word’s relation to man, i.e. humanity (v.4-5).

1) The Word’s Relation To Time

John 1:1 (ESV)

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

John’s full attention is on **the Word**, therefore, he wants the attention of his readers to focus on “the Word.” He begins by stating, “**In the beginning was the Word.**” We might ask, “In the beginning of what?” The similarity with the language of the opening words of Genesis gives us the answer. It’s almost impossible not to be reminded of the very first words of Genesis. The Bible begins with this phrase, “*In the beginning...*”

There is incredible similarity between the first five verses of John and the first five verses of Genesis. Both reference “the beginning.” Both mention God. Both reference creation. In both, God speaks and He creates through His “Word.” Both mention light and darkness.

Genesis 1:1-5 (ESV)

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.

5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

John forces our minds back to the beginning of all things. He is talking about the beginning of the universe. He is talking about the beginning of all created matter, even the beginning of time itself. His point is that **prior to the beginning of all things, the Word already existed.** The **Word** “was” in the beginning. Before the point at which the universe came into existence, the Word *already* existed. “Was” is past tense, so before the present tense ever even had a time to be present tense in, the Word was already past tense.

The Word predates the beginning of time. The Word is older than time itself. The Word predates even “the beginning.” The Word possess a kind of existence unlike anything we have ever experienced in this world.

2) The Word’s Relation To God

John continues to develop the idea of the Word by noting the Word’s relation to God.

John 1:1 (ESV)

1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

The Greek word John uses for the “Word” is *logos* (λόγος). The word was highly symbolic and held various meanings in Greek and Hellenistic cultures. In Greek Philosophy, primarily

In Stoic thought, *logos* was Reason, the impersonal principle governing the universe. A spark of universal Reason was thought to reside within people (at least the best and wisest of them), who must live in keeping with it to attain dignity and meaning.³

“As far as [the stoics] were concerned, there is no other god than *logos*, and all that exists has sprung from seminal *logoi*, seeds of this *logos*.”⁴ Is this what John means when he uses the word *logos*? Does “the Word” simply refer to an abstract principle that gave rise to and governs the universe?

The Word Was With God

Look at what He says, “**The Word was with God and the Word was God.**” The Word is *separate from* God because the Word is **with** God. The Greek preposition *pros* (πρός), translated as “with,” not only “indicates place or accompaniment, but also disposition and orientation.” It commonly means “to” or “toward.”⁵ This has caused many scholars to suggest that John might be here hinting at an “active relationship rather than mere co-existence.”

This little preposition effectively does two things; first, it points to a *relationship between God and the Word*, and second, *distinguishes the two from each other*.⁶ A.T. Robertson notes that since *pros* is in the accusative case it connotes that the two are, “face to face with each other.”⁷ This may be going a bit too far, but John is clearly leading his reader away from an impersonal understanding of *logos* and ever closer to a personal understanding of *logos*.

The Word Was God

The Word is *with* God, but John does not stop there. He goes on to say that **the Word was God**. “It is one thing for the Word to be *with* God; it is quite another for the Word to *be* God.”⁸ Yet this is

³ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 26.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 114.

⁵ Carson, 116.

⁶ Köstenberger, 27.

⁷ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Jn 1:1.

⁸ Köstenberger, 28.

exactly what John is claiming. The Word is both **separate from** God, and also **the same as** God. The two are both, different and also the same. Either John is thoroughly confused, a really bad writer, or he stretching the limits of our minds using simple language in order to explain the very essence of God Himself.

The Missing Definite Article

At this point, I should note that in the Greek, *theos* (θεός, God) has no definite article. This has led many to conclude that the appropriate translation should be “And the word was a god.” The Jehovah’s Witnesses are among those who have so concluded. However, it has been clearly demonstrated that there are many places in the New Testament where a noun can have no definite article and yet still be specific.⁹ One example is in this chapter, 1:49. However, one need not argue about Greek grammatical construction because when we get to verse three John will provide a perfectly good argument to clarify all misunderstanding.

Summary of John 1:1

So what have we seen so far? The Word existed before the beginning of time. The Word is separate from but close to God; the Word is *with* God. And third, the Word *is* God. Let’s move on to verse two. (These verses are the foundation stones of the doctrine of the Trinity.)

He Was In the Beginning...

John 1:2 (ESV)

2 He was in the beginning with God.

At first this seems to be a simple repetition of what has already been established in the first verse. However, John adds one word—*houtos* (οὗτος), the singular, masculine, pronoun—“he.” The Word is “He.” The Word is eternal, the Word is distinct from God, the Word the same with God, and **He** is also *personal*. The Word is not some impersonal, rational principle that governs the universe. The Word is a rational, *personal being* who governs the universe. The Word John is talking about is Jesus. We know the Word is Jesus because John tells us so in verse 14.

John 1:14 (ESV)

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.

Whatever might be meant by the term Word, *logos* (Gr. λόγος), John means a person with flesh and bones. He means a son, “the only Son from the Father.” John means Jesus. Jesus is the Word.¹⁰ Jesus existed in the beginning. Jesus was with God and Jesus was God. He was in the beginning with God. John is saying that Jesus is God.

Why Call Jesus “The Word?”

Why refer to Jesus as *logos* (λόγος, i.e. “the Word”)? As long as John had known Jesus, His name was Jesus. Why start calling Him “the Word?” Why use a loaded term with many possible meanings and potential confusion? Why all the drama and mystery? Is this merely a literary device to sell lots of books? And why say that the Word was God? It’s OK to say the Word was *with* God, but the Word was God?

⁹ Carson, 117.

¹⁰ John uses incredibly similar wording in his first epistle. See 1 John 1:1-4.

This makes me want to ask him, “John, why did you write like this? Did you dream this up? Or did you have some help here?” I know there are some pretty creative people in the world, but who thinks like this? And who writes like this? I wonder if John referred to Jesus as the Word because that was the name revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. Jesus did say, “When the Holy Spirit comes, He will lead you into all truth” (Jn 16:13) and “He will glorify Me” (Jn 16:14). There’s one other place in John’s writing where he uses this phrase. It’s found in Revelation 19:13.

The Revelation of John 19:11-13 (ESV)

11 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself.

13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.

This scene was revealed to John by the Holy Spirit (see Rev 1:9-10). Irenaeus reported that John saw this revelation at the end of the reign of Domitian.¹¹ Domitian reign ended A.D 96. The book of Revelation is assumed to have been written in the latter years of the first century and the gospel of John is dated at roughly the same time.¹² The similar dating of the two books can allow for John to have received the Revelation prior to his writing the gospel. If so, then perhaps John refers to Jesus as the Word because, according to the Revelation, that is “the name by which He is called.”

3) The Word’s Relation To Creation

John now moves on to develop the Word’s relation to creation.

John 1:3 (ESV)

3 All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.



John says that *all* created things came into existence through the Word, that is, through Jesus. Every rock, every tree, every mountain, every bird, every animal, every human, every planet, and every galaxy, owe it’s existence to Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the agent of God through whom He created all things. *Every curious wonder in the universe came into existence through Jesus.*

This make sense. If God spoke the world into existence, and Jesus is the Word, then the world was created through Him.

1 Corinthians 8:6 (ESV)

6 yet for us 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.

¹¹ *The Archeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 2043.

¹² The gospel of John probably was written around A.D. 90 while the Revelation of John around A.D. 95. Even if these dates are correct this does not exclude that possibility that John experienced the revelation at some time earlier than it or his gospel was written down and circulated.

Colossians 1:16 (ESV)

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.

Hebrews 1:2 (ESV)

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.

However, you might bump into a Jehovah's Witness who may want to argue with you about the translation of John 1:1 and say, "Jesus is not *the* God, he is *a* god. He is the first and highest created being. Yes, God created all things through Him, because He created Jesus first, and then through Jesus created all other things."

Just read the final phrase of verse three. "***Without Him was not anything made that was made.***" If something was made it was made by Jesus and nothing was made without Him. There is nothing that exists that did not come into existence without Jesus. Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims and others who say that Jesus was created commit the error of Arius (A.D. 256-336). Arius said, "There was once when he was not."¹³ The Arian heresy was condemned in A.D. 325 at the Council of Nicea.

When I was 7 I was an Arian. I could not imagine that Jesus "was in the beginning." My brain could not comprehend the Jesus had always existed. I remember repeatedly asking my mother, "But who created Him? How can He not have a beginning?" My mother said, "Well, when you meet Him you'll have to ask Him."

If Jesus is a created being, then He would have had to create Himself, because "*without Him was not anything made that was made.*" No one makes himself come into existence. It is impossible to have no power and then suddenly possess all power. Nothing cannot create something, but God, speaking through Jesus, created everything that exists.

The Word's relation to creation is that He is the source of all creation and nothing in creation that exists came into existence without Him—nothing, not one thing!

4) The Word's Relation To Man (i.e. Humanity)

Now we turn to the Word's relation to man or to humanity.

John 1:4-5 (ESV)

4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

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

The Word is the source of life itself which, in turn, is the light of men. Jesus is the source of both life and light. John is introducing two terms, life and light, which he will further develop. Life can mean both physical life and spiritual life, but more frequently John uses it to refer to spiritual life. And light in John almost always refers to spiritual clarity. Jesus says in chapter 5,

John 5:26 (ESV)

26 "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself."

¹³ Carson, 114.

John 8:12 (ESV)

12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

What Should Be Our Response?

What is the point of all this? How should we respond to this? I think the answer is found in Psalm 33.

Psalm 33:6-9 (ESV)

6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

7 He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap;
he puts the deeps in storehouses.

8 Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!

9 For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.

I think the point of all of this is verse 8.

Psalm 33:8 (ESV)

8 Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!

The proper response to this is **to stand in awe of Jesus**. John begins this gospel the way he does so that we would be stunned by amazing person of Jesus of Nazareth. He points out His eternal nature so that we would be in awe of Him. He explains that all of creation came into existence through Jesus so that we would see His glory! He is so glorious and powerful that life itself comes from Him! That is amazingly glorious but we just can't see it.

This world is so dark and our eyes so dim that cannot see His glory. It's like straining to see the sun on a cloudy day. You can't see the sun unless you rise above the clouds. It's like flying for the first time, you take off on a foggy, cloudy morning and you wonder where the sun is, then as you rise higher and higher and finally pop through the clouds, you realize that the sun is always shining, but we are simply prevented from seeing it.

Spiritually it is the same. This world is filled with darkness and we need the help of the Holy Spirit in order to properly see the glory of Jesus. Unless the Holy Spirit does something miraculous we will be content to take our eyes off Him and watch TV. Our hearts are so dark that we are perfectly content to turn away from the gazing at the glory of Jesus and go play video games or gaze at the computer or go shopping or anything other than seeking His glory.

So what? What does this have anything to do with our lives in half an hour? What difference does any of this make, today? When you sit down to lunch in a little while and you look across the table at the person seated across from you (whether it's your father or mother or sister or brother or friend), you are looking into the face of someone whose very life came from Jesus Himself. And the body in which their soul currently resides, every fiber of that body, was created by Jesus.

When you walk around the pond later this afternoon or sit in your backyard and listen to the birds sing or listen to the rain or watch the sun go down, you will be watching the creation of Jesus. God spoke this world into existence through Jesus. This world is not the result of a colossal cosmic accident. This world is a result of the personal creative power of God the Father who spoke this world into existence through God the Son, whose name is Jesus.

Jesus did not simply *enter* time, He *started* time.
Jesus was not just a *good* man, He is the *God*-man.
Jesus was not merely a *part* of creation, He is the *source* of creation.
Jesus did not merely *have* life, He *is* life.
Jesus did not show light, He *is* light.
Jesus didn't just know *about* God, He *is* God.
He didn't just stay in heaven, He became flesh and dwelt among us.

Stand in awe of Him! He was and is and forever will be—God.