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JOHN 1:1-18

Today, we begin a six-month study of the *Gospel of John*. As we always like to do when we begin a new book, let's set a little background. Let's look at the **who, what, when, where and why** of this book.

This book was written by the Apostle John. And it was written after Matthew, Mark and Luke wrote their gospels.

Matthew wrote his gospel portraying the Lord Jesus primarily as the **Jewish Messiah** and he wrote primarily for the **Jews**.

Mark's purpose was to reveal Jesus as God's **Suffering Servant** and it was written primarily for the **Romans**.

Luke's purpose was to deal with the **humanity** of Jesus and it was written primarily for the **Greeks**.

Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the synoptic gospels because of the similarity of their content.

But the *Gospel of John* is different.

John didn't write primarily to present Jesus as **Messiah**.

John didn't write primarily to present Jesus primarily as the **Suffering Servant**.

John didn't write primarily to present Jesus in His **humanity**.

John wrote to present **Jesus as God!**

The *Gospel of John* is recommended to folks who are searching for spiritual truth...or who are brand new Christians.

One commentator whom I love and have a lot of faith in says the purpose of the *Gospel of John* is to **build up the church**. He says that sense Matthew had written to the Jews and Mark to the Romans and Luke to the Greeks...**there was a desperate need for someone to write to the church**.

Another commentator I have a lot of faith in says the Gospel according to John was written for those **who do not yet believe** that Jesus Christ is God...he says it was written in order to lead them to that truth.

Which one is right? I believe they both are right!

The bottom line is that it is essential that we believe in the deity of Christ.

Now, I believe little children can come to Christ without knowing that fact, just as I believe little children can come to Christ without knowing about or understanding the virgin birth.

But, when a person is old enough to understand ...and this truth is presented to him, then he must believe this and he will if he's really God's child and I believe the book of *John* is used many, many times by the Holy Spirit to drive this truth home.

How do we know this was the primary purpose of John's writing? We know this by going to *John 20:30-31*.

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And when you turn from **John 20** back to **John 1**, we find John presenting the thesis that Jesus Christ is God! And I believe John would have done very well in one of our universities today. He states in the opening verses of **chapter 1** what he is setting to prove, and then he proves it.

John starts out in the first two verses stating that Jesus Christ is God. And he proves it in the next twenty-one chapters.

Then when he gets to the end he says that the things written in his book were written so that **you and I, his readers, might know that Jesus Christ is God and that we might believe on Him.**

And this truth is important to believers and unbelievers alike. All kinds of false teachings were coming into the church back then and John wanted the church to be fortified with the truth of the deity of Christ. John wanted his readers to know that Jesus, being God, became man!

Well, the **who** is John...he wrote this book. The Apostle John would go to write three epistles...**1, 2 and 3 John** as well as the book of **Revelation**. The Apostle John was the brother of the Apostle James and their father was Zebedee. John and James were known as the "sons of thunder."

And the **who** as it pertains to the recipients is the one who would know truth, whether it be a believer or an unbeliever.

The **what** is the good news of Jesus' deity.

The **why** is that we would know Jesus is God and that He became flesh and dwelt among us...and that we can have life in Him.

Let's think for just a moment about the **where** and **when** of this book.

It is believed by many conservative scholars that John wrote his gospel while pastoring the church in Ephesus that Paul had founded. By the time John wrote, all the other disciples were more than likely dead. The dates put on the writing of this gospel vary from 80 to 95 A.D.

So, with all that as background, let's begin looking at this grand old book.

From the very first verse we are aware that John's gospel is different from the others...

There is no genealogy, no manger scene, no birth announcement by the angels, no boyhood, no flight into Egypt.

John 1:1-5...

So, John is telling us three things here:

- 1) that Jesus Christ existed from the beginning...
- 2) that Jesus Christ was with God in the beginning...
- 3) that Jesus Christ was God...

In other words, the opening verses of this gospel contain a full statement of the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, doesn't it?

And it does it by the use of the word "Word."

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Now, when we think of the word “word” we don’t usually think of a person, do we? But in the synagogues back then, the Jews were constantly being taught that the Word of God was the same as God and that by the Word all things were made. But, they did not know that the Word was made flesh and that this Word made flesh was Jesus Christ.

And that’s why John is writing this...he wanted them to know!

Matthew Henry: “The plainest reason why the Son of God is called “the Word,” seems to be, that as our words are the interpretations of our minds to others, so was the Son of God sent in order to reveal His Father’s mind unto the world.”

Let me ask you...why is it necessary to believe that Jesus Christ is God?

Let me just give you three reasons...

- 1) **The truth that Jesus is God is important because apart from Jesus Christ we do not know what God is like.**

But if Jesus Christ is God then we do know, because to know the Lord Jesus is to know God.

- 2) **The truth that Jesus Christ is God is important because Jesus claimed to be God.**

We’ll see the Lord Jesus claim this in this book and if He isn’t God, then He wasn’t telling the truth.

- 3) **The truth that Jesus Christ is God is important because if Jesus is not God, His death on the Cross has no real significance.**

Why? Because if the Lord Jesus Christ is not God, that means He was man and all men are sinners and one sinner cannot die for the sins of another sinner!

But, because Jesus **is** God as John so swiftly points out, we see that He lived a sinless life and somehow in a way we’ll never understand became sin for us so that we might become children of God.

He became what He never had been so that we could become what we never could be!

So, that’s the very critical question every person must at some point come to grips with. Is Jesus only a man? If He is, we don’t need to go any further with this. We can go home from here right now. We don’t need to stay for church or come back tonight. We’re just wasting our time!

But, if Jesus Christ is God as John says and as Jesus Himself said, then He demands your belief and your total allegiance because He will not share His glory with another!

Verse 3...

This pictures for us Jesus as the **Creator**. And again, we see the fact that Jesus is God being reaffirmed and restated and reinforced! Jesus created everything...He created you and He created me...the **physical** you and.

David said in **Psalm 139**:

“For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made...”

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Verses 4-5...

Jesus not only gave us life in the *physical* sense...He gives us life in the *spiritual* sense.

Paul told the Ephesians that they were dead in their trespasses and sins, but they had been made alive with Christ and raised up to sit with Him in the heavenly realm.

And this life we receive from Jesus has **two dimensions...**

First, it is life without end. The moment we're saved we receive the blessed assurance of a life eternally spent in the presence of the dear Lord Jesus.

But, we don't have to wait for that...

Even today, living in this sinful old world (and it gets more and more sinful every day)...but even in our present circumstances, we can have a life that is abundant and full.

Jesus said, ***"I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."***

Then John talks about the life of Jesus Christ being the light of all men.

Verse 5...

I love the Williams Translation here:

"So the light continues to shine in the darkness for the darkness never overpowered it."

Darkness never overpowers light! Think about it. If you're sitting in a room that's well lit, and someone opens a door to the next room, or perhaps a door that leads to the outside, and it's dark outside, does the dark come in and overpower the light? Do you see a "shaft of darkness?"

NO! But if you're in a dark room and someone opens the door and the next room is well lit or someone opens a window and the sun is shining outside, what happens? The light overpowers the darkness, doesn't it? You will definitely see a "shaft of light!"

Now, that's just a little illustration in our physical world...but it's also true in the piritual world. The light of the Lord Jesus Christ will never be overpowered, or overcome, or comprehended (or any other verb you may use) by the darkness of this world or of the enemy!

Verses 6-8...

These verses are sort of like a parenthesis. Somehow the Apostle John thought about John the Baptist and we'll see more of him next week. But, he uses John the Baptist to introduce the subject of the Lord Jesus being the light of the world.

Verses 9-13...

These verses have good news and bad news. I'll give you the bad news first:

Here John speaks of the light John the Baptist told folks about. And he says the very world that Jesus made did not receive Him. He came to His own and His own did not receive Him.

Over in the books of **Matthew** and **Mark** Jesus told the parable of the landowner. He told how this landowner planted a vineyard and then rented it out and went away on a journey. And when harvest time came he sent his servants to collect his fruit.

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Remember what happened?

The tenants beat and stoned and murdered his servants. So, he sent more servants and they treated them the very same way.

Finally, he sent his very own son and said,
"Oh, they'll respect my son!"

But, the tenants took his son and killed him as well.

Now, what I just gave you is the condensed version of this parable. But since a parable is a earthly story with a heavenly meaning, let me remind you of the heavenly meaning of this parable...

In this parable God Himself is the landowner.
The earth is the vineyard.
The people of Israel are the tenants
The servants whom the landowner sent are the Old Testament prophets who came with the Lord's message to Israel and were stoned and beaten and killed.
The son the tenants killed was the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ came to His own and His own received Him not. And they were not passive about this...they were like the tenants of the parable... they **actively** sought to do away with Him.

How it must have grieved the heart of the Lord Jesus to come to His own and not be received by them...

That's the bad news...

But, there is **good news** here as well...

Verses 12-13...

Here John gives us the formula for the new birth...There are three verbs in **verse 12** that we need to notice...**believe, receive, become.**

In the case of a human birth, two factors interact to bring about a baby...the **human factor** and the **divine factor**.

Human beings do their part, and then God performs a miracle and life is created in the womb. A child is born.

And as it is with a natural birth, so it is with a spiritual birth.
We do our part. God performs a miracle and a new life begins.

The process revolves around these three verbs...

First we must **believe**, believe on His name! What does His name mean?

**"Thou shalt call His name Jesus," the angel told Joseph,
"for He shall save His people from their sins." Mt. 1:21**

To believe on His name is to believe in what His name means. It is to believe that Jesus can save me from my sins. And that assumes that I know myself as a sinner in need of a Savior.

But, I must do more than that...

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I must believe He is a **Savior**, but I must also **receive** Him as **my Savior**. That step simply involves confessing my need and inviting Jesus to be my Savior...to come into my life as Savior and Lord, to live and to rule and to reign in my innermost being.

When we do our part, God performs the miracle of grace. Then, we **become!** The Holy Spirit comes in and makes alive that which was once dead! The life-giving power of Almighty God flows in and regenerates our human spirits. And we **become** alive! We **become** children of God.!

Then by way of comparison and contrast, John describes the supernatural birth of a child of God...

Not of blood...(not of human descent - John Phillips)

This means just because my **parents** are God's children doesn't make **me** one of God's children. God doesn't have any grandchildren.

Nor of the will of the flesh...(not of human desire - John Phillips)

No amount of wishful thinking makes me a child of God. No amount of human desire makes me a child of God.

Not of the will of man...(not of human design - John Phillips)

No amount of parental or personal resolve can make me a child of God. My parents may have me baptized as a baby, but that does not make me a child of God.

I may use all my strength of character to live a good life, but that will not impart new life to me! It is a birth! We are born of God according to the three steps we saw in **verse 12**.

Verse 14...

The birth of Jesus Christ was different from every other birth. When any other child is born into this world, that child is a new personality...a new life that never existed before it was conceived. ***But when Jesus was born, it wasn't the creation of a new personality.***

He who was in the **beginning** became flesh! And He dwelt among us. This word for "dwelt" is the same word "tabernacle." He pitched His tent among us!

The word "**beheld**" is a word used of "**gazing with a purpose...of regarding with admiration.**"

John adds that in gazing on the glory of the incarnate Son of God, they saw that He was "**full of grace and truth.**" Grace corresponds with the revelation of God as love. Truth corresponds with the revelation of God as light.

What is grace? Unmerited favor?

Harry Ironside:

"Grace is the very opposite of merit. Grace is not only undeserved favor, but it is favor shown to the one who has deserved the very opposite."

Paul said, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

This continues to be an overwhelmingly incredible truth to me.

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It is amazing to me that while I was yet a sinner that He died for me. I will never cease to be amazed at God's grace and truth shown to me in His Son, Jesus.

Well, let's quickly look at these remaining verses...

Verses 15-18...

John uses the word **"grace"** three times in **verses 16 and 17...**

"grace upon grace"...**new** grace, **continuous** grace, **uninterrupted** grace...**grace that is sufficient to meet all my needs.**

Verse 17 tells us **"the law was given** by Moses but grace and truth **came** by Jesus Christ."

The law was engraved on cold tablets of stone. Grace and truth were wrapped up in warm living flesh and brought to us by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 18...

John has emphatically laid out his thesis in the verses we've looked at today...the fact that Jesus is God.

Yet here he says equally as emphatically that "no man hath seen God at any time."

John recognized that although Jesus was God when He came to earth, He deliberately laid aside, not His deity, but those attributes of deity that would be out of harmony or in conflict with His humanity.

The fact is that although the Lord Jesus never ceased to be God, He walked this earth as though He were not more than human. He was seen as a man even though He was God!

In a message given at **Moody Bible Institute Keswick Conference** some years ago, Major Ian Thomas put it like this:

"Jesus had to come as He came in order to be what He was;
He had to be what He was in order to do what He did. He
had to do what He did so that we might have what He has;
we have to have what He has in order to be what He was."

Major Ian Thomas was very good at this clever kind of definition. And here's how he defined this...

"Jesus had to come as He came (born of a virgin) in order to be what He was (a perfect man inhabited by God). He had to be what He was in order to do what He did (die to redeem us). He had to do what He did so that we might have what He has (His life, all that we lost in Adam) We have to have what He has in order to be what He was (perfect: man inhabited by God)."

And that's what the Gospel of John is all about!

But John didn't stop with the statement, "No man has seen God at any time."

He went on to say Jesus is in the bosom of God and He has **explained** God. This word "explained" is the word from which we get our English word exegesis. It means "to make known by expounding."

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The person who expounds or exegetes the Scriptures brings out things that were there all the time for people to see, but things that had been overlooked until they were brought forth.

Our pastor exegetes the Scriptures to us every time he preaches! How many times have we left church saying something like, "How did he get so much out of three verses?"

Well, Jesus is the incarnate exegesis of God. He has brought God forth, set Him before us, fully and accurately. He has "expounded" Him in what He is, in what He has said, in what He has done. In Jesus the very character of God may be known.

There is no true knowledge of God apart from Jesus Christ.

You cannot know God by knowing Buddha.

You cannot know God by knowing Mohammed.

You cannot know God by knowing Shinto.

You cannot know God by knowing Confucious, or Ba'Hai, or Joseph Smith or any other entity or concept or precept or teaching or doctrine!

You can know God only one way...and that is by knowing Jesus! Because as John has so beautifully stated... ***"In the beginning was the Word***

and the Word was with God and the Word was God."

And He still is!!!