

John 1 (Part 1):1-5 – In the Beginning was the Word

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Open your Bible to the Gospel according to John, and we're going to get into it this morning. If you're there, we're going to take the first five verses of the chapter. There's so much here. It goes like this. Follow along with me as I read:

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

Stop there. Let's pray.

Father in Heaven, just five verses this morning, but there's so much here that You have to say to us, and I pray my Father, God, that our hearts would be open to Your voice today. Lord, may Your Spirit speak. Fill us with grace and understanding that we might grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior, Jesus Christ. For it is in His name that we pray, amen.

If I could give you one easy, interpretive tool for understanding the Gospel according to John, it's this: it's all about Jesus.

There it is right there. If you keep that in mind that this book is all about Him, He is the central character. Jesus is the focus of everything that John is going to talk about here in this book. He is everything and everything is about Him. What's interesting about the way John starts this Gospel account, is that it's very different from the other Gospel writers.

Did you ever notice, as you read through Matthew, Mark and Luke, you find that they start talking about Jesus within the context, really of the history of Israel. Matthew begins with the legal genealogy of Jesus, and he begins with Abraham, the father of the Jews. Mark begins by telling about the preaching of John the Baptist as he began to speak of the coming or the time of Messiah for the nation of Israel.

And then Luke, he begins, he goes back to the birth of John the Baptist. Then he begins to cover the birth of Jesus, and then he shares the biological genealogy of Jesus and goes all the way back to Adam. But all of these things relate to the nation of Israel, relate to the kingdom of man and so forth that Jesus was born into.

But John takes a different path altogether. Interesting here that John begins at *eternity past*, which is an interesting sort of a phrase. But he begins by saying “*In the beginning...*” and we read those words, and we think “In the beginning; the beginning of what?” Well, the beginning of when things began. You see our human minds, we don't – we can understand there is an eternity past, but even then, we're using an oxymoron.

There is no “past” to eternity; eternity is timelessness. And so, when we use those two words together, they really don't fit, but they help us to understand what we're talking about. We're talking about the time before time. We're talking about that time, and time doesn't even work, but we're still talking about that part of eternity before things began.

And so that's what John begins with. But see, this has caused some people to wonder. And they begin to think about this and they think, “Okay, John begins by talking about Jesus as it relates to creation.” He says “*In the beginning...*” which is another way of talking about creation; when things began, when God created things, that's when the beginning was.

And he says “*In the beginning was the Word,*” and we know that it's talking about Jesus because it's all about Jesus. But this has caused some people to wonder if John is saying to us that Jesus began when things began. Well, that's not at all what John is saying. He's simply saying in verse 1 that when things began, Jesus was there.

Let me put that in the other way. Jesus was there when things began. Well, that's an interesting way of saying it, but you know, Jesus Himself actually goes back and speaks of Himself before that. He – and again *before* is a time word – but He speaks of Himself in eternity past. Let me show you a couple examples on the screen. John 17. Jesus is praying here; He says:

John 17:4-5 (ESV)

"I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."

“I glorified you on earth, (speaking to the Father) having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory I had with you before the world existed.” And that's another way of saying “before the beginning,” or “before everything began.” In other words, Jesus is saying that His glory was with the Father in eternity past.

All right, here's another example. Actually, just later in the chapter:

John 17:24 (ESV)

“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”

“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with (you) where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me (here it is again) before the foundation of the world.”

And in both of these passages, Jesus is saying, “I was with you Father in eternity past. In that period before time began, I was there. I shared your glory.” And those are wonderful statements, but they all make a little more sense when we read verse 1 as a complete verse where it says again, “*In the beginning was the Word,*” when everything began. There was the Word “*and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*”

And now we understand from the single verse more about Jesus. We know that He is the very Word of God. The Word of God. The Greek word is the *Lagos*. He is the *Lagos* of God. But then in an even more climactic statement, John says that the Word *is* God. Fascinating!

But there's a lot to these statements, and we need to kind of unpack them a little bit.

First of all, what did John mean when he wrote here that Jesus is the Word of God? Well, again, this is that word, *Lagos*, but this is not an unusual idea as it relates to the Old Testament because we know the Word of God was very active in the Old Testament, and particularly in creation.

We know that when we come to creation, we see the *Lagos*, the Word of God going forth. Here's some examples just a few:

And God said, “Let there be light,” (Gen 1:3)

And God said, “Let there be an expanse...” (Gen 1:6)

And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together” (Gen 1:9)

And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation...” (Gen 1:11)

Etc...

And God said, “*Let there be light,*” and God said, “*Let there be an expanse.*” And God said, sending forth His Word, “*Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together.*” And God said, “*Let the earth sprout vegetation.*” You get the picture.

The work of creation was accomplished by the Word of God, the Logos, going forth and creating. And so, what we're saying here, since John tells us that Jesus is the Word of God, we're saying Jesus is the Creator. He is the one who went forth and created. It is His word that went forth and created. And that's exactly what the rest of the Bible corroborates for us in several different places. From the book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 1:2 (ESV)

...in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed the air of all things, through whom also he created the world.

“...in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed the air of all things, (and look at this) through whom also he created the world.”

And then Colossians 1:16, Paul says it even more clearly:

Colossians 1:16 (ESV)

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.

“For by him (Jesus) 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.”

And then even right here in John 1, skip down to verse 3. John says it here again. You read in your Bible:

“All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.”

So, there's no question about the fact that God created the heavens and the earth by sending forth His Word, and Jesus is that Word that was sent forth; the Creator who went forth and created.

Now we need to back up a little bit and look at some of this other statement that John made at the end of verse 1 that is even more bold. And he says two very important things about Jesus as the Word. Look at the end of verse 1:

“And the Word was with God. And the Word was God.”

So, what is he saying? First of all, when he says that when “...*the Word was with God*,” he's saying that the word is distinguished from God the Father. And we know that to be the case. We know that the Father is a person, and we know that the Son of God, or in this case, the Word of God, is also a person; separate from the Father in their personhood, one with God in their divinity.

So, we have one God with distinct persons. So that's why John tells us that “*the Word was with God*,” and this messes with people's minds; the nature of God always will mess with our minds.

I have people ask me quite often, “If Jesus is God, then why did He pray to God when He was on earth?” They're separate persons. They were talking from all eternity. Good grief, you can hear the persons of the Trinity speaking in the creation account. “*Let us make men in our image.*” Right? Who's He talking to? Who's God talking to? “Oh, He's talking to the angels.”

Oh no! The Bible never says that man was created in the image of angels. It says, “so man created him, in the image of God He made him, male and female. He made them in the image of God. Let us make man in our image.” (Genesis 1:27)

The Father and the Son had been talking from eternity, and the Spirit; having a conversation. And there's this beautiful fellowship that's going on. But see, but it's hard – it's impossible for us to understand the nature of God. And so, people question it and they say, “I don't understand how that could be.”

Well, good for you, because you never will. We're talking about God here. We're not talking about mankind; we're talking about God. And we're talking

about the nature of God. And if you don't get it, there you go, that means God's bigger than you; that ought to make you happy, right?

So, the next thing he goes on to say is, “...*the Word was God.*”

And that's a very definitive statement, isn't it? If I simply say to you “the Word was God. The Word is God,” it's very definitive, very kind of cut and dry, very clear. It is not hard to understand when he simply says “...*the word was God.*”

In fact, it's so clear and it's so definitive, it has been viciously attacked. I don't know if you've had a Jehovah's Witness come to your door lately. Try their level best to convince you that your Bible's got it all wrong, and that Jesus is not in fact God; he is *a* god, small “g.” In fact, let me show you how – and they have their own Bible, The Jehovah's Witnesses; they call it the *New World Translation*.

John 1:1 (ESV)

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

John 1:1 (New Word Translation)

The Word was in the beginning with God and was a god.

On the top is what we just read from the ESV, which is what all the other English translations say: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” Very clear, very concise. But the Jehovah's Witness Bible says “*The Word was in the beginning with God and was a god.*” And again, the New World Translation is the only one. And if you ask them why their Bible differs from your Bible, they'll give you all kinds of grammatical reasons why it's so. But it's very dishonest and it's very un-scholarly because there's no other English Bible translation, or frankly, in any other language, that agrees with the New World Translation.

In fact, I remember when I went to Bible college, they gave us in this particular class that I had a list of all of the English translations of the Bible from the very first English translation to the current time. And that was back in the 80's, so there's been more since then. And I had a Jehovah's Witness come to my door and we started talking about this whole issue of who Jesus is, and I said “Hang on just a sec.”

So, I went in the other room and I got this piece of paper and I came back, and I grabbed a highlighter and I highlighted their Bible because the Jehovah's

Witness's Bible was listed there because it is an English translation of the Bible. So, I highlighted their Bible and I showed them this long page of English translations and I said, "These translations represent hundreds of Bible scholars who were able to read and write Greek for the New Testament. And you are telling me from all of these Bible translators and all the schooling and the learning that they – your guys are the only ones that got it right?"

And this guy looked me right in the eye and he said, "That's what I'm telling you." I said, "Well, we don't have much else to say" because that's crazy. There is no other Bible that agrees with the New World Translation, and the reason the New World Translation says that the Word was a god is because it agrees with their theology. And that's the only reason. And the grammatical excuses they give you for why they made it that way don't apply to where they translated the verses in other areas.

In fact – quick grammatical sort of a thing – the word *a*; do you guys remember your grammar? That's the indefinite article. The indefinite article doesn't exist in the Greek. They don't have an indefinite article. They have a definite article, which is *the*, but *a* doesn't exist. So, in English, we do have to put the indefinite article in, but the context has to demand it. You with me? The context has to demand it.

The only reason they put the word *a* before God and then gave it a small "g" is because for them, the context demanded it because Russell told them that Jesus is only *a* god, not one with *the* God. And that's the only reason.

The rest of the book of John – and this is something you're going to see as we go through this whole gospel account – the rest of the book of John is going to scream out and say, "Jesus is God." Over and over again. In fact, I trust that by the time we're finished with John – and I don't know how long it's going to take, don't bug me about it – by the time we're done with the Gospel, according to John, you are going to be convinced of one thing:

John declared Jesus to be God in human flesh. It will happen over and over and over again.

But here's what's really interesting too – not only did John, as an eyewitness, record for us statements that were made by Jesus that could only be made by God, but the Jews who heard Jesus believed He was claiming to be God as well. They were there, the Jews were there. They heard Him preaching, teaching and talking. So, what did they hear? What did they hear Jesus saying? Let me show you, John 10 up on the screen:

John 10:31-33

The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we're going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."

"The Jews picked up stones again to stone him (obviously, this wasn't the first time). Jesus answered them, 'I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?' The Jews answered him, 'It is not for a good work that we're going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.'"

Do you think the Jews heard Him saying He was God? You bet they did, and that's why they picked up rocks. They thought he was committing blasphemy when He was in fact telling the truth.

So, it's clear from what we see in the Bible. And speaking of statements that declare His deity, let's look at verse 4. This is a beautiful verse, but it's too easy just to quickly run past it. Look at verse 4 in your Bible:

"In him was life, and the life was the light of men."

Now it seems like a fairly simple statement, doesn't it? *"In him was life,"* and we kind of think, "Okay, well that's interesting." But did you know that there are several Greek words that we translate just simply *life* in the New Testament, but they have very different meanings. Let me put these up on the screen for you:

"Life" in the New Testament

- *Bios: Physical life*
- *Psuche: Soul-life (emotion, intellect, will)*
- *Zoe: Eternal, divine life of God*

Life in the New Testament could be *bios* which is where we get the idea of physical life. It's obviously where we get our English word *biology*. When Jesus talked about the cares and pleasures of this life, He used that word, that is the word, it's that is that biological life.

But then there's another word that is translated *life* in the Bible and that's *psuche*, and that speaks of the soul. There's even one particular Bible translation, I forget which one it is, that actually translates *psuche* “soul life.” And that's actually accurate because it's not talking about the physical life, it's talking about the emotional, intellectual life that we have. And that's by the way, where we get our word *psychology*, right? Dealing with the emotions, the will and the intellect. And that's just translated life in the Bible.

But then there's this last word, and this is the one John uses here in chapter 1. There's Zoe. I don't know if we have any Zoe's here in the room; I kind of like that name because it means “life”, but it doesn't just mean life. It's talking about the uncreated, eternal life that comes from God and is imparted to mankind. It doesn't come from us. We have physical life and we have *psuche* – emotional, intellectual life. We don't have eternal life apart from God imparting it to us. But that is the life that John is talking about when he says “*In Him (in Jesus) was (the) life*”. The eternal uncreated life of God; it is in Him.

Now, if that isn't a statement of his deity, I don't know what is. In Jesus is eternal uncreated life. That's what John is telling you. That's what he's saying to me. We have to hear and understand these statements.

And then he goes on to say that, “*This life was the light of man.*”

In other words, the life of Jesus is the light of mankind. The eternal uncreated life of Jesus is the very light that we walk by. And the fact that He is the light in us and the only light in us reminds us that mankind is living in total darkness. Mankind is in spiritual darkness, and we witness it every day.

I brought up my phone app between services and I thought, “I'm just going to pull up my news app just for a second and just read the first headline.” Put it on there, it was something about somebody killing somebody else. The world is full of darkness. We see it, we read about it, right?

But John says in verse 5, “*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*” Isn't that interesting? “*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*”

There's two statements here. The first is “*The light shines in the darkness.*” The idea is – oh, and by the way, I just want you to get used to this as we go through John, his Gospel, and then get into his letters, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. Get used to talking about light and dark, because he talks about them a lot. These are his

favorite word pictures to describe so many things. But this is really what he loves to talk about.

And he'll refer to that deep darkness that has fallen over all of mankind and the people living in this world, "living in darkness," "living in depravity." But he says here in verse 5 that *"The light shines in the darkness."* Guess who the light is? It's you. Look at Matthew 5:

Matthew 5:14-16 (ESV)

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

"You are the light of the world." (He says,) *A city set on a hill* (you can't hide that. It's going to glow; it's going to light up the sky. Can't be hidden. And he said people don't light a lamp and then right away put a bowl over the top of it; that'd be dumb. Rather, they put it) *on a stand, and it gives light to* (everybody) *in the house. In the same way,* (here's what he says) *let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and* (pat you on the back and say, 'You are cool!' That's not what it says, does it? It's so that they might) *give glory to your Father..."*

See, this is all about giving glory to God. Why? Because the light comes from Him. It doesn't come from you. It's not of you, it's of Him. Jesus is the light. He gives us the light of life, and it's the light that we are told to let shine before others.

Just about the time we start worrying, and we think to ourselves, "I think the church has gotten so weak. I don't know if we have any light left." And there have been times in history when the church seemed like the church's light was being snuffed out. But I love how John ends this statement concerning the light and the darkness. And he says to us, *"The darkness has not overcome it."* Isn't that good news?

"The darkness has not overcome it." Interesting. This Greek word that is translated "overcome" carries the idea of taking hold of something so that you can have it, so that you can possess it, so that you can control it. And he says the darkness is trying to take hold of the light so that it can possess it, but it hasn't been able to do that.

And it says here in the ESV, it says it hasn't been able to overcome it. But you might have a different Bible translation and some of them translate it slightly different than others. In fact the NIV, between the 1984 revision of the NIV and then the 2011 version, when they updated it, they actually changed their mind on how this verse goes. Let me show you:

John 1:5: (NIV84)

The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

John 1:5 (NIV2011)

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

Up in 1984, that revision said “the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” And then in 2011, they revised it to say “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” And you might say, “Why the difference?” Well, here's the reason for the difference.

This is not a bad translation, by the way. The NIV is a good translation of the Bible. What you're seeing here is a real challenge of Bible translators because John doesn't say why the darkness wants to overcome the light. He doesn't tell us why. He doesn't tell us whether it's an intellectual trying to overcome it or whether it is a violent trying to overcome it so as to extinguish it. He doesn't explain.

So, it's up to the Bible translators to try to kind of figure that out according to the context. And sometimes they come up with the idea that it's like, well, the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness hasn't grasped hold of it as to understand it. And then they go, well, I think it's more of a violent sort of a grasping. So, the darkness wants to lay hold of the light, but it hasn't overcome it.

Actually, you know what? I think they may both be correct because if you take John at his root meaning, what he's saying is the light shines in the darkness and the darkness hasn't been able to take hold of it; that's all he's saying. Whether for intellectual or violent reasons, who cares? The darkness has not been able to grab hold of it, lay hold of it and control it, and it never will.

And that's good news for you and me today. And we are being encouraged here to let our light shine. Because guys, the world's getting darker. But you know, darkness technically can't get darker. The world gets darker only because the light becomes more dim. Do you guys understand that darkness isn't really a thing, it's really just an absence of light, right? When you turn on the light, the

darkness goes away because the light takes over. And we've been called to shine our light in a very dark world, and it's hard.

Chuck Lin joined us for our men's breakfast yesterday morning, and he had such a good time sharing with us, but he challenged the men who came to breakfast yesterday not to get angry at the darkness of the world because it's very easy to do.

You read the news, you read the headlines, you see what's going on, you see what your politicians are doing or not doing. And it's really easy just to go “What are those dopes up to now? Oh, they're just – common sense is gone and they're making all these dumb decisions,” and you get frustrated.

But frustration can lead to anger. Do you know that Bible verse that says, “man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires?” (James 1:19-20) That's true, isn't it? Man's anger – you're never going to be able to shine your light when you're angry about the world. In fact, it will extinguish your light, it'll cover it up. It will be like lighting a lamp and putting a bowl over it.

So, we have to be very careful. Don't get angry, don't get frustrated. Shine your light. Let your light shine. Let people see the life that Jesus has deposited in you through His Spirit. Let them see it. Share about Jesus, talk about Him. Tell people about what He did on the cross. Shine your light. Amen.

Let's stand together.

We're going to have some people up front here to pray with you as you're heading out. If you need prayer this morning, we encourage you to come up and get that. So, let's pray together, shall we?

Father, we've looked at just a few verses here as we've begun this study of the Gospel according to John, and so many things, Lord, that we all already see. And You've given us this amazing glimpse of Your nature. And Lord, it's beyond us. We have absolutely no explanation for how You can be separate persons in one God. And yet, Lord, You've revealed it in the Word. And even though there have been many attacks on this, help us Lord to stand strong on what Your Word says.

And Father, we've seen also here today that You have given a great light to shine within each of us who have come to know Jesus as our Savior. And I pray, my Father God, that we would not allow that light to become dimmed through

fear or intimidation or sin or any number of other things, even frustration leading to anger.

Father, keep us in Christ. Keep us focused on Your will and Your Word. Keep our hearts light. Help us Lord to keep coming to the throne of grace; to offload the burdens and challenges that we pick up on a daily basis so that we can walk in the freedom that Jesus gives us to shine that glorious light to the people around us.

Lord, the people of this world are walking in deep darkness. And violence and corruption is the order of the day. But You have called us, Lord. You've called us to be different, to be other, and to shine that light to the glory of God. And we ask You to strengthen us every single day to do just that. We ask it in Jesus' precious name, and all God's people said together, amen.

God bless you. Have a good rest of your Sunday.