

God's Self-Expression

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 nothing was made that was made. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (John 1:1–5)

Today there is plenty of Jesus-junk for sale. Jesus-junk is pop culture material that uses the name of Jesus to sell its merchandise. You have coffee-mugs and calendars and fridge magnets and bumper stickers and T-shirts with the name Jesus, and sometimes something trite about Jesus like “Raised on coffee and Jesus” or a picture of Jesus on the cross with the word “Nailed it” or “Jesus is my rock and that's how I roll”. Sometimes you have brands like the Burger King symbol and they swap out the word *Burger* and put in “Jesus is the”, or the words Jesus Christ in the Coca-Cola font, with the words “Enjoy Jesus Christ and thou shalt never thirst”. You have the cartoon Jesus, the movie Jesus, the TV Jesus, and the Jesus of plenty of songs that claim to be Christian songs. But when you see or hear these, you have to ask, what Jesus is this? He seems to be a kind of hippy, somewhat effeminate, rather tame, spirit-buddy. He is a domesticated Jesus, one more product or thing to use and add to my life.

Of course, it would be very hard to do this if you had a high view of Jesus. If your view of Jesus included a deep sense of awe and reverence, that His person had such gravity and weight in your life, then it would be very difficult to tolerate such flippant, light views of Jesus. To gain a right view of Jesus, we need to hear the Word, and particularly the Gospels. The Gospel of John is an eyewitness account of Jesus Christ, written so we may know who He was, and that we may believe.

We saw last week this is the theme of the whole book. The book is divided into two parts: the book of signs from 1:19 to end of 12, and the book of glory from chapter 13 to the end of chapter 20.

But at the beginning of the book is this prologue from 1:1-18. This is like a foyer you walk through before you get into the building. And here in this foyer, John is going to set the stage for the rest of the book. This prologue introduces the true identity of Jesus, as well as His actions. It summarises John the Baptist's ministry, as well as the responses to Jesus. It explains why He came.

John wants us to use this prologue through the entire book. Every time we look at Jesus, we are to know that He is this One in these verses. When we hear Him speak, when we watch Him heal, when we see Him weep, when we listen to Him teach, when we watch Him eat and drink and wash feet, when we hear Him debate, this is who is speaking and acting. This One is the One called Jesus.

Most importantly, this is the One we must receive or reject. We either reject Him as verse 11 says, or we receive Him, as verse 12 says. These verses identify exactly who it is that we say we receive when we say we receive Jesus. If you imbibe John 1:1-18, I cannot see how you could ever tolerate the pop-culture Jesus.

Here is the identity of the true Jesus, and the actions of the true Jesus. Two aspects of the Jesus John wants us to believe in. In verses 1 and 2, we'll see His threefold identity. In verses 3 through 5, we'll see His threefold actions.

I. The Word's Threefold Identity

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.

Just by opening his book like the book of Genesis, John has captured our attention. He is not beginning his Gospel with the account of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, or the visits of the angels to Zacharias and Mary and Joseph. No, John is going back much, much further to show us exactly who this Jesus is.

But wait – is this Word actually the same person as Jesus Christ?

We know that when John uses the term *Word*, he is talking about Jesus because in verses 11 and 12 we read that this Word came to His own, and His own did not receive Him, but many others did. That means this Word, as verse 14 says took human flesh and was among us. Verse 17 makes it explicit by naming this Word as Jesus Christ: ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17)

But why does John use this strange terminology, “the Word”, the Greek word *Logos*? Why doesn't he just say, “In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God.”?

Well, for two reasons. First, it would be theologically confusing. The Person we now call Jesus certainly existed before Bethlehem, but it was at Bethlehem that He received that name. The Person we now call Jesus, as we'll see, always existed as God the Son, but He added to Himself a human nature 2000 years ago. He was not always called by the human name Jesus or Joshua. This Person pre-dates, and pre-exists the Incarnation we celebrate at Christmas.

The second reason for using the term Word is because John wants us to understand something important about the Lord Jesus by it.

A word is the expression of someone's meaning. In Greek, the language John wrote this book in, there are two words for word: *rhema*, which means a spoken word, and *logos*, which is a broader term, meaning word, thought, message, idea or even a word in action. Here John uses *logos*. The idea is: the communication of God. Whoever and whatever God is, the Word expresses that, communicates that, makes it known.

Now there was already a lot of use of this term in Greek philosophy. It carried ideas of divine reason, rationality being the spark of divinity, some even used it to mean a kind of mediator between man and God. John doesn't mean exactly that, but if you were a pagan raised in Graeco-Rome, you would at least have a starting point to get to the truth. But John is drawing on the Hebrew idea, where the Word of God is so often the very expression of God, the work of God, the intentions and meaning of God expressed. He may be drawing on the Proverbs passage we read, where wisdom is alongside God from the beginning.

Regardless, the idea is just like Hebrews 1:3 which says that God's Son is the express image of His Person, the brightness of His glory. He is the impression made by the character, He is the light travelling from the star to our eyes. If you want to know what God is like, what He desires, what He means to do, then this One called the Word, and the One we now call Jesus will tell you and show you. He communicates God to you. Verse 18 says that no one has seen God, in His infinite, invisible essence. But this One, the Word, the Son, Jesus has revealed Him, explained Him, declared Him. It is the word from which we get our English *exegete*. Jesus is the exegesis, the living sermon that reveals the Godhead.

The identity of the divine Logos is the One who enables men to know God, by becoming His

children through belief in Him.

Now in verse 1, John uses three phrases about the Word that are in exquisite balance. The Word was in the beginning, the Word was with God, the Word was God. Eternity, Trinity, and Deity.

The first one, says in the beginning *was* the Word. Very importantly, John uses a verb of being, (in English that's a word like is, am, are), not a verb of becoming. And it's in the imperfect tense, which means ongoing action in the past. The idea is, in the beginning, the Word was already existing. It doesn't mean, in the beginning, at some very early point, the Word began, or came into existence. It means, at that point which Genesis 1:1 calls the beginning, the Word already was.

This means that the Word, the Son, Jesus the Messiah pre-existed time and space. And if you exist before time, that makes you not part of the time-space creation. It means you are eternal. Jesus refers to His own pre-existence when He tells a hostile crowd, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." (John 8:58). But it is even more explicit in His prayer to the Father in chapter 17.

⁵ And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. (John 17:5)

²⁴ "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24)

The second phrase John uses is that the Word with with God. This is a word that means towards, even facing, but the idea is, to be with, to be in communion with. John is introducing a distinction here between the Word and God. In this second phrase of verse 1, God is referring to God the Father. God in the fourth Gospel usually means the Father, not because only the Father is God, but because the Father is the standard-bearer of the Godhead, he is the One we address when speaking to the Godhead. John wants us to know that the Word was in fellowship and communion with God. Again, same verb of being in the imperfect tense – always existing. Like we just saw from the lips of Jesus, the Word from eternity shared the glory of the Father, the Word was loved by the Father from eternity.

So somehow, there is some kind of plurality here in God. Clearly the Word is not a creature. He is not something God has made. He is eternal. But yet He is alongside God.

This is John's opening cannon shot against those who deny the Trinity. In the first words of his Gospel, he wants you to know there is a plurality in God. He doesn't here mention the Spirit; he will do so pretty quickly, verse 32 of chapter 1 mentions the Spirit appearing at the baptism of Jesus. Most often, this Gospel will speak of Father, Son, and Spirit or Helper. Here, the terms are God and His Word. I suggest if John had completed the triad, it would have been God, His Word, and His Voice. God the Speaker, God the Spoken and God the Speech.

But lest we get the wrong idea, John now gives us the third phrase to identify who this is. He says, the Word was God. But wait, I thought he just said the Word was in communion with God. Isn't he now contradicting himself?

Well, John does something here that's kind of under the hood of the car embedded in the language. For a moment you need to get some oil grease on your hands as I show you what's under the hood here.

In English we have what we call the definite article. The word *the* is the definite article. The church on the hill. It specifies. In that second phrase, John used a definite article. If we translated it over-literally, it would be, and the Word was with the God.

But now in this third phrase, he leaves it off. No definite article. So if you only knew English, and only knew very little Greek, you might say, John must mean the Word was a god. That's how the Jehovah Witnesses translate this verse in their Bible, to teach that Jesus was a divine creature, like Michael the archangel but not Jehovah.

But that's not what happens in Greek. If you take off the definite article, what you mean is that all the attributes and properties belong to the thing you are talking about. All that God is, is what the Word was. All the attributes, all the qualities, all the essence of God is what the Word had always been. The Word was always existing as God. God the Word. God the Son. As Paul puts it ⁶ who, always existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to selfishly cling to, (Philippians 2:6). The Word is not identical to [the] God mentioned in phrase 2; but the Word has and is everything that God the Father is.

John hasn't made a mistake. You need all three statements exactly as they are to have the truth. Take one of them away, and you have heresy. If he had written only the 1st and 3rd, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God*, then we would think that there is only one Person in God, called the Word – the heresy of Unitarianism. If he had only written the 1st and 2nd, *in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God*, then we would have thought that the Word was less than God and a creature – that's the heresy of Arianism. If he written only the 2nd and 3rd and had kept the definite article “*the Word was with [the] God and the Word was [the] God*”, we would have thought that the Word is the same person as the Father – that's the heresy of Sabellianism.

No, John shoots his theological arrow into the centre of the bullseye. The Word was eternal. The Word was always in fellowship with God the Father. The Word was always existing with all the essence, all the properties, qualities and attributes of God. Eternity, trinity, deity.

In verse 2, John repeats everything for emphasis. This same one, the one who is God, was with God in the beginning.

So who is this Jesus that people claim to be referring to in their bumper-stickers, and coffee-mugs, and pop songs? He was existing forever, He was in full communion with God, He was and is fully God.