

In the Beginning

John 1:1-14

December 26, 2010

John's was the last gospel to be written. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were already being passed around from church to church, and people were learning about Jesus through them. As John grew older and as problems began to develop in the church, he wrote a gospel with a slightly different emphasis to answer questions that were missing from the other accounts and to try to solve some of the more important issues. Mark began his account of Jesus' life with the ministry of John the Baptist and John's announcement that Jesus is the Christ. Matthew and Luke begin with Jesus' birth and the events surrounding it. John went back farther. He went to the very creation of the universe itself and began His account of Jesus' life and ministry there because he understood that the story actually begins before the dawn of time.

John began his account of the life of Jesus with the same words with which the Bible begins: "*In the beginning.*" In the original Greek, it is only two words, but they are very powerful words. John intended it to be this way. He wanted to draw his readers' attention back to the account of creation when God made the universe and all that it contains. John intended to go back to the start of everything except God Himself.

Once there, John started talking about the Word. Here, again, was a term with a lot of meaning, both for Greeks and for the Jews. For Greeks it meant the ability to think and to express ideas. It was the equivalent to our idea of reason. They saw it as an attribute of the

gods and a hallmark of the way the universe is made. Since the world to which John wrote was immersed in Greek thought, he intended to make full use of this meaning.

Of course, the Jews had another meaning to the idea of "the word." God had given them the scriptures. Comprised of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, they understood what we call the Old Testament to be God's message to them of His calling them to be His people and the history of their relationship with Him. To them the Word was God's message of how He expected them to live. Again, John wanted to allow his use of the word to be filled with this meaning as well.

And so John simply wrote, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" (v.1) I said he "simply wrote," and yet these are some of the most profound words ever committed to paper. In this sentence John sets before us the fundamental truth of who and what Jesus is. It is in this passage that John shows us the nature of the man we call Jesus and whose birth we celebrate on Christmas.

The Bible begins with **God**. When the universe came into being, God was already there, for it was His word, His declaration, that brought it into existence. Now. John tells us that the Word had a hand in that. Before anything else was, the Word existed with God. More to the point, the Word was God. Strengthening the point, John said again that the Word was with God in the beginning.

The Word is thus God, but also in some way separate from God. The words John used could not be more clear, but they still seem to make no sense. It is

difficult for us to get our minds around what John is saying here. There have been many attempts over the millennia to try to explain what John is saying here—to understand how God and the Word are related.

Some have posited that God comes to us in different ways at different times. In this case, the Word and God are exactly the same and there is no difference. It fits with John's statement that the Word was God, but denies that the Word was with God.

Others have said that there is more than one God. The Word is with God in the sense that they are co-gods over the universe they create together. This, however, denies that the Word was God. It denies the unity demanded by John's statement.

The answer the church has always maintained is that God somehow consists of the Word, and more. Over the early centuries of the church, as the early Christians poured over this passage, the teachings of Jesus about God and Himself, and other passages of the Bible, they began to develop the language of Trinity. Since the church began thinking about this issue, she has always maintained that God exists as one being and three persons. We cannot understand how this is, but we see it in scripture as the way in which God has revealed Himself to us. The **Word** is part of what God is, but is not all of what God is. It is truly God, but does not define or contain God. While the Word is God, God is more than just the Word. We learn this from the first two verses.

In support of this, and to show us that the Word and the rest of God have worked together from the start of time, John went on to explain part of the Word's role

in creation. It was through the Word that everything that exists was made. God made the world, and He did it through the Word. While it is true that Genesis tells us God created the universe by speaking it into existence, John is going beyond that here to say that the creative work was done by way of the Word.

Up to now, John has not defined the Word except to connect it closely to God. In verse four he makes a statement that brings the identity of the Word into much sharper focus. *"In him was life, and that life was the light of men."* In calling the Word, "him," John identified the Word as a **person**. This is not some force or attribute of God we are talking about here. It is a person with a will. It is a person who can make decisions and who works closely with the rest of what God is to bring about their mutually desired ends.

Even more, it is in the Word that life and light are found. In the Word is the life that is the light of men. It is the Word's light that shines in the darkness, but is not understood, or comprehended, by the darkness that surrounds it.

Darkness has no power over light. Indeed, darkness does not exist on its own. It is not real. We only find darkness where light is not. Darkness has no power over light. It has no power at all. By definition, where light is, darkness is not. As the Word brought light into the world, the darkness that had reigned here was pushed back, and its end was ensured.

This end was announced by John the Baptist, who came as a witness to the light. It was John's job to point to the light that all men might believe. It was John the Baptist's call by God to witness to the light that gives

light to every man and to point out it had come into the world.

That is the point of the gospel accounts. “[*The light*] was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” (vv.10,11) Again, this light, just like the Word, was a person. He stepped into the world He created, and yet He was not recognized. The world had gotten so far from what it was created to be that it no longer recognized its **creator**. He came to His own people, but they did not receive Him. The rest of John’s gospel is the story of how that played out. It is the story of Jesus’ ministry, of His teaching of the Kingdom of God and declaring its coming, of the signs and wonders He did to back up His claims. This is just the introduction, and John has much evidence to back up and support the things he says here that seem incredible.

It seems unlikely that creation would not recognize its Creator. Yet we see the same blindness in ourselves. As we look at the world around us we see a strong desire to deny the existence of God. We live among a people that don’t want to be bothered with Him for the most part. They are happy to have His help when they think they need it. They are happy to celebrate the birth of Jesus and the provision of salvation on the cross, as long as they can focus the celebrations on family, fun, food, and candy. We would really rather not be reminded of the true glory of the humble baby, or the blood and pain of the cross. These things tend to put a crimp in our style. Yet John made it a point to remind us

that, when God stepped into the world, the world He created, loved, and cared for did not recognize Him.

Some did, however. Most of the people rejected Him, but some did not. John tells us, “*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.*” (vv.12,13) Here, again, John managed to pack a lot of meaning in a few words. Just a dozen verses into his gospel and we already know that receiving the Word, who was with God at creation, and who is God, involves believing in His name. It is accepting Him for who He is, not who we want Him to be.

To those who received Him He gave the right to become children of God. The right to be children of God is not something that we all possess naturally. It is not ours by virtue of our birth. The right to be God’s child is a **gift** from the Word. It is not the case that everybody that walks on earth is a child of God. God’s children are a small group and membership is related to believing in the truth God has revealed about Himself and receiving Him. Being a child of God, having the “right” to be called one, is a gift from Him.

In order to make certain there is no question on this matter, John backs up this idea of membership in God’s family being a gift in the rest of the sentence. He makes two negative statements about how somebody becomes a child of God—that is, he lists two ways it does not happen—and then he makes a positive statement telling us how it does happen. The two ways in which people often assume they become children of God, but

don't, are by natural descent, or human decision. Again, we are not born children of God. We are God's creation, but the scripture is clear that God's children are different than just those created by Him. So, not everybody is a child of God. We also are not children of God by virtue of any human decision—whether our own or anybody else's. We don't decide if we are God's children. Our parents don't decide if we are God's children. Our spouse doesn't decide. It is not a human decision.

Who decides? We must be born of God. Just as you did not decide whether or not to be born into this world, the decision about being born of God is not up to you. It is God's decision who will be born of Him. Those who are born of Him have the right to be called His children.

John has told us that the Word stepped into the world, but he has not yet told us how. We end this morning with his description of how He came to the world and was not recognized. John wrote, "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" (v.14) The Creator stepped into His **creation**. The one Who made us became one of us. The Word, who made this world as a place for us to live and come to know Him, pitched His tent here with us and stayed for a while. This is a remarkable statement. God is wholly other. He stands outside the universe, and yet He stepped into it. This is the miracle of Christmas—that God is present with us in such a radical, reality altering way.

Those who recognized Him and lived with Him saw glimpses of His glory. John, especially, was present

during the transfiguration and when Peter declared Jesus to be the Christ. He was part of a select group that got to see the glory of God shine through the face of Jesus. Jesus is the one and only Son of the Father. He is full of grace and truth. Even more, as John would later quote Jesus to say, Jesus **is** the truth. He is the way the Father shows us His grace and showers it upon us. Jesus came from the Father to bring us the Father's grace and truth and to demonstrate His love.

And all of this started at the very beginning. From the moment of creation this was worked out and God's plan of salvation was set forth. The Word participated in creation, making everything that is, knowing that He would eventually step into it to redeem it for Himself and the Father. It was all known in the beginning, and it was all worked out in history. Yesterday we celebrated Jesus' birth. This morning we have been reminded of the power, authority, and grace of the one Who was born. Seek God's face in this season. Seek to know His presence even more, and if you do seek these things, thank Him He has given you the right to be called His child!