

Last week at the State Theatre for our Easter celebration, we wrapped up a series entitled “*God on the Move*,” where we explored the overarching story of scripture, which is marked by God’s desire to dwell with His people. Today begins a new series, and we will bridge the gap between where we’ve been and where we will be going. Some of what we will talk about this morning will seem familiar to you because there are similar themes. The new series that we will be looking at together for the next several months will be from the book of John, and we’ve entitled the series: “*Life in His Name*.” As you will see, life is a major theme in the book of John, and before we get into today’s passage, which is John 1:1-18, I want to discuss the main theme of John’s gospel.

The main theme for the book of John is found in **John 20:30-31**, “*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*” Here, John clearly states his purpose for writing, so that his readers may believe. Belief is the doorway through which we receive life. Not simply eternal life, but spiritual life with implications right here right now.

With John’s purpose for writing in mind, let’s turn to our passage for today and read from John 1:1-18. Now this section of scripture functions as a prologue for John’s gospel, much like the beginning of a Star Wars movie when you see the scrolling text appear on the screen. Contained within these verses are the major themes John will explore through the rest of his book, so without further ado and with the most dramatic voice that I can muster, **cue the music...** let’s stand for the reading of God’s word.

Read John 1:1-18 ESV.

Now we have a lot of ground to cover, 18 verses, and not a lot of time to do it. By the end of our time together, what I would like for you to see is how John structured these verses to comprise one of the most beautiful explanations of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Martin Luther once said, “If a tyrant succeeded in destroying the Holy Scriptures and only a single copy of the Epistle to the Romans and of the Gospel of John escaped him, Christianity would be saved.” Fortunately, we have much more than that, but this tells you something of the significance of John’s gospel, and its opening does not disappoint. So let’s get into it.

Introduction to the Word

John's Gospel starts off in verses 1 & 2 saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." The beginning and end of this statement form an envelope helping us, in the fewest words possible, understand something about the nature of God. First, we discover that while we haven't been formally introduced to the identity of the Word, we learn that the Word has eternally existed without a beginning, always present throughout time. Then we are told that the Word existed alongside God meaning that the Word was distinct. Then John explains that the Word was God. He neatly seals the envelope by then reminding us again that He was there from the beginning, eternally existing.

Now, as you could imagine, I spent a lot of time thinking about these initial verses because I know that many of you would do the same. Here we are introduced to an aspect of God that is confusing to many of us, and that is God's Triune nature. God is a Trinity. I thought why is God a Trinity and quickly realized I was asking the wrong question. The question is not why is God Triune, the question is what is the significance of God's triunity. The undeniable truth is that God's nature is triune— **one God manifested in three distinct persons (Image)**. This revelation is consistently affirmed throughout scripture, leaving no room for debate. With that in mind, we must ask ourselves why this is significant to our faith. Here in the opening verses of John's gospel, We briefly glimpse the beauty contained in this central belief of our faith.

Logos: Creator, Source of Life and Light

In verses 3-5, we learn another important aspect of the nature of this Word, which helps fill out our understanding of his role and what he came to do. We read that, "*All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*" Incredibly drawing upon the creation account found in Genesis we learn that the words God used to speak creation into existence wasn't just words, but was, in fact, a person who is responsible for executing his will. We see this elsewhere in scripture as well, but perhaps no more clearly than in **Colossians 1:17** says, "17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." **Hebrews 1:3** teaches us that, "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power."

For many scientists, it's a mystery as to what causes the universe to be held together and not to simply unravel. However, here, we gain insight into the role of an individual who was the Word, and credited with maintaining the unity of all creation.

We also learn something of the nature of the Word when John says that, "**In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**"

Knowing that this Word is the executor of God's will and created all things, he is also the source of all life. It's here we are introduced to another major theme in John's Gospel, light. We are told that the light shone in the darkness, but was not overcome by it. This Word is synonymous with light, and as the light shines on all people, both those who will believe in him and those who will not, it exposes all of creation for what it is.

To some, this light will be as the sun shining through a window warming your face on a cold day, and yet others will scatter from the light, finding comfort in darkness. We will revisit this idea in just a few verses, but for now, it's enough for us to know that the Word has always existed, he is distinct, he is God, he is the source of all created things, and he is the light of God exposing the darkness in our world. This should build out for us a fuller picture of who the Word is in our minds.

Witness of the Light: John the Baptist

With this understanding in mind, John turns our attention to the opening scene of his gospel in verses 6-8 it says, *"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light."* So we are introduced to the Word and given a profound understanding of his role in the cosmos, and now we are introduced to a new character named John, this is not John the author of the gospel of John, in fact John never mentions his name, he only refers to himself as the *'disciple whom Jesus loved'*, this man however, is none other than John the Baptist. We should be familiar with him from all of the other gospels, which tells you something of his significance, here we are told of what his purpose is. He is a witness. This is significant because he is a witness of the light, not the light himself. True prophets are like the moon, they are not the sun rather they reflect the sun. Many church leaders are too enamored with themselves to share the stage with God. Here we are told that John is a witness about the light so that others would believe through him. He was the forerunner to the one who is the true light.

Rejection & Reception of the light

In verses 10-13 we see how the world responded to the true light that John witnessed. Initially we are told, *"He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him."* The sad irony of this statement is twofold, first the one who created all things was not even recognized by his creation because they had become so estranged from him. As if to make matters worse, his own people, Israel, did not receive him.

Just when all hope seems lost, as if the light from a candle was about to be extinguished we are given hope in verses 12-13 when John says, **“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”**

Here we are introduced to another key theme in John’s gospel, new birth. As one commentary states, “flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” We see from this passage that new birth is nothing more than an act of God. This is what I love so much about the doctrine of election. It has nothing to do with what family you were born into, nor does it have to do with your status or your own personal ability. To be born of the Spirit is entirely a work of God in those who believe and receive new life.

Witnesses of God’s Glory (Believer’s Role)

In the next section of verses we are brought full circle. Whereas we are now counted among those who have believed and received life from the Word, like John the Baptist, we become witnesses. Specifically, witnesses of the Glory of God. Similar to the glory of God that filled the tabernacle in the form of a thick cloud of smoke. Here in verse 14 we see the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, literally translated as “tabernacling” among us in the form of a man. The full embodiment of God made visible.

There is a reference to John the Baptist again, setting the stage for what we’ve all been waiting for. John the Baptist says in verse 15, *“This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”* Whomever it is that John is referencing he recognizes that it is he who is The Word and he who is the light of the world. Do you know him?

Choice

Not only are we witnesses of His Glory, but also of his Grace. John continues in verse 16 saying, **“For from His fullness, we have all received, grace upon grace.”** Some translations interpret this as grace in place of grace, which we see signified in verse 17, **“For the law was given through Moses, which was one form of grace, but grace and truth came through...”**

And finally, what we've eagerly awaited: the Word, the light, the complete embodiment of God in human form—the central figure of the narrative. John identifies all these titles and attributes them to Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

And just as John began with an incredible statement regarding the Word he ends his prologue in verse 18 by naming Jesus, identifying him as the only begotten son of God, who sits in the lap of his Father, God has sent his son to us, and through believing in Him, we can experience life in His name.