

Series: Today we're beginning a new series that myself and the staff have been looking forward to since November of last year when we planned the series.

My personal story with this Gospel goes all the way back to when I was in High School and I had a friend named Chris who was a Jehovah's witness. He was knowledgeable and well-prepared to debate Christians over the issue of Jesus' deity. I had been recently saved or rededicated myself to Jesus and so I had a voracious hunger for God's Word. And John's Gospel was one of those books as a new believer/disciple that I would devour.

My friend Chris struck up conversation with me, challenging me about the deity of Christ. It was my senior year and I had grown quite a bit in my faith, and the Spirit had anointed me to open his blind eyes. God gave me the grace of bringing back to my remembrance all kinds of details from John's Gospel that I didn't even remember studying. A grace of the Holy Spirit. By the end of that discussion, Chris stared at the ground, looked up and said, "well Jeff. You've given me a lot to think about." I challenged him to go home and read John's gospel. Thinking he wouldn't.

But he did! And boy did he read it. Up one side and down the other. He came in Monday morning, stormed into my homeroom as other students were filing in before the bell, and the kid looked like he hadn't slept for days. He said, "Jeff I need to talk to you. I can't sleep. I have missed like half of my meals. And I read through John's gospel as many times as I could. I'm so confused. What do I do?" I said, "Repent and believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." And I held out my hands and he took them and I lead him in the sinners prayer right there in that classroom. He confessed his sins, he confessed his faith in the one true God: Father, Son, and Spirit—the three in one—and his faith in the full sufficiency of Christ's work on the cross to save him forever.

And he attended church with me that senior year every time the doors were open.

Until his parents found out. They converged him with their church elders and put him in the middle of the living room and assaulted him for his faith, threatened to disown and disavow him. And then, they pulled him out of the school to keep him away from me and the church. And despite my best efforts, I never found out what happened to him.

But the experience he had with this Gospel—the sleepless nights, the missed meals, the anguish of heart, the discombobulation—can all be ours as well.

If we take this sacred word deep into the recesses of our thoughts and meditations. If we wrestle with its truths and allow ourselves to be filled with the glory and majesty of this book?

John's Gospel can change your life. Your marriage. Your outlook. But that change never comes without holy disruption!

John's Gospel can also give you a voracious hunger to read Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Why Four Gospels? *There is only ONE GOSPEL—with four accounts.*

We have four original, authentic Gospels of Jesus in the Bible. But we must understand the literary differences between these Gospels.

Mark is an action-based Hero Narrative. The action Gospel. A Hero Narrative centers on the remarkable exploits of the Hero—usually someone like **Brutus, or Cassius, or Sulla**—and ancient Roman leader who put everything on the line for King and country.

Matthew is a Historical Biography. This type of biography shows the Hero's importance on a universal scale or world stage. Matthew adds a birth narrative as well as the major teachings of Jesus—he bookends his Gospel by Jesus' birth story which hails him as the ruler who will shepherd God's people (Mt. 2), and the risen and supreme Lord of the universe (Mt. 28:18ff).

Luke is a Historical Monograph. Ancient Monographs were typically orderly or chronological accounts of historically accurate events surrounding the life of a historical figure, not just stories about the historical figure. Luke begins his Gospel saying he undertook to write an orderly account of the events surrounding Jesus of Nazareth.

John's Gospel is a Theological Memoir. Memoirs were Personal reminiscences, the personal memories of select events in the life of a historical figure. A memoir is a very selective account of the teachings and actions of a historical figure. Issues of chronology are not nearly as important, as well the Memoir will have fewer public speeches and more intimate personal exchanges between Jesus and his closest followers or Jesus and his most vociferous opponents.

John's Gospel is designed around a particular theme. The stories are historical, but they are organized around his theological theme.

So, what's the theme?

Purpose and Theme: John 20:30-31 "Therefore many other **signs** (signs, sayings, symbols) Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these have been written **so that you may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that **believing you may have life** in His name."

So, John's purpose is that we would see Jesus' "signs" that we would believe that he is the anointed King (Messiah/Christ) and God's unique Son from eternity—and after having believed this message and trusted in HIM, we might receive eternal life, and abundant life.

Now what is the key to seeing Jesus in his "signs"?

John 2:2 "What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."

What was revealed in the sign Jesus performed? His glory. And after seeing the glory, the disciples believed. You see the key to believing in Jesus is that we must see that embodied in his life is the glory of the One and Only God, through God's one and only Son.

John 1:14 "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."

John wants to put us in the middle of a raucous wedding party at Cana as Jesus changes the molecular structure of water into wine.

He wants to put us on the dock as Jesus' teaching reverberates off that lake into the hillsides of hungry disciples.

He wants to give you and a ringside seat at the tomb of Lazarus.

And all of these miraculous signs and wonders as we behold them the glory of God is revealed to us.

Let's read this together, out loud. And then I want to encourage you to begin to memorize 1:1-18.

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

2 He was with God in the beginning.

3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:1-5).

The very first thing we see in this passage is that...

1. The Universe had an absolute beginning. “In the Beginning” (Jn. 1:1a)

Ἐν ἀρχῇ In Greek this word for “beginning” is *arche*, from which we get the term *archeology*. This entire family of words means “absolute start or commencement of any creative activity.”

Greek philosophers denied that creation had a definite beginning. Those philosophers taught that the universe emanates and springs forth eternally from God’s being. On this view, the natural universe is eternal and beginning-less.¹

But the Judeo-Christian faith does, and has historically refuted this belief in favor of a definite beginning of the finite universe. This view is repeatedly:

Affirmed in the Old Testament

- Gen. 1:1 “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gk. *en arche*)
- Is. 45:12 “It is I who made the earth and created mankind on it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I ordered their starry hosts.”
- Is. 66:1-2 “Thus says the LORD, “Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? **For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being,’ declares the LORD”**
- Job 38:4 “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding.”

The Old Testament affirms with unqualified emphasis “The universe began to exist.”

What about the New Testament

Affirmed in the New Testament

• **By Jesus**

Mk 10:6 “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’”

Mk 13:19 “because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again.”

I think it’s clear that Jesus thought that the world had an absolute beginning. And that the Genesis account of that beginning was historical and factual.

• **By Paul**

2 Timothy 1:9 “He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.” In typical Jewish fashion, Paul thought that the created order, including the creation of time, had an absolute beginning.

¹ William L. Craig “The Scientific Kalam Cosmological Argument” p.1. Accessed at ReasonableFaith.org.

- **By the early Church**

Heb. 1:10 “In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.” This “laying of the foundations of the earth” language is drawn right out of the OT and always refers back to the creation story of God creating the world from nothing.

- **Affirmed by Science and Cosmology**

Stephen Hawking “All the evidence seems to indicate, that the universe has not existed forever, but that it had a beginning... This is probably the most remarkable discovery of modern cosmology. Yet it is now taken for granted.” Yeah, um, Jews and Christians have been taking this for granted for thousands of years.

Cosmologist Alexander Vilenkin stated in no uncertain terms, “With the proof now in place, cosmologists can no longer hide behind the possibility of a past-eternal universe. There is no escape, they have to face the problem of a cosmic beginning” (p. 176). Vilenkin says he has convincing evidence after 3 decades of scientific inquiry into the issue: The universe came into being out of absolutely nothing.

- **Affirmed by the Philosophy of Science**

The logical impossibility of an eternal regress of causes.

This issue of there being an absolute beginning of all space-time and the material universe out of nothing is the distinguishing mark of Judeo-Christian theology. This idea distinguishes us from false, man-made, pagan concepts of the nature of the universe. There was a definite beginning to our material universe.

Summary: John affirms that the universe—all the space-time, matter, energy *everything in the closed system we know of as creation* came into being in the finite past. The universe had a beginning.

2. The “Word” existed before the beginning began. “was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning.” (1:1b-2).

ἦν We should begin with the Greek term “was” (Gk. *ēn*) which stresses the preexistence of something. “was” here is grammatically in the “imperfect tense” stressing a stasis, or already existing state. The verb is the imperfect, active, indicative, third person, singular of the verb **εἰμί** which means “I Am.” And if God had created the “Word” then *that would be the beginning*.

How could he be with God in the beginning? Because he *was God* before the beginning began.

ὁ λόγος Jesus is referred to as “the Word” using the Greek term *logos*. But what does this mean?

In Greek thought: *Greeks held that all matter sprang forth from the prime reality which existed prior to creation—an unseen, invisible reality of which the physical universe is a copy.*

And they called this prime reality **ὁ λόγος**.

In Hebrew thought: *They viewed the Logos to be God’s personified Wisdom, Truth and Torah.*

- Gen. 1:3, 6, 9 “And God said...”
- Psalm 33:6 “by the Word of the LORD the heavens were made.”
- Proverbs 8:27-31 “When he established the heavens, I was there;
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
²⁸ when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master workman.

So here’s how John brought correction to both the Greeks and Hebrews on the nature of “the Word.” While the entire created order *is not eternal*, has not existed forever, **God’s Word is eternal**. Ps. 119:89 “Your **word**, Lord, is **eternal**; it stands firm in the heavens.”
The *Logos* is also the personified wisdom, Word, and truth of God, who was with God in the beginning, and existed as God before the beginning began.

From this rich background of Greek semantics and language, and Jewish concepts and theology—*John leads his original Jewish and Greek audience to a new and compelling truth:* The logos “Word” is God’s personified

John 17:4-5 “I glorified you on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me at your side with the glory I had with you before the world was created.”

Colossians 1:17 “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

John makes it possible to say two things in this verse John 1:1-2: (1) the Word is distinct from God, and the Word (as to his nature) was God.

“The same divinity that belongs to the Godhead belongs to the Word.” This passage is the fountain out of which Trinitarian thought comes. The *Word was with God*, God’s eternal “Fellow; the Word *was* God, God’s own self” (Carson 117).

Thus it can be rendered “what God was, the Word was”—sharing full deity with the Godhead, but distinct in person from God the Father.

Summary: The “Word” in this text is a person who is the embodiment of God’s wisdom, truth, knowledge, and self-expression.

In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with, alongside, accompanying God, and the Word was, as to his nature, sharing the infinite attributes of the divine nature—he was God.

So naturally John wants to tell us that the Word was the agent of creation.

And as such, life can only be found in him alone. Apart from Christ there is no life. Apart from Christ there is no light of truth.

Because he is the embodiment of God’s own truthful self-expression.