

THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel - Part one

Sunday, February 10th, 2013, 10 a.m. - Teaching #1626

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HOW JOHN INTRODUCES HIS GOSPEL

John's gospel - written around 85 A.D., almost certainly by the Apostle John - stands apart from the three other gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. Those first three gospels are called the "*synoptic gospels*." The term synoptic is derived from a combination of the Greek words (*syn* - meaning together) and (*opsis* - meaning to see). And the idea is you can take the first three gospels and lay them along side each other and get basically the same synopsis or account of Christ.

John's gospel isn't in the same pattern. John lists events none of the others mention. And he omits events that the other three gospels all include. John gives us no actual account of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. The baptism of Jesus isn't in John's gospel, though most of the events surrounding it are. Surprisingly, there is absolutely no hint of the account of the last supper Jesus has with His disciples. These are huge differences.

John also switches up the order of some of the key events in the other gospel accounts. We're going to study why he does so later on. For example, Jesus' cleansing of the temple and driving out the money changers is consistently recorded near the end of His life in the synoptic accounts. John puts it right up front in chapter two of his gospel. And there are many other changes as well.

John focuses his account in keeping with his overall purpose of *persuading belief in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, God the Son - John 20:30-31* - "**Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; [31] 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.**"

In keeping with this goal John builds - carefully constructs - his account around *seven miracles*, though he repeatedly uses a very different name for them. In keeping with his purpose, he calls these seven *signs*. By that he means these miracles aren't just *tricks*, or even merely *acts of compassion*. In other words, contrary to *red-letter interpreters*, these miracles are not, in John's eyes, mere manifestations of Jesus' loving character. They *are* that, to be sure. But John tells us they are much more. Like all signs, these seven miracles *point to something beyond themselves*. They validate faith in Jesus Christ. They point to who He *is*. And they point to the unrepeatable atoning work He came to accomplish.

John is also famous for his recording of the *seven "I am's"* of Jesus. What a marvelous list this makes: "*I am the bread of life*" (John 6:35), "*I am the light of the world*" (John 8:12), "*I am the door of the sheep*" (John 10:7,9), "*I am the good shepherd*" (John 10:11,14), "*I am the resurrection, and the life*" (John 11:25), "*I am the way, the truth, and the life*" (John 14:6), and "*I am the true vine*" (John 15:1,5).

And so we are on a marvelous journey. John's truly is a unique gospel. It's the gospel of belief. Now for today's opening text:

John 1:1:1-3 - "**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 was not any thing made that was made.**"

Let's get right into it:

- 1) **JOHN WANTS ALL SINCERE SEEKERS OF GOD TO KNOW JESUS CHRIST IS GOD'S UNIQUE, ESSENTIAL MANIFESTATION**
Both those words - *unique* and *essential* - are important. *Unique* is important because it means there is no one like Jesus Christ. He's is not one of several options to know Father God. *Essential* is important because it means Father God will accept no terms of peace *apart* from Jesus Christ, God the Son.

John 1:1-2 - "**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.**"

We should be so grateful for John's opening words. Luke opens his account like a *historian*. And we need that revelation. John opens his account like a *theologian*. He addresses another urgent need. He takes us all back to what we need to know about Jesus *before* His birth that first Christmas.

I hope you can all see how marvelously crafted that single first sentence of the very first verse is - "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**" Everything important is in that one sentence. *When* the Word was - "**in the beginning.**" *Where* the Word was - "**with God.**" *Who* the Word was - "**was God.**"

This is not quick, accidental writing. This is theological brilliance in a nutshell. We owe to John's powerful emphasis a great deal of gratitude and careful thought. All the other gospels unfold the divinity of Jesus in stages, by degrees. John can't wait that long. You sense his excitement in the way he splatters the divinity and glory of God the Son in the very first sentence of his account. How long does John wait to get to the heart of matter regarding the greatness of Christ? Sentence number one. O, that our hearts were still filled with that same passion!

I have just two additional quick observations I want to make on these two opening verses:

First, John uses the simplest words to open his gospel with a Trinitarian God. Forgive me for quoting these verses yet again, but notice the repetition of the two monosyllabic words, **was** and **with** - **John 1:1-2** - "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God."**

"Was" and **"with."** **Was** defines the Word. The Word **was** God. That means He was not anything **other** than God. **"With"** is a **relational** word. It means the Word **was** God, and yet He was not **alone** in His **God-ness**. He **was** God - not **a** god - and yet He was **with** God. Behold the triune nature being placed before us in John's early description.

And John **repeats** both of these terms because he is unpacking a truth that we take in only gradually. Our earth-bound minds process something like the Trinity only little by little. John repeats his words as if to show us he really **intended** to say what he said - like we'd say to someone, "That's right, you heard me!"

Second, God the Son is defined with the intriguing label of "the Word."

This too is such a carefully chosen term. Try to imagine what someone - anyone - is thinking - what's in his or her heart - without their use of words. And remember, I mean no capacity to express their thoughts **at all**. A person who couldn't **speak** could still write or sign. But those expressions are just unspoken words - communication in a silent form. I mean try to know someone - what's **inside** them - with no communication **at all**. It would be little different from someone in a deep coma.

Now we're closing in on the weight of John's description of Jesus as the **Word - God's Word** - to this dark world. John's deep opening remarks - say **verses 1 through 5** - are very crafted and calculated. They're all interwoven like the threads in a knit sweater.

When John calls Jesus **the Word** he's already calculating on the kind of world the **Word** came into. He's already calculating on his description of this world as a very **dark** world - **John 1:5** - "**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."** And the description of Jesus as the **Word** helps us understand the **kind of darkness** this world is in.

John is saying we are **in the dark** about knowing God in any saving way apart from Jesus, God the Son. We misinterpret God. We pre-judge God. We think wrong thoughts about God. We can't **know** God at all unless we know Him through Jesus Christ.

O, how profound this all is! God uses **His words** in Jesus Christ. We get the complete picture of what's going on in His mind regarding our redemption. This is the only place where we have any **light** in our darkness. God isn't just gesturing or shrugging or signaling this dark world. Finally, He's **speaking His heart out to us!** We have something firm and absolute and helpful - **Hebrews 1:2** - "**...in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."**

2) **JOHN'S GOSPEL IS UNIQUE IN ITS IMMEDIATE EMPHASIS ON JESUS AS THE CREATOR OF ALL THINGS - AND THERE'S REASON FOR THIS**

John 1:3 - "**All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."**

If you know your Bible at all, you can't read the first three words of John's gospel without your mind going somewhere else. It's can't be mere coincidence that John begins his New Testament gospel with those famous Old Testament words, **"In the beginning....." (1:1)**.

There is a huge, undergirding theological principle being established here. The One who is coming - the **Word** who John the Baptist will shortly see and publicize - is going to do more than most people imagine. Many will see His life and miracles and death. Many will even rejoice in the **forgiveness** He will provide for sins. But John's mind is racing beyond even these precious things.

The One who is coming will lay the foundation for nothing less than a totally **new creation**. He will make **"all things new."** And John's way of signaling all of this is by reminding us that the one coming to establish this entirely **new** creation is none other than the one who established the **old** creation.

In other words, Jesus has the credentials to come and do what He's going to come and do. He can open up the heart to God again because **He** is the one who created us in God's image in the first place! This is why John is so quick and anxious to proclaim the **Word who reveals the Father** and the **Lamb who will die for our sins**, as the **creator of all that exists**.

I have one other important thought here. Notice carefully the repetition of John's words in this single verse - **John 1:3** - **"All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."**

John is being incredibly careful here. Why does John do this? What's he up to? The single sentence is composed of two distinct phrases. And they say **almost** the same thing, but not **quite**. John knew there was a very common heresy floating around that still exists today. There was the idea that God the Father was the real creator. He created a slightly subordinate Son. And then the Son was also involved in the rest of creation.

That's the reason for the second phrase in John's third verse. Very carefully, John insists that **"...without him** [those are the important words] **was not any thing made that was made."** If the Father created the Son and then they were involved together from that point on in the creative task, then there **was something - the Son - that was created without Him**. And that's what John says never, never happened. There was - and still is - nothing created in all the universe(s) that exists that the Son didn't create.

And there isn't a single atom in all the universe that He, through the power of His Cross, Resurrection and Ascension - won't subdue to Himself in His grand, re-creative, redemptive assignment:

Philippians 3:20-21 - **"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21] who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."**

So this is John's grand message. Yes, Jesus is the Lamb of God. But Jesus didn't come **just** to forgive your sins. That's a **part** of the message. But just a part. The forgiveness of sins is the means to a wonderful end. There will come a new heaven and a new earth. The graves will be opened up and our decaying bodies raised and transformed to be like Jesus' own resurrection body.

And John's point is only the **original Creator can do that!** The one who originally made the world and all that is in it out of absolutely nothing will faithfully remake the world He redeemed with His own blood.

And I'd submit to you that this is a lot of wonderful truth to pack into three verses! Stay with us as we continue on this great journey.