

Veiled in Flesh the Godhead See: John 1:1-3, The Word, 12/3/23

The title of our Advent series should sound familiar, many of you have been singing this line every Christmas season as far back as you can remember. It's a line from the Christmas Carol "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" written in the 18th century by heroes of the Great Awakening Charles Wesley and George Whitfield. *Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity, Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel* These powerful words were inspired by the prologue to the Gospel of John 1:1-18 and I have the privilege of unpacking this marvelous text each time we gather this advent. I use the word marvelous because every time I read and study it, it's what it makes me do: marvel at its simplicity and complexity, it's beauty and depth...I'm excited that we get to swim around in it and I invite you to join me. Read it, listen to it, pray through it this advent season.

John's primary goal in his prologue is to answer the question, *Who is Jesus?* Arguably the most relevant question anyone can ask in this life. We live in a world that has lots of opinions on this question. There is a religious Jesus- a prophet, an angel perhaps, someone who became godlike, there's also the New Age Jesus- like Star Wars, an energy or force that's in all of us to overcome evil or just a bad day. There's Political Jesus, one pastor calls this the Tweetable Jesus, who is just distilled into a set of quotes weaponized on social media to support your causes.¹ The list goes on. But when it comes to opinions about Jesus, instead of trusting Muhammed, Joseph Smith, Oprah, the Simpsons or the Discovery Channel, I would prefer to hear from an eyewitness, someone who followed Jesus, observed his life up close, was present at his crucifixion, an eyewitness to the empty tomb, the risen Jesus and the ascended Jesus, and one who gave his life defending the true identity of Jesus- and that is the Apostle of John. It took John more than three years to figure out the fullness of who Jesus was. But he does not want his readers to take more than three verses to find out what took him so long to know.² From just these three verses we are going to see *three Essential Truths about Jesus as the Word*, the term John chose to use for Jesus, which we will be discussing today.

The Word as Divinity

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.

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke begin with genealogies- Matthew traces Jesus' line to Abraham and Luke farther back to Adam, but John goes even farther back than both of them, he goes back to before there was a beginning. Now, hearing John start his gospel *In the beginning was the Word* Jewish ears would have perked up...that sounds like Genesis 1:1. In the beginning God, and that's the point. John wants us to see the story of Christmas goes back long before the baby in the manger...asleep on the hay...into eternity past, before even the Genesis 1 creation- John is saying that Jesus existed before the creation of the world. Now maybe you say, well Jesus never claimed that, his followers later just made him into more than he really was. The

¹ JD Greear from John 1 sermon.

² John Piper, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/in-the-beginning-was-the-word>

problem with this is Jesus' own words- for example in John 17 in his prayer before his trial he says in verse ⁵ *And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.* That's just one, but it's pretty clear.

John also says *In the beginning was the Word.* And hearing this would have made gentile ears perk up. John was deliberately using a word that was freighted with a great deal of philosophical cargo. The Greek word for *Word is Logos.* The Greek philosophers that shaped the Greek and Roman world of John and even our culture today, saw rational order in the universe and our world. They believed that behind that rational order was a *divine reason* or principle from which everything came to be. So the thought was that everything that exists in our world, humanity, your pet, trees and the chair you are sitting on is a manifestation of a pre-existent version from a divine but impersonal rational principle. They called this divine reason- the logos. And so when John dips his pen and writes "In the beginning was the Logos..." he is saying the Philosophers were onto something, but let me reveal the full picture- "Yes, there is a logos, but it's not a principle or force, it's not an impersonal idea or rationale, but a divine person, his name is Jesus.

Jesus is the Logos. And he goes on to say the Logos both *"was with" God and "was" God* in the beginning. Now this seems a bit confusing, doesn't it? How can I be with myself and myself as the same time...well you and I can't but God can. What John is doing here is affirming a doctrinal understanding about the Trinity. Firstly, that *Jesus is God, sharing the same divine essence and attributes.* As *Hebrews 1:3 says, The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.* And Jesus himself says more simply in *John 10:30 I and the Father are one.* Which is the reason the Jews picked up stones to stone him, because they saw that as blasphemy, that Jesus was making himself equal to God. Jesus is the perfect expression of God, this is why we should read the Gospels over and over because every attribute of God- his love, holiness, truth, justice, compassion is expressed perfectly in the life of Jesus. And secondly, by say that Jesus was *with* God, a word that used of those in intimate relationship, that *Jesus shares an intimate relationship with and yet is distinct from God the Father.* Now we see Jesus and the Father, he doesn't yet talk about the third person of the Trinity, he will later in his Gospel, but the same is true for the Spirit- One in essence, yet distinct from and in intimate, loving relationship with each other- that's the Trinity. Imagine the moments you have felt most loved, significant, on the same page, secure, pleased...these are often brief, transient, imperfect moments, even in great marriages and families...imagine this eternally times a trillion, trillion. This is the intimate, loving, united, secure, pleasing relationship that exists within the Trinity. And this isn't the sermon- but an aside- Through Jesus' work on the cross, God invites us into that relationship with Himself for eternity!

Now you may have, but Pastor Nate, I don't really understand the idea of the Trinity. How can one God be three persons? Well there is a mystery to it that we can't understand. Whenever we talk about the Trinity we are swimming in a vast ocean, much that is too deep to explore. I appreciate what *J.B. Phillips "If God was small enough for me to understand he wouldn't be big enough for me to worship."*

The Word as Creator

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

This is a staggering claim. And yet it correlates well with Genesis 1. Remember from Genesis 1, *what instrument God used to create everything?* Did he create the world by waving a wand or building it with his hands? No, Genesis 1:2 says that he *spoke* and the universe burst into existence. The most recurring word in Genesis 1 is the word "SAID": "And God *said*... *let there be light*, and there was light. John is saying the instrument of creation, the logos, the word is Jesus. The Apostle Paul says this it like this. *Colossians 1:16-17 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.* The most recent images from the Hubble Space Telescope suggested that there are about **2 trillion galaxies [PICTURE]** in the observable universe, filled with billions of stars and planets in each. Jesus spoke them into existence. The trillions of **subatomic quarks and leptons [PICTURE]** in your body? Jesus spoke them into existence...and Hebrews tells us he holds it all together through the power of his word. My brain hurts. Staggering...

Now suppose a Muslim, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness disagrees and says Jesus is a created being, he was just the first creation of God, which is an ancient heresy called Arianism from the 4th century. But the way verse 3 is written takes that possibility off the table. **[verse 3 slide]** *v3 If it was made, it was made by Jesus*, which takes off the table that Jesus was a made thing, because that would mean that Jesus would have had to make himself, which is impossible. Everything that was made was made by Jesus, and Jesus could not create himself, which makes Jesus an un-made being, and the only being that is un-made is God. Follow?

And so because Jesus as the Word is Divinity and Creator the implication for our lives leads us to the third essential truth. **The Word as Authority.** Because the logos for the Greek philosophers was the divine reason behind everything in creation, it gave purpose to the universe, to the world affairs, to how they live. See the important question for the Greeks was "What is the logos?" What is the purpose? Your goal, for the philosophers, was to align yourself with the logos so that you could live according to your designed purpose. The problem of course, is there wasn't agreement as to what that purpose was. It was subjective opinions with different schools of thought- Platonism, Stoicism, the Epicureanism...

But into that subjective, abstraction- John 1 says, the logos for which you were designed, that gives your life purpose is not a subjective, abstract principle or universal force, it's an objective, personal, knowable being- Jesus Christ, who created, designed us, whom we are to get to know and love. And we discover our purpose by knowing the Logos Jesus. That makes sense doesn't it, if Jesus made us and the world for a purpose, He has the authority to tell us how to live according to that purpose? If you see an iPhone being used as a doorstop, you would immediately say- that iPhone is not accomplishing its purpose, Steve Jobs would have been horrified because you are not using your iPhone according to the creator's design.

Now as obvious as this seems, you realize the statement I just made, that Jesus Christ has absolute authority over how we live, our purpose and we should live accordingly, that is about

as inflammatory of a statement as I can make in today's culture. We live in a culture that has largely abandoned and seeks to undermine the notion of a divine, absolute logos, especially the notion of a personal God to whom we are accountable. The logos in our culture is a lower case logos...subjective, personal. We are told there is no overarching capital L logos, we are told to look inside you and find your own logos, and that is true for you and no one's logos is superior to anyone else's. All equal. I define my own morality, identity, sexuality, purpose for myself. But let me ask the question, Who made you? Does your maker have a right to speak about these things?

Let me borrow an illustration from Tim Keller.³ Imagine you are in a Literature class and the teacher has you analyzing a poem and discussing what you think the poem means. And so all the students are giving their opinions about what the poem means. And no matter how crazy and wild your opinions are the teacher will probably say well they are all equal opinions because no one has the authority to say any different. This is essentially modern secularism's thinking today. But what would happen if suddenly the author of that poem came in and said, I wrote this poem and this is what I meant when I said it. Well, end of discussion. He's right, and you were either more or less aligned with the truth depending on your opinion. Because authority comes from the author. You can't say, "no you didn't mean that!" John 1 says the author of your life is Jesus, he defines what is true, he is our divine logos, therefore he ought to have authority over the purpose of your life.

So what is your logos? Who or what has the authority to define that in your life? Who or what decides the best way to use your time and resources? What is the logos that informs your morality? That decides how you will use your sexuality? You may say, "No one is going to tell me what to do with my body, or live my life but me." And that's fine, you have a right to your opinion, but I want you to admit your real position. You believe you are your own logos. You are like the student sitting around the table giving his opinions about what a poem means, you have no right to tell anyone what is right and wrong, what is moral or immoral, what is worthwhile or not worthwhile to pursue in life. And a world without a logos, is a world without truth (just opinions), a world without right and wrong (just what is efficient for who is in power), a world without real love (just a feeling from neurons and chemicals) , a world that has no meaning...to quote MacBeth (it is just a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing). And friends, that is a world that is unbearable. What if the incarnation that first Christmas was the author coming into the classroom of our lives? What if when Jesus said, "I am the living water, whoever drinks for me will never be thirsty." Or "I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me will live even though they die." What if he was speaking as the author of the universe, the author of the world affairs, the author of your life?

Now many of you are here and you believe everything I've said this whole time, and yet Jesus is not really, functionally the Logos, the authority in your life. You have other logos in your life. You might be living like that iPhone being used as a doorstop. It's functional, but missing out on the purpose it was designed by its author. Until you give him the authority he's due, you aren't

³ Tim Keller, John 1:1-5 sermon from 1990, www.Gospelinlife.com

really living your purpose. Give him your life, give him the right to become your divine reason so that you can live according to how you were designed.

Some of us hesitate and there is a tug of war in our soul, wanting to maintain control and authority in our lives and the reason is because we fear that if we really make Jesus functionally the logos of our lives that he might exploit that authority. What if I really give over my life and I lose something I love? Or I'm unhappy? Or he leads me somewhere I fear to tread?

But verse 4 says, *"In Him was life."* See Jesus isn't trying to rip you off, and exploit you or make your life miserable- he's trying to give you true life, a life worth living. And this is what I have discovered. And the reason that we can trust him is because when he came to this world, he didn't come like a dictator with ultimate power, exploiting his subjects. He could have. But he came humbly, he came to poor teenagers, he came like one of us and subjected himself to the world. He lived among us and loved us, and ultimately gave his life so that we could have true life.