

John 1:1-16 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

John 20

The Story of Jesus the beloved Apostle John wrote has been a favorite of Christians for generations.

While Matthew, Mark, & Luke tend to tell their stories in a more strict chronology of Jesus' life, John wrote his last and was acquainted with what they had written, so he takes a different tact.

John fills in some of the details & stories the other 3 leave out.

What I'm about to share with you is stuff that is usually only dealt with in a college class.

Churches hardly ever get into this kind of stuff because, most Christian just don't care.

But I know our group here on Wednesday nights loves this kind of stuff.

I know many of you read & study on your own & that some of you have encountered stuff written by liberal scholars that casts doubt on the NT.

This is the perfect place for us to take a look at some of these things.

Remember some time back when we took a look at the historical setting for the life of Jesus in Galilee where He spent the majority of His time.

We saw that Jesus presented Himself in the role of a **Rabbi** who gathered round Him a band of disciples, then worked His way throughout the countryside, presenting Himself to Israel as her long awaited Messiah.

We spent some time talking about **disciples** and how they were developed by the schools of Galilee.

Both boys & girls spent their childhood years under the tutelage of **torah teachers**, memorizing entire books of the Tanach.

Those who were especially good at memorization & showed skill at understanding the Word of God advanced to deeper levels of memorization & study.

Those who didn't went into their family's business or became apprentices in some other line of work.

Young men who showed **great skill** would move from studying under their torah teacher to following a rabbi, but only **if** the rabbi chose them, & rejection was far more common than acceptance.

The goal of discipleship was to be just like the rabbi.

By asking to follow a rabbi, a disciple was saying, "I think I can be just like you."

So most rabbis turned down disciple-candidates because they saw something in the young man that was a fatal flaw that would keep him from becoming like himself.

What made Jesus so remarkably different is that He went to 12 guys who'd already washed out of the disciples schools of Galilee and were at work in their family businesses.

And he called them to follow Him. IN essence he was saying to these guys, "I know that you can be just like ME!"

This explains why they all dropped what they were doing and immediately began following Jesus.

His invitation was a dream come true – something they had at one time aspired to but had given up on when their Torah teachers had flunked them out.

Now – I give all of this background to share this one important point – the disciples, who became the Apostles, were young men who'd developed the skill of memorization.

They could all quote entire books of the Tanach from memory, in a near word perfect manner.

They didn't possess notebooks & paper with ball point pens.

They didn't have laptops or iPods.

Learning was done by memorizing the lessons.

On Sundays for the last 2 weeks we've been taking a close look at the early church in Acts 2.

We've seen how they met daily at the temple to listen as the Apostle taught about Jesus.

Jesus had given them the promise that the Holy Spirit would recall to their memory everything He'd said.

As the Apostles spoke, the Spirit took charge and used their words to instruct the new believers who were flooding into the new community.

It didn't take long before the Apostles' teaching became a set & standard body of teaching.

And as the new believers gathered in their small groups from house to house, one of the things they did was to make sure they were all memorizing what the Apostles had taught about the life & teaching of Jesus.

They did this because the Apostles had made it clear every Christian is a DISCIPLE!

Jesus had sent them out with the command to make disciples.

The Apostles saw what they were doing as they taught daily in the temple was a fulfillment of that command.

So of course they made it clear those new believers needed to commit what they were saying to memory.

And since all learning was done this way in the ancient world, it was relatively easy for those early believers to memorize the standard body of doctrine & beliefs the Apostles taught.

Today, liberal scholars point to the *similarities* between the Gospels of Matthew & Mark & say that *both of them* used some unknown prior gospel as the source of their stories.

In fact, some go so far as to say that first, Mark used this mystery gospel, then Matthew copied Mark & added some stuff.

Now, this is curious in light of the fact Matthew was a disciple of Jesus while Mark wasn't.

Why would Matthew copy Mark when he'd been there & had heard & seen Jesus?

That makes no sense.

History tells us that Mark spent a lot of time with Peter, and drew his

knowledge of the life of Jesus from Him.

So, to what do we owe the similarities of not just Matthew & Mark, but Luke too?

In light of the history of that era, we can attribute their similarities to the fact that they wove their gospels around the set & standard oral tradition developed by the Apostles on the life & teaching of Jesus.

Matthew, Mark, & Luke simply took the standardized story of Jesus that was common knowledge, and had been memorized by thousands, then edited & tailored it to the specific audience they wrote to.

Mark was writing to those who were primarily Romans in their outlook.

Matthew wrote to Jews.

Luke wrote to his master, a man who came from a Greek culture & mindset.

Following the standardized story of Jesus known by all, they kept to the same chronological record of his life.

John wrote his gospel last, well after Matthew, Mark, & Luke were already in circulation.

Since he knew there were already 3 accounts that were written records of the accepted Apostolic account of Jesus, *as an Apostle*, he decided what was needed was an account that filled in some of the gaps left by the others.

And instead of following their method of telling Jesus' story as a chronology of events, John decided to tell his story thematically.

What I mean is, he doesn't follow a strict time table of Jesus went here, then there.

He does mention where Jesus was, but he's more concerned with what Jesus did & said.

The when & where aren't as important to John as the what & why.

This makes *outlining* John's Gospel a chore.

Outline of John

Here's the outline we'll be using.

I. THE SIGNS Chs. 1-11

II. THE END Chs. 12-21

In the first 11 chapters, John lists specific signs Jesus performed.

The last 10 chapters, John concentrates of Jesus' Last Week, and all He taught the disciples.

John tells us at the very end *why* he decided to take this different approach to the story of Jesus. In 20:30-31, he says –

30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

All 4 of the Gospels *together* don't come close to exhausting the details of the story of Jesus. In 21:25, John says –

25 And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.

John purposefully weaved his story around just a handful of things Jesus did & said that would encourage saving faith in his readers, then bring them into an ever-increasing experience of what it means to belong to Him.

This is what we'll be taking a look at on Sunday.

For now, let's dive in to ch. 1 -

I. THE SIGNS Chs. 1-11

A. Jesus as Creator 1:1-5

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

Matthew & Luke begin their stories of Jesus at Bethlehem, with His birth.

John starts his story much earlier; at the *beginning*.

Rather than presenting us with a weak & vulnerable babe in a manger, John speaks of the Ultimate Reality behind all things.

V. 1 has is one of the *cardinal proofs* for the Deity of Christ.

John begins his gospel with a bold, clear affirmation of Christ's divinity because it was a truth under attack at that time.

There was a movement afoot; we'd call it *a cult*, called **Docetism**, which was trying to mix Greek philosophy with Christian theology.

One branch of this movement denied the humanity of Jesus while another denied His deity.

That's why in 20:31 John said his aim was to prove that Jesus was **BOTH** The Messiah = *man* & Son of God = *Divine*.

So he begins with a clear cut declaration of Jesus' deity.

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

We know he's referring to Jesus here by what he says in v. 14 –

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Here John dispenses with the other error of the Docetists; that Jesus wasn't human.

The Divine Word took on humanity in the Person of Jesus the Christ.

John starts out -

In the beginning was the Word . . .

He begins his story of Jesus by reaching back to *the first words of the Bible*.

Gen. 1:1, **"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."**

According to Gen. 1:1, what existed *at* the beginning?

Not the heavens & earth. The beginning was the setting for the creation *of* the universe.

At the beginning there was only one thing – God.

John goes back to the beginning to speak of the very same thing.

But he refers to God as "the Word."

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

Since v. 14 makes it clear John is speaking of Jesus in v. 1, why didn't he just

write, “In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God and Jesus was God”?

He doesn't because he wants to make absolutely clear that when he refers to Jesus as God, his readers don't think of Him as some kind of *lesser deity* or merely an elevated spiritual being.

Jesus is nothing less than the One God of Israel, the Creator & Sustainer of the Universe.

By calling Him, “The Word” he accomplishes that.

You see, the word translated “Word” in v. 1 is the Greek word “logos” which had a very specific meaning in John's day.

Stay with me know . . .

From their earliest days, the Greeks showed an great passion for the realm of ideas.

They were among the first to develop schools in which men could devote themselves to nothing more than seeking to pierce the veil of mystery surrounding existence.

Our whole way of understanding the modern world is mostly the fruit of Greek philosophy.

There was *one pursuit* of the philosophers that surpassed all others.

They believed that behind everything that existed stood one Ultimate Reality that gave rise to everything else.

The heart & soul of all Greek philosophy was to discover what that Ultimate Reality was.

For a long time, they thought they had come close when they decided all creation was comprised of 4 basic elements or *essences*, as they called them;

Earth,

Water,

Fire,

Air

But after a while they concluded there had to be *another essence* that acted as the glue that held these things together in the right proportions to make all the different things in creation, from stars to dirt.

They called this the “5th / *quintessence*.”

This view of the universe lasted for decades.

But it left the philosophers with a question: What causes the quintessence to

KNOW how to order the universe as it is?

There is clearly a *design* in creation, & that means there's a Designer!

This is when the Greek philosopher *Heraclitus* came up with the idea of the “logos.”

Up till then the Greeks had used “logos” to refer to a person's reasoning & thought process.

We get our word “logic” from this.

Logos refers to ordered thinking & expression.

But Heraclitus used “logos” to describe the ordering principle *behind the universe*.

He concluded what they were looking for in the quintessence could not to be

found in the creation itself.

It stood outside the universe but gave order & direction *to* the creation. Other philosophers picked up his idea of the logos & began to run with it. They referred to the logos as the “creative energy” of the universe.

They saw it as an all-pervading principle that held all things together.

Plato, one of the greatest of Greek philosophers, gave expression to the idea of the logos in his famous story of the cave.

Imagine people sitting in a dark cave.

The light is so dim, they can't really see much around them.

And that cave is all they have ever known.

The light from the entrance to the cave shines on the back wall of the cave, and as people outside pass by the mouth of the cave, the people *inside* the cave see their shadow on wall.

The people inside the cave don't actually see the people, just their shadows. And after a lifetime & many generations the cave-dwellers begin to think the shadows are the real thing, instead of just the images of the real things projected by the light.

Plato used this story to say that all the things we see that comprise the universe are merely the shadows of a higher reality.

That higher reality is the logos which projects those things into the creation.

Think of it this way – when I say “chair” all of us think of the same thing.

And yet, a chair can take all kinds of forms. [Elab.]

The *word* “chair” produces in our minds an IDEAL from which all of us can project our awareness onto the things around us and identify whether or not a thing is a chair.

In fact, that IDEAL is what we use when we judge the suitability of something to fulfill its role.

By John's time, the Logos was the IDEAL behind all IDEAS.

It was the Ultimate Reality that explained *the way* the universes was, as well as *why* it was.

Through Jesus, John had come to understand that the Logos wasn't merely some abstract philosophical principle.

The Logos was a Person & he wanted others to come to know Him as he had.

[1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God . . .](#)

As a Jew, John knew the difficulty his fellow Jews had with the *deity of Jesus*.

So after putting his first statement *parallel* to Genesis 1:1, & by so doing equating Jesus with God, he moves quickly to show that Jesus was also **WITH** God; meaning the Father.

One of the consistent themes of John's gospel is the huge amount of grief the Jewish leaders gave Jesus because of His constant claim to deity.

The Jews were fierce defenders of the truth that there was only one God.

They had borne the anger & hostility of the Gentile world many times because of their fierce devotion to Yahweh as the one & only God.

While the rest of the world worshipped *many gods*, the Jews doggedly held to the worship of only One.

Yet here is John, a Jew of Jews, who now says that while there is only one God,

there are two persons who make up God.

As we read more of scripture we discover that there are 3 persons who comprise the One God; Father, Son, & Spirit.

Don't worry; I'm not going to launch now into an elaborate explanation of the Trinity now.

To be blunt – that far exceeds my puny intellectual capacity & meager teaching ability.

Rather, let me put it as far better teachers than I have said it.

The Bible is quite clear; There is One God, and three Persons who comprise Him.

Or to put it another way: God is 1 in essence but 3 in person.

Rather than stumbling at the doctrine of the Trinity because it transcends your understanding, rejoice that God is **bigger** than your intellect.

A God who does not surpass our understanding is not big enough to inspire awe.

And the essence of worship *is awe*; the awareness that we stand in the presence of something **bigger** than we are.

V. 1 ends with . . .

. . . And the word was God.

John wants to make sure his readers understand that Jesus is nothing less than the One True God.

We can't take it for granted that everyone here tonight believes this.

According to a recent poll, 40% of those who consider themselves “born-

again” believe that while Jesus was the Son of God, He made mistakes ^[1]

God does not make mistakes, and Jesus is God.

I'm reading a book right now by the foremost thinker of what's called the 'emergent church.'

These are people who feel alienated from the traditional church so they've left to start alternative groups.

They don't comprise a cohesive, unified movement so much as a loose affiliation of different groups that give expression to their disillusionment with the institutional church through all kinds of different ways of following God under the label of “Christian.”

Just yesterday I was reading his description of who he understands Jesus to be.

And I was stunned to see that he comes short of saying Jesus IS God.

He says that Jesus is the **expression** of God; that in Jesus we see what it means to follow God perfectly.

I mean, he dances round the block declaring how wonderful Jesus is, but at the end of it all, he's nothing more than a man whose humanity is made complete in that he allows God to live fully through him.

My concern is that this guy is hugely influential in the emerging church.

What he writes becomes the mantra for all the various groups that are call themselves **Emergent**.

John couldn't be more clear – Jesus is God.

2 He was in the beginning with God.

John is ultra careful to make sure he's filling in any holes that v. 1 may introduce.

By referring to Jesus as the Logos, he doesn't want his reader to think that Jesus is merely some kind of philosophical concept.

He's a *person*, so John assigns Him the personal pronoun, "He."

When the beginning began, Jesus was already there with God, as God.

3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

If a thing is made, if it is created, then Jesus did the making, the creating.

This ought to forever silence the Jehovah's Witnesses who say that Jesus was the First thing made, then He made everything else.

The language John uses here completely *nukes* that idea.

In terms of *category of being*, there are only 2 categories: Creator & created

And according to what John says here, what category does Jesus belong to?

He is in the Creator category.

Another reason John referred to Jesus as the Word here is because of the parallel he wanted to draw to the story of Creation.

Over & over in Gen. 1 we read that God *spoke* & creation came into being.

God creates by His Word.

It's God's nature to speak & reveal Himself to His creation.

He's not some far off distant deity.

He's not a serenely detached Creator who spun up the universe like a top then wandered off.

No -- God is the Word & the Word is God.

It's His very nature to speak, to reveal Himself.

God has revealed Himself to us.

The mysterious, all-pervading principle of order behind creation; the Great Designer Who's left abundant evidence for His existence in the universe, has stepped out of eternity, wrapped himself in human flesh & lived among us.

The Logos, the Word which spoke a billion-billion stars into being, spoke through the human vocal chords of a carpenter from Nazareth.

There is no more sublime thought than that the Creator should become a part of His creation so that we could know Him & have a relationship with Him.

4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

As the Creative Word, Jesus isn't just the originator of things, of objects.

He is the author of life.

He's the One who fashioned a body for man from the dust of the ground, then breathed into His nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.

This original life man received was the kind & quality of life God originally planned for man.

As long as man had it, he lived in light.

Light is used figuratively in the Bible to speak of glory & truth; of all that which is right, good, & pure.

Darkness speaks of sin & evil, of all that which is contrary to the goodness & holiness of God.

Based on ancient Jewish commentaries on Genesis, many scholars believe that

in their original creation, Adam & Eve were arrayed in garments of light. That just as Moses' face radiated with the light of the glory of God when he came down from Mt. Sinai, Adam & Eve spent so much time with God in the Garden of Eden their entire bodies took on His glory & reflected it into the creation.

But when they fell, their garment of light was extinguished in the awareness of guilt, and suddenly they could see each other's nakedness and felt shame. So they grabbed some leaves to hide behind.

John is saying that in Jesus is the original life God intended for man.

It's a life marked by light, by truth & goodness.

And it's a light the darkness could never extinguish.

The first man may have fallen into darkness, but Jesus could *never* be overcome, because He is God.

B. John the Baptizer Points to Jesus 1:6-34

Now John turns from this deeply philosophical & lofty introduction of Jesus as Creator God to the testimony of a rather rugged spokesman – John the Baptizer.

John does this because he'd begun his acquaintance with Jesus through him.

John the Baptizer was someone who'd made quite a stir in Israel.

He came on the scene in much the same mode as the prophets of old & many believed he was the one foretold to *introduce* the long awaited Messiah.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

He makes it clear – John's mission was ordained & designed by God.

7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.

John the Baptizer's mission was to point people to the Light, which vs. 4 & 5 make clear is Jesus.

8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

John wasn't the Messiah; he was the one whose mission was to fulfill the promise to announce the Messiah was coming.

9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

Jesus isn't *a* way among many. He's not one possible option a man or woman *might* chose as they survey the marketplace of available philosophies & various religions put forth by different groups.

Jesus is the one & only Way for everyone, at every time & in every place.

10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

Here is an amazing thing!!!

Jesus created the world, yet when He *entered* the creation through the Incarnation, the world didn't recognize Him.

11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

God worked in history to prepare the world *for* the Incarnation.

The Father & Son didn't just start the whole thing rolling then kick back to

watch; sitting on a big couch, eating pop-corn, & enjoying the show, looking for a good time for the Son to step into creation.
God directed the entire course of history so that the world would be right & ripe for the Son to step into the river of time.

He called Abraham to move from Ur to Canaan.

Then He developed Abraham's descendants into a nation in covenant with Him.

He spoke through the prophets & scriptures to prepare the Jewish people for the Promised Redeemer who would restore to humanity what had been lost in the Fall.

Though the Jews had the blueprint, when the Architect came, they didn't accept Him.

Instead, they hijacked the blueprint and built things their own way.

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

While the Jews did not receive Jesus as a nation, there were many individuals who did believe and received Him.

By the time John wrote this, many Gentiles were getting saved as well.

What was stunning was to see how Gentiles who had at one time worshipped idols, had through Christ become more zealous worshippers of the One true God than many of the most ardent & religious Jews!

Those who received Christ had the life God originally intended for man restored to them.

They became children of God; children who were not merely the physical descendants of Abraham, but genuine spiritual offspring of the Spirit.

John is drawing a contrast here between those who've been born again & unbelieving Jews who claimed *they & they alone* were the children of God.

John says it's not **blood**, meaning physical descent from Abraham that counts.

It isn't the **will of the flesh**, meaning it's not adherence to some religious code or law, as though someone could merit a position as a son or daughter.

Nor is it by the **will of man**. Someone *else* can't secure salvation for you.

Only God saves & turns the lost into His children.

The ones God becomes a Father to are those who receive His Son.

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

This verse, as with so many verses in John 1, I just want to preach!

Here John makes it crystal Who he means by "the Word" in v. 1 – Jesus.

This refers to the Incarnation, when the Eternal Son rose from His throne, divested Himself of all His rights in glory, wrapped Himself in the frailty of human flesh, & stepped into time in the form of an infant.

And though the Incarnation was a marvelous & mysterious veiling of the *divine* glory, John says that the glorious light of human life as it was originally designed by God was in full effect in Jesus.

He overflowed with both grace & truth.

I want to take a Selah break right there.

Grace & Truth all too often seem to be opposite poles of behavior for us.

Grace speaks of unmerited favor & blessing.

Its root means *to beautify*, to make pleasant.

Grace brings unquenchable, infectious joy.

Truth refers to honesty & openness.

It speaks of disclosure and complete frankness.

For many, truth is often harsh & sometimes cruel because it lays bare.

People will sometimes try to excuse the hurt they cause & the damage they do by saying, “Well, I’m just being truthful.”

Now, if we define truth like that, then it’s hard to see grace & truth as compatible.

Whatever joy grace bestows is ruined by a dose of that kind of truth.

Jesus was full of both grace & truth.

He saw things clearer than anyone else.

He knew what sin lurked in the heart of every person He encountered.

Yet He showered abundant grace on everyone He met.

Now, I know what some are thinking – “Oh yeah? What about the Pharisees? He wasn’t so kind with them! He called them the spawn of Satan and white-washed tombs.”

I’d counter by saying He was being both gracious & truthful with them.

What He said was not only totally accurate, it was measured out, not to insult them, but to awaken them to the danger they were in because of their proud self-righteousness.

And you know what – it worked because we read in Acts that many of the Pharisees ended up becoming believers after the resurrection!

As believers who are called to be disciples of Jesus, we are called to be just like Him.

Just as He is brimming over with both grace & truth, so must we be.

Maybe that would be a good topic for discussion in your time after tonight.

Do you tend more toward grace or a distorted idea of truth?

Do you bring delight & joy to those around you.

Is there a spiritual beauty that emanates from you so that people are attracted to Jesus?

Or do you lean more toward the harsh & critical?

After introducing John the Baptizer in v. 6 then elaborating on Jesus as the object of John’s mission, the Apostle returns speaking about the Baptizer’s testimony.

15 John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’ ”

As one of John the Baptizer’s first disciples, John the Apostle reports that John had pointed people to Jesus.

16 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.

John means the fullness of grace & truth to be found in Jesus in v. 14.

Because Jesus indwells His people by the Holy Spirit, they are the potential of being just like Him.

In Christ, God has poured grace on us so that we might receive *even more grace*.
Let's say Bill Gates hands you a key to his house on Lake Washington and says you can use it and what it gives access to any time you want, no restrictions!
That key is the evidence of a special favor he bestows on you.
Now, you can walk around and show it to everyone and brag to everyone you meet.
Why not rather, USE IT!!!!!!
Jesus gives us the great privilege of claiming His name.
Why not rather, USE IT to enter all that God has for us?

¹ Barna, George, *Virtual America*, Regal Books, pg. 322 - 39% did not respond as disagreeing strongly with the statement, "Do you agree or disagree that Jesus Christ made mistakes?"