

New Life: John 1:1-34
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I'm excited to ask you to open your Bibles to the Gospel of John, chapter 1. This is a first for me as a pastor, and obviously a first time for us as a church family to take the Gospel of John beginning in chapter 1 and work our way through the 21 chapters of this book. I believe with great confidence that this is exactly where God would have us to be as a church family in teaching and proclaiming King Jesus through the eyes of the apostle John.

I want to give you a special invitation. I want to invite you today to life - new life, abundant life, eternal life. Our study through John is for the very reason that the Gospel of John was written. We don't have to guess at it. We don't have to summarize it to come up with the purpose. It is one of the books of the Bible that gives within it the most specific statement of its reason for existence. In John 20:30-31, it's as if John says, "Here's why have told you what I have told you. Here's why I have shown you what I've shown you." As one who had been an eyewitness to Jesus, one who had touched Him, eaten with Him, heard from Him, seen Him alive, dead, buried, and resurrected, John wrote these words. He says 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."

The purpose of John's writings is that you would believe that Jesus is the Christ, that Jesus is the Son of God. And when you believe, there's this promise that this purpose is accomplished, you will have life in His name. More than 90 times in the 21 chapters of John, the word "believe" is used. About 40 times, the word "life" is used. On many of these occasions, belief and life are linked together in the same story, in the same verse, in the same sentence. There's no greater example of this than the most popular verse in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

I found this life as a junior in college. After years of knowledge of God, I came to know God. After years of a religion in a North Alabama Southern Baptist Church, as a junior in college in my apartment at Lamplight Apartments on the second floor in Auburn, Alabama, I surrendered my life to the life of Jesus Christ. And I found new life. Today, I want to invite you to know this life with Jesus. Whether you're a middle schooler or a high schooler, I want to invite you to life in Jesus Christ. You may be a single adult or a senior adult. I want to invite you to life in Jesus Christ. John makes this promise to us. He said that by believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, we can have life. John offers his own unique perspective on Jesus. He was a disciple. He was an apostle. He traveled with Him, he saw Him, touched Him, heard from Him, saw Him work, saw Him die, and knew where He was buried. He saw Him resurrected and saw Him ascended to heaven. About 50 years after walking with Jesus, seeing Jesus, and watching Jesus ascend to heaven, he wrote down his perspective on Jesus Christ, the Son of God. John offers his unique perspective.

If you have any familiarity with the Bible, you would know that this is the fourth Gospel of the Bible. When we learn the books of the Bible, we get the first four of the New Testament real quick - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We call them the Gospels of the New Testament. They each tell about the same person. They tell about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, but each one of the Gospels bring to us a unique perspective from that writer's view. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were all three written first. You might wonder if there really needs to be one more Gospel. It seems that in God's economy, these four Gospels give us the complete picture of who Jesus Christ is. Matthew's Gospel tells us about the King Jesus, showing us His authority. Mark's gospel tells us about the servant Jesus, showing us His humility. Luke tells us about the Son of Man Jesus, showing us His humanity. And John's Gospel shows us the Son of God Jesus, telling us about the deity of Jesus. Matthew the King with authority, Mark the servant with humility, Luke the Son of Man with humanity, and John the Son of God with deity.

Behold Jesus the King with authority. He is fully God and fully man, serving in humility so that you and I could have life. When you look at these different perspectives, you get the whole story. This weekend, our seniors in high school went away for a retreat up at the lake. There was a group of about 20 teenagers who were at the same place, at the same time, at the same lake, eating the same food, with the same leaders. But if someone were to take those 20 seniors in high school and collect their phones, and scroll through each of their photos, they might ask, "Wait, were you at the same retreat I was at? Did you eat the same food that I ate? Was that at the same lake that I was on? Was that what happened?" So many things would be the same, but through different eyes, different angles, different views, and many different pictures.

That's what's going on with the Gospel of John as he writes for us and shows us the deity of Christ. He is the son of God, and by believing who He is, you and I can have life - abundant life, eternal life. I want to read for us today the first 34 verses of the Gospel of John. When you read these first 34 verses, in many ways it feels like we are eating a 16 ounce porterhouse steak and stuffing it in our mouth all at once and trying to chew it. It is thick and rich. I'm not guaranteeing you that we'll get it fully chewed before we're done with it. But I want you to hear the verses and let the power of God's word speak in this place.

John chapter 1 beginning in verse one:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 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. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

Let me stop right there for just a moment and let you in on something that will help you understand the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John was written by the apostle John. He never refers to himself by name in the Gospel. At least five times, he refers to himself as "a disciple that Jesus loved," but never in the Gospel of John does John identify himself as "John" while writing. So anytime you see the name John, it is a reference to the one that we know as John the Baptist or John the Baptizer. That is the John that we're talking about. So to clarify, he's referring to the one that we identify as John the Baptist.

Let's pick up again in verse six:

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.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 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. 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.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them, "I

baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

In these first 34 verses of John chapter 1, John is building his case from the beginning that Jesus is the Christ. Do you know that? Do you believe that? Do you believe that Jesus, born in Bethlehem, is the Son of God and is the Christ? How do we know that? How can we support that? In these verses, John makes six claims about who Jesus is. In a way, it's like he brings to the courtroom six exhibits of evidence - six statements, six declarations - making this beginning case that Jesus is the Christ. That He is the son of God, that He's worthy of your faith, that He's worthy of you following Him with your life. That He's worthy, whether you are a middle schooler, high schooler, or a senior adult. He worthy of you surrendering your life to Him and letting Him be your all.

John is building this case. There are six important claims here. Why would it be important for us to hear the statements of truth in these claims? The first reason is that it's important for finding your faith. It is important for you to hear these claims about who Jesus Christ is and what builds the case for Him being the son of God and the Savior of the world and the Lamb of God. It's important for finding your faith, and it's important for you in living your faith. When you're faced with temptation and you're faced with challenges in this life and you're faced with decisions in your life, understanding these claims about who Jesus Christ is as the Son of God is so critical for us in living our faith.

The third reason these claims are important is that they are important for defending your faith. When someone challenges you and asks you, "You went to church yesterday? Do you believe that stuff? Isn't Jesus just like any other guy, just a good man? I heard some people say He was a prophet. He's not like *the* son of God, maybe he's just *a* son of God." Whatever those challenges would be, these claims that John makes right here in the beginning of chapter 1 are so important for finding your faith, for living your faith, and for defending your faith. They are also really important for sharing your faith. If you are going to talk to someone about salvation and sins being forgiven and eternal life, knowing who Jesus is and knowing that the Word became flesh and that He came

and dwelt among us, that He came with the purpose of taking away the sins of the world - those truths and claims about Jesus Christ is are so important for us in sharing our faith.

Today, I want to grab a hold of these claims that John makes. There is not a lot of time given to proving the statements in these verses. He writes as one who has already seen the proof. It's like he is saying to us, "Because I saw Him, touched Him, heard from Him, walked with Him, here's what I'm left to say about Him. He is the Son of God. He is the Messiah. That One that God promised throughout our history as Israelites century after century after century? I met Him, saw Him, ate with Him. I saw Him die. I saw Him alive. Believe it."

Here are the claims. The first exhibit of evidence - number one - is His existence at the beginning. Verse one says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." Kent Hughes is a writer that I try to read every time that I am preaching through books of the Bible. He says this about the first verse of John: "It is the most compact and pulsating theological statement in all of God's word."

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God."

What John is saying in that statement to us today is that Jesus Christ existed at the beginning. Now, if you begin to really think about that your mind will begin to hurt. Your brain will begin to cramp up on you. What John is saying to us is not that in the beginning the Word was created. He's not saying that in the beginning Jesus Christ was created. John is saying that in the beginning the Word existed. Jesus Christ existed. It is so critical here for us to notice this capitalized "Word." What was John doing? John was reaching back into the Old Testament, and he was reaching back into Greek philosophy. He was forming this bridge to his audience by showing that what God was saying and doing and being in Genesis 1:1 is who Jesus Christ is. He goes into the Greek philosophy world. For 300 years, leading right into the life of John, this idea of *logos*, the Greek word for "word" there had become a part of their vocabulary. For Greek philosophy, it was their way of understanding a concept of there being a divine mind, of there being divine reason and thought. This divine power held it all together, and it existed.

Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning," and John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the word." For John's audience, they would immediately have known that John was taking this concept of what we understood to be something that has always existed, something that has always been in control, something that has always directed, something that has always existed. John puts a person on it. John puts a name on it. Some of you may be in the habit of reading Proverbs. Have you ever read some of those chapters in Proverbs, and when you get about halfway down in a chapter, you realize that it sounds like Jesus is talking? What's really speaking in that chapter is referred to as wisdom.

John is going back and he's taking this concept of wisdom, concept of word, concept of the divine mind, and he's putting a person on it. He's saying that in the beginning the Word is the person of Jesus Christ. Here is what is going to happen over the next few months. John unpacks and shows

us who Jesus Christ is. He helps us to understand that Jesus Christ has been here forever. He has no beginning.

Number two: John claims not only the existence at the beginning of Jesus, but he claims also that Jesus had an identity as God. The second exhibit that he offers as Jesus being the Christ is not only His existence at the beginning, but His identity as God. He says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." He is stating to us this truth that the Word, Jesus Christ, that existed in the beginning with God - that His essence and His character in every way is God. They are separate, but the same. This is what we understand as the Trinity, God in three persons. They have the same character and the same attributes with different roles in the Godhead. Jesus' identity is God. John was talking about a person that had been walking around in Jerusalem on the Sea of Galilee performing miracles. He is telling people that he wants them to believe that He is the Christ, that He is the Messiah, the promised One, the Son of God. It starts with this - He was there in the beginning with God. And even though He was there in the beginning with God, He also *is* God.

This third exhibit that he offers is not only that Jesus existed at the beginning and has an identity as God, but you also see His work in creation. When Jesus showed up in Jerusalem working miracles, it was not His first miracle. Maybe it was His first miracle on earth, but His first miracle was with earth in the beginning. He says that Jesus Christ was there creating all things. Verse three says, "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." He was there existing with God as God creating all things. When you look in Genesis chapter 1, the Bible starts with, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Then it walks through day by day by day what God created. Then you get to verse 26, where God says, "Let us make man in our image." Do you notice something in common about both of those pronouns "us" and "our?" What is significant about that? They are plural. "Let *us* make man." Everything that has been made has been made by Him, through Him, and for Him, the New Testament says.

The fourth claim that John makes: the incarnation of Christ. Verse 14 says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." What a leap John makes! He is proving that Jesus, this man you who walked around on this earth, existed before He walked around on this earth. And before that, He was God, and as God, He created all that you see in this universe. Today, when reports come in and headlines say, "Another Galaxy," "Another Star," "Another Moon," "Another Planet," "Another Critter on the Bottom of the Ocean," "Another Insect in the Deep Jungle," - all of it was created by Him. As fully God, he became fully man. We call it the incarnation. It is a word that describes the spirit becoming flesh. It is a word that describes deity taking residence in the body. He is saying in poetic and powerful words that the Word became a human and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He tabernacled among us. He lived among us.

We can't go through this passage without remembering what Paul said in Philippians. In Philippians 2:5-8:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

John is stacking up these claims about Jesus and beginning to make this argument that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is the Son of God.

The fifth claim that he makes is an introduction by John the Baptist. Verse six 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." That word "him" is a reference to John the Baptist. John the Baptist came declaring as a witness and a messenger that there was One coming. Think about that! John's mother was Elizabeth. Elizabeth gives birth to John. He had one job and one purpose. He would grow up and he would declare there was One coming who would take away the sins of the world. In the apostle John's experience with Jesus, think about how that's fitting together in his mind. Here's something else really unique and intriguing and different than anybody that's ever been born before. There was somebody born before Him whose purpose on this planet was to tell others that someone else was going to be born. Wow. He was the messenger.

Listen to this in verses 21-23:

And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

When John the Baptist appeared on the scene proclaiming that Jesus was going to be born, he was the first voice from God in at least 400 years. When the Old Testament ends, God goes silent. And 400 years later, John the Baptist is on the scene proclaiming that the Messiah is coming. He is the One who is going to walk on this earth to take away the sins of the world. He came to make a path for Him and clear the way. He came as the front man. He was the opening act for Jesus to walk through the city and the town and the wilderness and cry out, "The Lamb of God is coming."

This exact prophecy from Isaiah 40 is fulfilled, and John also quotes this when he says that Jesus is coming. It says:

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,

and cry to her

that her warfare is ended,
that her iniquity is pardoned,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

John the Baptist said, "I come as a fulfillment of that prophecy. I am the voice crying out that Jesus is coming." Wow.

Number six: the apostle John offers up Jesus's mission to the world. If you want to believe that Jesus is the Christ and you want to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, there was one coming who announced Him, and He came with a purpose. Verse 29 says, "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Jesus came with a purpose. Why? To take your sin away. To pay for your sin. To carry your sin that separates you from having a relationship with a Heavenly Father. Jesus came to deal with that. There's not a thing in the world that you can do to get rid of your sin. Jesus Christ deals with our sin. Jesus Christ bore our sin, paid for our sin, and took away our sin. He came on a mission. Mark 10:45 says, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

These six claims don't necessarily prove anything, but over the next few chapters, you will see John unfold signs and wonders that Jesus did. These leave you saying, "He must've existed before the beginning of time." He must've made it all. He came with a mission. He knew exactly why He was here. So what is your reaction? With this invitation to life and these statements of truth

about Jesus, what is your reaction? Some of you will react today by ignoring Jesus. Some of you will react today by rejecting Him and saying, "I don't believe." Some may react by doubting. Some of you may react by studying more about it. Some may react indifferently because you haven't really heard a word I've said all morning. I'm praying and hoping and trusting that somebody in this room today would react by believing. Behold Jesus and believe Him. When you see Jesus today, the One who made it all and has been here before the beginning, who was announced by John and bore the iniquity of us all, do you believe Him?