

**The Light and the Lamp**  
**Jesus and John in the first three chapters of John's Gospel**  
**Part One: Jesus the Light and John the Lamp**  
**John 1.1-18 (see 5.33-35)**

We've just wrapped up an important sermon series about what makes Covenant Covenant. Over the past four Sundays we walked through our essential beliefs, our sense of calling, the values that shape us, and the posture of the heart that we aspire to.

If you missed it, or parts of it, I'd really encourage you to go back and listen to those messages via our sermon archives or our blog. Or if you'd rather read them we have a print version as well. Just call the church and we'll email them to you or print them off for you. I have a hunch that as we step into the future together we'll find that it was pretty defining series for us. I hope you'll make that investment.

Praying about where to go after that series, the Lord brought me to the first three chapters of John's gospel. What an amazing bit of Scripture, and what a perfect place to shift our gaze off of ourselves and onto the One whose sacrifice for us as savior and whose presence with us as Lord and whose rule over us as King define us.

Two people are prominent in these three chapters. Certainly Jesus the Light of the World looms the largest. As we walk through these passages we'll be exploring some of the metaphors used to explain who Jesus is – word, light, stairway, new wine, teacher, temple – and the implications for us as we wrestle with who he is and what it means for us to follow Him.

Because God created us for relationship with himself, and because Jesus came to make that relationship possible, and because it is necessary for us to receive Jesus by faith in order for us to experience that relationship, each sermon in this series will include an opportunity for us to respond to him in faith, and then the whole series will conclude on November 14 with an opportunity for you to be baptized if at some point during this series, or leading up to it, you entrust your life to Jesus by faith.

The other person who has a key role in these chapters, though not nearly as prominent as Jesus, is the one called John the Baptist, the last of the great prophets and the preparer of the way for the Messiah. If Jesus is the light, John is the lamp, as it says in John 5.33-35 – not a rival source of illumination, but one whose purpose is to carry the light of Jesus into the world and hold it up for all to see.

The presence of John in this narrative reminds us that for us as believers, Jesus is not only the object of our faith, He is also the subject of our witness. This series will give us an opportunity not only to commit our lives, afresh or for the first time, to Jesus, but also for us to commit to making Him known.

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So three ways to prepare your hearts for this series.

First, I encourage you to read through the first three chapters of John several times during this series.

Second, I'd encourage you to pray for an open heart and soul each Sunday as we gather and open up these chapters, that God would use this series to show you the truth and to move you to respond in a way that pleases God.

And third, I want to encourage you to do one of two things – either get one of the sermon series bookmarks that Michelle made for us ...

### **Show slide**

Or go to our website and download the sermon series wallpaper to use as your lock screen for the next couple of months.

You can find that wallpaper by going to our blog on our website, or you can use this QR code that will take you straight there.

The reason I want you to have this, whether on your phone or to tuck in your bible, is not because it so beautiful – which it is – but because it has on it a key passage of scripture from this series.

In John 3.30, John says, “He must increase but I must decrease” (John 3.30). We are asking every one of you first to memorize that passage, and then to pray it for yourself and for this church family every day from now until Thanksgiving.

\* \* \*

Okay, let's turn to the passage now.

The start of John's gospel, verses 1 to 18, one of the most stunning things ever written.

Think of every person you've ever met.

You and the other person come together into a moment – both of you, regardless of surface differences like age or gender or ethnic background – having much in common as fellow members of the human race.



You share a common origin, the result of a union between a man and a woman. You share a common experience, enjoying the joys and gifts, and grieving the difficulties and losses, of the human condition. You share common limitations, neither of you able to transcend the

finite limits on your existence. You share a common plight. You both wrestle to make sense of a God who is present but absent, and to live by a moral code that is inherent but impossible. And you share a common fate. Death awaits you both.



Little wonder that our imaginations have been captured by for the past decade by superheroes – the idea that someone among us looks normal, but has some sort of unique power that transcends normal human limits.



But when we finish the latest Marvel or DC movie and walk out of the theater, we leave those superheroes behind. We know we'll never run into one at the Union. They don't exist. We return from our escape to a world full of ordinary human beings.

But their appeal runs so deep, because the idea that there would be super humans touches one of the deepest longings we have as human beings, that there would come one who would transcend the human experience, rescue us from the clutches of whatever holds us captive, and bring us safely home.

Which brings us to the opening lines of John's gospel. This morning we'll look at verses 1-18 of chapter one.

This is one of the most striking and mysterious and provocative and beautiful passages you will find in the pages of scripture.

And my goal is just to help us hear it. To let it speak. To make its astounding claims and let our souls respond.

\* \* \*

The other three gospels all start with an eye-to-eye, fellow-member-of-the-human-race, sort of view of Jesus. We recognize him immediately as one of us, It is only gradually that we discover he is something more.

Not John. He doesn't even start within human history. He starts before it, introducing us to a central figure of his gospel, a person he calls The Word, who exists even before there was a world to be born into.

### ***The relationship between this person and God***

#### **John 1.1-2**

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



What do we learn about this person called the Word? Before creation began, he already existed. From the beginning he was already in relationship with God. From the beginning he was God.

Separate, and yet one, just as God and the Spirit of God are separate but one in the creation account at the beginning of the bible, which these pages echo.

### **Genesis 1.1-4**

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.

Nowhere else in the Bible is this person called the Word. It is not a name. As we get a few more verses in, in verse 14, John gives us something closer to a name and title. This is the unique Son of God.

The Word is not a name or title. It is more of a role that he fulfills.

Scholars have written volumes on what this word means. Some trace it back to the word of God in the Old Testament, which almost had a personal quality at times. Others connect it to the idea of the prime force that was a popular topic of debate among Greco-Roman philosophers.

But I think we're meant to take the word at face value. What does a word do? It expresses, it gives voice to, the heart and mind and purposes of the person who speaks it. Without a word, we are left to guess. But with a word, we know.

John tells us that's just what this person who has always been, who is in eternal and unbroken relationship with God, who is himself God – that is just what this person does. He expresses the heart of God.

As JB Philips translates the opening verses,

At the beginning God expressed himself. That personal expression, that word, was with God, and was God, and he existed with God from the beginning.

### ***The relationship between this person and creation***

#### **John 1.3**

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



It's said both positively and negatively so there's no ambiguity. We might say "Through him all things were made. No exceptions."

Again John makes an amazing claim. There is a line that runs through the universe, a stark dividing line, between the one that creates and all those things that are created, and he puts the word on the side of the one who creates.

***The relationship between this person and spiritual life***



**John 1.4-5**

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

What has the power to bring a soul to life? What has the wisdom to open the way to spiritual maturity? The Word does. He brings people to life spiritually and he lights the way for them to come into relationship with God.

As the Message translation puts it:

Every person entering Life he brings into Light.

Only now, having established the true nature and character of the one called the Word, does John turn the scene to the earth.

***The relationship between this person and John – John, the last prophet, pointing past himself to Jesus***



**John 1.6-8**

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

If you've not read John's gospel before this is potentially confusing – John the disciple is writing here about John the Baptist, who we should really call John the Forerunner, or John the Waymaker, or John the last of the prophets, or at the very least John the Baptizer, rather than John the Baptist.

God uses John the Forerunner to establish a pattern for those of us who come to along after him, and come to know Jesus and are then sent back into the world as his representatives

We too are sent from God – as the father sent me so I am sending you

We too are called to bear witness to Jesus – the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few

And for us too the goal is that all might believe – go and make disciples of all nations

As followers of the Word we are called to use our words to narrate our own experience of the grace and truth of God made manifest in Jesus



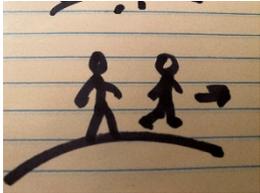
### ***The relationship between this person and humanity***

#### **John 1.9-11**

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

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

John makes yet another amazing claim, that God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, and the co-creator of the universe, stepped into the world that he made as a human being. Every person he encountered was someone he himself had helped to create.



And yet many of the very people he created didn't recognize their creator when he stood before them. And they turned their backs on him and walked away.

#### **John 1.12-13**

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.



We come in this verse to the heart of his mission, which was to bring humanity from spiritual death to spiritual life, and to reconcile them with the God who created them – ushering them into the relationship with God for which they were made.

The Message translation says:  
 But whoever did want him,  
     who believed he was who he claimed  
     and would do what he said,  
 He made to be their true selves,  
     their child-of-God selves.

### ***The relationship between this person and the historical Jesus***

#### **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 Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.



The phrase “made his dwelling” literally says “pitched his tent.” As Eugene Petersen put it in his translation:

The Word became flesh and blood,  
and moved into the neighborhood.

It refers to drawing near, but it also echoes all the language of the tabernacle and the temple in which God drew near to his people in the Old Testament.

The passage goes on:

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The idea of glory *always* has to do with God revealing himself, making himself known for who he is. Jesus comes dripping with the divinity that is his.

This is where we first encounter the idea that the Word of God is God’s Son. That doesn’t mean God conceived him – John tells us he has always existed with God. Instead, it means that he bears his father’s likeness. As the Message puts it:  
like Father, like Son

Another key passage that knits together glory, grace and truth is found in the story of God tucking Moses into a cleft in the rock and then passing before him, declaring his glory and goodness, and referring to himself using those same two words.

God fleshes himself out and strolls through our midst clothed in grace and truth in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

***The relationship of this person and John – John becomes less, Jesus becomes more – John is lowering himself and lifting up Jesus***



### **John 1.15**

(John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, “This is the one I spoke about when I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’”)

John is the last in a long and illustrious line of Old Testament prophets, and as such he carries a great deal of prestige.

Nonetheless he insists he is nothing compared to this Jesus, who is God and not merely human, and who has existed since before time began.

***The relationship between this person and Moses - God’s previous dealings with humanity***



### **John 1.16-17**

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

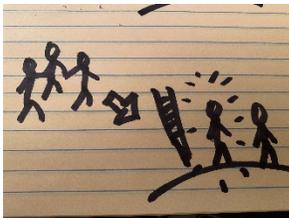
As the leading figures in Judaism and Christianity, Moses and Jesus are not at odds. The entirety of Moses' teaching anticipates and finds its fulfillment in Jesus, his obedient life, and his sacrificial death.

Moses anticipated the coming of Jesus in Deuteronomy 18.15, when he said:  
The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.

### ***A summary of the relationships between this person, God, and us***

#### **John 1.18**

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.



John closes this section by summarizing the miracle of the incarnation and by explaining why he calls this divine being – the second person of the Trinity, God the son, who takes on flesh as Jesus of Nazareth – he explains why he refers to him as “the Word.”

Because Jesus exegetes God. He explains God, expounds God, reveals God. He makes God known.

Jesus is the Definitive Word about God: we no longer need guess what is true about God, the Word is God telling us what is true about himself, about his heart for us, about his purposes in human history.

When a word is spoken, two things are expected of us. That we would listen, and that we would answer. What is your answer to the Word?

\* \* \*

Let me tell you about the first time I ever heard the word speaking to me.

By the time my senior year at Miami University rolled around, I had been an atheist for years. Mickey Maudlin was a good friend of mine and a fellow atheist.

I remember vividly at the end of the summer leading into my senior year, I was coming down High Street in Oxford, Ohio,, rounding the corner onto Patterson at the corner of East Quad in my VW bus. When I saw Mickey crossing the street. I stopped in the middle of the street and rolled down my window. “Mickey! How was your summer?”

He has a wonderful crooked grin that always makes him look like he's been up to something: "Great."

"What was the best thing that happened this summer?"  
 "I became a Christian."

I laughed. "That's hilarious. No, really. What was the best part of your summer?"  
 "Seriously. I became a Christian."

Exceedingly awkward silence, grin slowly disappearing. Glad to have a car pull up behind me so I had to get moving.

Mickey and I were both peer advisors, teaching study skills and doing tutoring for students who were struggling. Several months later, Mickey put up a notice on our bulletin board that he was going to be having a Bible study in his apartment. I studiously ignored it.

Then he offered another one. I ignored that one too. Eventually the whole semester went by and I had managed to avoid it. But after he got back from Christmas break he offered another one. Then he cornered me and asked if I would come. Not wanting to disappoint him, I said yes. Reluctantly.

The night I got there was a cold January night. It got dark early. The seat in my VW bus was frozen solid, and the heat didn't begin to start working on the short drive up Poplar street. I arrived chilled, awkward, and guarded.

The bible study was in Mickey's basement apartment – turns out I was the only one who showed up, which left me feeling really self-conscious.

We talked about other things, both of us trying to pretend we weren't feeling the least bit awkward. Then Mickey handed me a big fat bible and showed me how to find the section we were looking at, which was the opening part of one of the biographies of Jesus in the New Testament, a book known as John's gospel.

We turned to John 1.1-18. We read it, and we talked about what it meant, and the words came like a wrecking ball swinging through the last remnants of my resistance to God.

For a couple of years I had resisted, pushed back. Then I read this passage and my soul just broke open – all the pieces came together in my mind and I just knew it was true.

It made sense of who Jesus was 1.18

No one has ever seen God, but Jesus, God's one and only, has made him known

And it made sense of who I was, and how I could become part of God's story 1.12-13

to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— born of God.

It just all came together, like a demolition happening in reverse.

Who God is, who I am, why I exist, who Jesus is, what was required of me. There was no choice. I knew this was true, and I knew what I needed to do.

What about you?

Have you heard God's word this morning? Is he speaking your name? Do you hear him inviting you to himself?

Let me read this passage again, that parts about Jesus in particular, and then after I read it I'm going to invite you to join me in prayer. And if the prayer I pray expresses where your own heart is, then pray it in your heart with me.

\* \* \*

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

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

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

God, I need you. I'm sorry for all my sins, for the many ways I've lived my life for me rather than for you. I now put my trust in your Son, Jesus Christ. I believe in Him I come face to face with you, that through His death and resurrection He rescues me, making me right with you, and

God, I've just heard your Word. And I believe it, I believe him. I believe that you created me to enjoy a relationship with you. But I've pushed you away and wanted nothing to do with you. But Jesus is life and light. He is the one who brings my soul to life and brings me into relationship with you, Father. Up until now I have not welcomed him, but today I do. I open my life to him, to grace he gives, to the truth he embodies, to the blessings he brings.

My soul tells me that you exist God, even though I can't see you. But I believe Jesus makes the invisible God visible, and the unknowable God knowable. In Jesus I come face to face with you, God. Through him I give my life to you.

I accept his gift of forgiveness and new life. I turn from a life lived for me, and choose a life lived with you and for you. Lead me into the life you intend for me, Lord, and I will follow. In Jesus' name I pray this, Amen.

End with what a beautiful name

## **Announcements**

### Informational Meetings

These informational meetings will be 10:15-11:00am and 11:45am-12:30pm downstairs in the Gathering Place.

for those who would rather join us online, we will have Zoom meeting for you at 10:15am so you can participate in the informational meeting.

Children's Ministry will provide a fun, safe place for your children during the informational meetings following both services.

**First...**please pick up your children.

After the first service communicate, Toddlers and Pre-K will remain in Room 205. You will need to take your K-Fifth Grade children to Room 200.

After the second service communicate, You will need to take your children Toddler through Fifth Grade to the Lower Level Retreat Center.

## Call to worship

Awake my soul to sing  
 The glories of my God and King  
 Arise and praise the One  
 Worthy of the songs of a thousand tongues

Praise the Lord  
 Praise the Lord  
 Sing His greatness  
 All creation  
 Praise the Lord  
 Raise your voice  
 You heights and all you depths  
 From furthest east to west  
 Let everything that has breath  
 Praise the Lord

## Prayer

We praise your name

We own that we have failed to live and love as we should

Failed you, failed those you placed around us

We are part of a creation that has rebelled against you, part of it worshiping and honoring you, part of it wanting nothing to do with you – it is a world filled with the loss and grief and confusion of having pushed you away

We pray for us as a colony of heaven, that you would make us distinctive as your people, like your son in our compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, in our bearing with one another, our forgiving one another, our living at peace with one another, our living a life of love

We pray for those you've placed in our lives who don't know you, that Jesus present in us would be radiant to the world around us, and that you would use our witness to elevate you and increase your reputation, and that you would use us to draw others to yourself.

We surrender our lives to you, all that we are, all that we have, and we now open ourselves to your word and your spirit. Speak, Lord, your children are listening.

## Notes

Catherine of Sienna: makes of us himself

X: when I headed off to seminary, Sharon and I were 927 miles apart, she was in Cincinnati, I was north of Boston  
 I sent her letters – those expressed my heart to her  
 I called her – my record was standing in a phone booth and talking to Sharon for 3 hours and 59 minutes – I was able to tell in real time what she meant to me  
 But eventually I hopped in my little BMW and drove, 13 hours and 45 minutes, so I could be with her

Like the Christian faith  
 The scriptures that captured God's heart  
 The prophets who spoke God's heart  
 And the Son of God who fleshed out God's heart

You'll notice a number of those words  
 In the beginning  
 God  
 Created  
 Darkness  
 Spirit of God  
 God said  
 Light

Genesis 1 begins with God, and then mentions the spirit of God,  
 Here there is further differentiation and we are introduced to the son of God  
 The trinity

One of the over arching themes of the gospel of John is the idea of being from heaven or above and from this world or from below

John 8.22-23, 15, 17