



## Lesson 2 – The Book of John – Chapter 1

October 8<sup>th</sup> , 2017

### The Word Became Flesh

#### The Divine Life In Essence

**John 1: 1-5 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

John does not waste his time arguing with the Gnostics or other heretics about the nature of Christ. Rather, he states certain facts that he knows beyond all shadow of doubt to be true. All John has to do is bear witness to the truth of what he saw and experienced firsthand as he walked closely over three and a half years with Christ.

1. **Jesus Is Eternally God** - To equate Jesus with God was a proposition not lightly made. John was a Palestinian Jew, such a claim would be seen as blatantly blasphemous by the Jews. Yet, John does not shy away from this claim. He begins with an affirmation, "In the beginning was the Word," that does not refer to a start, but to an infinite state.

The Greek word used by John for "Word" is the word **logos**. It was a word familiar to Greek philosophers who associated it to an abstract conception that lies behind everything concrete - to the ideal, to what we could perhaps call wisdom. Thus, when John calls Jesus "the Word," the logos, he is referring to him as the thinker, the omniscient genius behind the created universe.

When John writes, "In the beginning was the Word", he writes it in Greek tense expressing a continuous state, not a completed past. It suggests the idea of "absolute, supratemporal existence." The Lord Jesus, in other words, was pre-existent in a timeless state before the creation of the universe. The word did not have a beginning. The word will never have an ending. The word belongs to eternity.

2. **Jesus is Equally God** - "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God*". In other words, there is more than one person within the godhead, and Jesus was one of those persons. The Old Testament writers caught glimpses of this. The very first sentence in the Bible expressed the idea of plurality in the godhead: "In the beginning God [*Elohim, a plural noun*] created [*a singular verb*] the heaven and the earth."

This usage is consistent throughout the Old Testament; God is referred to in a plural form accompanied by a singular verb. Thus, embedded in the Old Testament is the idea of the trinity: one God, three persons. John in essence, is lifting the veil here, revealing a deeper of scripture. From both

Old and New Testaments now, we arrive at the concept of God existing as three persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Three persons, one God.

3. **Jesus is Essentially God** - *"And the Word was God."* That is, in his essence, in what he actually is, in his nature, person, and personality, in his attributes and character, Jesus is all that God is.

- **In His Power of Creation** - *"All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."* All things. The Greek word *panta* refers to all things individually, all things separately. It is a reference to the infinite detail of creation. From the infinitely large to the infinitely small.

Jesus made it all. "Without him," says the Holy Spirit through the inspired apostle, "was not anything made that was made." The form of the text in Greek is even more emphatic: "not even one thing."

- **In His Power to Bestow Life** – "In Him was life," ... this does not simply mean that He possessed life, but that He was and is the source of life. The word here includes both physical and spiritual life. When we were born, we received physical life. When we are born again, we receive spiritual life. Both come from Him.

4. **As God, Jesus is the Essence of Goodness and Holiness** – *"and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."* The birth of sin brought darkness to the minds of men. It plunged the world into darkness in the sense that men in general neither knew God nor wanted to know Him. Into this darkness the Lord Jesus came—a light shining in a very dark place. The same One who supplied us with life is also the light of men, shining as the only true form of goodness.

**Luke 18: 18-19 (ESV)** <sup>18</sup> *And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"* <sup>19</sup> *And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."*

John is stating here that Jesus is the only perfect standard of what is good. That he is in essence, goodness itself and thus, provides the guidance and direction mankind needs. It is one thing to exist, but quite another to know how to live, to know the true purpose of life, and to know the way to heaven. The same One who gave us life, is the One who provides us with light for the pathway we travel.

## The Messenger

**John 1: 6-13 (ESV)** – <sup>6</sup> *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.* <sup>7</sup> *He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.* <sup>8</sup> *He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.*

<sup>9</sup> *The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.* <sup>10</sup> *He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.* <sup>11</sup> *He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.* <sup>12</sup> *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,* <sup>13</sup> *who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

## More Than A Prophet

The witness in verse 7, of course, is John the Baptist, the messenger, the "man sent from God" (1:6). John the Baptist was both a priest and a Nazarite. There are only three lifelong Nazarites mentioned in the Bible: Samuel, Samson, and John the Baptist. A Nazarite had to keep from touching a dead body and from any contact with the fruit of the vine. He also had to let his hair grow long. Forbidden to touch the dead body of even his nearest and dearest relative, he proclaimed to the world that his affections were on the altar.

**Luke 7:26 (ESV)** <sup>26</sup> *What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.* <sup>27</sup> *This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you."*

John the Baptist was not only a prophet, he was also a priest. A prophet represents God to man; a priest represents man to God. John was a priest and not only a priest - he was a Nazarite priest. A priest suggests professional consecration; a Nazarite suggests personal consecration.

## **The Motive**

John had a motive, a reason for his actions. " *He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.*" (1:7). Witnesses are called to testify to what they know. John the Baptist knew that Jesus was the light and he testified to that fact.

Although scripture states that John the Baptist was a great man, his motivation was not self-seeking. (1: 8) <sup>8</sup> *He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.*

A good illustration in nature is the relation of the moon to the sun, in the light each sheds on the earth. The moon generates no light of its own, but serves as a giant reflector in the sky, picking up the light of the sun and relaying it back to the earth.

Although the moon generates no light of its own, it bears witness to the light, always pointing back to and identifying the source of light...the sun. The moon's function is only temporary, serving as a reminder of coming day when the sun will shed its light directly on the earth, dispelling its darkness in a way the moon could never do.

Such was John the Baptist. He was not the light, but was sent to bear witness of the true light.

## **The Light Resisted By the World**

(1:10) <sup>10</sup> *He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.*

Nothing seemed to astonish the apostle John more than the resistance to Jesus. Looking back to the beginning of things, John was still amazed at how quickly and how completely people, both Jews and gentiles, turned away from the light. To John, this was a supreme tragedy and irony. People rubbed shoulders with God, yet were too blind to see.

## **The Light Resisted By His Own People**

(1:11). <sup>11</sup> *He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.*"

The Lord was resisted not only by the peoples of the world; worse still, he was resisted by his own countrymen. That is, he came to the Jewish people, and they had no use for him. He had been preparing them for that coming for centuries. The prophets had foretold it. Their regathering to the promised land from the Babylonian exile had heralded it. Their cold, dead, and formal religion echoed the need for one who could breathe life into their dead bones. John the Baptist had arisen to announce the imminence of his coming. But Jesus was not the kind of messiah they wanted.

## **The Light Received**

(1:12) <sup>12</sup> *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,*

"But..." Thank God, that was not all of the story. By John's old age the ranks of the redeemed were already reaching around the world. Millions had been born again.

John gives us in verse 13, what we might call the formula for this new birth. Here he describes the spiritual birth of the child of God. **(1:13)** <sup>13</sup> *who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

This verse tells us that the way we become children of God is...

**“Not of Blood”** ... This means a person does not become a Christian through having Christian parents. Salvation is not passed down from parent to child through the blood stream.

**“Nor of Will of the Flesh”** ... In other words, a person does not have the power on his or her own to produce this new birth. Although we might be willing to be saved, our own will is not enough.

**“Nor of the Will of Man”** ... No other man can save another person. A preacher, for instance, may be very anxious to see a certain person born again, but he does not have the power to produce this marvelous birth.

**“But of God”** ... This means simply that the power to produce the new birth does not rest with anything or anyone but God.

### **Emmanuel, “God is With Us”**

**John 1:14-18 (ESV)** <sup>14</sup> *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.* <sup>15</sup> *(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.”)* <sup>16</sup> *For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.* <sup>17</sup> *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.* <sup>18</sup> *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

**(1:14)** Is a critical point being made by John in the prologue of his gospel. In it, John emphasizes the mystery of the incarnation. He is telling us that the Word has now assumed a new form of existence. There was a unity of the Lord's person before and after the incarnation. When He came to this earth, He did not cease to be God the Son. But, at the same time his humanity was both real and complete. He remained the same person as before, but "he became flesh." This humanity of Jesus was not something temporarily assumed and then later discarded. It expressed a new form of existence, not a new existence.

The birth of the Lord Jesus was unique! When any other child is born into this world, it is the creation of a new personality. A new life is created, one that never existed before. But when Jesus was born, it was not the creation of a new personality at all. It was the coming into this world of a person who had existed from all eternity. This was something completely new in the history of the universe.

**(1:18)** <sup>18</sup> *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

In Old Testament times God granted people visions, theophanies, angelic visits. But all fell short of a direct view of God as God in all His glory. Men like Abraham and Jacob, Moses and Manoah, David and Daniel, Isaiah and Ezekiel, had manifestations of God given to them. The manifestations are stated as *"glory of the Lord," the "angel of the Lord," "the Word of the Lord"* came to patriarchs and prophets of old, but none of them saw God as God.

John repeatedly emphasizes the deity of Christ, reaffirming the fact that Jesus is God. Yet here he says equally emphatically that "no man hath seen God at any time." Although it appears to be a contradiction, there is none. When Jesus came to earth, he deliberately laid aside, not his deity, but those attributes of deity which would be incompatible with true humanity.

He had to do this, (1 Timothy 6:16) tells us that God dwells in light unapproachable. If Jesus had come into the world not only to be God but also to behave as God, nobody would have been able to approach him. The fact is that although he never ceased to be God he walked this earth as though he were not more than

human, a fact that explains many of John's later statements about Jesus. He was seen as a man even though he was God.

## The Testimony of John the Baptist

**John 1: 19-28 (ESV)** <sup>19</sup> *And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"* <sup>20</sup> *He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."* <sup>21</sup> *And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?"* He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." <sup>22</sup> *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?"* <sup>23</sup> *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."* <sup>24</sup> *(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.)* <sup>25</sup> *They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"* <sup>26</sup> *John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know,* <sup>27</sup> *even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."* <sup>28</sup> *These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

John writes his gospel from the standpoint of the close of the first century. Jewish rejection of Christ had hardened and crystalized. As a result, in verse 19 he calls God's ancient people "the Jews." It is his characteristic word for them in his gospel. He uses the expression seventy times. The word emphasizes the Lo-ammi status of the Hebrew people given by God in Hosea 1:9, which means "not my people". The Hebrew people are no longer regarded from the biblical standpoint as "Israel" but as "Jews." John adopts the name given to them by the gentiles.

John the Baptist had been ministering for a considerable time by now, gaining significant attention. Even Herod had made it his business to have conversations with John. It appears some in the Sanhedrin were speculating if John the Baptist was the messiah and, when they directly ask John if he is, he clearly denies them answering..."*I am not the Christ.*"

The Jews respond by asking if he is Elijah? **Malachi 4: 5** Foretells, of the return of Elijah prior to the arrival of the Christ..."<sup>5</sup> *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.*" When John answers..."*I am not.*", the questioners go back even further to Moses in **Deuteronomy 18:15 (ESV)** *"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—"*. Again, John answers "No".

John ultimately identifies himself by referencing scripture from **Isaiah 40:3**, Telling them he is only a herald. *"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord."*

An interesting note...from 1:26 *"but among you stands one you do not know,"* it appears John knew that Jesus was standing among the crowd listening to this exchange - standing there, smiling at his faithful ambassador, nodding his head in approval of his words. No wonder John's answers to these questioners grew more brief and more blunt.

## Behold, the Lamb of God

**John 1: 29-34 (ESV)** <sup>29</sup> *The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* <sup>30</sup> *This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'* <sup>31</sup> *I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."* <sup>32</sup> *And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. <sup>33</sup> 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.'* <sup>34</sup> *And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."*

About six weeks before, Jesus had been baptized by John in the Jordan. Right afterward, he had gone into the wilderness where his temptations took place. John makes no mention of this. Having defeated the devil, Jesus now returns to the Jordan.

This is the Lord's first appearance in John's gospel. He had come on this day to be publicly announced by his herald to the nation. John did not first introduce Jesus to the nation as the Son of God, nor as the holy one of God, nor as the Christ of God, nor as the word of God. He went right to the heart of Israel's need, of the whole world's need. He proclaimed him to be the lamb of God.

It is a special title for the Lord. He is called the Lamb explicitly only twice in the Old Testament, only twice in the gospels, only once in the book of Acts, and only once in the epistles. He is called the Lamb, however, twenty-eight times in the book of Revelation; it is particularly his apocalyptic title.

The great question in the Old Testament was voiced by Isaac on his way to Mount Moriah: "*Where is the lamb?*" (**Genesis 22:7**). Abraham's answer was equally great: "*God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.*" Now that great Old Testament question is matched by an even greater New Testament answer: "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*"

To complete the identification of the Messiah, John adds these words: <sup>30</sup> *'This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'* John was six months older than Jesus. While still in the womb, John had acknowledged the preeminence of Christ (**Luke 1:41 ESV**) <sup>41</sup> *And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.* Now he acknowledges his pre-existence.

## Jesus Calls the First Disciples

### John 1: 35-42 (ESV)

<sup>35</sup> *The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples,* <sup>36</sup> *and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"* <sup>37</sup> *The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.* <sup>38</sup> *Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"* <sup>39</sup> *He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.* <sup>40</sup> *One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.* <sup>41</sup> *He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ).* <sup>42</sup> *He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).*

Some of the Lord's earliest disciples had previously been disciples of John the Baptist. John the apostle was one of these. The greatness of John the Baptist's fruitfulness is seen in two phrases, "*The two disciples heard him say this, [John] "and they followed Jesus" (1:37).*

John the Baptist was ever the obedient servant. He never questioned his purpose, never sought personal recognition. A lesser person may have found it difficult to step away from the spotlight, losing the attention of so many followers. Not John. He promoted the move. His focus on his mission was intense.

In fact, where scripture says that John "*looked at Jesus as he walked by*", he uses the Greek word **emblepo**, which means "*to fix one's gaze upon*" or "*to give a penetrating look.*" The only other time the word occurs in the gospel is in verse 42, where Jesus is said to have given the same kind of searching look at Simon.

As far as we know, this was the last time John the Baptist ever saw Jesus. John's gaze was accompanied by the same exclamation he had proclaimed the day before: "Behold the Lamb of God!" That was all that really needed to be said. Andrew and John now immediately shift their focus to Christ.

The words of John the Baptist, identifying Jesus as lamb of God and Son of God, must have put awe in the hearts of both men. Probably the two were so awed by the thought of who he really was that they did not dare to speak to him directly. The Lord, knowing that he was being trailed, turned around and confronted these two. "*What are you seeking?*" he asked. Those are his first words in this gospel.

Andrew spoke for both of them; and addresses Jesus as "Rabbi" (Master). "*where are you staying?*" Evidently Andrew felt that the issues now being confronted were too momentous to be discussed out in public. He wanted a more personal and private setting. Where could he find this wondrous messiah again? Already he had someone in mind he wanted to bring to Jesus...his brother.

When Andrew returns with his brother Simon, the Lord looks at Simon. He identifies him at once and then gives him a new name which completely eclipses the old one: "*You are Simon, the son of John. You shall be called Cephas* [the Aramaic form for the name Peter]."

The word for Peter is "*petros*" meaning a movable stone, not a rock (*petra*). It was an indication of what Christ intended to do for the impulsive, easily swayed Simon. He was going to give him a rocklike character.

## **Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael**

### **John 1: 43-51 (ESV)**

*<sup>43</sup> The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." <sup>44</sup> Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup> Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." <sup>46</sup> Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." <sup>47</sup> Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" <sup>48</sup> Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." <sup>49</sup> Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" <sup>50</sup> Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." <sup>51</sup> And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."*

The Lord's invitation to Philip was trimmed of all verbiage: "*Follow me*" or "*Come, travel with me*" as some have suggested it be phrased. We can picture the warmth in the tone of the Lord's voice, the smile that accompanied it, and perhaps the friendly hand on the shoulder. From that moment on Philip was his man, and his first concern was for his friend Nathanael.

There is some doubt as to who Nathanael was since he is not mentioned by that name by any other New Testament writers. Generally, however, it is taken for granted that he is the disciple of the Lord called Bartholomew elsewhere in the New Testament.

After finding Nathanael, Philip exclaims, "*We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets wrote,*" adding for further clarification, "*Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph.*" It's notable that he begins by describing Jesus as the one who fulfilled all the scriptural requirements for the messiah. Nathanael was evidently a man who knew the Hebrew Scriptures. It's possible that Philip and Nathanael had often pored over the prophetic pages together. They knew that the messiah was to be a descendent of David's royal line, that he was to be born in Bethlehem, that he was to be born of a virgin, that he was to be a sojourner in Egypt for at least a time, and that he was to be identified with the northern part of the promised

land. All these details were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. Nathanael is incredulous when Philip states that this messiah is from Nazareth, answering... *"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"*

Because of its proximity to gentile cities and its mixture of gentile population, its backwoods manners, general biblical illiteracy and lack of sophistication, the people of Judea held Galilee in low esteem. Nathanael, a Galilean, exhibited this local prejudice against Nazareth, which seems to have had a poor reputation. His prejudice was not misplaced. Nazareth, in the gospels, lived up to its reputation. It was the first city to greet Jesus' claims with violence, and was ready to put him to death on the strength of just one day's exposure to his teaching. He was actively hindered in ministry there because of the town's scornful rejection of his claims.

The Lord could read Nathanael's soul. Speaking not to Nathanael but to the others he said, *"Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"*. Nathanael's reaction was one of surprise. *"How do you know me?"* he asked. Most people, when confronted with such a compliment, might hedge and deny the statement: "Me? No deceit? You don't know me!" Nathanael was not like that. He accepted the Lord's evaluation of his character as being true. His problem was not with his own disposition but with the Lord's discernment. How could this man know him?

Nathanael is astonished and exclaims...*"Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"* Jesus immediately acknowledges Nathanael's tribute and speaks to him of his comprehension of Christ (1:50-51). Nathanael had made what modern physicists would call a quantum leap. In one burst of revelation he had seen this man from Nazareth as God manifest in flesh. When Peter much later would make a similar confession on the mount of transfiguration, the Lord would tell him that such insight was not of flesh and blood but a direct revelation from his Father in heaven.

The first chapter of John ends with Jesus telling Nathanael that the revelations have only just begun... *"Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."* Undoubtedly, the Lord was pointing to a new millennium. One where there will be open communication between the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly Jerusalem.

The Lord was seeking to lift Nathanael's thoughts and all others to a higher sphere than was common among the narrow and circumscribed concepts of the kingdom.

Thus ended the first two days of the Lord's public ministry. In this brief time he enlisted six of his twelve disciples, including those who would be numbered as chief apostles.