

## See the Son. Believe for Life

### First Glimpse – John 1:1-18 (Part 2)

In the first chapter of the Bible, the creation account in Genesis 1, we find a number of pairs of opposites. On the first day God creates the light and the darkness. On the second day he separates the waters above from the waters below and he calls the waters above Heaven. On the third day he separates the land from the water below and now we have the heaven above and the earth below.

In Scripture “heaven” or the waters above are consistently spoken of as God’s realm and the earth is the realm of mankind. In fact, God gives the human couple the task of taking dominion over their realm, the earth below, under God’s Lordship from heaven. But God creates a beautiful garden where he places the human couple on earth, and specifically on a mountain we find out later in Scripture, and this garden becomes the place where heaven and earth meet. The two distinct realms come together in the garden where God walks with the human beings.

After the human beings sin, the way into this meeting place, the place where heaven and earth come together, is cut off from human beings. But as the story progresses, God meets humans again on Mt. Sinai and gives instructions for the tabernacle, where heaven and earth will come together, and God will meet with mankind again. These two realms are distinct until we get to the last couple of chapters of the Bible and there we read that heaven comes down to earth and the two meet and God will once again dwell with human beings as heaven and earth come together again.

I want you to see this contrast between heaven, as God’s realm, and earth, as the realm of mankind that is so important to the Bible’s story, because it’s impossible to grasp the significance of what John is saying in John 1:1-18 without this.

Last week we looked at John 1:1-5 and what we saw there was a description of the Word’s relationship to God in heaven in eternity past before anything had been made. But this week as we study the rest of this prologue or lobby to the Gospel, we will move from the realm of heaven to the realm of earth and then we will begin to see the two coming together.

Here's what we began looking at last week: **4 Glimpses of the Word who Became Flesh that Prepare Us to See Him.**

### **1. The Identity of the Word (vv. 1-5)**

John begins his Gospel by painting a beautiful picture of “the Word” as the one who existed in close relationship with God in eternity past and was, at the same time, equal with God in essence. The Word was the Creator of all things and this title, the Word, is rooted in the way the OT describes God's work through His spoken word. These first 5 verses are describing the Word as He is in His relationship with God and His role as Creator in Heaven. But when we move to verse 6 the entire passage shifts to time and space and the realm of the earth. This is our second Glimpse of the Word who Became Flesh.

### **2. The Witnesses to the Light (vv. 6-8)**

Again, let me remind you that these Glimpses are preparing us for what we will see in the rest of the Gospel and here we are introduced to the first witness to the light, or the Word. Look at verse 6.

Now this is not the same John as the author of this book, who never actually refers to himself by name in his gospel. This is John the Baptist, and he will play a prominent role in the first part of the gospel. Notice verse 19.

John the Baptist is very important in the gospels to the ministry of Jesus because of the OT expectation that God would send a messenger before the Messiah to herald His coming. Notice the language here in verse 6 that John was sent from God. The other gospel writers quote Isaiah 40:3 to describe the ministry of John the Baptist, but this gospel is most likely referencing Malachi 3:1. Of course, Malachi is the last prophet in the OT and so, there had been a sort of radio silence between Malachi and John the Baptist. But the Apostle John doesn't write about John the Baptist here to emphasize the renewal of prophecy. He writes about John because of verses 7-8 and the task given to John the Baptist.

3 times in these 2 verses you see the word “witness.” The idea is that John will testify to what he has seen and knows about the light. It seem likely that John is testifying to the expectation of Isaiah 9:1-2. And what is his goal when witnessing to the coming of the light? Look back at verse 7.

It's quite a simple formula really. John witnesses to the light and tells people about the light so that they will believe. And John is not the only witness in this book. Verses 6-8 prepare us to encounter other witnesses who testify to the light later in the book. Listen to John 5:36-39. And there will be others in this gospel. But, think about the way you encountered Jesus, the light. You had someone witness to you about what they had seen and know so that you would believe. Followers of Christ carry on the same work today of testifying to the light. And when there are witnessing there are always responses and there will be in the gospel.

### **3. The Responses to His Coming (vv. 9-13)**

Look at verse 9. Now, to be clear, I do not think verse 9 is describing some sort of prevenient grace that gives a sinful heart enough grace to awaken the will to choose Christ. This is talking about the objective revelation of the light coming into the world at the incarnation. All are accountable because the light has shown through the incarnation. But the responses have often been tragic. Look at the two levels of rejection in verses 10-11. First, verse 10.

John is speaking here of the world. The entire grouping of sinful human beings on the planet. People from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Notice that the light has come to the very people He has created. We saw back in verse 3 that all things were created by the Word and this certainly includes human beings. To be created by God is to be accountable and responsible to God. He is our maker and we are created by Him and for Him. We exist at his pleasure and for His glory. And yet, despite coming to the people He created to be a light to them in darkness, they did not recognize or know the light. But there's another level to this. Look at verse 11.

Jesus created the world and called a particular people group, Israel, out of the world to be His own. The language here paints the picture of someone showing up to his own home and being rejected and pushed out of his own house and away from his own family.

And we will see a lot of rejection of the light in this gospel, particularly by his own people. The tension between Jesus and the Jewish leaders shows up almost right away. In fact, you cannot tell the story of the gospel without the rejection of Jesus

by His own. By when you tell the story of His rejection by His own you automatically get to the good news of verses 12-13. Look at verse 12.

There will be some who do not reject the light but receive Him. What does it mean to receive Him? John defines it for us and it's the major focus of this gospel. Look at verse 12. One's name stands in for his full character, all of who a person is. So, to believe in his name is to believe what we have already seen about the Word in verses 1-5. It's to accept that description as true and the rest of the Gospel as true. It's to read these words and for them to find resonance in your heart and to believe that they tell the truth.

And God grants to those who believe His name to become the children of God. In the OT Israel is designated as the son of God and now those who trust in the light and believe His name receive the title, children of God. But, just as you did not initiate and bring about your physical birth, in the same way you do not have the authority to bring about your spiritual birth. Look at verse 13.

John goes to great lengths to make sure we understand that we do not become children of God by physical family connections, by the will or desire of any human being or any particular choice we have made. Receiving the truth about the light happens as God graciously opens your eyes to it. And this is exactly why the Word has come. This brings us to our last glimpse.

#### **4. The Reason for His Coming (vv. 14-18)**

Look with me at verse 14. John hasn't used this designation, the Word, since the first couple of verses. So, he's wanting us to go back to the beginning and remember exactly who the Word is. The one who existed in eternity with God and who was God; who created the world, and sustains all things with His life and who is the light of men, that Word has taken on human flesh. One author pointed out that when He became flesh He did not cease to be the Word. He's both and when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us this was the point in the biblical story where heaven and earth truly met.

Notice what John says in verse 14, He dwelt among us. The word literally means he tabernacled among us. Of course, this takes back to the OT and Israel in the wilderness in the book of Exodus. God's desire was to come and dwell in the midst of His people and in order to do that He had the tabernacle constructed.

But now, through the incarnation, God has come and dwelt among His people in human flesh. He has set up camp among human beings and Jesus, rather than the tabernacle or temple, is the true expression of God's being with His people. Why do this? Look at the rest of verse 14.

Do you remember in the book of Exodus where Moses asks to see God's glory? God replies that He will reveal Himself to Moses but only partially and Moses can only view Him from the back. Then God passes by Moses and proclaims this: Exodus 34:6.

John has already pictured Jesus as tabernacling among human beings and now he draws language directly from Exodus 34. Moses asked to see God's glory and only got a partial view but even that partial view made it clear that God was filled with steadfast love and faithfulness. John picks up on this story and points out that Jesus fully reveals God's glory to us by making His steadfast love and faithfulness, or grace and truth abundantly clear through His life and death.

Now, verse 15 is in parentheses and John is just making it abundantly clear that John the Baptist was witnessing to the Word who became flesh. Verses 16-18 continue the flow of thought from verse 14 and let me try to make it clear how all these fit together and what John is driving at.

Notice at the end of verse 14 we see that the Word is **full** of grace and truth. Now verse 16 says that we have all received from his fullness and that fullness is grace upon grace. What does that mean? The idea of fullness is completely sufficient. Paul speaks of Jesus this way in Colossians 1:19. He's all that God is in grace and truth, and we receive that from Him as we are born again as children of God.

Verse 17 explains the grace upon grace part of this. You can see the "for" at the beginning of verse 17. People have often read this verse as putting down the law of Moses or as being negative to the law. But verse 17 is explaining verse 16. We receive from Christ's fullness as grace on top of grace because God's grace was demonstrated in the law of Moses and an even greater fullness of grace comes on top of that through Jesus Christ.

In fact, the OT law and Scriptures are rightly understood as ultimately pointing toward the final revelation of God found in the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to John 5:46-47. *"God's character of grace and truth was revealed with the giving of law*

*(Exod 34:6), but made fully available to humanity ultimately through Christ.” – Craig Kenner*

And then verse 18 circles back around and bookends the whole section and completes it. Moses was told that he could not look directly at God’s face and that no human could see God and live. Yet, the Word, the only God who existed with God at the Father’s side, he has made Him known.

This is the reason for His coming. And every aspect of His life will reveal more of God to us, especially His death and resurrection. So, here’s what to expect from John Gospel. Over and over again we will see the identity of the Word made flesh through witnesses to His glory and there will be responses, both negative and positive to the proclamation of who He is. And all of this is to foster faith in the reader as God is put on display. I’m looking forward to it. Let’s pray.