

“I TESTIFY THAT THIS IS THE SON OF GOD”

John 1:1-51

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Many believe there is not a more profound opening to **any** book than Chapter 1 of the Gospel of John. Theologian, William Barclay, said: “The first chapter of John’s Gospel is one of the greatest adventures of religious thought ever achieved by the mind of man.” To win souls, and to strengthen the redeemed, this chapter presents testimonies that Jesus is God.

John wrote for both the Jew and the Gentile to understand Jesus’ deity. The Jews knew Messianic prophecies, yet most Gentiles knew little of God and His promises, so John included Jewish thoughts and explained words for his Gentile audience. He also chose special words and loaded them with meaning - words like truth, light, darkness, life.

The great evangelist, Billy Sunday, once said that there are 256 names given for Jesus in the Bible and added, “I suppose this was because Jesus was infinitely beyond all that any one name could express.” No one adjective or noun can capture the full meaning of who Jesus is, but in Chapter 1, John used seven titles to describe Jesus which outlined Jesus’ purpose, ministry, and status as both God and Savior. Why not keep count of His titles and we’ll compare notes at the end.

I’ll review the first chapter of John in these three sections:

1. The Prologue
2. The First Witness
3. The Initial Disciples

THE PROLOGUE

The first 18 verses of John’s Gospel is a *Prologue*. The term “prologue” combines the Greek prefix “pro,” meaning “before” and “logos” which means “word.” So, about the pronunciation of logos. Experts who know Greek said l-o-g-o-s is pronounced LAH-GAHS. Assuming that few hearing or reading this lecture speak Greek, non-Greek speakers typically pronounce it as LOWgos, so I will too.

John’s prologue provides statements of Jesus’ identity, why He came to earth, and information to help his audience understand the remainder of his Gospel.

Of the four Gospel accounts of Jesus, Mark introduced Him as an adult - a man from Nazareth. Matthew and Luke told of Jesus' conception and birth. However, John started *his* account of Jesus at the beginning of time itself; before anything existed.

John used the first words from Genesis, *in the beginning*, to link Jesus with God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (1:1) John wrote his Gospel in Greek, the language common to everyone at the time. So, in Greek, John 1:1 reads: "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God." (1:1) John introduced Jesus to both Jewish and Gentile audiences using a term that would be familiar to them - *Logos*. The Greek word, *Logos*, translated in English, is *Word*. Jews related to the term, *Word*, because in the Old Testament, God's will was often accomplished by His word. For example, "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made..." (Psalm 33:6) also "He sent out His word and healed them..." (Psalm 107:20) Gentile readers would have understood the idea of the *Word* – Logos – to be the Divine force that shaped the universe.

The Word, and God are two, and also one. God the Father and God the Son are equally God, yet separate Persons. They always existed. "[God] existed before anything else, and He holds all creation together." (Colossians 1:17) "In Jesus dwells all the wisdom, glory, power, love, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth of the Father. In Him, God the Father is known." (James Boice, theologian)

"He [the Word] was with God in the beginning." (1:2) When is, "*in the beginning*"? It is eternity past. Psalm 93:2 says, "You [God] are from all eternity."

"All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created." (1:3) The universe had a beginning but it wasn't pre-existing molecules floating around in black nothingness waiting to go *bang* and form the universe! In the beginning, God spoke, "Let there be..." (Genesis 1) and the *Word* caused the universe to '*become*'.

"For everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him." (Colossians 1:16) God is everywhere, in every created thing. We can't get up in the morning without bumping into God.

"In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it." (1:4,5) The Word gave life to the universe and He is the Light of this world, exposing sinfulness and illuminating the only path to salvation. Jesus said:

- Come to Me so that you may have *life*. (John 5:40)
- I came so that men would have *life* abundantly. (John 10:10)
- I give eternal *life*. (John 10:28)
- I am the way, the truth and the *life*. (John 14:6)

A keyword John used in his writings is *darkness*. Jesus' light illuminates the darkness revealing sin. Jesus said: "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness" (John 8:12). As brilliant as His light is, there will always be a struggle between His light and the force of darkness. However, the darkness cannot overcome or overpower the Light. The darkness crucified Jesus to *eliminate* the Light but it could never *destroy* the Light.

The other John in this chapter was sent to announce Jesus to the world. "There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world." (1:6-8)

In Malachi, the Lord said: "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before Me." (Malachi 3:1) After that prophecy, there was no communication from God for the next four hundred years; not until His messenger, John the Baptizer appeared. He was sent to be the first witness to testify about Jesus.

John the Baptizer was born of two very old parents and was Jesus' cousin. His mission from God was to prepare Israel for salvation the Messiah would bring. The Baptizer was *not* the prophesied Light but was sent to *testify* to the Light. Jesus isn't **one** light, or **one** way to heaven, (sorry Oprah). He is the **one and only** Way. Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

After introducing the Baptizer, John returned to proclaiming who Jesus was: "He was in the world, and the world was created through Him, and yet the world did not recognize Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him." (1:10,11) Throughout their history, Israel dreamed of the Messiah coming to save them, but because He didn't come as a warrior and conqueror, they didn't accept Him as the Messiah. If any culture on earth should have recognized Him, it should have been God's chosen people.

"But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in His name. (1:12) For those who choose to place their faith in Him, the King of the Universe gives the entitlement, the privilege, the acceptance, the adoption, to be His child!

God's amazing grace is something I will never understand. I am a child of the One who has incomparable wisdom and power; Who designed and created everything that exists; Who has supreme authority to control everything; the One in whose love put the plan of redemption in motion so that I could have eternal life with Him. He who knows the stars by name and who holds the universe in the palm of His hand, is my Father.

Those of us who are co-heirs with God's only Son, experience a spiritual rebirth that is due to *God's* will, "...not the will of the flesh" (13). For example, with physical birth, most all the effort, energy, and pain is endured by the mother, not the child. Definitely not the father. I read that during a baby's delivery, the nurse asked the mother on a scale of 1-10 how bad was her pain. She yelled 10! Her husband said, "Oh, come on. It can't be that bad."

Spiritual rebirth is entirely the work of God. His pain gave us the privilege of being His. "[God the Father] predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will." (Ephesians 1:5)

"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." (1:14) It's been said this verse is the reason John wrote his Gospel. About it, various scholars have stated:

- "Verse 14 is one of the most profound and controversial statements in Scripture." (Theologian Craig Atwood)
- Verse 14, "Might well be the greatest single verse in the New Testament." (William Barclay)
- "These four words, 'The Word became flesh,' are the foundation of our knowledge of God." (Alexander Maclaren)
- "The eternal uncreated Christ took on humanity at a specific point in space-time history." (John MacArthur)

Christ voluntarily became human and lived among us, yet He did not cease to be the sinless God. When He walked this earth, He took on the limitations and needs of human flesh and blood. The God who created the universe experienced happiness, sorrow, pain, joy, friendship and frustration. He welcomed people when He was tired; He kept teaching when his voice would get weak; He traveled from place to place ministering long after He was physically exhausted. C.S. Lewis said, "The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God."

"From His abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another." (1:16) God's grace is a constant, overflowing gift which began when He offered us salvation. "Different situations in life demand different kinds of grace. We need grace in

days of prosperity and grace in adversity. We need grace in the days of youth and another when we near our eternal home. We need one grace when we feel that we're on the top of things and another when we're depressed and discouraged. We need one grace to bear our own burdens and another to bear one another's burdens. We need one grace when we are sure of things and another when we are certain of nothing." (William Barclay)

"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (1:17) The 613 religious laws that governed God's people were never intended to save: "No one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are." (Romans 3:20). If we were able to keep the law with perfection, Jesus didn't need to come to earth to die for our sins. Jesus is the only way for us to experience forgiveness. He brought **truth** of the law, but He also brought **grace**. "With truth, Christ made people aware of their hopeless, sinful condition; with grace He offered forgiveness to all who would come to Him in faith." (Charles Stanley) And only those who accept Christ's sacrifice are spared from judgment.

"No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is Himself God and is at the Father's side—He has revealed Him." (1:18) It's true no human eyes have seen the Father, however, God came in human form to be "seen" as Jesus Christ, His Son. In Hebrews it says, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word." (Hebrews 1:3)

John packed a lot of truths into the first 18 verses of chapter 1. He set the foundation of our faith, that the Word, Jesus Messiah, pre-existed from eternity past alongside God the Father. He left eternity and stepped into time; entered the world as a man to redeem us so we would not be separated from Him. If you want to see the Word of God, if you want to see the One who brought the world into existence and who gives light and life to humankind, look at Jesus Christ.

John the author, then told us more about Jesus' first witness.

THE FIRST WITNESS

John the Baptizer wasn't the most fashionable dresser. He wore rough, probably smelly, camel's hair clothing. He wasn't keto or vegan because he subsisted on locusts and wild honey, the desert's equivalent of chips and salsa. Here is some trivia. In 2017, nutritionists at Loma Linda University unveiled a new diet – roasted locusts with copious amounts of wild honey. A side benefit of the diet was weight loss because over-eating on the diet was highly unlikely. The Baptizer's home was the wilderness outside Jerusalem.

He was called the Baptizer because he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. His ministry took place shortly before Jesus began His.

The Pharisees, an extremely legalistic group of Judaism, sent religious leaders to find out who John was because he didn't conform to the typical rabbi or preacher. **"Who are you?" (1:19)** they asked him. Instead of answering them, the Baptizer told them who he was *not*. He was *not* the Messiah, the deliverer prophesied in Old Testament Scriptures. He was *not* Elijah. The Jews believed that before the Messiah came, Elijah would return and prepare the world for the Messiah. John was *not* the Prophet who Moses said would come.

I'm sure his denials frustrated them and they demanded, **"Tell us about yourself." (1:22)** He told them his work was to prepare the way for the **Messiah** by quoting Isaiah 40:3. Referring to himself, he said: **"I am a voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" (1:23)**

In those days, roads were not surfaced and contained debris. When someone important was to visit a province, people would go ahead of him, smoothing and cleaning up the roads so the dignitary's journey was more comfortable. By preaching and baptizing, John the Baptist was making "the way" for the Lord.

His answer didn't satisfy them so they asked, **"Why are you baptizing the people if you aren't the Messiah, Elijah or the Prophet?" (1:25)** In those days, there was baptism but it was for Gentiles converting to Judaism. The Jews knew they were already God's chosen and felt they didn't need to be baptized like the Gentiles did.

John didn't answer their question about why he baptized, but said: **"Someone stands among you, but you don't know Him." (1:26)** Can't you just see their heads swiveling back and forth looking to see to whom the Baptizer was referring?

"He is the one coming after me, whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to untie." (1:27) Only the lowest of slaves were made to unstrap their master's smelly shoes, covered in dust, dirt, and dung. In humility, the Baptizer was saying he was unworthy to even touch His Master's shoes.

As Jesus walked by John the Baptizer and the crowds surrounding him, the Baptizer proclaimed four amazing truths about Jesus:

1) "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29)

Those who knew the scriptures knew the significance of *Lamb of God*. The blood of a lamb delivered the Israelites from death before they fled Egypt and the sacrifice of a lamb was thereafter required each Passover. The Baptizer proclaimed that the Lamb of God had arrived and His mission was to save the world from sin.

2) "...He existed before me. I didn't know Him, but I came baptizing with water so that He might be revealed to Israel."

Even though the Baptizer was about 6 months older than Jesus, he was referring to the truth that Christ existed from eternity past. Although they were cousins, we aren't sure how well the Baptizer actually knew Jesus prior to this occasion. One was raised in Nazareth, the other near Jerusalem. And there is mystery surrounding Jesus' youth, except for the time His parents temporarily lost the young Messiah when He was 12 years old. But since Jesus hadn't yet performed any miracles, perhaps the Baptizer really didn't know Jesus was the Messiah until seeing the vision of a dove at Jesus' baptism. God had told him:

3) "The one you see the Spirit descending and resting on—He is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." (1:32) Baptism with the Holy Spirit we know occurs at the moment of salvation.

4) "I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." (1:34) The Baptizer confirmed the same title on Jesus as John, the author, had: "the Son of God."

John, the author, then recorded Jesus recruiting His first disciples.

THE FIRST DISCIPLES

"The next day, John was standing with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" (1:35,36). One of the Baptizer's disciples was Andrew. Scholars believe the second one was John, the author of this Gospel. It's been said that John was the first of the Twelve to follow Jesus on earth, and the last of the Twelve to follow Jesus into heaven.

The Baptizer made the way for Christ and it was time for him to step aside. He had been proclaiming the Messiah was coming. Now he proclaimed the Messiah had arrived! Pointing his disciples to the Lamb of God caused them to follow Jesus.

"Jesus turned and saw them following Him, He asked them, "What do you seek?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" I wondered why Jesus asked them what they were looking for since in His omniscience He would have *known*. Whatever the reason, Jesus invited them to be part of His ministry and told them, "Come and see." (1:39)

John recorded the very hour this exchange occurred, which was four in the afternoon. Perhaps that was the hour his life changed forever. Do you remember the day you met Jesus? I do!

Andrew found his brother, Simon, and brought him to Jesus, telling him, “**We have found the Messiah.**” (1:41) In Hebrew, *Messiah*, means the Anointed One. William Barclay said: “Andrew was always introducing others to Jesus. He could not keep Jesus to himself.”

When Jesus saw Simon, He changed his name to “Cephas” which is Aramaic for rock. In Greek, Cephas translates to Petros. “Peter” is the English version of *Petros*. There's divine humor in Jesus naming a volatile, hasty, prideful, short-tempered person, “rock.” Yet Peter would eventually earn that title because long before he'd done anything noteworthy, Jesus saw Peter's potential and gave him a name worthy of his future. Thankfully, when Jesus looks at us, He doesn't just see what we *were* or *are* but also what we can become.

The next day, Jesus personally found Phillip and simply said, “**Follow me.**” (1:43) I'm sure their conversation was more involved, but Jesus called, and Phillip followed.

The next disciple was Nathaniel. I have a lot of sympathy for Nathanael because we share the same disease – foot in mouth disease. I *know* some thoughts are better left unsaid, but I don't realize it until after I've uttered them. So, Phillip went to tell Nathanael about the Messiah. Here's my version of their conversation:

Phillip said to Nathaniel, “Nate, we've found Him!” “Who?” Nathaniel asked. “HIM!” Phillip exclaimed, “the Messiah whom Moses and the prophets said would come! He's Jesus of Nazareth.” Nathanael laughed, “C'mon Phillip, you're telling me the *Messiah* is from *Nazareth*? Nazareth is a backwater village of barely 200 people and they're *Galilean* Jews – hicks. Can anything good come from Nazareth?!” Phillip grinned and said, “Wait a minute, Nate, aren't *you* from *Cana*, that other no nothing town right door next to Nazareth?” Nathanael shrugged and said, “Yeah, I see where you're going with this.” Phillip then simply invited Nathanael to meet Jesus for himself: “Come and see.” When those three words are spoken to an unbeliever, God can use them to change their life.

Philip brought Nathanael to Jesus and as they approached Him, Jesus said: “**Now, here truly is an Israelite —a man of complete integrity.**” (1:47) Was Jesus teasing Nathanael because he had dismissed Jesus for being from Nazareth? Or was Jesus paying Nathanael a sincere compliment, that there was nothing tricky or deceptive about Nathaniel because he was open and direct about stating his opinion?

Jesus' remark surely made Nathanael suspicious. How could an ordinary man he had never met know so much about him? “**How do you know me?**” (1:48) Nathanael asked Jesus. I imagined Jesus smiling slightly when He replied, “**Before Philip told you to 'come and see', when you were sitting under the fig tree, I saw you.**” (1:48) Maybe

Nathanael was alone under the tree praying for the Messiah to appear when Jesus saw him. And perhaps Phillip and Nathanael were all alone when they were talking.

To resistant people, Jesus sometimes would break through to them by proving His divine knowledge, just as He did in His conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. In this case, Jesus' reply confirmed His omniscience and Nathanael exclaimed, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (1:49) Within moments, Nathanael went from a skeptic to believing the Messiah had arrived.

Jesus used His conversation with Nathanael as a teaching moment and said to him, "Do you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You'll see greater things than this. You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (1:50-51)

Son of Man was a Messianic title from the book of Daniel and Jesus often called Himself that. Perhaps the "greater things" Jesus meant were what His followers would witness in the next three years in His presence. In today's world, perhaps Jesus would have said, "You ain't seen nothin', yet!"

So, how did you do in keeping track of the titles of Jesus in this chapter? There were seven of them:

- 1) "The Word" (John 1:1–3, 14)
- 2) "The Light" (John 1:4–13)
- 3) "The Son of God" (John 1:15–18, 34, 49)
- 4) "The Messiah" (John 1:17, 19–28),
- 5) "The Lamb of God" (John 1:29–34, 36)
- 6) "The King of Israel" (John 1:43–49)
- 7) "The Son of Man" (John 1:50–51)

God is revealed in many ways, including in Scripture, but the most complete revelation of the *Word* of God, the *Logos*, is Jesus. Propelled by love, the Creator came in the flesh to our tiny spot in the universe. He became part of His creation and came to save us by offering us forgiveness. As John's Gospel unfolds, we will learn, that to see Jesus, is to see the Father.