

# ***John 1 v 1 to 18: Who is Jesus – Really?***

## ***Introduction to John's Gospel***

John, who wrote this gospel, was 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. As a young man he experienced over three years of close companionship with Jesus of Nazareth, yet he chose to write the gospel at the end of his life, towards the close of the first century. As best we can tell, he wrote it from the city of Ephesus, where he settled after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD. John does not retrace the events recorded in the 'synoptic' gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke); rather, he tells us his reason for writing: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20 v 30, 31).

Each of the Gospels emphasizes a different origin of Jesus: Matthew shows Jesus came from Abraham through David, and demonstrates that he is *the Messiah* promised in the Old Testament (Matthew 1 v 1 to 17); Mark shows Jesus came from Nazareth, demonstrating that he is *a servant* (Mark 1 v 9); Luke shows Jesus came from Adam, showing Jesus to be *the perfect man* (Luke 3 v 23 to 38); John shows Jesus came from heaven, demonstrating that Jesus is *God*. The first three Gospels focus on what Jesus taught and did: John focuses more on *who Jesus is*.

John shows us who Jesus is by highlighting seven 'signs' (miracles) of Jesus, six of which are not mentioned in the first three gospels. John shows us who Jesus is by allowing Jesus to speak for himself in seven dramatic 'I am' statements, which are not included in the first three gospels. The Gospel of John has even helped scholarly sceptics to believe: the oldest surviving fragment of the New Testament is a portion of John 18, found in Egypt and dating well before 150 AD, indicating wide circulation by that early date.

John's father was Zebedee. John's mother was Salome, one of those to go to the tomb early on the morning the resurrection of Jesus was discovered. John's older brother was James. John was a partner in the fishing business with Peter. John and his brother James were given the nickname 'Sons of Thunder'.

John begins his gospel by asking: 'Who is Jesus? Where did he come from?' The first 18 verses are a summary of John's most profound convictions about Jesus. They focus on this central fact: Christianity is not a philosophy; it is about a person, Jesus. He is central to the Christian faith. To take Jesus out of Christianity is like trying to think of daylight without the sun.

The Gospel of John is a *beloved* gospel. Because of its paradoxical combination of both simplicity and depth, it has been called 'a pool in which a child may wade and an elephant may swim'.

## ***The Word of Life (John 1 v 1 to 18)***

- Who is Jesus – how would you begin to answer this question from verses 1 to 4?
- Why is Jesus called 'the Word' (v 1)? What is a word? What does the word 'Word' mean? How would you describe Jesus' relationship to God?
- "The Word became flesh" (verse 14). Jesus came into the world, but the world "did not recognise him" (v 10). Why not?
- Who does, and who does not, become a child of God (v 12)? How do we become "children of God"?
- Life – light – glory – grace – truth – blessing... What ideas do these words suggest? What feelings do they evoke? Do you think they explain the purpose of Jesus' coming into the world?

***[MORE OVER...]***

“In the beginning” (v 1) refers to the timeless eternity of Genesis 1 v 1. John essentially wrote, ‘When the beginning began, the Word was already there’ – the Word existed before creation, or even time. “was the Word” – ‘Word’ is the Greek word λόγος (*logos*), which had deep roots in both Jewish and Greek thinking. In the mind of the ancient Jews, the phrase ‘the Word of God’ could be used to refer to God himself. The Greek philosophers saw the λόγος as the power that puts sense and reason into the world, making the world orderly instead of chaotic. Therefore, in this opening John says to both Jews and Greeks: ‘For centuries you’ve been talking, thinking, and writing about the Word (λόγος). Now I will tell you who he is...’

“and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” – with this brilliant statement, John sets forth one of the most basic foundations of our faith, the Trinity: (i) there is a Person known as ‘the Word’; (ii) this Person is God, because he is eternal, and is called ‘God’; (iii) this Person does not encompass all that God is: God the Father is a distinct Person from the Word (‘the Word was *with* God). “He was with God in the beginning” (v 2) – again this makes the point that the Father is distinct from the Son, and the Son distinct from the Father: yet they are equally God, with God the Holy Spirit making one God in three Persons.

“Through him all things were made” (v 3) – the Word created all things: therefore, he himself is an uncreated Person, as Paul wrote in Colossians 1 v 16. “In him was life” (v 4) – the Word is the source of all life: the Greek word translated ‘life’ is ζωή (*zoe*), which means ‘the life principle’, not *bios*, which is mere biological life; “and that life was the light of men” – this speaks of spiritual light as well as natural light: without Jesus, we are dead and in darkness. “The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it” (v 5) – ‘has not overcome it’ is another way of translating this verse: light cannot lose against darkness.

“There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe” (v 6, 7) – the work of John the Baptist was deliberately focused on bringing people to faith in Jesus. “He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light” (v 8) – John the Baptist’s work was well received and widely known, so it was important make it clear that John the Baptist was not “the light”, but that he pointed towards and bore witness of that light. “The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world” (v 9) – John does not mean that Jesus gives light to everyone in the sense of universal salvation. Rather, the reason why anyone is born into a world with love or care or goodness is because of the “true light” and the light he gives to the world. “The world did not recognize him... his own did not receive him” (v 10, 11) – God came to the same world he created, to the creatures made in his image, and yet the world did not recognize, let alone welcome him: this shows how deeply fallen human nature rejects God, and that many reject God’s Word and light.

“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (v 12) – ‘right’ is the Greek word ἐξουσία (*exousia*), which also means ‘power’ or ‘authority’. Though some rejected this revelation, others received him and thereby became children of God – through a new birth, being “born of God” (v 13), and not by human effort or achievement.

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (v 14) – the Greek word translated ‘made his dwelling’ is ἐσκήνωσεν (*eskenosin*), from σκῆνος (*skenos*), meaning a ‘tabernacle’ or tent. John connected the coming of Jesus to mankind with God’s dwelling with Israel in the Tabernacle. “We have seen his glory” – John was an eyewitness and could say, ‘I saw his glory, the glory belonging to the only Son of the Father.’

“From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another” (v 16) – Jesus’ coming has meant a never-failing supply of grace and truth, following on from the law (also of grace) given through Moses. Verse 17 describes and demonstrates the ‘fullness of grace’ announced by John the Baptist and brought by Jesus. The Word, Jesus Christ, brought a different order than the one instituted by Moses. “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (v 18) – Jesus is the perfect declaration of the unseen God. The Father and the Son belong to the same family, and Jesus has declared the nature of God to man. We do not have to wonder about the nature and personality of God: Jesus has declared it – by his teaching and his life...