

## The Word Became Flesh

John 1:1-18

Key Verse: 1:14

*“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

How many of you know what I am thinking right now? “Our thoughts are invisible, but as soon as we speak, or write them down, they are revealed. Take the deepest thought and clothe it in words and it becomes visible to everyone. Consider the plays of Shakespeare. At one point they were just his thoughts, but they became visible through his words.” (a) Likewise, Jesus is the Word that reveals God to us. Jesus makes the invisible God visible to us. May God bless us as we begin a new journey today or maybe a continuing journey as we get to know God better through his Son Jesus Christ.

This morning we will start our study of the book of John. The book’s title is derived from its author, the disciple John one of Jesus’ inner circle. “Christian tradition holds he was the last surviving of the Twelve Apostles and died around the age of 94—the only apostle to die naturally, likely at, or near, the beginning of the second century, A.D. John’s traditional tomb is thought to be located at Selçuk, a small town in the vicinity of Ephesus, which is in modern day Turkey.” (b)

“Roman Catholic tradition states that John went to Ephesus and from there he wrote the three epistles: 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> John. He was allegedly banished by the Roman authorities to the Greek island of Patmos, where it is believed that he wrote the Book of Revelation. According to Tertullian, John was banished after being plunged into a vat of boiling oil in Rome and suffering nothing from it. It is said that everyone in the Coliseum audience put their faith in Jesus upon witnessing this miracle. This event would have occurred during the reign of Domitian, a Roman emperor who was known for his persecution of Christians in the late 1st century.” (b) John wrote this book sometime between 65 & 85 AD. which was around 30 to 50 years after Jesus died.

John’s gospel is the last of the four gospels to be written and it is believed that he wrote it for the Greeks because the gospel had spread so far that the number of Greek believers had begun to outnumber the Jews at this point. John looked to bridge the gap between Greek philosophy and the gospel.

Whenever I read John’s gospel, I always wondered why he started it out the way he did. Actually the first 18 verses is really an introduction or prologue that sets the stage. Verse 1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Especially I wondered, “why did John start out with all this talk about the word?” In order to fully understand what John meant, it would be best if we were a first century citizen of the Roman Empire who lived in Greek philosophy and culture. Unfortunately we live in Chicago in the 12th century. So I’ll do my best to give you a brief history and get us all up to speed.

“The Greek word that John used in the introduction to his gospel is called “logos” and it is often translated as word. Taken literally, that meaning is problematic, for how could a mere word exist from the beginning of time? How could a word be God? And how could such a word become human, in particular, the man, Jesus Christ? Literally, “logos,” did mean word. However, it could also mean utterance, speech, logic, or reason, to name but a few. Heraclitus of Ephesus, who lived in the sixth century, BC, was the first philosopher we know of to give logos a philosophical or theological interpretation. Heraclitus might in fact be called the first western philosopher, for his writings were perhaps the first to set forth a coherent system of thought much like what we now call philosophy. Although his writings are preserved only in fragments quoted in the writings of others, it’s known that he described an elaborate system touching on many concepts such as change is constant, the dynamic interplay of opposites, and a profound unity of

things. The Logos seemed to figure heavily in his thought and he described it as a universal, underlying principle, through which all things come to pass and in which all things share. This notion of The Logos was further developed by Stoic philosophers over the next few centuries. The Stoics spoke of The Logos as the Original Reason, through which all things came to be, by which all things were ordered, and to which all things returned. Although there is no direct evidence that John ever read Greek philosophy, yet it seems clear that the concepts he articulated were firmly in his mind when he wrote his gospel.” (c) And what John does is tie the gospel to the Logos, Jesus to the Word and it connects powerfully with the Greek people, which was critically important for the future of spreading the gospel.

Let’s see how John does it. Let’s read verses 1 & 2. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”<sup>2</sup> “He was with God in the beginning.” When hearing the phrase, “In the beginning,” anyone in John’s day, who was familiar with the Scriptures, would immediately think of Genesis 1:1. However John reaches back even farther than Genesis, into eternity past. His point is that in the beginning, even before creation, someone already existed along with the Father: the Word. John weaves the gospel masterfully between the Old Testament and Greek philosophy connecting the two. Take the phrase “was the word” this also echoes the creation account with just a passing hint to the power behind God’s word when he simply spoke, “Let there be light, and there was light.” (Gen 1:3)

The psalms and prophets portray God’s word in almost personal terms, but not quite. (Ps 33:6, Isa 55:10-11) For example Isaiah describes God’s word as coming down from heaven only to return to him after completing the task it was sent to do. But once again John takes the prophetic depiction of God’s word even further. No longer is God’s word merely spoken of in personal terms, it now appears as a real person, the Lord Jesus Christ, (1 Jn 1:1, Rev 19:13) when he says, “the word was God,” and “He was with God in the beginning.”

In verse 3 we find the Word’s involvement in Creation. It says, “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” This verse is an example of the interplay of opposites that we find scattered in John’s writing. Example: all / nothing, light / darkness, life/death. In v3, we find that Jesus is the key to our existence. Everything that we see, smell, touch has been created by God through Jesus. Hebrews 1:2 goes even farther and says that God made the entire universe through his Son, Jesus. That’s an amazing concept when you think of the vastness of the universe. But what’s even more amazing is that this vast universe was not only created through Jesus, but that it is even held together by him. (He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:17) When I first studied science the atom always amazed me because I wondered how did all those protons, neutrons hold together, and how all those electrons stay in their orbits without flying away. And how when combined together they make different things. Contrast the vastness of the universe with the complexity of each person’s DNA. It’s really amazing that he not only created this but that it’s held together through Jesus.

Verse 4 says, “In him was life, and that life was the light of men.” Again we can see that John’s teaching is deeply rooted in the Old Testament. At creation, calling forth light was God’s first creative act. (Gen 1:3-5) Later, God placed lights in the sky to separate light and darkness. Light exists apart from an object like our sun and light makes it possible for life to exist. But once again, John’s teaching goes deeper and says that life was “in him,” and that Jesus is the source of life and that includes both physical and spiritual. John’s teaching is so deep. I heard that seminary students can spend several semesters on these first 18 verses but we are going to cover it in one afternoon. John declares that Jesus is the True light, (light of life) who is both eternal and universal and yet still personal to each one of us that guides us along the path of life.

Verse 5 says, “The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” The footnote indicates that “understood” might be “overcome” which makes it a little easier to understand. This is

another example of opposites opposing each other. Beneath the contrast of light and darkness lie many Old Testament verses. For example the prophet Isaiah depicts the coming Messiah as light shining in the darkness, he says, “the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the shadow of death a light has dawned.” (Isa 9:2) (see also Isa 60) Not only does the light shine in the darkness, the light is stronger than the darkness. But be sure that there is a battle going on between light and darkness.

In verses 6-8 we see a shift toward John the Baptist who came as a witness testifying about the light, about Jesus. John’s whole purpose was so that ALL men might believe. This is also true for the disciple John. If you do a word search on the word “know” you will find, by far, the most occurrences are in John’s writings. It is clear that he wants us to know something because he is saying it over and over. And John the Baptist is no different, he came to so that all men may know that Jesus is the promised Messiah. John was so sure and so determined that he gave his life backing this up. (Very few people in the world have ever fulfilled God’s will in their life. But John was one of them. So his death, while humanly tragic dying so young ~ around 30, is spiritually glorious.)

In verses 10-14 the text shifts the focus back to the Word. Take a look at verses 10-13. “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.”<sup>11</sup> He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”<sup>12</sup> Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—<sup>13</sup> children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” Even though everything was made through Jesus, the world didn’t recognize him when he came. This might be expected because they were not looking for a Messiah, but Jesus’ own people didn’t accept him. Not only did they not accept him, they rejected and killed him in the most horrific way. And the amazing thing about this is that he didn’t wipe the world out. Instead he gave us rights. He gave us the right to be a child of God if we repent of our sins, accept him and believe in him. Then we are accepted into the family of God, we are redeemed from the being the enemy of God, who rejected him to become his child that receives one blessing after another. However in our country we love our rights. People will fight for their rights. But our sinful nature twists things and we turn our rights into entitlements. Our rights come only by the grace of God. One’s enemy has no rights, however even though we were God’s enemy, he gave us the rights of his children. We become his children not born by the natural / physical way but by the spiritual way, born of God.

And how do we become born of God, it comes through Jesus. In order to do so he had to come to our world. And this can be seen in verse 14. Can we read it together. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” During our study, Dan mentioned that in the German translation the word for flesh had a very crude connotation like meat. Jesus gave up his glorious throne in heaven and came to earth like a bag of meat. This is very striking and it reminded me of one of Spurgeon’s messages that I read. In it he said that people will do anything to try and stay in this life for as long as they can. But he asked, “Who would want to stay in this body that is dying from the moment we are born? Why would we want to remain in a bag of decaying meat that reeks of death when we can be transformed into spirit that is eternal, limitless and full of life? His description was so vivid and powerful that I couldn’t help but agree with him. Jesus gave up his glorious heavenly body and became flesh. And he did it so that he could live with us and make his home with us. To have a very personal relationship with us. To live with us, interact with us, experience life with us, bless us (v16) and to reveal God to us. Through the testimony of both Johns, we are able to see the glory of God. One way is through the many miracles that John records, through Jesus’ forgiveness and through his resurrection.

Verses 17 & 18 say, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”<sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” Moses gave the law which was a blessing because it helps us to live together with each other and with

God. But it is oppressive because it points out all our faults. However when Jesus came he not only gave us truth but brought grace along too. And grace is wonderful. V18 says – has made Him known. In other words, Jesus has made God known. This reminds me of John 14:6, “Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”” Jesus has seen God and he came to make God known. Through Jesus we can see what God is like. (Think about the Transfiguration – God visited Jesus with Moses and Elijah and told the disciples to listen to Jesus) Last summer our family went on a white water rafting trip. This was not like the one we all went on a couple of summers ago. The one last summer was on a damn controlled river that could be very dangerous. So a guide went in every raft. And because of our guide, the ride went very smooth because he had been there before and knew where all the difficult spot were and he could keep us out of trouble. On the other hand when we went a couple of years before, we didn’t have guides and a couple of our folks almost drowned.

If we are going to follow someone’s directions, isn’t it wise to listen to someone who has been there before? Jesus has been in heaven and he came to show us the way we can go back to heaven and have eternal life in the glorious kingdom of God. “Going back to The Logos, The Word, if it is true that there is a single, unifying principle eternally at work in the universe, through which all things come into being and by which all things are ordered, one would expect that it would be attested to by other sources. That is in fact the case. For example, in The Tao Te Ching of Lao Tzu, the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu wrote of such a principle he called the tao, or 'the way of life'. In the Upanishads, ancient Hindu philosophers wrote of the ultimate reality and called it Brahman, which is manifested in the individual as Atman. Even today, modern physicists acknowledge a single, fundamental principle of the universe and seek to articulate it in the form of a complete, unified theory of physics.” (c) But what we realize from the Bible is that when God created man, he put it in him an innate desire to know God and John was pointing out that this desire points to Jesus. Jesus is the key because he came as a light shining in the darkness. So the question is, what is your reaction to the light shining in the darkness on you? That depends are you a criminal? Or are you lost? Same circumstance but very different reactions. When the light of Jesus shines on you, are you happy because you are one of his lost children, or do you reject him like a criminal caught in the act?

#### Footnotes

a – Ray Pritchard - <http://www.jesus.org/is-jesus-god/who-is-jesus/the-invisible-god-made-visible.html>

b – Wikipedia - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_the\\_Apostle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_the_Apostle)

c – Ken Funk - <http://web.engr.oregonstate.edu/~funkk/Personal/logos.html>