

The Writings of John The Gospel of John

As we saw in our last session the gospel of John differs from the other three gospels in that John is determined to show the majesty and the deity of Jesus as the Christ, which comes from the Greek word *christos* meaning “anointed” or “chosen one,” and is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *Meshiac* or “Messiah.” The Biblical imagery of the word “Messiah” or “Christ” is that of a king chosen by God. Often in the O. T., God would tell a prophet to go and anoint a chosen person and proclaim him king. The act of anointing with sacred oil emphasized that it was God himself who had ordained a person and given him authority to act as his representative. Although the literal meaning of “*anointed*” refers to the application of oil, it can also refer to one’s consecration by God, even if literal oil is not used (Heb. 1:9). This is what all four of the gospels teach us, that Jesus was God’s anointed, the one who would act on His behalf and in His stead. This is also the reason the Jews had and still have a hard time accepting Jesus as their saviour. They expected to see Messiah as a mighty king who would rid the nation of Israel of all oppression and lead them in a time of peace and prosperity. They did not expect a humble carpenter who ultimately would be executed for what they saw as treason. However, John goes further in his gospel and tells us of the deity of Jesus not only as THE Messiah, but he teaches us about Jesus as the second person of the Trinity * (see note 1 below). So let’s look at the opening prologue of John’s gospel.

Chapter one verses 1-5

The word *prologue* comes from the Greek words “*pro*” meaning “before” and “*logos*” meaning “*word*,” and was a device used in literature and playwriting to explain the upcoming events to an audience. Here John uses the first eighteen verses of his gospel to explain Jesus to us, His nature and the circumstances of His earthly mission. For us, this “*prologue*” serves as an introduction to the narrative which starts at Vs.19. John opens Vs.1, by linking his gospel to the Creation narrative of Gen.1, (*In the beginning*). This leads us into a new narrative which signals Jesus’ appearance at this time in history as a new creation. The Greek *logos* or “word” designates Jesus’ deity as THE Word. John is telling us that Jesus is the Word of God, he is the living embodiment of the mind of God and the express image of God’s Will, He is God incarnate. In Greek philosophy, the *Logos* was used to refer to reason or logic, and was thought of as the abstract force that brought order and harmony to the universe. John uses these qualities of the *Logos* to sum up the person of Jesus and firmly asserts that the *Logos* is God.

In Vs 2, John tells us that “*the Word*” already existed because He was “*in the beginning*” which tells us that eternity is unique to God. We are also told that “*the Word*” was “*with*” God in the beginning, this suggests a close and personal relationship of intimacy. Now, in Vs. 3, we are introduced to Jesus as co-Creator because “*all things were made through Him*,” in this verse John is emphasising the deity of the Word. Since the work of Creation belongs to God alone this means that Jesus must be an equal to God and we know this by the remainder of the verse, “*without Him was not anything made*” (see also Vs.10, Col.1:15-17; Heb.1:2).

John continues in Vs.4, to affirm the deity of Jesus, “*In Him was Life*.” Again this points us to the equality Jesus shares with the Father who has, Jesus says, “*life in Himself*” (chapter 5:26).

In Vs.5, John speaks of the light of Jesus. It is a characteristic of John’s gospel to use contrasting concepts, (light and dark, 1:4-9; love and hate, 15:17-18; above and below, 8:23; life and death, 6:57-58; truth and falsehood, 8:32-47). The theme of darkness and light re-appears in chapters 3:19; 8:12; 12:35-36, where Jesus identifies Himself as the source of the light that drives out darkness.

Verses 6-13

Here we see yet another contrast. Here John the Baptist is “*sent from God*” whereas in the previous verses we see that Jesus is God. Note the absence of the title “Baptist” here for John, this is because John the writer is believed to have been a disciple of John the Baptist and knew him simply as “John”. John highlights the role of John the Baptist briefly but concisely for us.

John the Baptist was sent “*from God*” that is to say he was a prophet of God and was, in fact, the last of the O.T. prophets because the new covenant had not yet been implemented by Jesus. John's mission was to “*bear witness about the light*” and pave the way for Jesus' ministry to begin. The words “*all*” and “*everyone*” signifies that Jesus' gospel had universal meaning and demonstrated God's common grace is for all mankind and not restricted to the Jews.

In Vs.9, the writer John makes it clear that John the Baptist was not the Messiah, but testifies that he did come to bear witness to the true Messiah, the “*light of the world*” (8:12). It was the public ministry of Jesus that brought the true light of the gospel into the world (Vs.9). John again highlights the eternal existence of Jesus in Vs.10, where he tells us that Jesus “*was in the world*” which speaks of His deity and sovereignty as Creator. Also highlighted in this verse is the sad truth that although “*the world was made through Him*” the world “*did not know Him.*” Man could not recognise the Creator when He came because sin had blinded our eyes and hearts to see the majesty of Christ in our midst. The saying goes that “*there are none so blind as those who won't see*” and this is true of the world, fallen man had degenerated so far that we have lost sight of the truth and even in the presence of God we refused to see Him standing among us, and this is reflected in Vs.11. However, Vs.12, gives us the answer to our sad state, the gospel. All who do receive Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, to them He gives “*the right to become children of God.*” Here is the full majesty and grace of God in one sentence. We are, by nature, enemies of God and face the devastating force of His wrath, we are not His children by nature. Yet by His glorious grace we are given the faith to believe in the redeeming work of Jesus (Eph. 2:8). Having received this faith we are then born into the family of God through the cross where Jesus “*Gives us the right*”, it is not something we can aspire to or earn, it is “*given*” to us purely by the grace of God. Our birth is an action taken by the Holy Spirit who gives life to us who were “*dead in trespasses and sins;*” (Eph. 2:1). Jesus gives a more detailed description of this birth in chapter 3:1-21, and it is through this rebirth that we see Jesus in all His glory.

Verses 14-18

John now reaches the climax of his prologue. We saw last time how some of the heretical views of the day included gnosticism where all earthly things (matter), were seen as evil and only the spiritual was seen as important. Another view came from a Greek legend that gods came to earth disguised as human beings (*see Acts 14:11, and note 2). John's statement “*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*” serves to address such views. God did not just appear to be human, He actually became human, born of a woman and taking on a genuine human nature. Having become human He then “*dwelt among us*” which translates as “*pitched His tent*” and signifies the temporary nature of His stay on earth. It also points back to the tabernacle of the O.T. where God resided with His people. It was in the tabernacle that the people saw the glory of God (Ex. 16:1-10; 33:18-23; 40:34-35), but there may also be a reference to the transfiguration here which was witnessed by John, Peter and James (Matt. 17:1-5). The word “*Glory*” is used solely in reference to God as sovereign ruler of the universe, and it is this divine glory that Jesus has by right as “*the only Son.*” There is a difference of opinion as to the exact meaning of this phrase, whether it means “*unique*” or “*one of a kind.*” However, a better understanding can be seen from Heb. 11. where the author refers to Isaac as Abraham's “*only begotten*” or “*unique*” son. Although Abraham had other sons, Isaac is “*unique*” because he is the son of promise and is therefore different to Abraham's other sons. The Son of God showed the world the full grace and promise of the gospel of God. John the Baptist's ministry preceded the ministry of Jesus, yet Jesus existed from all eternity before John. The law of God was given to man to show God's grace but the fuller expression of His grace came through the person and work of Jesus who expressed God's “*grace upon grace*” perfectly. We know that God is invisible and without form (1 Tim. 6:16), and because of our sinfulness any manifestation of God's glory would instantly destroy us. However, the incarnation of Jesus brings God to us in a way we can understand and survive. Jesus is from eternity alongside God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, and it is God the Son who reconciles us in a way that has no parallels.

*(Note 1) Jesus is referred to as the second person of the Trinity purely because of the order in which the Trinity is portrayed in Scripture. The word "Trinity" is a term used to denote the Christian doctrine that God exists as a unity of three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each of the persons is distinct from the other yet identical in essence. In other words, each one is fully divine, but each one is not the totality of the other persons of the Trinity. Each has a will, loves, and says "I" and "You" when speaking. The Father is not the same person as the Son, who is not the same person as the Holy Spirit who is not the same person as the Father. Each is divine, yet there are not three gods but one God. There are three individual subsistences or persons. The word "subsistence" means something that has a real existence. The word "person" denotes individuality and self-awareness. The Trinity is three of these though the latter term has become the dominant one used to describe the individual aspects of God known as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Included in the doctrine of the Trinity is a strict monotheism which is the teaching that there exists in all the universe a single being known as God who is self-existent and unchangeable (Isaiah 43:10;44:6,8). Therefore, it is important to note that the doctrine of the Trinity is not polytheistic as some of its critics proclaim. Trinitarianism is monotheistic by definition and those who claim it is polytheistic demonstrate a lack of understanding of what it really is.

•The Trinity

- God is three persons.
- Each person is divine.
- There is only one God.

Many theologians admit that the term "person" is not a perfect word to describe the three individual aspects found in God. When we normally use the word person, we understand it to mean physical individuals who exist as separate beings from other individuals. But in God, there are not three entities nor three beings. God is a trinity of persons consisting of one substance and one essence. God is numerically one. Yet, within the single divine essence are three individual subsistences that we call persons.

- Each of the three persons is completely divine in nature though each is not the totality of the Godhead.
- Each of the three persons is not the other two persons.
- Each of the three persons is related to the other two but are distinct from them.

The word "trinity" is not found in the Bible, but this does not mean that the concept is not taught there. The word "bible" is not found in the Bible either, but we use it anyway. Likewise, the words "omniscience," which means "all-knowing," "omnipotence," which means "all-powerful," and "omnipresence," which means "present everywhere" are not found in the Bible either; but we use these words to describe the attributes of God. So, to say that the Trinity isn't true because the word isn't in the Bible is an invalid argument.

Taken from the CARM (Christian apologetics and research ministry), www.carm.org

*(Note 2) The legend was of Philemon and Baucis who lived in a humble cottage thatched with reeds and marsh stems for the duration of their marriage. They lived in a town filled whose citizens were stingy and frugal, but despite the improper behaviour of their neighbours, they maintained their piety and their love for one another. They worked together as equals, and though they acknowledged their poverty, they did not dwell on it. Instead, they passed their many years in happiness and humility, making them the perfect candidates to offer hospitality to the gods. Zeus, the primary Greek god, and his son Hermes, god of messengers, had disguised themselves as humans. Weary from travel, they stopped in the town of Philemon and Baucis, yet after knocking on one thousand doors, the gods found that none in the village would offer them hospitality. Finally, the gods knocked on the door of the dilapidated, thatched cottage. Philemon invited them in, and though they had to stoop down to enter the doorway, Zeus and Hermes entered the tiny home of Philemon and Baucis.

Philemon prepared a place for his guests to sit and chatted with them as Baucis served them food and wine. Philemon prepared a stew with preserved meat as an entree. As their guests ate, Philemon and Baucus noticed that each dish and each goblet of wine refilled by itself, as if by magic. Distraught, they prayed to the gods to make amends. Zeus and Hermes revealed themselves and assured the elderly couple that no harm would come to them. Instead, they guided Philemon and Baucis to a nearby mountainside. When the couple looked back, they saw that their entire village had been consumed by a swamp, and that their home had turned into a temple. To reward them for their hospitality and piety, Zeus offered to grant the couple anything they wished as a reward for their hospitality toward the gods. After conferring with Baucis, Philemon requested only that he and his wife be allowed to serve as priests in the temple and that they die at the same moment, as they loved each other too much to be parted by death. When the couple finally passed away on the same day, the gods turned them into trees. Future generations would hang garlands in the trees and speak homilies to honour the memory of Philemon and Baucis.