

1. JESUS, THE WORD OF GOD

John 1v1-3; 14.

Around Easter this year there was international focus on Jesus with the release of Mel Gibson's film 'The Passion of the Christ'. Our focus must be on Jesus, not just for a few weeks before something else comes along to distract us, but constantly. So we are starting this series in the Gospel of John, fixing our eyes on Jesus.

John's Gospel.

Ch.20v30,31. is the key to understanding this Gospel. "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." A Gospel is an evangelistic document not a biography. So the two key themes are:

(1) Who Jesus is: In the first chapter alone, a wide variety of names & titles are used for Jesus e.g. The Word, God, the Light, The Only Begotten, Christ / Messiah, Lord, Lamb of God, Son of God, Rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph, King of Israel, Son of Man. These names, & much more, explore who Jesus is.

(2) What it means to believe in Jesus: The Gospel contains vivid portrayals of ordinary people putting their faith in Jesus and narrates the battles they faced. e.g. a Samaritan woman against a background of prejudice - gender, race & her own lifestyle. e.g. a man born blind who is given his sight, but who, as a result, falls foul of the religious hierarchy. e.g. Thomas, declaring "My Lord & my God" after battling with doubt. All together there are 27 personal interviews with Jesus in this Gospel.

John is writing much later than Matthew, Mark & Luke. Their Gospels have been in circulation for some time, and so John selects largely new material & presents it in a different way. 90% of the material is unique to John. Of the 7 miracles in John, only 2 are in the Synoptic Gospels. This Gospel is more reflective than the others, and yet it does not try to be mystical or speculative. It is actually written in more simple language than the other Gospels.

The Foyer to the Fourth Gospel. (ch.1v1-18)

D.A.Carson: *"The Prologue is a foyer to the rest of the Fourth Gospel simultaneously drawing the reader in and introducing the major themes."* cf. Visit to the Cinema.

So some of the posters we see in this foyer advertise, what is to come

Jesus the Light of the world & the giver of new life.

It prepares us for a conversation about natural & spiritual birth. (ch.3)

It introduces John the Baptist & his unique role as a witness.

The reaction of the Jewish leaders is foreshadowed, rejecting Jesus.

The Glory of Jesus. Jesus the the Truth.

All of this, and more, are here in the foyer. But tonight, we move into studio one. We are going to view Jesus, the Word of God.

Jesus, the Word of God. (1v1-5; 14-18)

Although I have said there is nothing mystical or speculative about John's Gospel, opening the Fourth Gospel may give you another impression. It is beautiful, but most

of us today struggle to understand it when we first read it. e.g. My giving John's Gospel to a colleague at work when I was a young Christian. Next morning he returned it., saying that chapter 1 with its' talk of 'the Word' was incomprehensible.

It *is* possible to say something fairly simple & straightforward to understand it and explain it to others today. But I would also like to help you grasp why John used it in his own day.

1. The simple explanation. Words enable us to express ourselves. I may look at my wife and think "I love her". But words enable me to communicate this. So I say "I love you". In the same way, Jesus is the Word of God. He perfectly communicates the heart and mind of God to us. Hebrews 1v1,2. "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.."

2. But why did John use this expression when the Gospel was first written? John wrote in a context of Greek thought & culture. By his day much of Greek philosophy was teaching that there was One Supreme Transcendent God. Yes, there were other lesser gods, but One was above all others, a God of Pure Unchanging Being. This was a good point of contact for preachers of the Gospel.

Greek philosophers also talked about the need for a mediator between the world of men, and this One Supreme God, & they sometimes referred to this mediator as the Word, (Greek Logos). So far so good. Plenty to use as a springboard for gospel preaching there! But there were problems.

*The Logos was separate from God in their thinking, and inferior to God.

*The material world was not the creation of the Supreme God, but of an inferior deity. It was corrupt, changing, evil.

*The supreme God needed the Logos to mediate, because a God of pure being could have nothing to do with a decaying, corrupt material world

So, John writes. **1v1-3. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. "**
v14. "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."

Notice, that the identity of the Word is not disclosed until v17. There is no specific identification of Jesus until then. But we are in on the secret from the start. We don't need to pretend that we don't know.

In the beginning was the Word

A deliberate echo of Genesis 1v1. e.g. My incident with a drunk in Newcastle City centre. who slurred, "I'll talk to you if you can tell me the first four words in the Bible." Even an inebriated man knew the words "In the beginning God".

This takes us back, before creation. Matthew & Luke begin their Gospel with the baby in the manger, but John takes us further back to Christ's pre-existence. From before "the beginning" He has been. The first Greek readers were being given a very different perspective on the Word. Not some inferior; not some derivative deity; not some new kid on the block.

and the Word was with God.

This hits the Greek idea that the Word was quite separate from the One supreme transcendent God. And it says more than the Word "existed alongside". It speaks of interaction, an active relationship, of lives woven together.

There is a similar glimpse of this in v18. "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." Lit. "who is in the bosom of the father" . The picture is not that of an infant in the arms of its daddy, but of mutual love & companionship. (cf. Jesus & "the disciple whom Jesus loved". John 13v23) It was a standard expression for fellowship: of two persons turning towards each other in intimate conversation.

The Word was with God. There has always been fellowship with in the Godhead. We see this in the Biblical Creation account. Gen.1v26. Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.."

and the Word was God.

There seems to be a gradual drawing back of the curtain. First we are told of Christ's existence before time; then of His continuous interaction with the Father. Now, we have His complete identification with God. The Word was God.

This would have been a strange thought for Greek readers. And though it has been orthodox Christian doctrine from the very beginning of church history it sounds strange to modern ears. Islam rejects this Biblical truth. Groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses deny that Jesus is God. And of course, secular humanism, which reigns supreme in much of the western world, scorns the very thought of Jesus being God.

He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

The Word is also the agent of Creation. The material world is not the inferior work of some minor deity. It is the handiwork of the One Transcendent God, with the Word fully involved. In the Genesis account God speaks and creation comes into being. This is the activity of the Logos. The dynamic Word of God, bringing life into being. The apostle Paul writes similarly: Coloss. 1v15-17.

The Word became flesh

The One who inhabited the universe - enclosed in Mary's womb for 9 months.
The One who had no beginning in time, born into time; into human history.
The One who contemplated eternity set out on a 33 year journey to the cross.

The Word, who was God, became flesh. Fully human.

For the Greeks this was shocking. For them “flesh” meant impure, corrupt, decaying, something despicable. But Biblical truth cuts across this. Man is made in the image of God. There is nothing intrinsically evil about being human. It is sin that is evil. God became man in Christ - a perfect man, without sin, to redeem sinful humanity. The Word became flesh. This is the Biblical doctrine of the Incarnation.

and made his dwelling among us.

Literally. “pitched his tent”, or “tabernacled” among us. This recalls the Old Testament Tent, or Tabernacle, the flimsy construction of Moses and the Israelites in the Sinai desert, which God chose to inhabit in Glory. This explains John’s words

We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus is the Glory of God shining in a frail, human physique. But His glory on earth was not primarily that of shining light and splendour, but of grace and truth.

APPLICATION.

1. Let’s make sure Jesus is our focus. Everything flows from Him & back to Him.

Our worship of God is to be Christ centred.

Jesus Christ is the Good News we have to proclaim.

Jesus is the rock on which we build our individual lives

Jesus is the foundation for building church life.

Jesus is our hope for the future.

2. There is no need to apologise for Jesus. There is no tiptoeing around who Jesus is in this Gospel. It is in your face. Jesus is God. This is far removed from a portrait of Jesus as a good man, an inspired prophet an outstanding teacher, one of the great figures of history. No, He is God. And John, in the opening of his Gospel, also shows us that it is possible to be culturally relevant without diluting the message of who Jesus is; without dumbing down e.g. happy clappy ‘s without much content: and without sizing down - reducing Jesus to a bite-size saviour.

3. Enjoy the mystery of who Jesus is. While there are some things that are plain & simple, there are others that are difficult to grasp. That’s all right. There are many things in life I do not fully comprehend, but I know someone does! In the case of Christ, we will not fully appreciate His glory, understand what pre-existence out of time means, comprehend how He could be both man & God, and grasp the complexity of One God eternally existing as three persons, Father, Son & Spirit. Enjoy the mystery. The Greeks are a good reminder that human reason can take us so far, but we still need revelation to understand spiritual truth. (1 Cor.2v10-16.)

4. Jesus’ Glory is inseparable from the Cross. “We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” When you watch the film ‘The Passion of the Christ’, it seems far removed from glory. Probably “gory” would be more appropriate. Yet Jesus talked of His own death on that cross

as His being glorified, and of glorifying the Father. John 12v23-28. That is why, Paul and the other apostles kept their message centred on Jesus and His death on the cross. (1 Cor.1v18-2v5)