

John on Jesus - Jesus, the Word
Sign Title: John on Jesus - Jesus, the Word

April 22, 2012

Good morning Faith family. I would also like to welcome those who are connecting through the Internet. Today we began live streaming on the web. If you are out of town, south for the winter, or just can't make it to church, you can catch everything live on the web. All of our web sites have links to our live streaming feed.

- Faithefree.com - which is our main site
- Faithefree.info - which is our online bulletin
- Christ2Rculture.com - which is our main teaching site.

The live feed works on your desktop plus it also works on Apple, Blackberry, Windows Mobile and Android devices. If you have something that connects to the Internet, you can connect live on Sunday morning.

There are many stories behind the stage, lighting and video project that I haven't had a chance to share. As we launch live streaming, it is appropriate to share one. This kind of live streaming involves some expensive equipment. The software needed to do this right is pricey, so from the beginning of this project we began trying other ways of live streaming to avoid spend the money.

As almost all building projects run, by the time we wrap things up, I know expenses are over-budget. I don't have all the bills so I don't know how much we are over by, but I know we are at the end of spending. In the last two weeks, it also became painfully obvious that all the low-cost alternatives of live streaming we tried wouldn't work. We needed to purchase the expensive software.

Everything is ready to go with the upgrade, but without that software, we are dead in the water when it comes to streaming and recording. It is the last piece of equipment we need to finish the project. I tried every angle from discount codes to purchasing it used on eBay, but nothing brought the price of the program in our range.

I was praying about it. Cindy was praying with me. My kids were praying with me about this. God gave me an idea. I felt God prompting me to call the company, ask to speak to the president, tell him what we are trying to do, tell him we are out of money and make a big request. Ask him to give us the whole thing to us for free. Now as you can guess, getting ahold of a company president could be just as challenging as getting him to give us the software but it was worth a try.

God worked it out. He gave me a chance to talk to the president of the company on the phone. I shared our vision. I made the big ask, and he gave us the whole thing for free. God is good. He is very good. This is more evidence that God is behind this project and we are privileged to be a part of it. Let's pray and thank God, then let's get into the text.

Prayer

God, thank you for this time together. Thank you for being so gracious and compassionate toward us. Thank you for putting the final technological piece of this project together by a sheer act of your grace so we can tell more people in our region and beyond about the grace offered to us through Jesus.

Thank you that the Bible is not just stories about what you did but about what you are still doing. Thank you for letting us face adversity and hardship so we have stories about how you brought us through them. It is those stories that build our trust and confidence in your love for us through Jesus. God, we love you.

Thank you for the privilege of studying John's Gospel. Help us to understand who we are and what we have through Jesus. Thank you that everything we have is because of your love and grace. Amen.

What cultural background do we need to know?

Before we get into the text, I need to give you some Hebrew and Greek background. Hang with me on this one. If you don't have this background, the beginning of John's Gospel is mysterious.

John wrote for the Hebrews.

If you have studied the Bible, you know the Jews were proud of their ancestry. They were proud that they could trace their ancestry back through David and Jacob and eventually to Abraham, a man called by God. The Jews knew they were God's chosen people. They understood God was working his plan of redemption through them. They understood God loved them in a way he hadn't other nations.

They also knew that God's action in the world and in their lives was through his Word. They knew from Genesis that God brought things into existence simply by speaking. God's word was power. When God spoke, things were brought into existence or events changed.

They also understood that at certain times, God chose people to speak his words. Those whom God spoke through were called prophets. The prophets literally spoke God's words to his people. God didn't give them an idea and they told others about it to the best of their ability. They understood God was literally speaking his words through his prophets. In other words, God could speak to his people without error. God's prophets said exactly what God wanted them to say.

Since God's words in creation were powerful, the Jews understood that God's Word through the prophets would also be powerful so it should be treated with reverence. It should be treasured.

This is why the Jews memorized Scripture. They studied Scripture. They gave their life to understanding it. So for the Hebrews, the Word of God is foundational to everything. John knew that. This is why he began his Gospel the way he did. He got the attention of the Hebrews by talking about the Word. But there is another group of people in that culture.

John wrote for the Greeks.

The Greeks didn't have a great biological lineage they could trace back to Abraham. They are more interested in philosophy and philosophers. They traced their philosophy about life back to a man named Heraclitus. Interestingly, thanks to Heraclitus, they also had this concept of the Word in their understanding of the creation of the world.

Who was Heraclitus?¹ Heraclitus was a philosopher that predated Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Cicero. He taught that the world was in a constant

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraclitus>

state of flux and disorder. His famous saying is that you can never step in the same river twice, because everything is changing. As he looked at the world with all of its chaos and disorder, he reasoned there must be something that brought harmony to it. There must be something that provides meaning and purpose to the chaos around us. He came up with the concept that Logos, the Word, was behind all things. He believed the Word created the world by fire and governed creation. Heraclitus was not a Christian. He didn't know about Jesus and he had some messed up thinking but; nevertheless, he was a highly influential philosopher in his day. His concept of the Word being the order behind all things was adopted by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Cicero, just to name a few. His teachings on the Word being the governing force behind all things controlled the Greek understanding of the world for hundreds of years and into the time of Jesus.

Heraclitus was so influential that when he died his face was imprinted on the coins in the city of Ephesus where he lived, much like George Washington is on our dollar bill. Coinage with his face continued to circulate for a couple hundred years after his death.

John tried to bring these cultures together.

So in the ancient world there were these two completely different mindsets about life and origins. John, as an old man who was trying to reach his world for Jesus, tried to bring these two worlds to Jesus. If John couldn't find a way to bring the Hebrews and the Greeks to Jesus, the church was in trouble.

This is not unlike our own day where there are many different cultures, races, religions, languages and traditions that all need to hear about Jesus. Just as missionaries learn about another cultures so they can tell them about Jesus, John crafted the Gospel of John so he can explain Jesus in a relevant way to both the Hebrews and the Greeks. John acted as a missionary to the world around him. That is the culture background we need to know.

What is the historical background we need to know?

As we pick up the book, this is where we find ourselves. Matthew already wrote his Gospel. It was written primarily for a Jewish audience. This is why Matthew frequently talks about Jesus' relationship to Jewish culture and tradition. Those were the questions the Jews were asking. Mark already wrote his short gospel to the Romans. It is the cliff note Gospel, because the Romans were busy people who rarely had time to finish the books they read. This is why Mark kept it short. Luke, a doctor by trade, took the time to extensively research his Gospel. It is detailed. It is historical. It is chronological. It is the Gospel written for big brains. John knew these three are already in circulation. He wrote something different.

When you read Matthew, Mark, and Luke, you realize they are similar. John is the same story, but it is quite different. Why is John different? It is the same story but told in a fresh way, because John is the closest eyewitness, so he took liberties that others couldn't. We also must remember that when the Gospels are different, it is not that one Gospel is less true than others. Each Gospel writer told the same story in a different way, because they were writing for

different audiences. Who was John writing his Gospel for? John's audience was the Greeks with their philosophical background and the Hebrews with their theological background. He wrote to reach both of them *at the same time*. Once we know that, the lightbulb comes on when we read the beginning of John's Gospel. It explains why it begins in a mysterious way. Let's put our finger in the text.

How does Jesus relate to God?

In the beginning was the Word. John 1:1 (ESV)

All of the Gospels start either with the beginning of Jesus' life or with the beginning of his ministry. John went back even further. He went back to the very beginning of all things. He started before there was time. He started from the reference of eternity.

The Hebrews loved this, because John started his Gospel with the same words that Genesis 1 begins with, "In the beginning..." The Greeks also instantly connected with this because they believed the Word (Logos in Greek), was the creating and organizing force behind everything. So John connected with these two completely different cultures at the same time with his first sentence. Then he moved from completely connecting with them to challenging their thinking.

...and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The Word is not just God's speech in action, as the Hebrews thought. The Word is not just an impersonal unifying force behind all things, as the Greeks thought. The Word is God. The Word was God from the very beginning of all things.

Not only that, but the Word was distinct from God. Now for the Jews, who prided themselves on monotheism, this sounded like heresy. The Word is God and yet was separate from God? How can that be? Today, knowing what we do from the rest of the Bible, we understand the concept of the Trinity. There is one God, but there are three persons in God. There is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. One God in three persons. At the time John was writing, the Hebrew culture didn't understand there is one God in three persons so they were left scratching their heads. The Word is with God. He is God yet he is distinct from God.

He was in the beginning with God. John 1:2 (ESV)

Now John took the concept of the Word, which can bring together the totally different worlds of Greek and Hebrew thought, and he said the Word is a person. The Word is a he, not an it. For the Greeks, this leaves them scratching their heads. Heraclitus taught the Word was like an impersonal unifying energy field, like the Force in "Star Wars." John said that isn't true. The Word is a person.

So John caught their attention, and he challenged their understanding. Then he said something everybody can agree on.

How does Jesus relate to the universe?

All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. John 1:3 (ESV)

All of creation was fashioned by the Word of God. The Hebrews agreed with this. They remembered that from Genesis. God spoke, and the world was created. But remember, this Word is another person in the Godhead who is God.

To make sure they understand just how big the Word is, John said it all again but in the negative way, “without the word, nothing was made that has been made.” In other words, there is no one behind the Word who created anything. *All things in existence were created by the Word.* The Word made all physical creation and all spiritual beings. The Word made the angels!²

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. John 1:4 (ESV)

Not only did the Word make all of physical creation but the Word is the source of all life in creation. The Word is what makes the plants grow. He is the one who makes babies in a mother’s womb. The Word is who made all of us, and we are only alive because he sustains all of us.

This Word is not just the source of life but it is the light of mankind. Now in the weeks that follow, we will explore the imagery of light and darkness in John. For now, realize John carefully uses the term “Word” so he can speak to the Greek and Hebrew cultures in a way that will challenge them but keep them listening. He does the same thing with the terms light and darkness. They are culturally relevant terms for his audience.

He didn’t want to be like one of those weird televangelists that you instantly tune off after two seconds of listening because they don’t live in your world. He wanted to keep his audience tuned in talking in terms meaningful to them.

² Hebrews 1:1-14

For now, let me explain light and darkness this way. John said that direction, purpose and meaning is what light gives us. That is what the Word gives us, because the Word is the light of men.

When we built this stage, we painted everything in the back black. One thing we forgot to install was a light. You know what it is like walking in a black room with no lights? You trip over everything! The Word is the lamp of our life that gets flipped on so we don't keep groping around in life wondering what we are here for and what we should be doing with our life. The Word is our light. Jesus is the one who gives us meaning and purpose.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:5 (ESV)

There is this tension between darkness and light. The darkness in this world is trying to snuff out the light, but it hasn't been able to do it.

John successfully grabbed the attention of the Greek and Hebrew thinkers of his day. If we simply substitute Jesus for the Word, we realize he has taught us, and them, some deep theology about the greatness of Jesus.

Now John presses the pause button on philosophy and anchors Jesus in history. He begins with John the Baptist.

John the Baptist prepared the way.

Who is John the Baptist? John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin. He is different from John the apostle, who wrote this book. Jesus' mother, Mary, and John the Baptist's mother, Elizabeth, were related. They both have great conception stories. Elizabeth was an old woman. She was too old to have children. God allowed her to become pregnant through her husband Zechariah.

Mary was the opposite. She was young, and she wasn't married. She was a virgin so the odds of pregnancy were also slim.

Now John the Baptist's job was to prepare the way for Jesus. He had a unique style of ministry that didn't fit the culture. He was a back-to-nature kind of man with long hair, animal skin clothing, and he ate bugs for lunch. When he talked with you, he had pieces of beetle caught between his teeth. He came out of the woods screaming at everybody, telling them to repent of their sin because God is coming into the world

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. John 1:6–9 (ESV)

What I love about John is he understands his job. In that day, John was a hip cultural sensation. He is a back-woods-bugs-in-teeth kind of guy. Today, he would be the star of his own reality television show. In that day, it became trendy for everybody to go camping in the wilderness to hear John preach. He yelled a lot. He told people to repent of their sins and get baptized.

Even the religious leaders were taking backpacking trips to the wilderness. It would have been easy for all this popularity to go to John's head. After all, when all the KOA campgrounds are full for miles around because they came to hear you preach, that can inflate an ego.

Thankfully, John understood his role. His job was to be a sign post. His job was to simply to point people to Jesus.

In that day, the Jews were expecting the Messiah. They were expecting God would send their redeemer to organize them and lead them from under the

oppression of the Romans. People were thinking that John might be that redeemer. Everybody wanted him to speak at their conference. John didn't get caught up in popularity. He kept telling people he was not the main event. He was only the warm-up band. He was pointing the way to Jesus.

Today, many Christians get this wrong. We think life is about our happiness. We think God came to make us popular and comfortable. In reality, our role is no different than John's. We simply point people to Jesus. John got his head cut off because he pointed people to Jesus. If you think Jesus came to make us happy, you are wrong. Jesus came to save us from our sins and bring us into a relationship with God. Our role is to point people to Jesus. Our role is to follow Jesus wherever he leads us, even if our head gets chopped off because of it. That is OK. God doesn't exist to serve us; we exist to serve him. There is no greater joy than serving Jesus, but there are often times of great pain when we serve Jesus. John's role and our role is to point people to Jesus.

The world did not recognize Jesus.

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. John 1:10 (ESV)

John still works with this concept of light, but the light of men is also the Word from before. John said that even though the world was made through Jesus, the world did not recognize him. Like a funnel, John works his way down to clearly linking Jesus to the light and the Word.

Let's just connect Jesus to the Word to see what John is doing. Jesus made everything, but when he humbled himself to take on a body, nobody recognized him.

Think about this. What was Jesus like? He was from Nazareth. Nazareth was a backwoods town where everybody was related and the whole school system fit in one room. His earthly father was a carpenter, a minimum-wage job. Jesus wasn't rich. He didn't get married. He was homeless. He didn't write any books. He probably didn't travel more than 30 miles from the place he grew up, yet, he was God. Most people expected God would come as a high-class kind of guy. God, the one who created the universe out of nothing, comes to us in this completely unexpected way. Very few believed he was God until he did something only God can do; he rose from the dead.

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. John 1:11 (ESV)

Here we have John trying to bring the two cultures together again. Jesus came and appealed to the Jews, but the Jews did not recognize him or receive him. Instead, they crucified him.

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, John 1:12 (ESV)

John here opened the doors wide. To become a God-fearing Jew, it was a tough process which ultimately involved, if you were a man, circumcision. As you might guess, there were plenty of God-fearing Gentiles that were not willing to go through circumcision for obvious reasons.

Yet, with Jesus, it is a totally different story for both Jews and Greeks. It is not about joining another culture and a painful surgical act. It is simply believing in Jesus' name. That is all it takes to become a child of God if you are a Jew or Gentile.

who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:13 (ESV)

He added an interesting twist about what it means to be a Christian.

While in one sense, recognizing Christ and following Christ is open to anyone, in another sense, it is an exclusive club. John will talk much more about this later in this Gospel.

The ability to recognize Jesus for who he is so we can believe in him is not a natural ability. It is a supernatural ability given to us by God. This is why some people can hear about Jesus all day long and it means nothing to them. Others hear about Jesus and it clicks. They believe in Jesus and love him. It is a supernatural gift that God gives some people to hear about Jesus and respond to him. In one sense, it is so easy. It is simply believing Jesus is the Word and that he died on the cross for our sins and rose from the grave. In another sense, it is incredibly hard because none of us have the ability to trust in Jesus on our own.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (ESV)

Now, John connected where he began with Jesus. The Word that was with God is a person that dwelt with God. The Word made everything physically and spiritually. The Word is the creator of life. This same Word came and dwelt among us as Jesus, but very few recognized him. John said, I was an eyewitness of this. I saw Jesus' glory. He dwelt among us.

This word *dwelt* is an interesting word. Literally, it is the word *tabernacled*. It is the same concept of what happened with ancient Israel when the Hebrews were traveling through the wilderness and God dwelt in the tent of

meeting among them. God was literally with them. John said the Word who created everything came and tabernacled among us in flesh. He did it under cover. He looked so ordinary that people didn't recognize him.

Conclusion

So the one that is behind Greek culture called the Word and the one who is the Word from Genesis in Hebrew culture is the person of Jesus, who is God. He is the one who created everything. He humbled himself to come to a dumpy rural town to grow up with poor parents. He never traveled more than 30 miles from home. He didn't write a book. He was homeless and poor. He died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead to secure eternal life for all who believe in him.

Jesus is the answer behind everything. Jesus is the answer that every philosopher, theologian and religion seeks. Jesus created matter. Jesus created life. Jesus is the light that gives the meaning and purpose everyone is looking for. John said that to know Jesus, we simply need to believe in his name and we will be born as children of God. That sounds easy, but it is also the hardest thing in the world. To see Jesus for who he is an impossibility apart from a supernatural work of God in our lives.

John says, when we are born of God, it is not just so that when we die, we will go to heaven. John says being born of God is a relationship with God that begins right now. He is the one who is with us in the hard times. He is the one we talk to and pray to. Our experience of Jesus' love for us only gets bigger in eternity.

Applications

1. My first application is for those of you who have not trusted in Jesus. I ask you to believe. If God is working in your heart now, that is a supernatural thing. Ask Jesus to forgive your sins through Christ's death on the cross and believe. What God starts in you this morning, he will complete.
2. If you are already a Christian, my application for you is to be like John the Baptist. Realize none of us are the light. We are only sign posts. Faith Church exists to point people to Jesus. Each one of us exists to point people to Jesus. Jesus is the answer everyone is looking for.
3. Another application for those us who believe comes from John the apostle. He knew his mission was to find a way to explain Jesus to people in a way they could understand. That is what we are trying to do at Faith Church. We want to reach into our culture and tell people about Jesus in a way they can understand. It is not just what we do as a church, it is what we are to do as individuals. There is really only one question for each of us. If I really believe, to whom and to where has God called me to be a witness? Where has God called me to take the story of Jesus? You see, many people think a missionary is just somebody in a foreign land. That isn't true. God is calling each of us to tell people about Jesus, the Word behind it all.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you so much that you are God and that if we see you, we see all there is to be seen about God. Father, I pray for those here and for those connected through the Internet. I pray that they would believe and experience life through you. I pray for those of us who know you. Help us to be good sign posts this week. Help us to point people to Jesus and not ourselves as the answer. Help us to think hard. like John the apostle, and discover ways to take

something in the world around us and use it to explain Jesus to people in a way they can understand.



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