

John 1:1-18 – The Word that Shines¹

Before the class: Prepare the 3:22 minute video of a middle school football play for the Instruction section: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Ejh_hb15Fc Make a copy of “A prayer for Grace and Truth” for each class member for the Transformational Exercise.

Fellowship Question: (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin discussion, and to lead into the study)

What is the first word your child spoke?

Using your smart phone/ipad/etc., how many different definitions of the word “word” can you find?

Information

As we begin the study of the Gospel of John, it is good for us to remember that this book may well have been the last book of the New Testament written.

“Who is Jesus? is the leading question running through the whole Gospel. This is, of course, a core concern of the other Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, but John concentrates on it in a distinctive way and develops it further. John’s is an understanding of Jesus that has had the benefit of long reflection on eyewitness testimony, on the Synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark, and Luke], and probably also on the teaching of Paul, and also many years of living and teaching in a Christian community. *It is the culmination of the New Testament testimony to Jesus.*”²

Unlike Matthew and Luke, John does not begin his gospel with the nativity story of Jesus. John had a different purpose and a different audience from those evangelists. John takes us back, not to the time of Mary and Joseph and shepherds watching their flocks at night. John takes us back to the preexistence of Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jerusalem - the whole earth - indeed, the whole universe!

“What tripped up insiders about Jesus was that he was from Galilee (Jn 7:52). ...The last king of Israel...had to share David’s nativity (Ps 89:3-4; Mic 5:2) - everyone knew that. But in John’s narrative world, Jesus’ heavenly origin was far more important than any early nativity. John didn’t need to tell the story of Jesus’ birth because ‘He was in the beginning with God’ (Jn 1:2).”³

When we use the word, “word”, we might mean several different things. We might mean the literal word, like “the first word she said was...” What are some other ways we use “word”? (To

¹ This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc, 2023. More lessons may be found at greatbibleteachers.com.

² David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 4.

³ Rodney Reeves, *Spirituality According to John: Abiding in Christ in the Johannine Writings* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 27.

give someone your word, meaning they can trust you. Early hip-hoppers used to say ‘word’ to mean, “this is the truth” or “I agree”. In the computer world, Word is a Microsoft program used to create documents. Etc.)

Our text this week focuses on this word, “word.”

- Have a class member read John 1:1-5.

The Greek word for word is “logos” (pronounced LOW-goss). Like our “word”, logos could have different meanings, depending on the speaker and the context.

Scholars have noted that “Word” might be seen in several ways. In the Old Testament, when God speaks, there is divine *power*. Worlds are formed and people are transformed by God’s spoken word and by God’s word as spoken through prophets, priests, and poets. In the Greek world, to the Stoics, Word was a rational *principle*. Logos was the power that governed all life and that all life had in common. It was logic, rationality, and providential. The early Christians used “word” to refer to Jesus and to the good news about Jesus that was the Christians’ *proclamation*.

You might have noticed that John 1 begins a lot like Genesis 1.

- Have a class member read Genesis 1:1-5. You may want to have John 1:1-5 read again.

What similarities did you hear between these two passages? (John uses a word, logos, to refer to Jesus; John uses Genesis 1 as a template; John is saying that Jesus and God are one and the same, etc.)

“Once one makes the connection with the creation story in Genesis, other images in the Prologue begin to make sense. In Genesis, God ‘speaks’ the world into being: John refers to the Word, the *logos*, as being the agent of all creation. In Genesis, light is the first thing created, and then God separates light and dark; John speaks of the Word as light that shines in darkness. The opening verses of the Prologue, then, are in dialogue with the well-known opening verses of Genesis and serve to frame the story of Jesus in terms of God’s creative impulse before time began.”⁴

- Have a class member read John 1:9-13.

Who or what is “the world” in this passage?

“For John, ‘the world’ carries a multiplicity of meanings. It is the object of God’s love, not God’s judgment (3:16-19), yet the world has judged itself by rejecting the light. Jesus came to bring life to the world (6:33), although he is not ‘of this world’ (8:23)...For the Fourth Evangelist, then, the term *the world* is the locus of fallen humanity but the object of a mission from God.”⁵

⁴ Mark A. Matson, *John*, Interpretation Bible Studies (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 9.

⁵ Matson, 11.

Have you ever been in a very dark room when someone switched on the light? How do you react? (a complaining groan, cover eyes, turn head, etc.)

Here, the light of the world is appearing in the dark world – darkened by sin and evil. How did the world react to Jesus? (rejection, crucifixion, etc.)

How does the world react to Jesus today? (rejection; try to reduce the light; persecute those who walk in the light; etc.)

One way to reject or to reduce the Light of the World is by recasting the Light, to put a lampshade over the Light. What are some ways the world puts a lampshade over the Light? (recast Jesus as simply a good man or a prophet or a political rebel, etc.)

Those who trust in the “name” of Jesus are now called children of God. “Name” is another word that can have different meanings. We know that Jesus (the Greek name for the Hebrew name Joshua) was a common enough name for males of that era. What is a deeper meaning of “trust in the name”? (the personality, the being, the authority, the role, etc.)

- Have a class member read John 1:14-15.

Each year as we celebrate Christmas, we marvel that “the Word became flesh.” If someone should wonder, “what does God look like?” here is the Christian’s answer: God looks like Jesus – not in a literal way, as a Jewish man with a beard and long hair wearing a robe. But look inside Jesus and you will see God. Look at the actions of Jesus and you will see God at work. Listen to the words of Jesus and you will hear the words of God.

Jesus was “full of grace and truth.” Why does Jesus need both? William Hull said, “Grace without truth is easily seen as sentimentality while truth without grace can appear to be an inflexible rigidity.”

Recently, a middle school football team displayed both truth and grace. One boy with special needs was on the team. The truth is, he never would – and never could – score a touchdown. But members of the team, behind their coaches’ backs, planned two plays that allowed him to score. Grace and truth were on display.

[See the video of this story here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Ejh_hb15Fc] Where did you see grace and truth on display in this video? How did grace and truth on display affect the persons involved?

- Have a class member read John 1:16-18.

The purpose of Jesus coming to live among us is found at the end of this passage: to make God known. What are some things you know about God because “the Word became flesh” in Jesus Christ?

Often, the Bible is called “the Word of God”. This can be confusing since Jesus is called “the Word of God.” I once had a remarkable discussion with a pastor who insisted that Jesus and the Bible were one. To him, the Trinity was God the Father, Son/Bible and Holy Ghost. “Jesus is the Word of God. The Bible is the Word of God. That settles it,” he insisted.

What is the difference between “the Bible *is* the *Word* of God” and “the Bible *contains* the *words* of God”?

Transformational exercise

Listen to these words, again, from today’s text: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us...full of grace and truth... Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

If we know the truth about ourselves, we know we are not what we want to be. We want to be more like Christ – more pure, more loving, more generous, more sacrificial, more prayerful, more faithful, more obedient – but we are not there. That is the truth. Maybe it is even easier to see this truth about others – *they* need to be more pure, loving, etc. And, that is probably true, too. We have enough evidence for a conviction.

We can be fairly full of this truth about ourselves and others, which can lead to self-hate and/or self-righteousness.

But, let’s remember that the Word that became flesh lived a life “full of grace”. This Word in the flesh, while hanging on a cross, looked at the truth of a world filled with pride, greed, lies, and betrayal, and said a word of grace: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34) The truth hurts. Grace heals.

Consider your own spiritual life. Are you full of one, but not the other? Where do you need more “filling”?

[Allow time for reflection. Conclude with the following reading.]

Leader: He was in the world, and the world came into being through him

All: Lord, sometimes I act like this world centers around me and would end without me. Help me to remember that it all started and ends with you.

Leader: To all who received him, who believed in his name, God gave power to become children of God.

All: I am your child. Help me to live up to your name.

Leader: The Word became flesh and lived among us.

All: Help me to model through my life the life you lived.

Leader: Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

All: Lord, help me to see the truth of who I am and how I live. Cover me with your grace. Amen.

A Prayer for Grace and Truth

Leader: He was in the world, and the world came into being through him.

All: Lord, sometimes I act like this world centers around me and would end without me. Help me to remember it all started and ends with you.

Leader: To all who received him, who believed in his name, God gave power to become children of God.

All: I am your child. Help me to live up to your name.

Leader: The Word became flesh and lived among us.

All: Help me, through my life, to model the life you lived.

Leader: Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

All: Lord, help me to see the truth of who I am and how I live. Cover me with your grace. Amen.