

Introducing.....

John 1:1-18

Imagine - you've gone to see a new doctor, you been ushered into the doctor's room and there you are waiting for her/him to come in. In that situation, you might notice certificates on the wall; maybe some photos of the family on the desk. So even before you meet your new doctor in person, you've got some sense of who they are and what qualifications they have.

John 1:1-18 is similar. This first section of John's gospel (often called 'the prologue') allows us to get to know Jesus before we actually meet him (we'll have to wait until v29 for that!)

In these first 18 verses we're given an awesome introduction to Jesus. And we'll see that Jesus is the centre point, the lynchpin of what it means to be in relationship with God.

Read through the text (a couple of times if you need to) and mark/circle/underline **recurring words or themes**. After you work through it, share with the group what you came up with.

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

²He was with God in the beginning.

³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

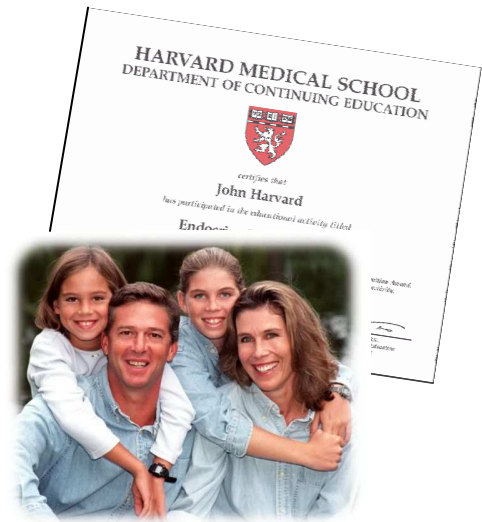
⁶There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world

¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

¹²Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴The 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.

¹⁵John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' " ¹⁶From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.



The Word

Unlike many of the other terms in this section (eg. light/darkness, witness/testify, believe, truth, glory), the reference to **'the Word'** is found only in this introduction section of John's gospel. It may only appear here, but it's very important concept to grapple with if you want to have a proper understanding of Jesus.

a) What is the purpose of **our** words?

b) John 1:1 deliberately takes us back to Genesis 1:1 (look it up to see the link). From Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1-3, what does **this** Word do that our words can't do?

c) In what way is this Word put in the highest position (John 1:1)?

These first couple of verses of John seem strange to us. John gives us a very dynamic picture of the Word. In one sense it's separate from God and in another sense it's one with him. God's word actually makes things happen... God's word is a powerful force. God's word is almost... personal. Take a look at these Old Testament ideas:

Psalm 33:6 – By the word of the Lord were the heavens made.

Isaiah 55:11 – So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

It's interesting to note that in the early translations of the Jewish Scriptures (our Old Testament) into other languages, the Jewish people sometimes replaced God's name with alternatives, including 'the Word'. As one example, a translation of Exodus 19:17 reads:

Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet *the Word of God*.

From all of this we can see, to say that *the Word was with God and the Word was God* is perhaps not as strange as we first think. (Or, at least, it may be strange to us, but may not have been so strange to John's first readers.)

d) But this 'prologue' presents something about the Word that goes beyond what any Jew could normally accept. In fact, it would be offensive. What is it?

Don't let your possible familiarity with the idea that the "Word was God... and the Word became flesh" diminish your appreciation of how amazing this is.

i) How does this picture of Jesus compare with how you might normally think of Jesus, or how your neighbours / classmates etc think of Jesus?

ii) In the very act of letting the Word becoming flesh, what does this tell us about God?

iii) If we want to explain to people what God is like, what should we do? (also see v18)

Light and Darkness

e) Read Genesis 1:1-3. What connection do you see between this and John 1:3-4?

f) It seems to be that this reference to light and darkness is referring to more than just creation. In fact light and darkness is a big theme in John's gospel. Read John 3:19; 8:12 and 12:46. In your own words, what is this light and darkness?

g) In John's gospel, light is a way of referring to Jesus himself – the source of salvation and eternal life - and darkness is a picture of evil and rebellion. If we understand the reference to light and darkness in 1:5 in this way, what does this verse tell us?

John the Baptist as a Witness

h) This introduction presents John the Baptist (not the "John" who wrote the gospel) who we'll see much more of in the next study. But from v6-7 who was John and what was his purpose?

John the Baptist came to bear witness to Jesus. He came to testify that Jesus is the one whom we should believe in. **‘Witness’** and the related idea of **‘testimony’** is another important theme in John’s gospel. A Samaritan woman testifies to Jesus (4:39); the Scriptures testify to Jesus (5:39); Jesus has the authority to testify about himself (8:13-14) Jesus’ miracles testify to him (10:25); the Holy Spirit bears witness about Jesus; and John the author of this gospel is giving his testimony (19:35; 21:24). The issue that is before all of us then is – will we listen to the witnesses? Will we believe?

Non-Recognizing and Receiving

i) If the witnesses are telling the world about Jesus, what is the tragic thing we learn about the response to this testimony v6-11?

It’s tragic not only because those who he created (‘the world’ v10) are rejecting their creator, but specifically, the Jewish people (‘his own’ v11) are refusing to recognize the one they’ve been waiting for, the Christ or Messiah.

j) From what we’ve looked (especially in terms of ‘darkness’), why did people not accept the testimony?

k) In our own context, how does this help us understand the reason for our neighbours’ / classmates’ rejection of Jesus?

l) But there are those who listen to the testimony and receive Jesus. What is the privileged status of those who believe Jesus?

m) When don’t we think of ourselves as children of God? What about thinking about other Christians?

n) What should we do to correct our thinking?

o) In your own words, how do we *not* become Christians v13?

p) How does this compare with how many people think of Christians?

We haven't had the chance to explore all the 'prologue'. But as we go through John's gospel, try to pick the connections between this introduction and the life of Jesus. This prologue is sort of like a mini-summary of the rest to come. We've seen some mind-blowing things about Jesus today and the challenge that John's gospel will keep putting before us – will we believe in Jesus and keep our belief in him?

Share & Pray

1. Share & pray about particular people you would love to see receive Jesus and believe.
2. Spend time giving thanks for what God did with the Word becoming flesh.
3. Spend time giving thanks for what God has done in your life to make you his child.