

Eternal Source of Life and Light

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[0 : 00] Good afternoon folks and welcome to our lunchtime Bible talk. Good, you're all very welcome to our time together and if you've not met me before, my name is Paul Brennan, one of the staff here at the church.

And we are, as we saw last week, we are beginning a little series through the Gospel of John. So we're going to be working through each Wednesday lunchtime through till Christmas, looking at John's Gospel.

And two reasons for that really. One is to encourage and build you up, but the other is also to reach out to friends. John's Gospel is explicitly evangelistic, as we saw last time he's writing, so that people would see and would believe and would have life.

And so we've got these little cards here on your seats, which are just little invitations to come to these Wednesday lunchtimes over the autumn. So do take those, do use those, and invite friends along.

And also you may want to follow up and make use of the resource, the Word One-to-One, which Mark Campbell was speaking about last week. It's a simply John's Gospel in a very accessible, simple format.

[1 : 16] And it's designed for you to read with a friend. And so make use of those. We have some available to buy outside, but do make use of the Word One-to-One. And if you're here and you've never read for yourself the Bible, then why not ask the person who's brought you or come and speak to me, and we'd love to get you reading the Word One-to-One with someone.

So do make use of that over this autumn particularly. Good, well, let's turn to God's Word. And we're going to the very start of John's Gospel. Having been at the end last week, we're going to look at the very start.

So you'll find us on page 886, 886, and we'll read the first five verses of John's Gospel. So John chapter 1, reading from verse 1.

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

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

[2 : 30] In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Well, let me pray, and then we'll think together about these words. Father God, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for John's Gospel.

And we thank you for your prayer. And we thank you for your prayer. And we thank you for your prayer. And we thank you for your prayer. So that we may read it, and believe it, and believe it, and so have life. And so have life, everlasting life. So please would you help each one of us now to listen to your Word, and to believe it, and to so have life.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. To have eternal life, you must believe in the true Christ.

You must believe in the true Christ, and not a false one. Not a misrepresentation of Christ. Not the Christ of human intuition, or philosophy, or false religion.

[3 : 41] But the true Christ. Christ. And John gives us this Gospel, demonstrating in every paragraph that Jesus is God in human flesh.

That he is true God and true man. Fully God and fully man. That is the Christ who is the true Christ. That is the Christ that must be believed on in order for one to be saved. And so, as we turn to the very first page of John's Gospel, it ought to be no great surprise to us that it's all about Jesus Christ.

Because it's only in him, according to John, only in him that salvation is to be found. It's all about Jesus. And these words here at the start are utterly astonishing words, aren't they? The claims they make are the biggest claims you could possibly make. Because they go to the very root of everything. We're going to see in these first five verses that Jesus is the beginning of all reality.

[4 : 50] So let's look at verses 1 to 3 first. And we see here that Jesus is the beginning of all reality because he's always been with God and is God. Now, I need to be clear before we delve in any further.

We need to be clear about who or what John is referring to here when he talks about the Word. It's all over these first few verses, isn't it? In the beginning was the Word.

And the Word was with God. The Word was God. So who or what is John talking about? Some pretty big claims here about the Word. And we just need to look a few verses on to see and understand what John is talking about.

Look down to verse 14 of chapter 1. He says this, 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. It's just as the writer of the Hebrews puts it. In the past days, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets.

[5 : 59] But in these last days, he has spoken to us by a Son. The Word was a person, isn't it? It's God's own Son, Jesus Christ.

And the claims made here in these first two verses are extraordinary. John is saying that Jesus is the beginning of all reality. Look at how it begins. In the beginning was the Word.

And immediately, as you read those words, we are transported back to the very beginning of creation. The very first words of the Bible. You see, the story of Christ doesn't begin in Bethlehem. It begins beyond the frontiers of time and the secret counsel of God in all eternity. See, these first three words of John chapter 1, they're the first three words of what we now call the book of Genesis.

The first book of the Bible. How does Genesis begin? In the beginning. In the beginning. When all things were created, we're told that they were created by the Word of God.

[7 : 06] He spoke. He said. God said. God said. And it was so. And we're told here that the Word, Jesus, he was there at the very beginning.

In fact, he was already there at the creation of the world. His existence stretches beyond our created universe. He is therefore eternal. He was already there at the beginning.

But it's not just that he was there. That word beginning means also the root or origin. So John is saying here that not only was the Word already there at the beginning of all things, but he was the cause of all things.

He's the source. He's the origin. And he's the source of all these things. Not only because he was there in the beginning, but also because of what we're told about him in relation to God.

Look at the second half of verse 1. The Word was with God. And the Word was God. He was with God.

[8 : 17] And that preposition with, it stresses proximity. But it's not merely that the Word was associated with God, that he was in the general vicinity.

No. This means that he was in intimate fellowship with God. And it's this intimacy of union and communion between the Father and the Son that John is stressing.

They were intimately bound up. He was in some way, then, a distinct person. He was with God. There's some sort of distinction there.

But he's also himself God. He was with God and was God. So that is he, the Word, Jesus. He wasn't some sort of inferior, created Christ, as the Jehovah Witnesses would have you believe. Nor is he less than divine, as Unitarians would have you believe. No, John is teaching us clearly that the Word is eternal. He's God himself. He's the source and creator of all things.

[9 : 24] And verse 3 is emphatic. All things were made through him. And without him was not anything made that was made. It's pretty extraordinary stuff, isn't it?

These are major, major claims that John is making. The Jesus of John's Gospel. The Jesus of all the Bible. He claims rule over all of heaven and earth.

Because he is God. And he's God in human flesh. And that is an exclusive claim to truth, isn't it? This isn't one possible truth amongst many.

It can't possibly be, can it? Either Jesus is part of the Godhead and the creator and sustainer of all things. Or he isn't.

Either Jesus really did walk this earth, say the things that he did, die, rise again, ascend to heaven, and promise to come back again to judge the living and the dead.

[10:26] Or he didn't. Either Christianity is the truth, or it isn't. It can't possibly be one truth amongst many, holding equal status with Islam and Sikhism and Hinduism or whatever other religion you want to place alongside it.

To say all religions are the same or are equally true, it's a total nonsense, isn't it? To say that doesn't take any of them seriously at all, does it?

You see, Jesus presents himself not as one possible path to God, but as God himself. Now we may choose to just believe him, but he cannot be one truth amongst many, can he?

We don't have that option. That's not a possible response to Jesus. Either he is or he isn't. And these claims here at the opening of John's gospel are just simply earth-shattering, aren't they?

They claim to shape all reality. They claim that Jesus is the beginning of all reality. He is God. It's hard to get your mind around, isn't it?

[11:40] But these are huge claims. And they're claims to the truth. The truth. Not one truth amongst many, but the truth. Let's look on then and see two key implications flowing out in verses 4 and 5, given what we've seen of Jesus here.

Given that he was with God, he is God, he was there at the very beginning, he's the creator of all things. Two things flow out. So verse 4, Jesus is the source of life, and verse 5, he's the shiner of light.

So verse 4, Jesus is the beginning of all reality, and therefore, the source of life. Now the result of the words activity in the beginning was not just the creation of the world itself, but of all life within it. Again, look at verse 3. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life.

So we're being taken beyond the initial act of creation itself into the ongoing sustenance of the universe. The word is the giver of life.

[12:56] All life derives from him. Every breath that we take, every beat of our heart, every moment we live is granted and sustained by him.

Jesus is the source of life. But he's not merely the source of physical life, is he? As you read on through the gospel, you see that John uses this word again and again, life.

And it's not merely to reflect physical creation, something more is often meant. And he's talking about life in all its fullness, true life, life in God's eternal family, life beyond the grave.

That's what John's talking about. And you see, ever since Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden of Eden, from the tree of life at the fall, the issue of life and death has been one of the major themes through the Scriptures.

Isaiah speaks of the shroud of death that unfolds all people and it anticipates a day when death will be swallowed up. And it's only in Jesus that this life, eternal life, is found.

[14:11] He's the source of life. Not just of creation in the here and now, but of a new creation that stretches out beyond death that we'll experience in this world.

That is the great hope of the gospel. It's a life beyond the grave. And that is, as you'll remember from last week, if you were here, that that is John's great purpose, isn't it?

As he writes his gospel, that we believe the testimony he's recorded for us, that we believe it, and so know that life, that eternal life, a life that's found only in Jesus' name.

And this is the one to whom we're being introduced here, at the start of John's gospel, the giver of life. You wonder what impression these words would have had on those who first read them, or a matter of someone reading these for the very first time.

Absolutely overwhelming. I think you and I are so used to hearing these words. They're familiar. They almost wash over us. We hear them every Christmas. They sort of pass us by.

[15:19] But do we see the immensity of what John is saying? That the power behind all powers should speak himself into a human frame, putting on a face and hands and walking this earth amongst us.

It's just staggering, isn't it? This really is the key to everything. That's John's claim. And given this premise, everything else falls into place, doesn't it?

Think of the miracle there at Canaan. You can read it in chapter 2, where Jesus turns water into wine. Now that's an unheard of thing, isn't it?

If you or I could do that today, we'd be a millionaire, just turning water into wine. But if Christ, who is the eternal word, who made all things, the one who invented wine, then this miracle becomes not only understandable, but inevitable.

Of course he can do it. He's the creator of the world. And that is the kind of mess that John is wanting to put across. Of course he can grant life. He's the author of life.

[16:29] That life is found only in him. He's the source. Searching for life in any other place is utterly futile, isn't it?

So friends of yours who don't know Jesus and they're striving for meaning, striving for life, they're not going to find it anywhere else but here.

Jesus is the only source of the life that all men need. So that's the first major implication. Jesus is the beginning of all reality and therefore the source of life.

And then secondly, verse 5, Jesus is the beginning of all reality, therefore, he's the shiner of light. Look again at the end of verse 4 and verse 5.

The life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Verse 4 tells us that in him, in the word, in Jesus, was life and the life was the light of men.

[17:39] He is the true light for all men. So anything that men and women understand rightly, any truths that we stumble upon, whether they be in the field of maths or chemistry or biology or philosophy, anything that we rightly understand is because we've been given light by our creator.

He's enabled us to see and understand certain things. But it's not just that we've been able to see and understand true things in the realm of maths and science and whatever else.

God has, in his creation, revealed things of himself. Creation itself pours forth speech about him.

But even more than that, God has given us specific revelation of himself contained in the scriptures.

And yet those Old Testament scriptures on their own are not in themselves the full revelation of God to man. There was more to come. As God revealed himself through the word, ultimately, he reveals himself in one person.

In these last days, he has spoken to us by his son. Jesus Christ is the ultimate, the final revelation of God to mankind.

[19:04] Through all he said, all he did, all he was. Jesus is the light. He's the light of revelation, the light of salvation. But how do people respond to this light?

Look at verse 5. It's a bit jarring, isn't it? Suddenly, John inserts this idea of darkness. Now, looking at our world, if you looked at our world from space, you'd think that we're doing all we can to eliminate darkness.

Apparently, every year, we are extending the area covered by light by 2%. So each year, we're expanding the square mileage of light by 2%.

But actually, according to the Bible, darkness is something that humankind enjoys. You see, in Bible terms, darkness is the absence of life, the absence of Jesus.

It's an absence of everything that's good. And we weren't designed to live in darkness, were we?

We were designed, we were made for a relationship with God, a relationship we turned our back on and to darkness we turned.

[20:25] And whilst we weren't made for darkness, the thing is, the more time you spend in the dark, the more your eyes become accustomed to the gloom. And so humanity has come to enjoy, to love the darkness.

In John chapter 3, we read these very penetrating words. He says this, the light has come into the world. And people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light, lest his works should be exposed. The sad reality is, as we know only too well, is that whilst the light of God has shone out from the beginning of time into the hearts of men, mankind has persistently refused to see and understand.

Our world has not understood the light, but rather has rejected it. And the reason for that, we're told, is because Jesus, as the light of the world, he will expose hearts.

He will expose our evil deeds. And who wants to be exposed to things that we keep to ourselves, which we know aren't quite right, but we've suppressed our conscience so much so that the deed itself no longer provokes that sense of guilt anymore.

[21 : 54] People don't want to give up those things. And so, as the searching, penetrating light of God's revelation begins to shine upon us, we by nature recoil away, we hide, we don't want to be seen.

It's only, isn't it, it's only by God's grace at work in us that we begin to turn towards the light, not run from it. So John's realistic, isn't he?

There are two responses. Walk into the light, and so know the source of life, or stay hidden in the shadows, now and for all eternity.

And John's appeal to you is to turn, turn to the light, and so know life. Don't turn away. So although John notes the reality of darkness, the wonderful and terrifying thing is that it doesn't matter how much opposition there is to the light, the darkness will not overcome it.

That's the resounding note at the end of verse 5, isn't it? The light defeats the darkness. And that is ultimately true of the destiny of our worlds.

[23 : 17] The light will fully and finally shine in every corner, and darkness will be no more. Darkness has not defeated the light. How could it?

Darkness never stands a chance in the face of light, does it? Particularly the searing light of the creator of all the universe. What hope the forces of evil in the face of the creator of God is a total mismatch.

The light has shone and the darkness has been obliterated. Jesus is the source of life, the source of all life, and he will not in the end be overcome.

So do we see the sheer magnitude of what John is claiming here about Jesus? These aren't small claims, are they? These claims have implications, implications for every single one of us in this room.

Implications for every single person outside those doors in our city, in our worlds. God. And John would urge you, you'd urge everyone, to respond to this Jesus because this is the true Jesus.

[24 : 28] Turn to him, trust him, and know life. It's not found anywhere else. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

he was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it. Well, let's pray. Father God, we do thank you for the clarity of your word, and we thank you for the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so please would you help us to respond as we ought, not turning away, but rather turning towards the life and the light of the world.

So please help us to do that, and please help us to be those who are eager and willing to share these words, to point others to the truth, because it's only in him, only in this Jesus, is life found.

[25 : 54] So help us, Lord, increase our numbers, bring more to life. So many are walking in darkness, things, and so will you give us the great joy of seeing people we know coming to eternal life.

So hear our prayer, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.