

God Revealed

John 1:1-18; October 25, 2015

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Introduction: This past week our staff and wives had the privilege of traveling to NC for the Unite Conference. This is a conference put on by the Pillar Network, a network of other like-minded churches and church plants that we associate and partner with in order to plant churches. The church that Kevin Sanders came from is a part of the Pillar Network. Well, last Sunday, Tanner had the opportunity to return to our sending church, Open Door Baptist Church in Raleigh, NC, and preach for the first time since they sent us up here in 2010. He also had the opportunity to preach in chapel at SEBTS where he and I both received our Master of Divinity and Ph.D. He did a great job and you can go watch it on the SEBTS website. But before he got up to preach, Dr. Danny Akin, the president of SEBTS and who Tanner used to intern for, came up to introduce Tanner. He's basically trying to convince us of why we should listen to him. That's what John's doing for us in the passage we're going to look at today. In this Prologue, he's laying the foundation for why we should pay attention to what he's going to tell us in his Gospel about what Jesus both said and did. Some of described this passage as the "foyer" to the Gospel of John. Think about it, if you had a few minutes to convince someone why they should spend time reading and studying about Jesus in one of the Gospels, what would you say? Well, in these eighteen verses, I hear John saying, "This is why you need to pay attention to what I'm going to tell you later about this guy named Jesus." You would do well to pay attention because:

I. Jesus is the Eternal and Preexistent Word (1-5).

"In the beginning was the Word ..." (1).

- John begins with a clear allusion to the very first verse in the Bible which says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). This imagery is continued in the immediately preceding verses as well with references to "life" and "light" shining in the "darkness." He does this for a number of strategic reasons.

1. John is presenting Jesus' coming and mission as a renewal of the original creation. In Jesus, God is beginning this work of a "new creation."

- ◆ Why do we need a "new creation"? Because we are all broken and live in a broken world. Look at the brokenness in just the past week:
 - The strongest hurricane ever recorded just hit Mexico (200 mph). This storm is now bringing up to 30 inches of rain to parts of Texas (remember how much rain SC had just a few weeks ago - reference Will Popes family).
 - Yesterday, a drunk driver drove her car into a homecoming parade at OK State and killed 4 and injured 47 (5 still in critical condition).
- ◆ So, as the first creation was both physical and spiritual, so is this "new creation."
 - Jesus promises spiritual "new birth" (John 3:3-5).
 - Jesus promises physical resurrection (John 5:25-29).

2. *In the same way that God brought forth the original creation through his word, God creates this “new creation” through his “Word” as well.*

- ◆ “Word”: the word conveys the notion of divine self-expression or speech. But as we will see further down, this “Word” and divine self-expression is not just an idea or wisdom, it is an actual person, namely, Jesus Christ (1:17).
- ◆ John wants his readers to equate the effectiveness of God’s word with the living Word, Jesus Christ. When God speaks, things come into being (cf. Gen. 1).
 - “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (1:3).
 - “And God said, ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear.’ And it was so” (1:9).
 - “And God said . . . And it was so (1:11, 14-15, 24).
- ◆ The effectiveness of God’s word is affirmed elsewhere in Scripture:

“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host” (Ps. 33:6).

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:10-11).

- ◆ By presenting Jesus, including his entire ministry, as the “Word,” John is presenting Jesus as the final and definitive self-revelation of God (cf. Heb. 1:1-3).

The identity of the Word (1-5).

- “. . . the Word was with God” (1:1, 2).
 - This phrase affirms that the Word and God are two distinct beings.
 - It also affirms that the Word existed before creation (1:2).
- “. . . the Word was God” (1:1, 3-5).
 - This statement is shocking because it affirms that the Word is just as much God as the Father is.
 - This affirmation would seem to fly against the monotheistic bedrock of Judaism which says, “The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut. 6:4) and “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:2-6).
 - ◆ The belief in, and worship of, one and only one God set Israel apart from all of the other religions and pagan practices in the world.
 - ◆ In view of this, any claims to deity by any individual would have been fiercely opposed. We see this described in the Gospel of John:

“This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John

5:18).

“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’ So they picked up stones to throw at him” (John 8:58-59).

“‘I and the Father are one.’ The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. . . . ‘It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God’” (John 10:30-33).

- ◆ Yet, as OT scholar, Christopher Wright affirms, this monotheism was the “assumptive bedrock” of Jesus and all his followers (Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God*, 105).
- ◆ Ironically, John and the NT authors show no evidence of any conscious tension between the attribution of deity to Jesus and their Jewish monotheistic beliefs.
- ◆ Thus, rather than rejecting the divinity of Jesus, we must redefine Jewish monotheism as a Christological monotheism, where the relationship of the Son to his Father is integral to who the one true God is (see Richard Bauckham, “Monotheism and Christology,” 165).
- Like God, the Word created all things (1:3).
 - If there’s any question concerning the identity of Jesus and his relationship to the Creator God, John seeks to clarify it in verse 3.
 - The NET version translates it this way: “All things were created by him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.”
 - Greg Koukl, a Christian apologist, who is the president of Stand to Reason Ministries, has shared how he uses a napkin to explain this verse, particularly to Jehovah’s Witnesses who don’t believe that Jesus is God.
 - ◆ Draw a large box that represents everything that exists and then draw a line through the middle of the box dividing everything that exists into two categories: 1) all things that never came into being and 2) all things that came into being. Then ask, “Which box does God belong in?” The correct answer is the one on the left. Then read John 1:3: according to this verse, Jesus made “all things.” Now state, accordingly to the law of the excluded middle, a thing was either created or it wasn’t created (there’s no third option). Additionally, accordingly to the law of noncontradiction, a thing can’t be both created and not created. Take a coin and ask them to put it in the box that Jesus belongs in. The conclusion: If Jesus caused all created things to come into existence, then he must have existed before all created things came into existence, and thus, he must not have been created.
- Like God, the Word is the source of life and light (1:4-5).
 - This is an allusion to the another OT verse, Psalm 36:9: *“For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.”*
 - The opposite of life is death and the opposite of light is darkness. Physical and spiritual death has reigned ever since the Fall as well as moral darkness, namely, the

- world alienated from God (ignorant, blind, fallen, sinful and dominated by Satan).
- Jesus is a light so strong that no darkness can overcome it (speak of Satan operating through Judas and the Jewish leaders). Jesus has come to give life, both now and forever (5:24, 39-40; 6:54; 10:10), to those who are dead so that they can live in the light, unclouded by the presence and power of sin. We all need this and long for this.

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12; cf. 11:25-26; John 14:6; 17:3).

Conclusion:

- God the creator and the Word through whom he created are inseparable.
- As a result, there’s no way to God except through the Word. Life is found in him.
- John intends that his entire Gospel is to be read in light of these opening words. Jesus’ deeds and words are the words and deeds of God.

II. Jesus is the Incarnate Word (9-14).

“The true light” (1:9):

- Not only is there light imagery in the OT at the creation account, the promised OT Messiah was often presented as a light entering darkness, specifically in Isaiah.

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone” (Isa. 9:2; context: “For unto us a child is born...and he shall be called...” - 9:6).

“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isa. 49:6).

- By speaking of Jesus as the “true light,” John is presenting Jesus as the one who is the fulfillment of the OT hopes and expectations. Jesus is the “true light” who brings light to “everyone,” namely, all people, Jews and Gentiles.

Rejection by “his creation” and “his own people” (1:10-11):

- His “own creation” did not know him (1:10).
 - John is highlighting the tragedy of the world’s rejecting the one through whom it was made. “The world should have welcomed its Creator as a familiar friend, indeed as a hero, Savior, and Sovereign; instead, it showed itself alien and antagonized, hostile and morally and spiritually dark, apostate and fallen (Kostenberger, *Theology*, 182).
- His “own people” did not receive him (1:11).
 - The first half of John’s Gospel documents how, for the most part, Israel failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah and thus rejected the light.

Reception by those “who believed” (1:12-13):

- The structure of the Prologue places 1:12b at the center of attention, the place on which the chiasm pivots. Thus, John is not only introducing God’s self-disclosure of himself in the Word who became flesh, he is also introducing the results of this gracious revelation. If you receive Jesus and believe, you will become a child of God.
- This naturally leads to the question which is answered in 1:13: how is someone born again? In fact, Nicodemus will ask this very question in John 3.
- The answer: someone is born again and becomes a new creation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15) not by bloodline or genealogy, but by God. Salvation is a work of God.

The Incarnation (1:14):

- This verses constitutes the most concise verse in the NT on the incarnation. 1:1 makes it clear that Jesus was fully God and 1:14 makes it clear that he was fully human.
- In Jesus, the glorious, divine and preexistent Word has “become flesh,” he has been born as a frail human being just like you and I. Jesus took on flesh because this was the only way to bring about both physical and spiritual rebirth.
- The word for “dwelt” literally means that Jesus “pitched his tent and took up residence among us.” It is a reference to the OT tabernacle and temple where God’s *shekinah* glory, his visible presence, resided. John shifts from a distance reporter to that of an eyewitness.
 - One of the most clear allusions is to Exodus 33-34 where Moses asks God, “Please show me your glory” (Exod. 33:18). This is how God responds:

“And he said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name, ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,’ he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live’” (Ex. 33:19-20).

“The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin’” (Exod. 34:6-7).

- John is suggesting that this glory can now been seen in Jesus, and him alone. He is the one-of-a-kind unique Son of God (cf. 1:18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). It is in Jesus that we see God’s complete and perfect expression of his grace.
- How does the incarnation inform our mission? I’m not trying to be Jesus to someone. My mission is one of proclamation pointing to Jesus. But later Jesus is going to say, “As the Father sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21). I think we should ask, “How can we effectively minister to a lost world if we are not in it? How can we reach those who are far from God if we are not with them? How can we be salt and light in the darkest places of our city if we have no effective contacts or relationships in those areas?”

III. Jesus is the Apex of God's Revelation (6-8, 15-18).

John the Baptist, a witness to the preeminence of Jesus (6-8; 15).

- The fact of his testimony: John, the Baptist, in the Fourth Gospel becomes John, the witness (6-8).
 - “According to this gospel, then, the purpose of John’s coming was ultimately not to administer baptism or even to preach repentance, but to bear witness to the people of Israel regarding the Messiah” (Kostenberger, *Theology*, 181).
- The content of his testimony (15).
 - Jesus ranks before John because he was before John.
 - “Seniority in age (albeit by a mere six months or so) on the part of John was overruled by the enfleshed Word’s preexistence” (Kostenberger, *Theology*, 187).

Jesus Christ, the Apex of God's Revelation (16-18).

- John clarifies the relationship of Jesus to salvation history:
 - What’s his relationship to the giving of the law at Sinai through Moses?
 - ◆ Jesus is greater. Moses had never seen God.
 - ◆ John is not contrasting Moses with Jesus (law vs. Gospel) but rather drawing his Jewish audience in. As Kostenberger notes, “If you want an even more gracious demonstration of God’s covenant love and faithfulness, it is found in Jesus Christ” (*John*, 47).
 - What’s his relationship to God’s glory in the tabernacle and temple?
 - ◆ Jesus is the manifest presence of God’s glory.
 - What’s his relationship to John the Baptist?
 - ◆ Jesus is greater because he was before him.
- The greatness of Jesus and his role in salvation history rests in his relationship with the Father. Not only has he seen God, he is God. He was with God in the beginning at the Father’s side so he is the one perfectly qualified to “make God known.” He is perfectly able to give a full account of God to us.
- God’s revelation and redemption culminate in and through Jesus. Later Jesus will say, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).
- In the rest of this Gospel, John proceeds to tell us how Jesus, the Word-made-flesh, Son of God, makes God known.
- The reason we can’t see God is because, 1) God is spirit and 2) sin separates us from God. Jesus has overcome both of these obstacles by becoming flesh and being sinless and dying for sin to reconcile humans to God.

The Point: God has revealed himself in Jesus, the preexistent and eternal Word, so come to him and believe in him that you might have life and walk in the light.