

The Gospel of John

Lesson 1: The Word Became Flesh -- John 1:1-18

Every other Gospel opens with a beginning we can picture. Matthew gives us a family tree. Luke gives us a pregnant teenager and a long road to Bethlehem. Mark drops us straight into the desert with a wild-eyed preacher in camel's hair. But when John picks up his pen, he reaches back past the manger, past Abraham, past the first sunrise, all the way to a moment before there were any moments at all. "In the beginning was the Word." Before the galaxies were flung into the dark, before there was light to separate from darkness, before there was a single created thing, the Word already was. John wants us to understand, before he tells us anything else, that the baby in the manger did not begin in the manger.

There is a hush over these first eighteen verses, the kind of hush you feel walking into a great cathedral. John is showing us something almost too large to hold. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. Every atom that exists was spoken into being through Him. In Him was life, and that life was the light of the world, a light the darkness has never been able to put out. And then, in one staggering sentence that the early church could hardly believe it was allowed to say, John tells us what this eternal Word did. He did not stay safely in heaven. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The One who made skin took on skin. The One who made tears learned to cry them.

Stop and feel the scandal of that for a moment. We are not talking about a great teacher who said wise things. We are not talking about a prophet who pointed people toward God. We are talking about God Himself, the eternal Son, stepping into His own creation, walking on the dust He had made, going hungry, growing tired, and eventually bleeding. The infinite became an infant. The Author wrote Himself into the story. And He did it, John says, so that to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He could give the right to become children of God.

Maybe you have lived a long time with a small Jesus, a Jesus who is mostly a moral example or a comforting idea. John will not let you keep Him small. These verses are an invitation to look up and see who has actually come to find you. Not a religious figure to be admired from a distance, but the living God who loved you enough to wrap Himself in your humanity. Read these eighteen verses slowly, and let them do what John meant them to do. Let them lift your eyes to the glory that has come down to live among us, full of grace and truth.

Group Discussion: John says the Word "became flesh and dwelt among us" (v. 14). Why do you think it matters so much that Jesus was not merely a wise teacher or a powerful prophet, but God Himself come in human flesh? What changes about our faith if we get this wrong?

Personal Reflection: John writes that those who received Christ were given "the right to become children of God" (v. 12). When you think about your own relationship with Jesus, do you tend to

relate to Him as a distant idea, a helpful teacher, or as the living God who came to make you His own child? What would change in an ordinary week if that last truth sank all the way in?

Read John 1:1–18

Study Questions

1. John opens by telling us that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (v. 1). What does each part of this verse teach us about who Jesus is, and why is it significant that He is both “with God” and “was God”?
2. John says that in the Word “was life, and the life was the light of men” (v. 4). Where in your own life are you most tempted to look for light, meaning, or life apart from Christ, and what does this passage say to that search?
3. Verse 3 says that “all things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” What does it mean that Jesus is the Creator of everything, and how does that truth shape the way we think about Him and about the world we live in?
4. John the Baptist came as a witness “to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him” (v. 7), yet he was careful to say he was not the light himself. In what ways might you be tempted to point people to yourself rather than to Christ, and how can you live more like a witness who points beyond himself?
5. Verse 14 says, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory.” What does the incarnation, God taking on human flesh, tell us about the kind of God we serve, and why could a merely created or adopted being never accomplish what the eternal Word came to do?
6. John writes that “to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (v. 12). What is the difference between merely knowing about Jesus and actually receiving Him, and where do you see that difference in your own walk?
7. Verse 17 says, “the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” How does this contrast help us understand the relationship between the Old Covenant given through Moses and the New Covenant that has come through Christ?
8. John says of his own generation, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (v. 11). What are the subtle ways people still refuse to receive Christ even while remaining religious, and how do you guard your own heart against that quiet kind of rejection?
9. John says “no one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (v. 18). Putting verses 1, 14, and 18 together, how would you explain and defend from this passage the full deity, eternal existence, and incarnation of Jesus against the claim that He was only a created being or simply a good man?
10. Look back over these eighteen verses as a whole. John moves from eternity past, to creation, to the coming of the light, to the Word made flesh, to the gift of becoming children of God. Which part of this opening hymn most enlarges your view of Jesus, and what is one specific way you sense Him calling you to a bigger trust in Him this week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Colossians 1:15–20, Christ as the image of God in whom all things were created and hold together; Hebrews 1:1–4, the Son as the radiance of God’s glory and the exact imprint of His nature; Philippians 2:5–11, the eternal Son emptying Himself and taking the form of a servant; Genesis 1:1–3, the God who creates by His word; 1 John 1:1–4, the Word of life that the apostles heard, saw, and touched.