

## Believe: Why Jesus Came

### Beginning with the Word

John 1:1-3

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“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 any thing made that was made.” (John 1:1–3)

Imagine for a moment that you are a literature teacher. As you plan out the school year, what books would be on your list as essential reading for your students? What books do you think would be foundational?

I researched this question. Here are five of the top 50 that made the list: *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*; *Alice in Wonderland*; *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*; *Winnie the Pooh*; and *Black Beauty*.<sup>1</sup> Now, I’m sure you’d probably have your own favorites to add to the list.

But what causes a book to make it into the top 50? There must be something unique, something special, and something influential about the book. Often, there is an underlying message that could be considered formative. For example, *Charlotte’s Web* is considered by many to be the greatest children’s book of all time because of its messages about loyalty and friendship between a pig named Wilbur and spider named Charlotte. It is a classic because of its narrative and message.

Books shape our understanding of the world. And some books are both foundational and essential.

When it comes to the Bible and understanding the basics about Christianity, the same holds true. While all of the Bible is the Word of God, there are some books that are foundational to the whole. All of the Bible is helpful and profitable (2 Tim. 3:16), but there are some books of the Bible that, if neglected, will create gaps in your understanding of the gospel. They are essential. Additionally, there are some books in the Bible which serve as excellent starting points for someone who is not yet a believer or perhaps someone very young in the faith.

### The Gospel of John is Foundational

Some books of the Bible are foundational and essential because of their simplicity, their clarity, and their thoroughness. The Gospel of John is this kind of book. It is a masterful account of the life of Jesus, His teaching, His miracles, and the response of people. It is a wonderful book to study whether you have

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.indy100.com/article/the-50-books-every-child-should-read--g1-VK2oB6I>

been a follower of Jesus for years or you are a relatively new believer. It is especially important if you are not yet a Christian.

Today we are beginning a nine-message journey through this monumental book. Beginning today through the month of November, we are going to move very slowly through the first eighteen verses. We'll pick up the pace when we start the new year, but I wanted to allow us the opportunity to linger over these eighteen verses.

This section is often called the Prologue. It serves as a summary of what will follow in this book. There are metaphors, concepts, and key words introduced in these verses which will appear throughout our study. These verses lay the footings for the foundational material that we'll discover in John's gospel.

### **In the Beginning: Three Truths about Jesus**

The first three verses are beautiful, loaded, and essential. John reaches back further than any of the other gospel writers. Matthew's gospel starts with a genealogy. Mark begins with John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus. Luke writes about the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus.

John, however, goes even further. The opening verses sound similar to how the Bible begins in Genesis 1:1 – *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth"* (Gen. 1:1). Now consider John 1:1-3. The tone alignment is intentional:

"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 any thing made that was made." (John 1:1–3)

Now John doesn't mention the name Jesus in these verses. In fact, we don't read the actual name "Jesus" until verse 17. But that is who John has in mind. He just doesn't give all of that away yet. The entire gospel is designed to highlight the life and teaching of Jesus.

There are essential truths that must be known about Jesus. John will make that very clear throughout his gospel. And in this text, we see three foundational truths regarding who Jesus is: 1) Jesus is the Word, 2) Jesus is God, and 3) Jesus is the Creator. Let's look at each of these.

#### **1. Jesus is the Word**

We begin with a critical concept that appears three times in verse one. You cannot read John 1:1-3 and miss the word "Word." Notice what John says:

- The Word was in the beginning
- The Word was with God
- The Word was God

John is talking about Jesus. The shift from “Word” to “He was in the beginning with God” (v. 2) help know that John has Jesus in mind. John 1:14 makes this connection plain:

“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” (John. 1:14).

Now we’ll unpack “in the beginning,” “with God,” and “was God” in the next point. For now, I want us consider why John uses this word and what he is saying. After all he could have said, “In the beginning was Jesus. He was with God. Jesus was God.” But he doesn’t do that. Why?

The concept of “Word” or logos in the original Greek language was a philosophical and cultural idea that was a vital part of the culture into which John writes. So, it is really interesting that John’s opening line seeks to connect who Jesus is with something familiar in the context of the people to whom John is writing.

The Gospel of John is the fourth gospel. Matthew’s audience was Jewish. Mark was writing to Roman citizens. Luke was trying to reach Greeks. John, however, was the last gospel written (probably between 80-95 A.D.). His audience is universal. John is appealing to anyone in his culture who will listen. That is one reason why he uses “word.” The idea was embedded in the culture.

In the first century, the “word” represented the philosophical center. One group of philosophers, called the Stoics, believed that logos or “word” was the essence of the rational human soul and the principle by which everything exists.<sup>2</sup> They believed that everything had its beginning in this “word.” It was god-like to them.

Others viewed logos as connected to a message in general or a word from God. John surely has a Jewish audience in mind when he writes. The focus on the Word of God would have been very familiar to those who knew the Old Testament. The first chapter of Genesis tells us that when God speaks, that world is created (Gen. 1:3). Psalm 33:6 says “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made...” God’s word is powerful. Further, God delivers through His word – “He sent out his word...and delivered them” (Ps. 107:20). Finally, God reveals Himself through His word. The Old Testament prophets frequently identified a “word from God.” For example, God calls Ezekiel a watchman and tells him, “Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them a warning from me” (Ezek. 33:7). God speaks to people through His word.

The “Word,” however, is not just an idea. You will notice that it is capitalized. That is intentional because it of the personification of the concept. The Word is a person who is being represented. This is how Old Testament literature pictures wisdom. She calls out, raises her voice, and gives a long speech in Proverbs 8.

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<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson, [\*The Gospel according to John\*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 114.

There are examples of this in our own culture and history. When I say “liberty” what image comes to mind? You probably think of Statue of Liberty who we often call Lady Liberty. Or maybe you would think of the recruitment image of “Uncle Sam” used during and after the War of 1812. Both are personifications of cultural ideals and value.

Jesus is the embodiment of all that “Word” means. He possesses the power of God. He is the deliverer from God. He is the revelation about God. Jesus is the center of the created universe, and He is the focal point of redemptive history. Jesus is the means and the hope of salvation. Jesus is the ultimate self-disclosure of God.<sup>3</sup>

Why does this matter? The Gospel of John is designed to help you understand who Jesus is. Every story, and every message— even the order in which they are placed—is designed to help you know about Jesus. John wants you to see what he saw – “glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). He writes this book in order to help people know who Jesus is, what He was like, and what He taught. The reason, of course, is simple but eternally significant. If you don’t know who Jesus is, then you will not know who God is.

Jesus Himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

As we start our journey in this text, I want you to know that my aim is not merely that you would know more about the Gospel of John, the background behind the book, or content of the stories within. The aim of John’s gospel is for to know Jesus, to love Jesus, and believe in Jesus.

So, how much of your understanding of what it means to be a Christian is connected to Jesus? Do you love the Bible, or do you love Jesus? Do you know theology, or do you know Jesus? Do you believe in a system, or do you believe in Jesus?

Jesus is the Word. He’s the self-disclosure of God. Jesus tells us what God is like.

## 2. Jesus is God

Now that we know something about the significance of the “Word” and what it means, let’s return to what is said about the “Word.” There are four statements. Each one identifies an important and foundational truth related to the deity of Jesus. Let’s look at each of them.

***In the beginning was the Word*** – John want us to know that the Word was there at the beginning of all things, including the universe as we know it. John’s goal here is not only to echo Genesis 1:1, but to make it clear that the Son of God who walked the earth as Jesus of Nazareth was present before anything that was created. The Son of God possesses the same pre-existence as God because He is God.

***The Word was with God*** – The critical word in this phrase is “with.” We use “with” to mean near someone (“he walked with her”). But we also use it for something closer to identification (“are you with

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<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, [\*The Gospel according to John\*](#), 116.

me?). John is using the word to highlight not merely a closeness in proximity, but an intimacy of relationship. Here, we see a reference to the relationship between the Father and the Son, something that becomes much clearer in verse 14. Jesus (the Word) was in relationship with God. He is the Son.

***The Word was God*** – This is the most definitive statement as John directly affirms that Jesus is God. Jesus of Nazareth was God-in-the-flesh. As we'll see later in John's gospel, this is the claim from Jesus that would lead to the cross. But John makes it very clear in the very first verse: the Word was, and is, God.

***He was in the beginning with God*** – We find this statement in verse 2. It serves as a repetition of the first part of verse 1 and a summary of what John is trying to say. As John starts his gospel narrative and as he highlights the life of Jesus, he wants to be sure that we fully understand that the God-man, Jesus, who was born in the city of Bethlehem, was truly God.

Jesus was there before time began. Jesus, as the Son, had an intimate relationship with the Father. He is one person of the Trinity. Jesus, while a man, was also God. John wants us to know that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the one who is, who was, and who is to come. He is the Almighty (Rev. 1:8)!

The Gospel of John is written in order to help people believe that Jesus truly was the Son of God. In fact, if you want one word to write in the margin of your Bible to summarize the message, it would be "believe." That word is used almost 100 times in this wonderful gospel. Let me give you a few examples just in the first three chapters. As I spent time in these first four chapters during my morning Bible reading, I saw that believe is everywhere:

- **Regarding John the Baptist:** "He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him" (John 1:7).
- **Regarding salvation:** "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God," (1:12)
- **Regarding Jesus' disciples after His first miracle:** "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him" (2:11).
- **Regarding eternal life:** "'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life'" (3:16).
- **Regarding the people brought to Jesus by the Samaritan woman:** "They said to the woman, 'it is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world'" (4:42).
- **Regarding an official with a dying son:** "The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.' And he himself believed, and all his household." (4:53)

And that's only through chapter four. There are seventeen more chapters! John's mission is to point you toward belief in Jesus as the Son of God.

But why must a person believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Why does John feel the need to make this point clearly through multiple stories, through the teaching of Jesus, and through the account of His

death and resurrection? The answer is critical: Jesus has to be God or redemption, the forgiveness of our sins, doesn't work.

Wayne Grudem gives three reasons:

1. Only someone who is fully God could bear the full penalty for all the sin of those who would believe in Him
2. Only God can accomplish redemption on our behalf; no human being is able to save mankind
3. Only someone who is fully God could serve as a mediator between God and mankind<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, the only way for forgiveness of sins and eternal life to be offered to mankind is through the death and resurrection of the Son of God. In order to become a Christian, you must believe that Jesus is God.

John aims to convince you of this fact. He wants you to believe that that Jesus is God.

Do you realize that believing is what makes a person a Christian? For those of you who are not yet Christians, I hope this sermon series causes you to be convinced that Jesus really was the Son of God. I pray that you'll believe.

And if you already are a Christian can I invite you to return to the most basic aspect of what it means for you to be a Christian – to believe. You see, believing in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and believing in Him as God, is just the beginning. I hope this gospel keeps you believing and strengthens your belief. I hope you'll see multiple examples of people believing in Jesus and that you'll be reminded that you need to keep believing.

### **3. Jesus is the Creator**

The third foundational truth is found in verse three. It is a clear and definitive statement about the role of Jesus in creation. John wants to make it clear that Jesus (the Word) wasn't just there; He was involved in the creation of the world as we know it. Take note of two statements:

**All things were made through Him** – John wants those who read his gospel to know that Jesus is the agent behind the creation of the world.<sup>5</sup> Everything that we know in this world was made through Jesus. Everything owes its existence and life to Jesus.

**Without Him was not anything made that was made** – In the previous statement, John made the point about Jesus being the creator. But John emphasizes it again – just to be clear. There is nothing that was made without Him.

Why is it important for John to establish the creator-role of Jesus? Well, the apostle Paul says something similar in Colossians, but he adds something at the end:

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<sup>4</sup> Wayne Grudem and Jeff Purswell, eds., *Bible Doctrine – Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 241.

<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson, [\*The Gospel according to John\*](#), 118.

*“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” (Col. 1:15–20)*

If Jesus is the creator, then He has authority of everything. He rules over that which belongs to Him. He’s the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. If Jesus is the creator and if He is God, then rejecting Him is eternally dangerous. Failing to submit to Him is not just a mistake; it is treason.

### **Why Did Jesus Come?**

Why did John write this gospel? It is because he wants you to know why Jesus came. He wants you to see Jesus for who He really is! Everything in this book will point you toward not just understanding Jesus, but receiving, believing, and submitting to Jesus.

In fact, right after John writes about the resurrection of Jesus he tells us his purpose:

*“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:30–31)*

This book is written so that you might believe. John writes his gospel so that you can know why Jesus came and so that you might believe in Him.

If you already are a believer, I hope this series enlivens your heart and reminds you why you love Jesus. I hope you find yourself saying, “Man, I love Jesus!” And I also hope you’ll think of someone who doesn’t know Jesus yet and invite them to come to church with you.

And if you are here and you are not yet a Christian, I hope this book does what it has for so many over the centuries. I hope you will come to understand that Jesus is the revelation of God (the Word), He is God, and He is the creator.

Of all the books in the Bible, John is a must-read. All of the Bible is important. John is essential.

It lays out a vision of who Jesus is, and it invites you to do one thing: believe!

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