

John 1:1-5 (Part 1)

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[0:00] Well, good morning to you. Please take your copy of God's Word and join me in John chapter 1. Last week I introduced the Gospel according to John to you. I developed some of its themes with selected text.

Today we're going to look at John chapter 1 verses 1 through 5. And I have a pretty good feeling this will be part 1 of 2 of our look at this text.

These days are distracted days. According to a 2015 study released by none other than Microsoft, the average attention span of an American is 8.25 seconds.

Less than that of a goldfish. I didn't take the time, really care too much, to understand their definition of attention span.

I don't really know what they meant. But we are undoubtedly distracted people. The issue affects young and old alike.

[1:09] Older folks, which I'm starting to count myself one of, like to look at younger generations and point out all the problems with them. But it doesn't just lie with young folks.

I was having blood work done a couple of weeks ago, as older people do. And as I waited there, there were 20-something, 60 to 70-somethings, and every single one of them, every single one of them, was staring and scrolling on a phone screen.

It was shocking. It was shocking. So I decided that day to be a rebel young guy and sat there and did nothing. I just stared at the wall in rebellion against them.

You need to think about how you can be less distracted. The church needs to think about how we can help.

The church shouldn't attempt to coddle this problem, but should rather push back against it. The majority way, I believe, we can help one another is to gather earnestly to fix our attention heavenward.

[2:26] We also live in very self-centered days. New technology and all the marketing that comes to us through it places you at the very center of the universe.

It seeks to cater to your every whim when you demand it. We don't watch TV on a schedule anymore, if you think about that.

When I was a child, you saw the show or you didn't see the show. Maybe someday they would syndicate it and they'd come back around, but you had to schedule your life around their schedule.

We don't do that any longer. I was listening to a podcast, and I'll add, at my convenience and on demand, and one of the guys speaking pointed out that even when we pull up maps these days, we don't look at a map and then locate ourselves on the map, but the map locates us at the center of it all the time.

I never had considered that, right? My map puts me at the middle of everything. This is a problem. This is a problem.

[3:41] Everything at our fingertips on demand. The church should most certainly push back at this point also. You are not the center of the universe, and very little in reality revolves around you.

We gather to worship the one who is, in fact, at the center of everything. Now, I didn't live in John's day.

I'm only living in mine, and I can make commentary on our distractedness and our self-centeredness, but have no idea the general mentality of John's early readers.

However, if I were to guess, I suggest to you that they also needed their attention fixed beyond themselves and the den of the world in which they lived. I would guess that John means to grab their attention and ours in the way that he opens his gospel account.

It's rather striking the way he begins this account of Jesus' life. Let's push back this morning together against distraction and against self-centered tendencies in order to behold the Lord Jesus Christ in John chapter 1, verses 1 through 5.

[5:12] Before I read it, beloved, I want to remind you that this is God's word to us. John wrote it with an original audience in mind as he wrote it, But God worked in him supernaturally as a word to us, written for his glory and our good, that we might believe its promises, obey its commands, and have affection for its author.

May we hear it and respond accordingly to it. I'll begin reading in 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. 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. In the first five verses, John introduces to us Jesus without using his Hebrew name in the following five ways.

We see Jesus as the Word. We see that Jesus is pre-existent. We see that Jesus is the Creator. We see Jesus is self-existent.

[6:40] And we see Jesus is the unquenchable light. And I believe that this is the point that I'll bring up. I'll save it until next Lord's Day as we consider the resurrection together.

The Puritan John Owen wrote in his book entitled, *The Glory of Christ*, which I really commend to you. It's a difficult read, but it's a great read. *The Glory of Christ*, the following, and I quote, The revelation made of Christ in the blessed gospel is far more excellent, more glorious, more filled with rays of divine wisdom and goodness than the whole creation.

And the just comprehension of it, if attainable, can contain or afford. Without this knowledge, the mind of man, priding itself in other inventions and discoveries, is wrapped up in darkness and confusion.

This, therefore, he's talking about Jesus Christ, the gospel of Jesus Christ. This, therefore, deserves the severest of our thoughts, the best of our meditations, and our utmost diligence in them.

For if our future blessedness shall consist in living where he is and beholding his glory, what better preparation can there be for it than a constant previous contemplation of that glory as revealed in the gospel, that by a view of it we may gradually be transformed into the same glory.

[8:12] The Christian eternity will be filled with the wonderment of Christ. So, Owen is arguing, we should seek to know him now, that he might be exalted in our minds and in our lives.

Perhaps in some small measure, the Lord will use this time to bless us to that wonderful end. Let's look first that Jesus is introduced as the Word.

John says in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word, Word, was an interesting choice for John to make as an introductory title for Jesus.

The Greek word *logos* was packed full of meaning for John's Gentile readers. Greek philosophers used this word to refer to the abstract principle of reason and order in the universe.

With something out there kind of a furial, the *logos*, the source from which all of this comes is the way they used that word. It was an unknown source of creation and wisdom.

[9:36] So, John, in this opening verse, presents Jesus as the personification of creative power and reason. He's about to say, this *logos* that you use in your thinking can, in fact, be known.

John's Jewish readers would have also understood this word to be packed full of meaning. They knew that God spoke the world into existence with mighty words.

That He made covenants with His people with words, gave them wisdom through the written law, counseled prophets and kings, and revealed the Scripture, the Old Testament Scripture, through spoken words.

So, to John's first century Jewish readers, John introduces Jesus as the incarnation of divine power and revelation.

I would have loved to have sat with a Gentile believer who had just read this opening phrase, and a Jewish believer who had just read this opening phrase, and hear them talk about all that it meant to them as they think about Jesus as the word, the logos of God.

[10:53] John, in introducing Jesus as the word, draws straight lines to His divinity, but lest anyone might be confused, he tells us that He was with God in the beginning, and that He is God.

I won't take the time this morning to plumb the depths of Trinitarian theology. John's going to give us plenty of chances for that in the coming months together.

However, for now, I want you to see that Jesus, before time as we know it and understand it, dwelt as God in Trinitarian unity.

The author of Hebrews says in chapter 1 and verse 3 of Hebrews, He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature.

The exact imprint. He is God Himself. It is a great wonder that Jesus should humble Himself to take the form of a man in order to suffer His Father's wrath for our sin.

[12:05] We ought to think and think and think about the innate nature of Christ. Charles Wesley gives us some hint of this wonder in his song, And Can It Be That I Should Gain, that I'm about to read to you.

It's verse 2, I believe. It's on the back of your bulletin with a rather unfortunate typo, but I'll read it without the typo. Charles Wesley wrote this, He left his Father's throne above, so free, so infinite, His grace, emptied himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race.

Tis mercy all, immense and free, for, oh my God, it found out me. Amazing love, how can it be that thou, my God, should die for me?

Jesus is the Word. The personification of creative power and reason. The incarnation of divine power and revelation.

Jesus is God. Secondly, and it follows, that Jesus is preexistent. We see at the very beginning of verse 1, John tells us, As God, Jesus was in the beginning.

[13:36] And then he repeats it again in verse 2. Do not be confused. He was in the beginning, and He was in the beginning, is what John does.

The Greek word for beginning means source or origin. It's meant to draw our minds back to Genesis chapter 1 and verse 1.

In the beginning God created, it's referring to the time before the universe began. The verb was in the imperfect tense describes continual action in the past.

And so we could render, verse 2, He was always being in the beginning with God.

These two verses in no way suggest that Jesus was created. And if anybody tells you otherwise, you should stop listening to the following things they say.

[14:39] Jesus was not created. He was. Jesus just is. Marcus Dodds, in the Expositors Bible Commentary, says this, quote, The word did not then begin to be, but at that point at which all else began to be, He already was.

In the beginning, place it where you may, the word already existed. In other words, the logos, before time, eternal.

Paul writes in the first part of Colossians chapter 1, verse 17, Jesus is before all things.

He preexisted everything we know to be as God. The third thing that we see John introduce Jesus as is the Creator in verse 3.

He says here, All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. And I love, there's a carefulness, there's an economy of words going on here, but he repeats things that seem to matter so very much.

[16:01] Right? He's not going to leave us unclear at this point. All things made through Him, and without Him, not anything made that was made. All of it, every bit of it, made by Jesus.

Travel with me at this point over to Colossians chapter 1. I think you'll appreciate seeing a few things I'd like to mention here. I just read the beginning of verse 17.

I think the text that those words are set in will serve us well at this point. A bit of an expansion on what John is communicating here.

Colossians 1, verse 16 and 17. For by Him, Paul writes, Christ, 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.

So a bit of an expansion on the idea. Less economic in his use of words. All things created through Him, and then at the end of verse 16, and for Him.

[17:08] And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. Jesus Christ, Paul and John tell us, is the Creator and the Sustainer of all things.

Everything that we can see, and everything that we cannot see, were created by Jesus and for Jesus. This is a magnificent thought.

This is a thought, I think an undistracted person would spend a lot of time considering. It should absolutely capture our minds. Everything made by Him and for Him.

The entire universe was created to what end? To what end? To the end of His praise. To the end of His praise.

Maybe the reason that we are so tempted to worship paltry things is that we don't... Verse 1, The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork.

[18:23] Lift your eyes up from your screen. This is a novel idea. Go outside when it's dark. Pay attention to all that has been created and be in awe.

This universe was made by Christ and it was made for Him. Paul goes on to tell us that He's the Sustainer of all things. He says at the end of verse 17, And in Him all things hold together.

The author of Hebrews says in chapter 1, verse 3, He upholds the universe by the word of His power. And if sometime you want to muse entertainingly with me, ask me about Jonathan Edwards and his theory of continual creation.

I'd love to talk with you about it. It's fascinating. Not only were all things created by Jesus Christ and set into motion by Him, but all things are also sustained by Him.

Everything goes until He says, Stop. And everything stops until He says, Go. It's all happening by His command.

[19:34] Now, everything in the universe is made of atoms. Protons, electrons, neutrons. If you've not learned this yet, you will. If you've learned it, you've probably long forgotten it.

It's incredible. Everything is made of atoms. Scientists have labored over the past century to explain away the existence of God.

It sometimes seems like the whole point of science these days is to explain away God. But they have failed to explain how it is that the atom remains in its orbital state. How does an atom remain an atom?

Carl K. Darula, physicist, is cited in a book entitled *The Atom Speaks* in reference to what scientists are calling the strong nuclear force.

This is what they call that power that holds an atom together. The strong nuclear force. He says this, quote, Do you grasp what this implies?

[20:36] It implies that all the nuclei have no right to be alive at all. Indeed, they should never have been created. And if created, they should have blown up instantly.

Yet, here they all are. Some inflexible inhibition is holding them relentlessly together. The nature of the inhibition is also a secret.

One thus far reserved by nature herself. What he's saying is, we don't have any scientific reason to understand why it is that anything holds together.

Why do I hold together? Why does anything you're viewing right now stay in the shape that it's in and not just burst into atoms flying everywhere?

It's a secret, he says, one thus far reserved by nature herself. Science hasn't answered this question, but the Bible has.

[21:37] If you'll allow, the strong nuclear force is Jesus Christ and the word of his power. Jesus is the creator and he is the sustainer of all

things.

Back in John 1, verse 3, all things made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. Ah.

We should stand in awe of this truth. Fourthly, Jesus is self-existent. self-existent.

We see this in the first part of verse 4. In him was life. In him. He possessed life.

Ontology is the study of the nature of being. The beginning of verse 4 is a brilliant ontological statement.

[22:40] In him was life. The word translated life is used all throughout John's gospel and always refers to spiritual and eternal life.

Jesus possesses within himself life. This is something often referred to as aseity. His aseity. Jesus is ase, which is from the Latin. It just means of self. And it's an incredibly important doctrine and a doctrine that is constantly under attack.

You want to be discerning as you listen and read all of the wonderful resources that are out there. If people are attacking the aseity of God, his self-existence, you should be very cautious about what follows.

Everything that has been created needs some power source to sustain it. the plant needs nutrients and water and sunlight.

[23:42] Our cars need fuel and tragically expensive maintenance. We need food and water and shelter and some of us need tragically expensive maintenance.

I could go on and on and on, but I hope that you see the point. Everything created, all of it, cannot sustain itself. It tends toward entropy.

It needs something to input into it for it to continue on. Not so with Jesus. He is self-existent.

His divine nature needs no inputs to go on. No fuel, no energy input, always existing, never created. He just is. everything created is in some form of process. And very tragically, there are theologians today that have invented a thing called process theology that suggests that God is responding to us and that his very nature is at change.

[24:53] Does God respond to us? Of course he does. But is who he is responding to us? No, not ever. Once again, be very careful if anybody seems to be promoting process theology.

John tells us in no uncertain terms, Jesus is. He exists. In him was life. Later in John, John records these astounding words.

This is John 8 and verse 58. Jesus says this, Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.

This is a reference to Exodus 3.14 where God responds to a fearful question that Moses asked him.

He says, Who shall I say sent me? And God says to Moses, I am who I am.

And he said, Say this to the people of Israel, I am has sent me to you. This is this idea of aseity. I need not appeal to some other authority.

[26:01] Tell them my name is I exist. I am. Nothing changes me. I am who I am. This is an astonishing thing for Jesus to say because he rightly was claiming to be God.

Unchanging, immovable God. Everything in the universe is becoming moving from one state to another.

If you can recognize this about yourself, you will be so glad to know that Jesus is. John goes on to say, Jesus possesses life and he says, the life was the light of men.

And we'll pick up more of this, I think, next week. But the themes of life and light are prominent in John's gospel. Here we see the two clearly connected in a metaphor that speaks to the contrast of Jesus against all that is evil in the world.

We, I think, take light for granted. We have light in abundance. It is everywhere. But if you lived in a time when the only source of light was from a flame, oil, wood, you had to produce, this metaphor would likely have had a more felt impact on you.

[27:28] Just a couple weeks ago, I took my middle son, Judah, on his ride of passage trip. He turned 13 this year. And he wanted to go to the Okefenokee swamp and camp out in the swamp.

And so the first night we paddled some 10 miles to an island called Floyd's Island and had the noisiest night of camping I have ever experienced. There are a lot of critters in the woods, in the

swamp.

I am fairly confident that an orangutan lives out there somewhere. It was loud. And we were in a tent and we had the rain fly on and there were noises I just would have loved to have seen what in the world they were.

And I wasn't terribly frightened, but I will admit there are some noises I would have really liked to know what they were. But just before we went to bed, one of the things reported, as a caution to put your food up safely because bears do make it out onto this island.

Somehow they travel through the swamp and they make it out onto this island. And so you want to be mindful of that kind of thing. And something large came through the woods. And I've done a lot of camping, I've done a lot of hunting, you know, there's the squirrel pouncing around, makes a lot of noise.

[28:42] This was not a squirrel. It was large. And Judah and I both were very glad for all the lights that we had on us. We were able to illuminate the woods which noise was coming from and never saw what was making the noise.

But boy, were we glad that we weren't huddled around a campfire, wondering what was coming through the woods our way. I think we take light for granted.

And this idea of the life that's in Jesus being the light of men may take a little more careful thoughtfulness on our part.

Light scatters the unseen. Light brings security. The themes of life and light are seen connected elsewhere in the Bible.

Psalm 36 verse 9 For with you is the fountain of life. In your light do we see light.

[29:44] In Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 4 there Paul talks about the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God. And then Jesus in John chapter 8 verse 12 says I am the light of the world.

whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. So Jesus is self existent and we're going to see next week that the light that he brings most certainly was not conquered by the darkness.

Jesus is the word. Jesus is preexistent. Jesus is the creator and Jesus is self existent. So what? What do we do? Jesus is just being introduced to us. Let's move on. Let's get quickly to the application. There's so much to be considered here though. First, if you have not placed faith in Christ's person and work, if you dwell in darkness, if you understand the weight of your sin, your offense against the holy God, repent and believe.

Turn by faith in Christ. The whole point of the book of John is that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ and have eternal life in him.

[31:08] If you have placed faith in Christ's person and his work, worship. Worship. Praise him.

Beloved, what we think about the most and talk about the most and spend our money and our energy on, says a lot about what we worship. And we ought to take the time to think about our week.

Just think about last week. Start at Monday and go through now and think about how you spent the things you have, the resources you have.

What did you spend them on? It may communicate much to you that needs to be repented of. Our minds should be full of the glories of Christ.

I think John intends to really capture us in these opening verses, to work to that very end before he gets biographical at all.

[32:13] Because of who Jesus is, we can cast all our anxieties, our fears, our doubts, our troubles, our depressions on him. There's no situation that escapes his attention or his power.

There is no circumstance that surprises him or evades his providential control. He is our confidence in life and in death.

The reality of who Jesus is makes sure all the promises of God to those of us who have believed in him. We should worship.

And as part of that worship, we should share. He is the reason we boldly share the good news of his kingdom.

If our affections are rightly turned toward him, we will want to talk about him. We will look for every opportunity we have to tell people about this Christ, this Lord and Savior of our souls.

[33:17] Maybe we be a people who are told to shut up. They don't want to hear this anymore. We should be talking that much about this person that we love so dearly.

The reality of who Jesus is demands our affections and it demands our obedience. Let's pray together.