

In the Beginning Was the Word

by John Piper

The Gospel of John shows Jesus' divine identity and authority, and emphasizes the importance of abiding in Jesus' Word.

Duration: 53:49

Scripture: John 1:1-3, John 1:14, John 1:20, John 1:29, John 1:51, John 10:28

Topics: "Jesus Christ", "Divine Identity"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the Gospel of John and the identity of Jesus Christ. He highlights four key aspects that John wants to convey about Jesus: the time of his existence, the essence of his identity, his relationship to God, and his relationship to the world. The preacher emphasizes the weightiness of these doctrines and the simplicity of the language used in the Gospel. He encourages the listeners to be in awe and worshipful of Jesus, as John's intention is to stun and amaze with the identity of the crucified man who became flesh.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.DesiringGod.org The sermon text is John 1, 1-14. Again, that's John 1, 1-14.

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. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through Him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

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. Okay, let's pray. These things were written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing have eternal life in His name.

So, Father, I pray that for this sermon, and for all the sermons to follow on the Gospel of John, this purpose would be fulfilled. I'm not able to save anybody, but the Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword. It pierces to the division of soul and spirit, bone and marrow, as it were, and lays bare the things about ourselves that we don't even know ourselves.

What a discovering power the Word of God is. So come, Holy Spirit, and give this power now to Your Word, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Gospel of John is a portrait of Jesus Christ in His saving work and Word, with a focus on the last three years of His life. Especially His death and resurrection. Its purpose is given clearly in John 20, verses 30 and 31.

You don't need to go there, I'll read it to you. Now, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, that He is the Messiah, the long-hoped-for One, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. So the book is written clearly to help people believe, to bring about faith.

However, don't make the mistake of thinking that if you're a believer already, it's not for your soul. There's a lot of people who think that sentence means, this book is written to make unbelievers believers, so I'll read Romans. Listen to John 15, 6. If anyone does not abide in Me, he's thrown away like a branch and withers.

The branches are gathered and thrown into the fire and burned. Listen to John 8, 31. If you abide, remain in My Word, you are truly My disciples.

If you just take those two words, 15, 6, 8, 31, what's clear is that when John says, I'm writing these words that you might believe and have life, he means keep on believing as well as become a believer. Because if you stop believing, you were never saved. You will be picked out of that, gathered in a bundle, and thrown into the fire.

Those who abide in Me, that means keep on trusting Me, believing Me. That's what branches do in vines. They draw down life.

They trust the vine to give them what they need. They don't go looking for it on Wall Street, especially now. So, do not make the mistake of thinking, oh John, that's the simple gospel for unbelievers and I need meat.

That is a colossal mistake. You talk about meat. When he says, these things are written so that you may believe, he means John Piper, you get up in the morning and read this book and I'll keep you a believer.

You leave Me and My Word and think you can make it on your own without this Word? You will perish forever. And yes, chapter 10 teaches nobody can pluck us out of His hand. If you're His, you'll feed on His Word.

This portrait of Jesus is written by an eyewitness, who was part of these infinitely important earthly events. Five times in this gospel, we find these unusual words, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Very strange.

Don't you love them all? Five times, the disciple whom Jesus loved. And at the very end, last chapter, chapter 21, verse 20, it says, Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them. And four verses later, it says, this is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things.

So, the one called the disciple whom Jesus loved, the one who was leaning with his head on Jesus' shoulder at the Last Supper, wrote this gospel. This is a very close account. This is not somebody a hundred years later, who's trying to figure out what happened by tracing it down.

He was there, and he wrote a book with his own divinely inspired witness of the events of Jesus, and what they mean for you today. Now, the reason I venture the phrase divinely inspired witness is, among others, this. Jesus told John and the other apostles that he was going to do that for them.

Let me read you the two key verses where I see that. John 14, 26. He says to his disciples, The helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

That's Jesus' way of saying, I'm going to not leave this up to you to get this right. Or here's John 16, 13. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears, he will speak.

So those two verses say to me, at least in Jesus' intention, John and the others were meant to be authoritative, reliable spokesmen who become the foundation of the church in their writings, according to Ephesians 2. Jesus chose apostles, he saved them, he taught them, he sent them, he gave them the Holy Spirit for divine guidance, and they became, in their writings, the foundation of the church. That's why we preach the Bible, and not our own ideas. That's why I feel very tethered to this book.

I feel like when I'm talking, and my talking begins to move away from the content of this book, I feel nervous about what I'm saying. And I make a beeline back to the book, because my authority is nothing, except insofar as it accords with what's in the book. And that's why you must measure it that way.

I want us to be a church in the pulpit, in our songs, in our prayers, in our small groups, in our meetings, in our conferences, that are not only in a vague way based upon the Bible, which everybody says they are, but explicitly, visually, verbally, manifestly, saturated with the Bible, because there's the authority, the power, the life. Human words accomplish nothing if they're not clearly echoing God's truth. He has the power, we don't.

It's the inspired Word of God. John is the book. Now, that phrase, Word of God, takes us now to our text.

So, I hope you will wear out your Bible by opening to John chapter 1. And we're only going to look at verses 1 through 3 in this message. So, we won't go at this pace, probably, through the whole book. At least, I don't think I could live that long.

But there are portions of it which must, especially at the beginning here. I think the pace will quicken lest we become repetitive, because this is a very repetitive book. It's like a bee buzzing around a flower.

And there's only one flower, and he sees it here, he sees it here, he sees it here, he sees it here. So, if we can unpack it densely at the beginning, then later we will probably be able to move more quickly. Let's read these three verses.

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. Let's focus first on the term Word. In the beginning was the Word.

Of all the things that could be said about the Word, here's the most important. I say it without fear of contradiction. The most important thing you must know about the Word is given in verse 14.

And the Word became flesh. That is the most important thing that you can know about this Word. There are other supremely important things, but if you miss this one, you'll miss John's angle on it.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father. The Word is the Son full of grace and truth.

So the Word refers to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, the fleshed, fleshed human nature Son of God. Now, John knows what he's about to do. He's lived a long time thinking about what was so hard for him to grasp during the life of Jesus.

And he's lived a long time, and now he's going to write this story. He knows Jesus was a man. He leaned his head on his shoulder.

And he's going to tell us story after story of what he did as a man on the earth. He knows where he's going. His life, his work.

You saw him, you heard him, you touched him. It's what he says in his first epistle. We touched him.

He stresses it with his hands. Flesh and blood. Not a ghost.

Not an apparition. Like, whoosh, shows up. Appears and vanishes.

He ate, he drank, he got tired. He was sitting on the well in chapter 4, tired and hungry. John knew him very closely.

Jesus' mother lived with John from the day Jesus died till the day John died. That was a... Till the day Mary died, probably. She probably died first.

We don't know. Think of it. He could ask her anything.

He knew him so well. He knows where he's going. He's going to tell this story about this man.

So what he's doing in verses 1 to 3 is not as though he's beginning here. We're beginning here. He's not beginning here.

He didn't get that for three years. He's beginning here where he wants us to begin. He's saying the most ultimate things about Jesus Christ he could possibly say at the beginning of his story.

Then he says in verse 14, pretty quickly, that's the one who became flesh. That's the one I put my hand on his side and laid my head on his shoulder. So John clearly doesn't want us to go through what he went through.

He and the others fumbled the ball so many times during those three years trying to figure out who it is that could command the wind and the waves and drive out demons and heal leprosy and raise the dead. Who is this? And even at the last when they were running into the tomb, John got it first and Peter didn't get it. This was slow in coming.

Who is this? And he doesn't want us to go through that. That struck me. First words out of his mouth in writing is, in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

That's what I'm talking about. Isn't that amazing? What do we draw from that? Well, one thing I draw from that is he means for us to read this gospel stunned. He means for us to read this gospel worshipfully.

It's not wrong to write a story with suspense. This one just doesn't have any. At least not with regard to the identity of the main character.

Just get it clear from the beginning we're talking about God. Amazing. Didn't have to do it that way.

Could have done it legitimately another way. But he's saying, I want you to know that this Jesus made you. As you read, think, He made me like a potter makes a pot only more because He also invents the clay.

He wants us to know this immediately. Feel it. He wants us at the beginning of this sermon series to be absolutely blown away by what He says here.

To our mouths to drop open that He could say these things about a crucified apparent criminal. He just wants us to be worshipful. So John says, No, we're not going to go the route of sneaking up on the identity of Jesus.

That's the way I walked. But you're not going to walk that way in my gospel. Very first words out of the end of his pen are supposed to stun you, blow you away in the identity of this man who became flesh and dwelt among us.

Let there be no mistaking John means us to read every word of this gospel with a clear, solid, amazed knowledge that Jesus was with God and was God before the world was and that He made everything, created the universe. He wants you to have a magnificent Savior. He wants your Savior to be really big.

For whatever else you love about Jesus, His tenderness, His meekness, His kindness, His patience, John wants you to be blown away so that all of that is inside something absolutely huge. Jesus made the galaxies. This Jesus whose tenderness you love and patience you love and kindness you love and rightly so, He held children in His arms and made the world, was God.

But we should ask, why did He choose to call Him the Word? I said the most important thing you can know about the Word is that it became flesh. He became flesh. But I'm still asking, could He have used another word? Could He have used another name? Truth? In the beginning was the truth? In the beginning was the light? In the beginning was the way? In the beginning was the life? Could He have said any of those? Why Word? My answer is this.

You test it. Because I won't appeal to anything you can't see. John calls Jesus the Word because He had come to see the words of Jesus, that is the things that came out of His mouth, the words of Jesus as the truth of God, and the person of Jesus as the truth of God in such a unified way that Jesus Himself in His coming and working and teaching and dying and rising was the final decisive message from God, Word from God.

He listened to Him teach and He saw Him work and His person and His Word were so unified that that totality was Word, was message from God. Or here, let me put it another way. What God had to say to us at the fullness of time, what God had to say to the world was not only or mainly what Jesus said, so many take Him as an admirable teacher, being very selective in what they believe, not only or mainly what He said, but who Jesus was and what He did.

That was the main thing God had to say to us. His words clarified Himself and His work, but His self and His work were the main truth that God was revealing. Jesus said, let me give you a few quotes.

Jesus said, I am the truth. John 14, 6. He said, I came to witness, witness to the truth. So He was the truth and He witnessed to the truth.

That's what John was seeing. He was truth, He witnessed to the truth, Word over here, and a kind of Word, witness in His life over here, and John just saw all of that coming together as one great message, Word from God. Or, He said, if you abide in My Word, you're truly My disciples, and He said, abide in Me.

John listens to this. Abide in My Word, abide in Me, abide in My Word, abide in Me. Does it mean to abide in His Word? In His Word, you're in Him, you're in Him, you're in His Word, and he saw them coming together.

Here's another one. He said, the works that I do bear witness to Me. In other words, His working was His witness.

His hands and feet and legs and mind and mouth working was a witness. You put all that together. As John watched this man be truth and be the message and speak the message and see them come together again and again, and he drew down the conclusion.

I think the best thing I can call him from eternity is God's Word, God's message to us. God's decisive message became flesh. Here's one other clue.

I believe the same author who wrote the Gospel of John wrote the Revelation of John. Language is so similar in so many ways and so many concepts are the same and it's attributed to the same. I have no reason to doubt it.

Revelation 19.13, he describes the second coming like this. Jesus at the second coming. He is clothed in a robe, dipped in blood, and the name by which He is called is the Word of God.

Now, four verses later, he says, and from His mouth comes a sharp sword. We all know what that is. By this sword He will rule the nations.

The sword is the Word of God. So, He is the Word of God and He is ruling by the Word of God. And so John saw these coming together from beginning to end that His speaking and His being were so unified in God's intention for him that he called Him in Revelation 19 and in John 1 the Word.

The Word of God. So, I think as John begins his book, he has in view all the revelation, the truth, the witness, the glory, the light, the words that came from Jesus, that Jesus was His living, His teaching, His dying, His rising, and he sums it all up. That revelation that came in all those ways in this three-year period especially sums it all up and says that was God's final decisive Word.

Exactly what the writer of the Hebrews says. Remember? In many and various ways, God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son. So there it is.

The Son of God was the ultimate, decisive, final Word of God to the world. Which is why these Gospels are so amazingly important. So I ask, what does John want to tell us about the Word that became flesh? The one he knew, the one he laid his head on.

What does he want to tell us about Him? And I'm going to give you four things. Number one, he wants to tell us about the time of His existence. Number two, he wants to tell us about the essence of His identity.

Number three, he wants to tell us about His relationship to God. And number four, he wants to tell us about His relationship to the world. Those are the four things.

Let's take them one at a time. They won't be long. Number one, the time of His existence.

Verse one, first phrase, in the beginning was the Word. Those words, in the beginning, in Greek, are identical to the first two words of the Bible. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Don't think that's an accident. What John is saying is, before there was any matter, before anything had been made, was Jesus. In the beginning was the Word.

So there at the beginning, when those things were brought into being, He was there already. That's the point of in the beginning. And another confirmation that John is thinking that way is that in the beginning God created, and the very first thing he tells us about Jesus' action is, everything was made through Him.

So creation is in His mind as He writes the words, in the beginning. So Jesus was there as the Son of God in the beginning. Let me say it in an Einsteinian way, and then I'll give you the biblical phrase for Einstein's theory of relativity.

Jesus was there not only before matter, He was there before time. Because the 20th century brought the discovery that matter and time are coextensive. No matter, no time.

Kind of a controversial thing biblically sometimes. Listen to the great doxology. Now I don't think the biblical writers knew the theory of relativity.

They just knew truth. Jude 1.25 goes like this, To the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory and majesty, dominion and authority, before all time, now and forever. He's lifting up his doxological praise of Jesus Christ, and he says, before all time, now in these times, these times of the ages, and forever, glory be to Him.

Or, take 2 Timothy 1.9, God gave us grace in Christ Jesus before the times of the ages. So, when he says in the beginning was the Word, the connection with Genesis 1, the wider references to being before time, is meant to communicate before anything else was, He was. So get the time right.

He did not come into being. He just was. More on that in a minute.

Number two. The essence of his identity. Verse 1, I'm going to skip a phrase and come back to it, just because I want to link it together with the relationship with the world.

Verse 1 at the end. The Word was God. One of the marks of this gospel is that the weightiest doctrines and the simplest language go together.

I don't think that statement could be made grammatically simpler than it is, or more weighty than it is. I don't know how to make it more weighty. I don't know how to make it more simple.

Sometimes we say John is simple. Well, that's grammatically absolutely true. It's the simplest Greek and English in the Bible.

And this book would vie for first place in weight of matter. The two go together. That's one of the unique things about this gospel.

You can't make this simpler. You can't make it weightier. What he means is he wants Bethlehem loud and clear with all other true Christian churches to worship Jesus Christ as God.

And fear no blasphemy. No idolatry. He wants us to fall down with Thomas full of doubt.

Jesus says, you're doubting? He was so patient. Put your hand here. Put your hand here.

And Thomas won't touch him. He's on his face. My Lord and my God.

That's the way he wants us to be week after week in this gospel. On our face. My Lord and my God.

That's who became flesh. He doesn't want us to be like the Jewish leaders in chapter 10. They said, verse 33, it's not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy.

Because you, being a man, make yourself God. Of course we're going to stone you. So John, not wanting us to be deceived, puts first the word was God.

Don't join them. He's just pulling blasphemy out of our lives as a charge that when we bow down before Jesus Christ and worship him as God, we're not blaspheming. So, do you see what this means for our series on the gospel of John? And I do hope that you will invite both believers who don't have a church and unbelievers who don't have a Savior to sit under this preaching.

I hope you will for this reason. The implications of what I've just said is as we focus week after week on Jesus as he appears in the gospel, we are meeting God. So ask your friends, you want to get to know God? Well, yeah, if I could.

I mean, if there were a way. Well, the gospel of John says at the beginning that the word was God. And it says the word became flesh.

And then it spends 21 chapters describing by an eyewitness what this flesh was like. And if he's right, then he's telling us what God is like. Just come listen and see what you think.

That's what I would do, I think. If a Jehovah's Witness or a Muslim ever says to you, this is a mistranslation. The word was God.

That's a mistranslation. You need to see our New World translation. Or the real version is buried in a temple somewhere beneath the ruins of Jerusalem.

And you got it all wrong here. And what it should say is the word was a God. The word was a God.

See, there's no article there in the Greek. See that? Now, here's what you should respond. I'm going to tell you in about five minutes.

But there is a way for you to respond without knowing any Greek at all that that's not true. Okay, so hold on because I want to put that in connection with the last point. But I'm very keenly aware I've talked to so many over the years of where they're going to take you right away if you respond to this sermon positively and worship Jesus.

Because they think, Jehovah's Witnesses do, that He was an angel and was created. Number three. So first, the time frame of Jesus before all things.

And second, the essence of His identity. The word was God. Now third, His relationship to God.

Verse one, in the middle here. The word was with God. In the beginning was the word.

The word was with God. And the word was God. Now, those two phrases.

The word was with God and the word was God is why the church believes in the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity that there is one God and three centers of consciousness in one divine essence is not the creation of philosophers. It's pressed on us by sentences like this.

He was with God and He was God. Well, how can you be Him and be with Him? And the doctrine of the Trinity has always boggled the minds of genuine believers. He was with God.

He had a relationship to God. He's the perfect image of God reflecting all that God is and standing forth as a person who is full of deity, Paul says, in a distinct person. One divine essence.

So far, we've seen two persons. God, the word with God, who is God. Not easy.

Just clear. Just clear. True.

Paul said, when I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put away childish things. Becoming a man means going to heaven.

In that text, it means Christ coming back or going to heaven. Now we see in a mirror dimly. Then face to face.

Now we know in part. Then we will know even as we are fully known. Paul was so aware that he was saying things that were fragmentary and would not totally finish the picture.

Just true things. Infinitely important true things. One day, we will get more light on how you can be one God and be three persons.

Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit will show up later. So far, here's what we've seen. In regard to time, He is before all time.

In regard to essence, He is God. In regard to relationship, He is with God. Distinct from God as a person.

Yet God. Now finally, number four. His relationship to the world.

Verses two and three. He was in the beginning with God. That just repeats the two points of verse one for emphasis.

All things were made through Him. And without Him was not anything made that was made. The Word who became flesh and dwelt among us taught us, healed us, rebuked us, protected us, loved us, died for us.

John wants to begin by saying He created us. John must have a sense that that kind of greatness, that kind of wonder needs to be there. Otherwise, all the other things that we're going to learn about Him are going to seem pedestrian and ho-hum and He'll just be another random teacher doing a few hocus-pocus things.

All things, verse three, all things were made through Him. Now don't lose the point of verse one that the Word was God. When you hear all things were made through Him, yes, it's right to say He was God's agent.

Through Him. When God says, by His Word, let there be, that Word is Jesus. By the Word, He brought the universe into being.

But if you push that too hard, you're going to forget the Word is God. Not just an agent of God. So hold it all together.

Don't leave what you got in verse one and get to verse three. When I say He's your maker, I don't mean God used an angel to make you. I mean God created you through God.

And they are so mysteriously one as to leave us simply saying Jesus made us and the Father made us and there was a relationship of agency involved because by the Word He brought us into being. So, now we're back to the Muslim and the Jehovah's Witness. Or any brand of Arianism.

Fourth century. First really big heresy. Arianism.

Because Arius said, there was when the Word was not. Meaning he came into being. He was a creature.

Athanasius against the world was banished five times from his homeland defending against Arius. Almost the whole world went Arian. Except for Athanasius standing.

It was amazing. We have much to be thankful for in church history. And to be sorry for.

So, if a Muslim or a Jehovah's Witness both of whom are Arians say you got this translation wrong. It really shouldn't say the Word was God. It should say the Word was well, God-like or a God great prophet, great angel and then God used him for great things.

You can know that's not true. Just because of verse 3. I can show them this. It says in verse 3 First, all things were made through him.

Now you might think that's enough right there. That's enough. He's not a creature.

He created creatures. Isn't that enough? All things were made through him. But, they will surely say well, not really because when it says all things were made through him of course, the one who made all things is excluded from the all things.

And is himself then made. And you might say just on the basis of that well, it's not obvious to me that he's excluded from, I mean that he's not the one who makes creatures rather than being in the all things made. Because it doesn't look like he's in the all things made.

He made all things. If it were just left at that you'd have an argument and you'd go on and on. He didn't leave it at that.

He went on to say this. And, without him was not anything made. That was made.

Why do you do that? Why did God inspire him to repeat himself and then add without him nothing was made in the made category. If he's in the made category he had to make himself. If you don't exist you can't bring yourself into being.

I don't think you need to know any Greek. You don't need to go to Thomas, though that might help. Hebrews 1 might help.

Romans 9 might help. Colossians 2 might help. The deity of Jesus Christ, the godness of Jesus is pervasive in the New Testament, but all you need to do is push with all your might on verse 3 and say, I think the way verse 3 is constructed without him was not anything made.

That was made. Everything in the made category angels, whatever, he made it. So he can't be in that category.

End of argument. See you later. One little thing you might try with Jehovah's Witnesses at the door because I don't think we should play games.

I think we should care about their souls. I don't think they're believers. I don't think they're Christian.

So my tactic now, I've done this for years they ring the doorbell, they have their magazine, whatever and I say, I think I understand where you're coming from. I've talked to Jehovah's Witnesses a lot. I'm a Christian who believes deeply that Jesus Christ is not a mere angel and that he is very God of very God.

I know you don't believe that. So I don't want to get into a discussion but I would like to pray for you. And if you would just bow with me.

Let's ask Jesus to come and show us who's right here. I have never had one of them let me do that. Never.

One old man ran as fast as he could off my porch. So that's just my suggestion is that if you don't have time to sit down and talk about what I just said I really mean this with all my heart I believe Jesus will show up like on Mount Carmel and they'd know he might show up. And none of them has ever said well fine let's have a truth encounter here.

Christ was not made. That is what it means to be God. May the Lord in this series help us to worship Christ.

If you're here tonight and you or today at the South Campus or the North Campus and you don't bow the knee to Jesus as your Lord and your God may the Lord open your eyes as you read this gospel and he testifies through his word about his reality may you yield and have eternal life. Let's pray. Father in heaven I plead for those of us who are believers that we would grow in our treasuring of Christ and our trusting of Christ.

And I pray that unbelievers who who come and who are in these services today would find themselves struck and drawn by King Jesus. 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. We worship you Lord Jesus. Amen.

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