“IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD”

Scripture: John 1:1-18.

This morning we will begin a verse by verse study thru the Gospel of John. It was written by the Apostle John somewhere around 85 to 90 A.D. John’s purpose for writing his gospel is stated toward the end of the book in John 20:31. READ it. As John sits down to write there are all sorts of questions about Jesus and heresies have started to take root. There is increasing persecution of the church and many who claim to be Christians are starting to fall away from the faith. You have to remember, it’s been 50 years since Jesus ascended back to heaven. All the other apostles have died. Subsequent generations grew up who had never known Jesus or the apostles personally. Naturally there were some questions about who Jesus really was. And so John, drawing from his personal knowledge and experience with Jesus writes the Gospel of John to prove that Jesus Christ indeed is the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

Like a lawyer in a courtroom, John calls witness after witness to the stand, including Jesus Himself, to give testimony about Jesus – what He said and what He did. John presents his case that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and through Him we can have eternal life. It is a relevant book for our time as many people have questions about Jesus and who He is. Most believe that Jesus was a real historical figure. Most acknowledge that He was a good man and a good teacher. Some think of Him as a prophet. But clearly most people don’t see Jesus as the Son of God. Whenever I am ministering to brand new believers or talking to people who are seeking to know more about Jesus I point them to the Gospel of John. It is written in an easy-to-understand language. John uses the simplest words, puts together the simplest phrases and sentences, and yet conveys staggering and mysterious truths. If a person will read and study the Gospel of John they will learn more about Jesus and will grow in their faith. So with that introduction, let’s get started.

READ John 1:1-2. John begins his opening remarks by making three statements about Jesus. They affirm once and for all the deity of Jesus – that He is God. Who is “the Word” in verse 1? We know it is Jesus because later on in verse 14 John tells us who “the Word” is. READ John 1:14. Jesus became flesh. He dwelt among us. It was His glory that we saw. He was the only begotten Son from the Father. He was the one full of grace and truth. John tells us three things about Jesus in verses 1-2: (1) that Jesus is eternally God. He has always existed; (2) that Jesus is equally God. He is the second person of the Trinity; (3) Jesus is essentially God. He is God in His nature, personality and character. Jesus is all that God is.

READ John 1:3. Wow! What a statement! John says here that Jesus was present at the creation of the world. Not only that, but He was actively involved in the creation. He was the mastermind behind it all. He created everything!

READ John 1:4-5. When the physical universe was created, life and light were created out of the darkness and from nothing. In a spiritual sense, Jesus also provides life and light, doesn’t He? He brings forth life in those who are spiritually dead. Later in John 11:25 Jesus will refer to Himself as “the resurrection and the life.” This new life in turn produces light for those who were in spiritual darkness. In John 8:12 Jesus will claim to be “the light of the world” and if we will follow Him we will not walk in darkness (because light overcomes darkness). As the story unfolds we will see how Jesus does this – through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave!

John now moves quickly to the early days of Jesus’ ministry.

READ John 1:6-8. The witness, the messenger sent from God was John the Baptist – not the Apostle John. John is not talking about himself here. In fact, what is very interesting is that John never uses his own name in the Gospel of John when referring to himself. Who was John the Baptist? I always refer to him as the last of the Old Testament prophets. He is the “Elijah” that God will send in Malachi 4:5 before the awesome day of the Lord comes. So he was a prophet. He was also a priest as his father was. As such, he was totally consecrated to God. Finally, John the Baptist was a Nazarite which means he had to keep from touching a dead body, could not come in contact with any fruit of the vine, and he let his hair grow long. He was sent by God to bring the nation of Israel fresh light, to announce the coming of the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah. He, in essence cast a floodlight on Jesus and announced “Here He is!” John the Baptist was sent from God. He himself was not the Light (though some believe he was the Messiah). Instead he was the one who was sent to bear witness of the Light – Jesus Christ.

READ John 1:9. Who is “the true light”? That’s Jesus. And who is it to whom Jesus gives light? To everyone. Every person has some light. Those who have no written or oral revelation have the light of creation and God has given everyone a conscience. Did the Jews of Jesus’ day have any light? Yes, the O.T. scriptures. Do we have light today? Absolutely! We have the entire of canon of scripture and the gospel message proclaimed in thousands of churches each week, on the radio, television and on the internet. God makes sure that everyone has some light. And God will hold each person responsible for the light they have been given.

READ John 1:10-11. The sad fact is that when Jesus came into the world that He created, most people rejected Him. Both Jews and Gentiles turned away from the Light. Here was Jesus. People rubbed shoulders as it were with God! He was right there in human form in front of their faces teaching like no man they had ever heard. He was healing the sick. He was walking on water. He was calming storms. He was making lame people walk. He was making blind people to see. He was turning water into wine. He was feeding thousands of people with just a few loaves of bread some fish. He was raising the dead. He was casting out demons. Yet, they were too blind to see. John says that the Lord Jesus came to His own people and they did not receive Him. What a tragedy! Ahhh, but there’s good news…

READ John 1:12-13. Some people received the Light. Some believed in His name. Some believed He was the Savior and that He could save them from their sins. They had faith and, acting on that faith, they received Him and became children of God. Verse 13 makes it clear that our spiritual rebirth is not of human effort. No amount of wishful thinking, positive thinking or effort in our flesh makes us children of God. Having godly parents or grandparents won’t make us children of God. Strength of character, living a good life, doing good things, even reading the Bible and praying every day, will not make us children of God. To become a child of God requires a rebirth. We are born physically but to be saved requires a spiritual rebirth – born of God and not by the will of man.

I’ve always said that if it had been left completely up to me I would not have accepted Christ. Left to myself and my own thinking I would have thought I was OK and didn’t need to be forgiven and didn’t need Jesus. But the Holy Spirit convicted me of my need for a Savior. I was a sinner and could not save myself. He showed me that faith in Jesus was the only way to heaven. And because of the Holy Spirit’s work in my heart, I believed in and I received Christ. John makes a strong statement here in these verses about the sovereignty of God.

READ John 1:14. Here John describes the incarnation of Jesus. Incarnation is a big word that simply means, “in the flesh.” God became flesh and blood and dwelt among us. Jesus did not lay aside His deity, but He simply veiled His glory in human flesh. When John says “we have seen His glory” he was speaking from his own personal experience. John was privileged along with Peter and James to witness Jesus in His shekinah glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. Then later, he and the other disciples saw Jesus following His resurrection in a glorified resurrected body. But that is not all John is referring to here. He speaks to having witnessed Jesus’ inner glory. He knew Jesus intimately. For 3 ½ years he saw and conversed with the very Son of God! He gazed at this glorious person. He listened to the words of Jesus. And based on this, John describes Jesus as being “full of grace and truth.”

READ John 1:15. Basically the Apostle John is saying here that John the Baptist’s testimony backs me up. John the Baptist is the one who first identified who Jesus was. In Matthew 3:11 John the Baptist offered this testimony concerning Jesus: “He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals” (NASB). I think that this is what the Apostle John has in mind here. John the Baptist, the forerunner, the prophet sent by God to announce the coming of the Messiah, recognized the significance of who Jesus was and he proclaimed it to all who would listen.

READ John 1:16. We as believers in Jesus Christ receive from Him an inexhaustible supply of grace. Paul puts it this way: “to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Eph 3:19) In other words, Christians, all the exceeding riches of God are ours in Christ. What an amazing thought! I picture God’s grace like the waters of Niagara Falls, thundering unendingly into our hearts.

READ John 1:17. Did you notice that? The Law was given, but grace and truth came. Whereas the Law was impersonal, engraved on cold tablets of stone, mediated by angels and given to Moses – by contrast, grace and truth were brought into this world by the God-Man, Jesus Christ, wrapped up in warm, vibrant human flesh. Grace was not given to us at the expense of truth. Truth was not given to us at the expense of grace. Both were given to us in perfect proportions, in the perfect Son of God.

Well, one more verse…with this the Apostle John wraps up his opening statement. He will start calling witnesses to the stand next week.

READ John 1:18. This verse is a good transition into the rest of the Gospel of John. Until Jesus came on the scene nobody had physically seen God. Sure, God had occasionally given people visions. And men like Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Daniel, Isaiah and Ezekiel saw manifestations of God. But nobody had ever actually seen God. Jesus, God in human flesh offers us the clearest view of God we will ever see this side of heaven. “He (Jesus) has made Him (God) known. Jesus Christ, fully human and yet fully God – that’s going to be the recurring theme of our study. And when we get to the end, John will rest his case and he will leave it up to individuals to weigh the evidence and decide for themselves – is Jesus just a great man, a great teacher, a prophet or is He God in human flesh? The answer to the question “Who do you say that Jesus is?” has eternal consequences.