

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: John 1:1-14

Sermon Title: "More Than Just a Man" (Trekking through the Gospel of John)

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People tend to view Jesus as a mere human being. They tend to think that Jesus was a historical figure who, like anybody else, was a baby, occupied a patch of land for a time, and then died a terrible death, more terrible than the average person might die. So, to them, Jesus is a good teacher who lived a decent life. He was an influential character like George Washington or Alexander the Great, who had a bunch of followers who thought he was something special. Jesus can be lumped in with Muhammad, Buddha, Confucius, and others, who came up with some brilliant stuff to think about that could possibly change a person's life. If Jesus performed any miracles, he did so as a person who had a magic touch. If Jesus affected history, he did so for a time and then faded away, although people today still think he was something special.

Yet, we turn to the first words of John's Gospel, and we discover that Jesus wasn't just a person who occupied space on earth thousands of years ago. He was more than an historical figure for the textbooks – he is the Reason there is history at all.

John starts with the beginning of it all. The Book of Genesis starts the same way: "In the beginning." Genesis talks about the beginning of creation. Scientists today would call it the Big Bang. John, however, goes even farther back. His beginning is before creation itself. The beginning he talks about is way before time existed. And at that time – if we can call it "time" at all – was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning, before time and space, with God.

With a little more reading, we soon find out that John is talking about Jesus Christ, supposedly a mere human being. Jesus was with God before there was time, before there was a universe, before there was us. Jesus was with God, because Jesus is God. There is no separating the two: God the Father and God the Son, as well as God the Holy Spirit, three-in-one. So Jesus is not somebody who just pops up in the middle of human history – Jesus was present before history.

This means that Jesus Christ is eternal. He was before the beginning of it all, he was during a period of 30-some-odd years on this planet, and he is the resurrected Lord forever and ever. Jesus Christ has staying power, not like a George Washington or Alexander the Great or any religious world figure who showed up for a period and then died. Even in death Christ is eternal, the ceaseless, timeless God of us all.

Everlasting, perpetual, uninterrupted. Jesus Christ is not a historical figure or a good teacher or some really-neat guy who once lived. Jesus Christ is.

In verse 3, John tells us that “all things were made through Christ, and without him nothing was ever made.” Paul picks up this point in his letter to the Colossians: “[By] him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominion or principalities or powers. *All things* were created through him and for him.”¹ Have you ever tried to hammer a nail into a piece of wood without using a hammer? You could use a wench or the sole of a shoe, but they don’t work as well on big projects. Have you ever tried to cut a beam of wood without a saw of any kind? Not all of us are karate experts. Think about trying to complete projects around the house without the simplest of tools, and then imagine the universe being created without Jesus Christ. It would never have happened. None of the planets or stars or moons would exist without Jesus Christ in the beginning. Scientists would not be contemplating the theory of a Big Bang, because such a thing would never have occurred. And if creation wouldn’t exist, neither would we. We do not live without Jesus Christ. This puts a whole new

¹ Colossians 1:16 (italics mine). Refer also to Hebrews 1:2.

meaning to what John says in verse 4, “In him was life, and the life was the light of all.” Without Christ in the beginning, there is no life. Without Christ, there would have been no life to redeem on the cross.

Try to build a deck with no hammer or nails or saws, try to knit a blanket or scarf with no needles, and try to explain how the universe and we exist without Jesus Christ. Nobody can do it.

John calls Jesus Christ the Word, capital W. The Greek word for *word* is *logos*, from which we get the words *logic* and *reason*. Depending on who you are, the word *logos* – reason and logic – could mean different things. We don’t have time right now to discuss the various definitions for the word *logos*, although John was making the point in his Gospel that Jesus Christ is the definition of logic and reason, no matter how you view these things.

We will discuss, however, one point of view on the word *logos*, and that comes from the Greek philosophers. Way back when, the Greeks loved their philosophy, about as much as Americans love watching *Dancing with the Stars* and *Real Housewives*. There were prominent philosophers who believed that logic and reason were the only true things we should strive for in life. Today Americans believe they should only strive for money and iPhones. The thing the

Greeks strived for was *logos*, and *logos* could perfect the mind and body, make everybody more sociable than Facebook has made them, allow everyone to reach a much higher plateau of existence than the one we stand on now. The problem is, not everybody can reach this plateau. Philosophers believed that only a select people could obtain *logos* that would make them perfect human beings. Of course, the philosophers thought themselves to be the perfect candidates for higher existence, so they were the only ones who would get it. Try as you can, only a few will reach the goal.

Plato was one of those philosophers who believed this. He once wrote an allegory, or a parable, in his book *The Republic* that discussed this *logos* that only certain people can obtain. Plato describes a deep dark cave in which a lot of people are living. They all are chained to the back wall in this cave, and all they are allowed to do is stare at another wall. On the wall are images that are projected by the fire that is blazing behind them. It is like watching a movie that involves other people doing other things, and those watching don't realize it is a movie they are watching. They think it is reality. They think the images and the cave are all life is about. There is nothing more.

However, the philosopher says that there has got to be more. There has got to be a world outside the cave,

and it is that world which is real. Really real. The philosopher wants to reach this other world, but the chain keeps him from going outside, where a bright light is shining. He wants to go to that light, but the chain yanks him back. Once the philosopher believes that reality is not in the movie, and that reality is outside, he has gain true *logos*, and the chain breaks, and he reaches the light, and lives a better life.

Plato created this allegory, or parable, about the cave around 350 years before Christ came in human form. This was still a strong belief that people, especially Greeks, held while Jesus moved from town to town. John was proving to people that Jesus is the Logos, the Reason, the Logic, that everybody has been looking for. He is the Reality of our existence, the only One who can show us how the image on the wall are not real, how those images are full of sin and waste and sadness. Jesus Christ is the Word who can break the chain, and show us out of the deep and dark cave, and take us into the light of reality where God the Father resides.

Plato's Allegory of the Cave is such a beautiful piece of work, when seen from the perspective of a Christian. It is funny how Plato was so close to the answer of life, how he was so close to sounding like a Christian himself. It only he had lived during the time of Jesus' ministry on earth, he might have rearranged

the allegory to involve Jesus as the Logic, the Reason; the chain and images, and even the cave, as our sin; and the reaching of the cave entrance as our resurrection.

Even during Jesus' time on earth, there were philosophers and Greeks who believed that only a few could obtain logic and reason. John noted in his Gospel that Jesus Christ is the Word, and the Word is for everybody. Not just for a select group of people. Not for those who have brains or good looks. Not for people who can achieve the "perfect life" with wealth and family and job and possessions. Jesus Christ was "the true Light," John says, "which gives light to every [person] coming into the world... [As] many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in his name."²

John would prove this by telling the story of Jesus on earth. He would tell about a Pharisee named Nicodemus who wasn't sure who Jesus was, but wanted to get to know him better. In a nightly encounter, this Pharisee would hear Jesus out, and he would be confronted with the Word of God to the world, and he would have to make the choice to accept him or not. A Samaritan woman would encounter Jesus at a well during midday, and she would hear

² John 1:9, 12.

him out, and she would be confronted with a choice to receive new life or return to her old, sinful life. A blind man would receive sight from Jesus, but he would not be able to point Jesus out from a crowd of people. Learned people and religious people would surround him and attack him with questions and doubts, and under the pressure the once-blind man would have to stand on what he was given: new eyes and a new perception of God.

John would tell many stories of important people and not-so-important people, of sinful and so-called sinless people, each one meeting with Jesus, each one standing in the presence of the Eternal God, and each one given the gift of Logos, the Word. Whoever we are, if we want to do the will of God the Father, we will find the Son. If we want to break from the chains and darkness of life, and embrace the light, we will have Logos, Reason, Jesus Christ, and the Word will save us. Anybody can have this, if they want it. Just ask.

So, Jesus Christ is more than a historical figure, more than just a good man with some good ideas. Jesus Christ is the foundation of history, of existence, of meaning and purpose. We find our life is Jesus Christ, a life we've always had in Jesus Christ, but sin just got us off track, and took us away from God. In Christ, our lives are redeemed, and we return to God

through Christ. In effect, just as all things were created through Christ, all things are re-created through Christ, the Savior of the world.

Throughout the next months, we are going to learn more about Jesus Christ as John tells the story about him. John will bring us to different places, and in each place we will stand in the presence of the Eternal. The Word will share a word with us, and by his words he will mean to transform us. This is why he came into the world. Our understanding of him is changed, and in this change we are new people.

Assurance of Pardon:

Listen to this Good News: “If we claim that we’re free from sin, we’re only fooling ourselves. A claim like that is [absolute] nonsense. On the other hand, if we admit our sins – make a clean breast of them – God won’t let us down. God will forgive our sins and purge us of all wrongdoing.” Since we confessed our sins, God will forgive us through his Son Jesus Christ and bring us into the light of his salvation. Thanks be to God. Amen.