Jesus – the Word at the Beginning

1. Introduction

a. As we established last time John's gospel is very different from the Synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke). John focuses on Jesus' teaching about his own identity and his unique relationship with the Father. John wants us to know who Jesus is so we can put our faith in him and have life in his name.

John 20:30-31 *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; [31] 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.*

b. It is "in his name" that we have life. This doesn't just mean we tag on "in Jesus' name" at the end of our prayers. In biblical times, and often still today, names are important. They conveyed something about the character and nature of the person. Jesus name was chosen by God and communicated by the angel.

Matt.1:21 *She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."*

c. By believing in the salvation which is ours through Jesus we can know eternal life. That life comes from him and in his name we can find all truth. So as we look at John's gospel we are going to see the many names, or titles, Jesus gives to himself. As we do my hope is that we will grow deeper and deeper in relationship with Jesus.

d. So let's begin at the beginning with the first three verses of John's gospel:

John 1:1-3 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made*

2. In the beginning

a. The most important thing to know about this Word is actually found in verse 14:

John 1:14 *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.*

b. John knows what he's about to write in these 21 chapters. He is going to tell us the story of what Jesus Christ did and what he taught. This is a book about the life and work of the man Jesus Christ that John knew and saw and heard and touched with his hands

1 John 1:1 *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life*

c. Jesus had flesh and blood, he ate and drank and got tired, and John knew him very closely. Jesus's mother lived with John in the last part of her life (John 19:26). Therefore, what John is doing in John 1:1 is telling us the most ultimate things about Jesus that he can.

d. Over three years of being with Jesus John figured out something of the fullness of who Jesus was. But he does not want his readers to take more than three verses to find out what took him so long to know. He wants us to have in our minds, fixed and clear, from the beginning of his Gospel, the eternal majesty and deity and Creator rights of Jesus Christ.

e. That's the point of verses 1–3. He means for us to read this Gospel worshipfully, humbly, submissively, awestruck that the man at the wedding and at the well and on the mountain is Creator of the universe. John doesn't gradually unveil the nature of who this man is – he announces it from the very beginning. It is his intention to stun us and blow us away with the identity of this man who became flesh and dwelt among us.

f. John means for us to read every word of this Gospel with the clear, solid, amazed knowledge that Jesus Christ was with God and was God and that the one who laid down his life for us created the universe. John wants us to know and believe in a magnificent Saviour. Whatever else you may enjoy about Jesus, John wants you to know and treasure Jesus in his infinite majesty.

3. The Word

a. Why did John choose to call Jesus "the Word?" John calls Jesus the Word because he had come to see 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 and decisive message of God. What God had to say to us was not only or mainly what Jesus said, but who Jesus was and what he did. His words clarified himself and his work. But his self and his work were the main truth God was revealing. "I am the truth," Jesus said (John 14:6).

b. He came to witness to the truth (John 18:37) and he was the truth (John 14:6). His witness and his person were the Word of truth. He said, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples" (John 8:31), and he said, "Abide in me" (John 15:7). When we abide in him we are abiding in the word. He said that his works were a "witness" about him (John 5:36; 10:25). In other words, in his working he was the Word.

c. In Revelation (by the same author as the Gospel), John describes Jesus's glorious return:

Rev.19:13 *He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God*

d. Jesus is called *The Word of God*, as he returns to earth. Two verses later John says, *"From his mouth comes a sharp sword"* (Rev.19:15). In other words, Jesus strikes the nations in the power of the word of God that he speaks — the sword of the Spirit. But the power of this word is so united with Jesus himself that John says that he doesn't just have a sword of God's word coming out of his mouth, but he *is* the Word of God.

e. So as John begins his Gospel, he has in view all the revelation, all the truth, all the witness, all the glory, all the light, all the words that come out of Jesus in his living and teaching and dying and rising, and he sums up all that revelation of God with the name: he is "the Word" — the first, final, ultimate, decisive, absolutely true and reliable Word.

f. The meaning is the same as in Hebrews 1. The Son of God incarnate is God's climactic and decisive Word to the world.

Heb.1:1–2*: Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,* ***2*** *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.*

g. John wants to tell us four things about Jesus Christ in these opening verses of his gospel:

i the time of his existence

ii the essence of his identity

iii his relationship to God

iv his relationship to the world.

4. The time of his existence

a. The words "in the beginning" are identical in Greek to the first two words in the Greek Old Testament: *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* That's not an accident, because the first thing John is telling us about what Jesus did is that he created the universe. That's what he says in verse 3. So the words *"in the beginning"* mean before there was any created matter, there was the Word, the Son of God.

b. John begins his Gospel by locating Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, in relation to time, namely, before time. Jude exults in this truth with his great doxology:

Jude 1:25 ….*to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen.*

c. Paul says in 2 Timothy that God gave us grace in Christ Jesus *"before the ages began."* So before there was any time or any matter, there was the Word, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2 Tim.1:9 *who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.*

5. The essence of his identity

a. One of the marks of this Gospel is that the weightiest truths are often delivered in the simplest words. This could not get simpler — and it could not get weightier. The Word, who became flesh and dwelt among us, Jesus Christ, **was and is God**.

b. Let us be clear; we worship Jesus Christ as God. We fall down with Thomas before Jesus in John 20:28 and confess with joy and wonder, "My Lord and my God!" When we hear the Jewish leaders say in John 10:33, *"It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God,"* we cry out, "No, this is not blasphemy. This is who he is, our Saviour, our Lord, our God."

c. This means that as we look at Jesus in John's gospel we are getting to know God. If we want to know God then we need to know Jesus. The invitation of John's gospel is to come and meet God as we meet Jesus.

6. His relationship to God

a. *The Word was with God, and the Word was God* is the heart of the great historic doctrine of the Trinity. The Word, Jesus Christ was with God, and he was God. He is God, and he has a relationship with God. He is God, and he is the image of God, perfectly reflecting all that God is and standing forth from all eternity as the fullness of deity in a distinct Person.

b. There is one divine essence and three persons. Two of them are mentioned here. The Father and the Son. We learn those names later on in the book. The Holy Spirit will be introduced later.

c. Since we see in a mirror dimly and we know only in partial ways (1 Corinthians 13:9, 12), we should not be surprised that this remains to us a mystery. However, that does not mean we discard this truth. If Jesus Christ is not God, he could not accomplish our salvation. and his

glory would not be sufficient to satisfy our everlasting longing for new discoveries of beauty. If we throw away the deity of Jesus Christ, we throw away our soul and with it all our joy in the age to come.

Heb.2:14–15 *Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, [15] and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*

7. His relationship to the world

John 1:2–3 *He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

a. The Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, taught us, healed us, rebuked us, protected us, loved us, and died for us *created* the universe. Remember to retain the mystery of the Trinity from verse 1. Don't leave it as soon as you get to verse 3. All things were made through him.

b. Yes, another was acting *through* the Word. God was. But the Word *is* God. Therefore, we mustn't diminish the majesty of the work of Christ as Creator. He was the Father's agent, or *Word*, in the creation of all things. But in doing it, he was God. God, the Word, created the world. Our Saviour, our Lord, our Friend — Jesus is our Maker.

8. Jesus was not made

a. This is such a central pillar to our faith – Jesus is God and was in existence before anything was made. Muslims or a Jehovah's Witness would say he was created but this is the ancient heresy of Arianism from the fourth century. This belief sees Jesus as the first of creation, the highest of the angels or, as the Arians said it, "There was when he was not." John has written verse 3 precisely in a way that makes that impossible.

b. He did not just say, "All things were made <u>through</u> him." You might think that is enough to settle it. He is not a creature; he created creatures. But someone could conceivably say, "Yes, but 'all things' does not include himself." It includes everything but himself. So he was created by the Father, but then with the Father created all other things.

c. But John did not leave it at that. He said, in addition (the last part of verse 3), "and without him was not any thing made *that was made*." This makes it explicit and emphatic and crystal clear that *anything* in the category of *made*, Christ made it. Therefore, Christ was not made. Because before you exist, you can't bring yourself into being. Christ was not made. That is what it means to be God. And the Word was God.

9. Begotten Son of God

John 3:16-21 *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. [17] For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.[18] "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. [19] And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. [20] For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. [21] But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."*

a. At the core of the Christian faith is this eternal truth. To believe in Christ is to believe in his pre-creation existence as the only begotten Son of God.

b. False teachers have latched onto this phrase to try to prove their false teaching that Jesus Christ isn't God; i.e., that Jesus isn't equal in essence to God as the Second Person of the Trinity. They see the word "begotten" and say that Jesus is a created being because only someone who had a beginning in time can be "begotten."

c. What this fails to note is that "begotten" is an English translation of a Greek word *monogenes*. As such, we have to look at the original meaning of the Greek word, not transfer English meanings into the text. So what does *monogenes* mean?

d. According to the Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, *monogenes* has two primary definitions. The first definition is "pertaining to being the only one of its kind within a specific relationship." This is its meaning in Hebrews 11:17 when the writer refers to Isaac as Abraham's "only begotten son" (KJV). Abraham had more than one son, but Isaac was the only son he had by Sarah and the only son of the covenant. Therefore, it is the uniqueness of Isaac among the other sons that allows for the use of *monogenes* in that context.

e. The second definition is "pertaining to being the only one of its kind or class, unique in kind." This is the meaning that is implied in John 3:16 (see also John 1:14, 18; 3:18; 1 John 4:9). John was primarily concerned with demonstrating that Jesus is the Son of God (John 20:31), and he uses *monogenes* to highlight Jesus as uniquely God's Son—sharing the same divine nature as God—as opposed to believers who are God's sons and daughters by adoption (Ephesians 1:5) made in his image. Jesus is God's "one and only" Son.

f. The bottom line is that terms such as "Father" and "Son," descriptive of God and Jesus, are human terms that help us understand the relationship between the different persons of the Trinity. If you can understand the relationship between a human father and a human son, then you can understand, in part, the relationship between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity. The analogy breaks down if you try to take it too far and teach, as some pseudo-Christian cults (such as the Jehovah's Witnesses), that Jesus was literally "begotten" as in "produced" or "created" by God the Father.

g. The Nicene Creed is the sole ecumenical creed as it is accepted as authoritative by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and major Protestant churches. It was adopted in its current form by the Christian fathers of the Ecumenical Councils, the First Council in Nicea (325 AD), and the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (381 AD).

h. The phrase "begotten, not made" comes from the second sentence of the Creed in which the God-man Jesus Christ is defined for faithful and theological understanding, saying: *"And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light, true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made."*

i. Jesus is called the Only-begotten because He alone is begotten of the essence of God the Father, unlike the other children of God (men and angels), whose essence differs from that of the Father. Begotten of the Father before all ages, emphasises that the Son is begotten of the Father's essence before the beginning of time, which came into being along with the world. The universe may not yet have even existed, but the Son is eternally begotten of the Father.

j. To further emphasize the authenticity of Christ's divinity, the Creed states that He is begotten, not made, of one (and the same) essence with the Father. Unlike all other beings, Christ is not a creation, but the offspring of the Father's essence.

10. Conclusion

a. So why does the fact that Jesus was begotten not made matter? What difference does it make to our view of God? Primarily, I think, it emphasises for us the importance of relationship. Our God is a relational God. Before the beginning of time the Godhead were in a relationship of love.

b. God didn't create us because he needed people to relate to and to love. He created us so we could share in the love that was already existent in the Godhead. To be brought into the relationship between the Father and the Son. Jesus makes this clear in his prayer towards the end of John's gospel.

John 17:20-23 *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,* ***21*** *that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.* ***22*** *The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,* ***23*** *I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me*

c. Our faith in Christ Jesus is evidenced by our inclusion into the eternal love between the Father and the Son. As adopted sons we enter into a pre-existent family where love is most perfectly expressed. As we grow in our relationship in this family so the beauty and power that brought the world into creation is released through us into a needy and broken world.

11. The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Amen