

## John 1:1-18

I don't know how you feel when you come to a portion of Scripture like this one! To me, it's quite fantastic, it's out of the ordinary, it lifts us from where we are to where God wants us to be. And that's the whole reason for Christmas - it's a story of redeeming love and astonishing grace.

These verses are breathtakingly beautiful, they shine the spotlight on Jesus as God. They are so profound for they help us see Jesus in a new light: we see him as he is; and we focus on him, as he was! We see him in time, then we take a moment to look back, and see him in eternity!

Here's a man whose influence has spanned the generations, embracing every continent; here's a man who has impacted the course of history from day one. Even today's date is based on the calculation of the date of his birth!

That's what led Time magazine to conclude that 'Jesus is the single most powerful figure in all human history.' That's where Jesus stands head and shoulders above the rest of us, that's what makes Jesus truly unique.

When we come to these verses in John 1, the big question is, Who is Jesus? We'll find out in a few minutes because John's biography of Jesus is compelling reading. We read it from cover to cover and there's only one storyline, that's Jesus! In his prologue, or intro, John leaves us in no doubt that Jesus is God!

There are two great truths that emerge in verses 1-18. Number one, Jesus is bigger than I think he is; number two, Jesus is greater than I think he is! How do I know that?

See what John says in verses 1 and 2: 'in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.'

You've probably noticed, there's a strange similarity to what John says and what we read in Genesis 1:1, 'in the beginning God'. The first steps we take in John's gospel lead us through a time tunnel that transports us to eternity past. In a sense, we step back in time and, when we get so far back, we step out of time!

John takes us back to the vastness of eternity before there was anything at all. And he takes us back to Genesis 1, where God began to reveal himself to all mankind.

In other words, in eternity, before man, before creation, before time itself, there existed the everlasting triune God. With a few carefully chosen words, John makes it clear that Jesus was not *from* the beginning, but that *in* the beginning, he was already there. He is eternal!

That's hard for us to understand; the fact is, we don't have to understand it, we simply accept it, and get on with it! There's no way a finite mind like ours can comprehend an infinite God.

We read the prayer of Moses in Psalm 90 where he affirms this timeless truth: 'Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.'

Remember this, there never was a time when Jesus did not exist, and there never will be a time when he does not exist. Put it like this, Jesus is not a has-been, but he's someone who always 'has been'.

Three times in the first verse, John refers to Jesus as the Word. The Greek word is 'logos'. The fact is, words communicate, we use them every day to get our message across. And that's precisely what Jesus did! Like a capstone to the pyramid of prophets that preceded him, Jesus was the final spokesman for God, we have echoes of that truth in Hebrews 1:1-2.

From A to Z, Jesus is the divine alphabet spelling out God in such a way that even the youngest among us could grasp the wonder of his nature and his attributes. That's why John spoke of him in Revelation 1:8 as the Alpha and the Omega! John says he was with God, face to face, in eternity past. Yet, in some mysterious way, this Word was not only with God, he was God. When we take a look at Jesus, we need to appreciate that Jesus was not simply the revealer of God, but God himself revealed.

Jesus is the living expression of all that is on God's mind and God's heart, but he's even more:

he is all that God is. In a sense, Jesus makes God visible to you and me!

So, Jesus is God, and Jesus was with God: both are equal, both are eternal; that's what we've learned so far. The next couple of verses introduce two more great truths: number one, Jesus Christ himself was not created, and number two, all things are created by him.

The one we're talking about here is an eternal Christ; yes, he was there at the onset of time, he's been around from day one, he was actively engaged on creation's morn, but he was present throughout the aeons of eternity before that! The old hymn is right when it says, *thou art the everlasting Word*.

John moves up a gear when he informs us in verse 3 that he is a Christ who is active. In fact, John makes it absolutely clear that he is the agent of creation. He is the great creator for 'through him all things were made [and] without him nothing was made that has been made.' Paul picks up on this idea when he writes in Colossians 1:16-17 that Jesus is not only the creator of the universe, but its sustainer as well!

You see, he not only started the ball rolling, he's the one who keeps it going! The bold truth is, he can do all of this because he is God! And let's not forget, if he can run a global show, then surely it's not too much bother for him to look after your life and mine as well! Ah, this God is a God who is bigger and greater than we think he is!

So far we've discovered that Jesus is the source

of life and the sustainer of life; well, here in verses 4 and 5, he is the significance of life. John says, 'in him was life, and that life was the light of men.' In other words, his life is our light. Jesus is our purpose, and meaning, and reason for living. Life is empty without him. He makes a difference! Your life and mine sparkles and shines when Jesus lives within us.

Without him, we're living and walking in darkness. Without him, this world is clothed and enveloped in inky blackness. I think you can see where John is coming from; he wants to show us the miraculous change that comes about when Jesus enters the fray.

Yes, the light is revealed in the person and coming of Jesus, but sadly, according to verse 5b, that same light is rejected. Men and women in today's world are no different to people in the first century. When the light shone brightly at the advent of the Lord Jesus, it met with stiff resistance. People, by and large, didn't want Jesus intruding into their lives, they wanted little or nothing to do with him.

And two millennia down the road, it's no different! The man in the street couldn't care less about Jesus as the light of the world, he's content to live his life in the twilight zone!

I think it's wonderful to realise that Jesus can light up your life no matter how dark it may be. Where there is chaos, he can bring order; where there is emptiness, he can bring fulness; where there is darkness, he can bring light; and the

darkness, no matter how deep it is, it can't overpower it! The light dispels the darkness. You see, the light not only reveals the darkness, it reigns over it!

One night when Robert Louis Stevenson was a small boy, his nanny called him to come to bed. Oblivious to her summons, he was in a world of his own for he was staring at something outside his nursery window. The nanny walked over, stood at his shoulder, and inquired patiently, 'Robert, tell me, what are you looking at?'

The little boy, without taking his eyes away from the window, exclaimed in wonder as he pointed to the lamplighter who was lighting the street lamps, 'Look, nanny! That man is putting holes in the darkness.'

You and I may not be able to change the world, but we can punch a hole in the dark! That's what Christians have been doing for decades, they have switched on the light in the midst of blackest darkness.

One outstanding torchbearer is the man that John talks about in verses 6-8, it's John the Baptist! This fella was the first cousin of Jesus, he served as a one man advance party. He was the last of the fiery Old Testament prophets whose assignment was to prepare the way of the Lord. John the Baptist overcame the darkness of religious intolerance and public apathy and secular pluralism of his day by boldly proclaiming the truth of God's word and applying it to the lives of people around him. The fact is, if we want

to overcome the darkness of our day, we must do the same!

The message for the twenty-first century is crystal clear, there is one light, there is only one light.

That means, there isn't a light for America and a light for Africa and a light for China and a light for Europe and a light for India. No! There is one light for the entire world, for all time, for every person, and his name is Jesus.

That's why John bore testimony to the light.

That's why you and I share our faith, that's why we present the gospel, that's why we refuse to be intimidated and silenced by a post-modern, multicultural, pluralistic world. You see, when all is said and done, Jesus is the light of the world!

I always shudder when I read verses 10 and 11 in John 1; they remind me of the opening lines of a great old gospel hymn: *'our Lord is now rejected, and by the world disowned, by the many still neglected, and by the few enthroned.'*

The plain fact is, even though Jesus offers himself to everyone without exception, his light is shunned by many. Men and women down the ages have spurned his generous love and tender mercy, they have given him the cold shoulder, they have consistently adopted a dig-your-heels in attitude when it comes to saying yes to Jesus. Millions have said a loud 'no' to Jesus!

The reality is, that scenario is true for people around the world, it's equally true for his own people, the Jews. John tells us in verse 11, 'he came to that which was his own, but his own did

not receive him.'

The contrast is patently obvious when we read John's measured response in verse 12. Sure, there were so many who refused to cast their vote for Jesus, but those that did, their lives are richer, their hope is brighter, their future is guaranteed, their status is elevated to one where they can rightly be called the 'children of God'.

That's what Jesus does, he turns our lives inside out, he does in us and for us what no-one else is able to do. It happens in an instant, but it lasts for a lifetime. It all hinges on that moment when we receive him and believe in his name. That's what it means to be born again, that's what a real Christian is, it's all about a vibrant personal relationship with Jesus.

John spells it out very clearly in verse 13 that there's only one way to get to know Jesus Christ. We need to realise it has nothing to do with 'natural descent'. Entrance into God's family is not something we inherit, it's not automatic. Just because my parents are believers, that doesn't make me a Christian. You can't pass it on from generation to generation! The simple truth is, **God has children, but he has no grandchildren!**

John strengthens his argument when he says it's not 'of human decision or a husband's will'. In other words, it's not just a case of me signing a decision card at the end of an evangelistic service, there's more to becoming a Christian than that! And, no-one else can do it for me, you can't become a Christian by proxy, my partner

can't come to Jesus for me, I have to come to Christ by myself!

The final phrase in verse 13 reminds us that a Christian is an individual who is 'born of God'. I come to Jesus in my sin, he cleanses me, he makes me anew, he brings me into his family, he gives me life in place of death, he takes me from the realm of darkness and he puts me into the circle of his love and light. You know, I can't think of a better place to be!

The challenge is, have you made up your mind to follow the light? There is no middle ground, you don't have the luxury of side-stepping the issue. I would encourage you to come to him right now; if you do, it's a decision you'll not regret!

So far, John has been reminding us that Jesus is God, he is the creator and sustainer of the world, he is eternal, he is light, he is life, he is the revelation of God to mankind.

But, right here in verse 14, there's a sea change, for here we see him as the God Man. Jesus is God walking on planet earth in a human body. It's what the theologians call 'the incarnation.' It's the moment in time when Jesus pitched his tent in this world. When we look at Jesus in verses 14-18, he is God personified. The focus is very much on the glory of God and the grace of God. The glory of God speaks of his matchless character and unique radiance. It tells me of one who is unrivalled, he has no equal in this world. He is incomparable. God's glory was evident at different times to different people in different

situations in the old testament era, but that was surpassed when God came down to earth at the birth of Jesus; one look at Jesus and you saw the living God.

The great news is, according to verse 16, 'from the fulness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.' We don't deserve it, we can't earn it, we can't bargain for it, we can't buy it, we just open our hearts and hands to receive it. It is one blessing after another blessing after another blessing: it doesn't ever stop, they just keep on coming!

That's what motivates us to serve Jesus! We don't do what we do because of a list of do's and don'ts, we do it because of the outpouring of his love and blessing into our hearts. I want to do my best for Jesus; we want to live our lives to please God because, in Jesus, we have grace and truth.

Truth to live by and grace to help us do it!

You see, the law didn't make us feel better, it made us feel a lot worse; the law didn't help us to be good, it revealed how bad we were; the law didn't give us joy or peace, it sent us on a guilt trip; the law didn't help us measure up, it showed us we fall short!

That's where Jesus made the difference – when he came into the world, he gave us a reason for living and he gives us the resources for living! We have grace! Amazing grace, sufficient grace – grace to live life to the full, and when we come to the end of the road, grace to help us die well!

