

John 1 (The Prologue)

6th December 2009 (pm)

“In the beginning...” (v1)

Matthew begins his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus. Matthew is wanting to show the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah so he includes the genealogy to show that Jesus is from the royal line of David. Matthew then goes on to tell us about the birth of Jesus and the visit the visit from the Magi.

Luke similarly tells us about the birth of Jesus but Luke seems to go into a lot more detail about the people. Luke is like the reporter who gets under the skin of the story and we find out about certain individuals, their experiences and even their feelings. Luke is an on the ground reporter and seems interested in the common people. It is Luke that tells us about the shepherds being visited by angels.

Mark’s gospel begins a little later. He misses out Jesus’ birth and goes straight to John the Baptist and almost immediately into Jesus’ baptism.

John however, takes us back much further. John takes us back to the very beginning. There are echoes of Genesis 1 here. When we compare the two it seems that John is very deliberately trying to show that Jesus Christ and God the creator are one and the same person.

Genesis 1 begins with the words:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)

John 1 begins:

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning.

³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”
(John 1:1-3)

John is introducing us to someone who is more than a man. Not just a baby in a manger, but God, the one who created the entire universe. The one who was there at the beginning of time, even before the beginning of time. He is the alpha, the beginning. There was nothing before him. “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” Often at this time of year we focus on the picture of the baby Jesus lying in a manger, vulnerable and helpless, sometimes portrayed as cute and cuddly. All of that is fine, Jesus was a baby in a manger, he was vulnerable and helpless, we’ll get there in a minute but John wants to say something important to us first. He wants to say that this Jesus is so much more. He is eternal, he is beyond anything that we are or ever could be. John says:

¹⁵John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" (John 1:15)

John says that through him all things were created. When we compare that to Genesis we see clearly that that also includes us. He created us, we are his creation. John says:

He came to that which was his own... (John 1:11)

We know from Genesis that we were created to be in a relationship with God. God intended us to be close to him. In Genesis we see Adam and Eve walking in the garden with God, talking freely with God. The picture of God's perfect world.

But it didn't stay that way for very long. Sin entered into the world and the relationship between God and people gradually began to erode. We only have to go as far as Chapter 3 of Genesis to see how quickly this relationship erodes. Human beings have become so far removed from everything that God wanted them to be that God decides to destroy it all and start again.

But even after this, the world quickly becomes a sinful place again. It seems that no matter what God does, human beings have an inherent desire to turn away from God into sin. So this deterioration of our relationship with God continues and John tells us that even though the world was made by Jesus, the world didn't recognise him.

¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

(John 1:10-11)

We have become so far removed from God that even when he is among us in the flesh, we don't recognise who he is. The eyes of the world are blind. Either that or they have them tightly shut. Either way, the world is in darkness. Spiritually dead.

But there is hope:

⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

(John 1:4-5)

Light makes things clear that were hidden in darkness. In the light we see things as they are. The world often appears to be unaware of their need for a saviour. We get so used to the world being the way it is that we are blind to how grotty it has become.

It's a bit like the child who is playing hide and seek and decides to hide in the cupboard under the stairs. It's dark in there when they are hiding and they feel it is a good hiding place. They are quite happy to sit in there for as long as it takes to be found. But when the light is turned on in the cupboard, they realise that it is full of cobwebs and suddenly the child feels uncomfortable and wants to get out.

When we see in the light, we realise that the world isn't as attractive as we may have thought it was. And we become aware of our need for a saviour. But there is also more that Jesus reveals to us.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only [Son], who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only [Son], who is himself God and ^[b] is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

John tells us here that the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Already we have seen that the Word was God and now John tells us that God (the Word) made his dwelling among us. It's this word Emmanuel (God with us). And what's so significant about that? Well John says in verse 18; "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only [Son], who is himself God and ^[b] is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Jesus the Son reveals the Father to us.

Jesus said to his disciples:

⁷If you really knew me, you would know ^[b] my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

⁸Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

⁹Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

(John 14:6-9)

So Jesus came to open our eyes, to reveal the father to us and most importantly to restore our relationship with him. That's what God wanted for us in the first place and he was so desperate to restore our relationship with him that he gave up the riches of heaven and came to live as one of us. He was prepared to come as a vulnerable, helpless baby born in a manger. And ultimately, he was also prepared to pay the ultimate price for us.

¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Isn't this incredible what John is saying? Sometimes we get so used to it that we lose the wonder of it. Though we are way off track and our relationship with God lies in tatters, through this child in the manger, we can become children of God. God who made everything that has been made, the world, the stars and planets, the sun and moon, the universe. This God who is so big, whose arms reach out to the ends of the universe, also has his arms out in love for each one of us. Even though as a human race we have messed up and messed up and messed up again. God loves the people he has made so much that he is willing to forgive, even at his own great cost. Because he loves us and he wants nothing more than to reconcile the relationship between us and him.

Of course, it's your choice. Some people still choose not to receive the offer of God's love. As one writer put it; "Some people change their ways when they see the light, others only when they feel the heat."

But to those who do respond and receive him, we have the right to become children of God. Born again in him.

I guess that most of us in this room have received Jesus and therefore we can call ourselves children of God. And not only does God call us his children but also his co-workers. To work with him to invite others back into the family. You see, just as we are "his own", others are "his own" too. He also created them and he wants them in the family too.

Jesus said:

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

(Revelation 3:20)

We can't make people respond, but we can be witnesses, just as John was. We can tell our story of the things God has done in our life. How we have come to realise who God is.

If we go down a few verses from our passage this evening we see that John tells his story to the Pharisees of how he came to realise who Jesus is:

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

³² Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."

(John 1:29-34)

John tells that testimony with such humbleness and grace doesn't he? "I myself did not know him..." but then John tells of how he came to realise that Jesus is God's Chosen One, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

We all have a story to tell and it is the most effective form of evangelism, to tell someone what God has done in your life. Do it with the grace that John had. He was honest enough to admit that he didn't recognise Jesus once. Be gracious to those who don't yet recognise Jesus, and be gracious to those whose understanding perhaps isn't as well formed as yours. We all grow as Christians at various speeds.

And most importantly, give the glory to God. John never soaked up the glory for himself, even though he could have done quite easily. But he always pointed to Jesus, he always reflected the glory to him. Let us do the same.