

John 1-1-2 Introducing Jesus!

Announcements:

Super encouraged by crossroads ministry (around 60 people, including helpers, on Wed night)...

Preamble:

This morning we begin our sermon series in the gospel of John.

John has been called “God’s love letter to the world.”

Speaking of the gospel of John, Luther wrote, “This is the unique, tender, genuine chief Gospel... Should a tyrant succeed in destroying the Holy Scriptures and only a single copy of the Epistle to the Romans and the Gospel according to John escape him, Christianity would be saved.” (Quoted by Boice)

The apostle John, who spent three years with Jesus, tells us very specifically why he wrote this gospel...

John 20:30–31 (ESV) — **30** 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.

We all need to experience more life in Jesus’ name. Let’s pray to that end...

Prayer for illumination:

Please join me in prayer...

Sermon introduction:

Who is Jesus?

Mormons teach that Jesus was a man who became one of many gods. Furthermore, he is a polygamist and a half-brother of Lucifer.

Islam teaches that Jesus was a great prophet, inferior to Muhammad, yet not divine.

Prince Phillip said that “Jesus might be described as and underprivileged, working-class victim of political and religious persecution.” (Driscoll, 15)

Fidel Castro said, “I never saw a contradiction between the ideas that sustain me and the ideas of that symbol, of that extraordinary figure [Jesus Christ].” (Driscoll, 15)

“...philologist John Allegro argues that . . . Jesus was no more than the code-word for an ancient sex-cult inspired by a hallucinogenic mushroom.” (John Blanchard)

Not too long ago, Madonna, Ashton Kutcher, Ben Affleck, Brad Pitt, and Pamela Anderson wore shirts that proudly said, “Jesus is my homeboy.” (Driscoll, 12)

Who is Jesus? A great moral teacher, a great prophet, mortal human, your homeboy, or someone else entirely????

What we believe about Jesus is absolutely critical, since it determines your eternal destiny.

So who exactly is Jesus? This brings us to John chapter 1. In the first two verses of John's gospel, we learn about three aspects of Jesus identity.

So, who is Jesus???

First, Jesus is eternal!

John 1:1 (ESV) — 1 In the beginning was the Word, . . .

In the beginning, in the beginning of what? In the beginning of time. How do we know that John is talking about the beginning of time?

For a few reasons...

The opening statement of John 1 is nearly identical in syntax and grammar to the opening statement of Genesis 1. In Genesis 1:1 we read, "**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth** (i.e., the universe)." (Gen 1:1)

Furthermore, the word "was" in John 1:1 is in the imperfect tense, meaning "was continuing." If the Word was continuing in the beginning, we can safely imply that the Word existed before the beginning.

In addition, the term "beginning" (ἀρχή) can also mean "origin" in the sense of a basic cause, or the beginning of history, or the root of the universe. (ZECNT)

Finally, the eternity of Jesus is taught in other parts of the Bible.

Colossians 1:17 (ESV) — 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

See also Heb. 1:1-2, 10; John 8:58; Rev. 1:8,17, Phil. 2:6.

But who is the Word who is eternal??? Jesus.

John 1:14 (ESV) — 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.

In the beginning, before God created all things (including time, space, and matter), Jesus existed!!!

Why does all this matter?

Illustration:

A fierce battle over the nature of Christ erupted in Alexandria Egypt in the 4th century A.D. Lines were drawn in the sand and violence erupted on the streets, literally.

Who started this theological brawl? A man named Arius!

Arius was born around 260 AD.¹

Christian History Magazine, notes that he was “a man of tall stature, an austere countenance, and an ascetic life. He had charming manners and went about from house to house, with his sleeveless tunic and scanty cloak, popular especially among women.”²

He promoted his false teaching with music. During a fierce debate over the nature of Christ at the council of Nicaea he burst into song! (Mark Noll)

One of his songs went like this-

“Arius of Alexandria, I’m the talk of the town,
friend of saints, elect of heaven, filled with learning renown;
if you want the Logos- doctrine, I can serve it steaming hot;
God begat him and before he was begotten he was not.”

(Calhoun’s church history lecture)

Arius had great respect for Jesus Christ. He taught that Christ was a powerful being, but nonetheless he was a created being. His rallying cry was, “There was a time when Jesus was not”. If Jesus was a created being than he was not equal with God the Father. If he was not equal with God the Father, he was not fully God, if he was not fully God, he was not valuable enough to atone for the sins of the world on the cross.

Furthermore, if there was a time when Jesus Christ (the son of God) did not exist, then there was a time when the father was not the father, which destroys the very essence of God’s divine nature. God the father’s fatherliness is at the very heart of his nature.

Fortunately, God raised up a hero to fight the heresy of Arius. His name was Athanasius. He was told, “Athanasius, the whole world is against you.” He replied, “Then I will be against the whole world.” As a result, he was given the nickname Athanasius contra mundum. He had to run for his life five times in his battle for orthodoxy.

Why was he so valiant for the truth? Why did he risk his life five times? Because what one thinks about Jesus Christ really matters!!! Heaven, and hell, and the very nature of God are at stake.

So, is John saying that Jesus Christ is God??? This brings us the second point.

Jesus is eternal! In addition...

Second, Jesus is divine!

In 2020, Ligonier ministries published the results of a massive survey on what American’s believe about Christian doctrine.

52% of Americans polled think that Jesus was a great teacher, but not God.

30% of self-identified evangelicals think that Jesus was a great teacher, but not God. To be clear, this means that 1/3 of American Evangelicals don’t believe that Jesus was fully God!!!

55% of Americans believe that Jesus was the first and greatest of all created beings.

On one hand, this should not surprise us.

Dan Brown's book the Davinci Code was a runaway best seller a few years ago. It sold 80 million copies. Although the work was fiction, the author had an agenda. The book strongly implied that the early church did not believe in the deity of Jesus Christ. Brown goes on to argue that Christ was not considered divine until the counsel of Nicaea in the fourth century.

Bart Ehrman, the notorious and prolific professor of religion at UNC Chapel Hill, argues the same thing.

Several years ago, I was having a conversation with a co-worker at State Farm Insurance about Jesus. She said, "I was raised in a church. I believe in God, but I'm not convinced that Jesus was God."

Sometimes the variety of opinions about Jesus cause us to wonder, is the NT unclear about the deity of Jesus Christ? Nothing could be further from the truth.

John 1:1–2 (ESV) — 1 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.

We learn in verses 1 that Jesus is eternal, which is an attribute of deity.

We also learn in verse 1 that Jesus is the Word. The word "Word" is the Greek word Logos. By using the word Logos John was probably making a dual reference to God's powerful creative word in Genesis 1 and the unifying principle of Greek philosophy that brings harmony to life.

John would not have to say anything else to prove that Jesus is God. But he keeps going...

To prove beyond all reasonable doubt that Jesus is God, John says at the end of verse 1 that the Word (i.e., Jesus) was God.

This is one of the clearest statements of Jesus deity in the NT.

Even though we don't need other texts to prove that Jesus was God, let me read a few more.

John 20:27–28 (ESV) — 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." **28** Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Romans 9:5 (ESV) — 5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

Titus 2:13 (ESV) — 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

Hebrews 1:8 (ESV) — 8 But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.

2 Peter 1:1 (ESV) — 1 Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

See also 1 John 5:20; John 8:58

Illustration:

When I was in my first year of seminary, I thought I was kind of a big deal in the world of theology. It turns out that every first-year student thinks they are a big deal. I was confident in my abilities to destroy the arguments of all the opponents of the Christian faith. One day, I was getting my hair cut not too far from the seminary. I tried to tactfully bring up the gospel. When you are getting your hair cut, you have a captive audience. What is the barber going to do, stop cutting your hair, and tell you to leave? Probably not!

Anyways. As I tried to engage my barber in gospel conversation, I quickly found out that she was a Jehovah's witness, but not just any JW, but a well-trained Jehovah's witness. Very quickly I realized that I was in over my theological head. Then I realized that I was not a big deal in the world of apologetics and theology.

Jehovah's witnesses love to talk about John 1:1. They claim that John 1:1 says, "the Word was a God" not the "Word was God." In other words, Jesus was not equal with the Father, the one true God. He was created by God as an inferior being, which is exactly what the heretic Arius taught in the 4th century.

Why do they insist on this? Because the Greek word for God, (theos) is not preceded by a definite article. Therefore, they argue, it is best translated as "a God" rather than "God."

How should we respond?

Greek and English do not use definite articles the same way. According to Colwell's rule of Greek Grammar (a very well-established rule), the lack of an article does not always imply indefiniteness ("a God"). Sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't. How do we know whether it does or does not? Context.

We could say a lot more about Greek grammar, but you will probably forget most of it within 30 seconds.

But that is ok, because the rest of the Bible makes it very clear that Jesus is fully God. Furthermore, there is not even the slightest hint anywhere else in the Bible of the existence of a lesser, created God.

Application:

If he is God, he must be worshipped.

If he is God, he must be obeyed.

If he is God, he must be trusted.

If he is God, when he judges the world, he will judge the world with perfect justice.

If he is God, his death on the cross is able to forgive you, transform you, and place you in relationship with the triune God...

Jesus is God. Maybe you are thinking, I thought God the father was God??? And doesn't the Bible teach that there is only one God?

This brings us to the last point...

Jesus is eternal.

Jesus is divine.

Third, Jesus is with God!

What does this imply? A few things...

Since Jesus is with God, we confess the trinity!

John 1:1–2 (ESV) — 1 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.

In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God. These words have massive implications for how we think about God.

These words teach that the Word (Jesus, or God the Son) is distinct from God the father, and he enjoys a personal relationship with God the father (v. 2).

Since Jesus was with God the father in the beginning, Jesus and God the father are both divine. Theologians say that the two are coeternal and consubstantial.

John 1:1 is a crucial text for forming the Christian Doctrine of the trinity. The doctrine of the trinity teaches that God is one being who exists eternally as three persons: Father, Son, and holy Spirit.

Each person is fully God, each person is distinct, yet there is one God.

God does not exist as three modes.

God does not exist as three gods.

God does not exist as one God in one person.

The Bible teaches that there is one God in three persons. We are trinitarian monotheists. Each word counts.

John 1:1 is brilliant. John's words perfectly preserve Jesus separate and distinct identity, while affirming his eternality, and his equality with God. It is hard to think of a better way to craft John 1:1.

One scholar writes,

“The simple sentence of verse 1 is the most compact and pulsating theological statement in all of Scripture. Jesus was always existing from all eternity as God, in perfect fellowship with God the Father and (though not mentioned) the Holy Spirit. He is the cosmic Christ.” (PTW)

Application:

David, this all seems so esoteric. Why get all worked up about the doctrine of the trinity?

Because Christianity is inescapably trinitarian. Said another way, the trinity is at the heart and soul of the Christian faith.

The Bible is a message from the father, about the son, understood in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We are elected by the father, redeemed by the son, and sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1).

We pray to the father, through the son, by the power of the holy Spirit.

Salvation is from the wrath of the father, through the death of the son, and applied in the power of the holy Spirit.

We are adopted by the father, through the son, and this is confirmed in us by the holy spirit.

The trinity is not a complicated doctrine to be avoided, it is the heart and soul of Christianity.

So much more we could say about the trinity... Let me recommend Michael Reeves excellent little book “Delighting in the Trinity.”

Since Jesus is with God, we confess the trinity! But there is more...

Since Jesus is with God, we rejoice in the trinity!

John 1:1 (ESV) — 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.

The preposition “with” suggests a close personal relationship of intimacy. According to one scholar, it communicates the idea of nearness, along with a sense of movement toward God. According to another scholar, the word “with” indicates that “there has always existed the deepest equality and intimacy in the Holy Trinity.”

In other words, for all eternity the father and the son and the Holy Spirit, have been in a close loving relationship.

We see this clearly in other parts of John’s gospel.

John 17:24 (ESV) — 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

In John 16:14, we learn that the Spirit lives to glorify the son.

In John 17:4, we learn that the Son lives to glorify the father.

In John 17:5, we learn that the father seeks to glorify the son.

In John 17:5b, we learn that this has been happening for all eternity.

The inner life of the trinity is characterized by other centeredness and mutually giving love. No member of the trinity demands that the others serve or celebrate him, rather, they are all committed to serving and celebrating the other two.

One scholar writes,

“At the center of the universe, self-giving love is the dynamic currency of the trinitarian life of God. The persons within God exalt, commune with, and defer to one another... each divine person harbors the others at the center of his being. In constant movement of overture and acceptance each person envelops and circles the others.” (Plantinga, Quoted by Keller in RFG, 215)

C.S. Lewis writes,

“In Christianity God is not an impersonal thing nor a static thing—not even just one person—but a dynamic pulsating activity, a life, a kind of drama,... (The) pattern of this three-personal life is... the great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very center of reality.” (C. S. Lewis, quoted by Keller in RFG, 215)

When people say God is love, they usually mean that love is really important to God, or that God is really loving. But this does not go far enough. Love is the very essence of his divine nature. The trinity is proof of this reality.

Before anything existed, God dwelled in a perfect community of love. This means that God had no needs.

Ultimate reality is a community of persons who know and love each other.

The father is constantly loving, serving, and celebrating the son and the Spirit.
The Spirit is constantly loving, serving, and celebrating the Father and the Son.
The son is constantly loving, serving, and celebrating the Father and the Spirit.

Application:

Imagine being in a relationship where you and your beloved love each other with perfect, self-giving, sacrificial, and gentle love all the time. Sounds like heaven, doesn't it? That is because it is from heaven.

God created you to experience this type of love.

But our sin separates us from experiencing God's loving triune community.

Since God is love, he acted lovingly to bring you back into this community. What did he do? He sent his only son to earth to remove the guilt and stain of our sins so that we could experience relationship with the triune God.

When Jesus took on flesh, his divine nature remained part of the trinity, but his human nature experienced all the heartache and pain of living in a fallen world.

Why? To die in your place in order to bring you back to God.

We were not designed merely to find inspiration from God, or to believe certain things about God, or to be good moral people in the fear of God. No! We were designed to glorify God by finding our greatest joy, pleasure, and delight in relationship with the triune God.

We see this spelled out in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 13:14 (ESV) — 14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

What do we learn about Jesus from John 1:1-2?

Jesus is eternal.

Jesus is divine.

Jesus is with God.

Conclusion:

By every objective criteria Jesus of Nazareth is the most influential person to ever live!!!

Jesus currently has more followers than any other person in world history (2.3 billion).

Jesus continues to be the center piece of the world's yearly calendar. We live in the year 2021, which means that it is 2021 years after Christ's birth.

Jesus continues to shape our weekly calendar. Historically, the world takes Sunday off, because it is the day that Jesus rose from the dead.

Over 98 nations in world history have officially called themselves "Christian nations." No other person has directly influenced this many nations.

There have been more books, songs, and poems written about Jesus than any other person in world history.

Renowned Yale historian Jaroslav Pelikan wrote,

“Regardless of what anyone may personally think or believe about him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of Western culture for almost twenty centuries.” (Wellum, 25)

Why? Why is Jesus so incredibly influential?

Because he is no mere man. He is the eternal son of God, the second person in the trinity, equal with the father, and the Spirit. As a result, he is worthy of total devotion. Let’s pray...

Benediction- 2 Cor. 13:14

¹ The birth dates of many men in this article are uncertain. Scholars date Arius birth between 250 and 260 AD.

² *Christian History Magazine*, Issue 85, Winter 2005, “Saints and Heretics,” Elesha Coffman, pg 85