

## The Word Became Flesh The Divine Logos (John 1:1-5)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on November 29, 2015

### Introduction

- ❖ This morning I'm pleased to begin our new sermon series called "The Word Became Flesh", where we're going to walk through chapter one of John's Gospel. This is timed for the Advent season. Now I can't presume everyone here grew up going to church, so you may not be familiar with the Christian calendar and the observation of Advent. You're not alone.
- ❖ I remember walking by a toyshop one Christmas season and saw a sign saying their Advent calendars are now in stock. I was a bit surprised that a toyshop would be selling Advent calendars, so I had to take a look. Ten minutes later, I had covered the entire store and still couldn't find them. So I finally asked the young lady at the counter, and she brought me over to the Playmobil section and pointed to this stand that said *Advent calendars*. They certainly looked like calendars with the typical doors for each day of Advent to flip open, but they had themes like "Dragon's land", "Knight's castle", "Pirates", "Unicorn in Fairy World".
  - ▶ I was so confused. I was expecting Advent calendars. I was expecting manger scenes, wise men, shepherds, etc. At least throw in a Santa and reindeer. But I guess that's not to be expected anymore. So if the typical kid's understanding of Advent has to do with dragons, pirates and unicorns and if parents are buying this stuff, then I think it will do us good to remind ourselves what Advent is really about.
- ❖ **Advent is a celebration in the Christian calendar that spans the four Sundays prior to Christmas day.** The focus is on waiting, in particular waiting for the coming of the Christ. The word itself is derived from Latin, *adventus*, which means *the coming*. Advent focuses on the two comings of the Christ.
  - ▶ On one hand, we look back and celebrate the fact that the Christ has already come over 2000 years ago in space-time history. But Advent also point us forward as we wait for the return of the Christ – with the same sense of longing and hope as the ancient Hebrews who waited and trusted God to keep his promises to send the Messiah at the fullness of time.
- ❖ **So as we observe Advent, we want to focus on how past events that center on one man (one newborn child) shape the way we see and experience present day events, and how they direct our hope forward to the future.** Our present day is growing more and more chaotic. It's in a present time like this that we look to the past, to understand and deal with the present, by directing our hope to the future. That's what we hope to accomplish by studying John chapter 1. This morning I want to cover vv1-5.
- ❖ The way John begins his Gospel is markedly different from the other three. Instead of providing his readers with a genealogy or birth narrative, he gives us a heavy dose of theology. His goal was the same as the other Gospel writers – **to teach that Jesus is the true God who truly became a man for us and for our salvation; he became a son of man that we might become sons of God** – but instead of a manger scene, John stretches the story all the way back to eternity past. To the beginning. Before the heavens and earth. Before anything was, there was the Word. And the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

- ❖ His point is that the Incarnation (the Christmas story) is not just a beautiful story. It's the climax of the One Big Story that preexists all others. **It's about how God seeks to be with his people, to dwell with us, to make his presence felt. It starts in heaven in preexistent glory and culminates on earth in veiled glory, incarnate in the man Christ Jesus.**
  - ▶ I want to show you three things about Jesus in this text. 1) He's the reason of life, 2) he's the source of life, and 3) he's the author of life.

### Jesus the Reason of Life

- ❖ First, John introduces us to Jesus by identifying him as the very reason of life. He's not just the reason for the season. He is the Reason itself – for everything. The Greek word for *Word* in v1 is *logos*. Now that's an ancient term pregnant with meaning. It's lost on us modern readers. But for John's original audience of first-century Hellenistic Jews and Greeks, no one would've missed the connection.
  - ▶ *Logos* can mean a *word* or more appropriately a *message*. But it can also be translated as *reason* or *logic*. **And in the ancient world, Greek thinkers were known for debating the *logos* of life – the reason or logic of life.** What is life all about? What is the underlying rationale governing it and holding it all together?
    - Only until you discover the *logos* (reason) of life, can you achieve life's fullest potential. Only then can you make sense of it all – to see the logic behind it all. **These philosophers were tackling the biggest question of all: *What's it all for? What's the reason of life – for life?***
- ❖ There were different schools of thought. The **Epicureans** were the thinkers who concluded that there really is no *logos*. They didn't outright deny the pantheon of gods, but they were practical atheists. They saw the gods as far removed and uninvolved in life. So there's no rhyme or reason. There's no underlying logic to it all. So if there's no discernible *logos*, then all you're left with is a "just do it", feel-good philosophy of life. That's the essence of Epicureanism. Just eat, drink, be merry, and repeat until you die and rot away.
  - ▶ Then there was a rival school of thought, the **Stoics**. They were more pantheistic, meaning they saw God as an impersonal force in all things. To the Stoics, the *logos* is the animating principle behind life itself. Life was about a disciplined pursuit of this rational principle that governs and holds all things together.
- ❖ So while Epicureans are just enjoying themselves and trying not to think about the *logos* of life, Stoics were seeking it with the assumption that it boiled down to some sort of principle.
  - ▶ This is why John's first sentence is so earth-shattering. **He's making the bold claim that there is a discernible, perceivable *logos*.** You don't have to ignore the question and ignorantly chase after pleasure without purpose.
    - And at the same time, the purpose doesn't boil down to some philosophical principle. No, it's a person. **There's a person you have to know and once you do, you've got hold of the *Logos* of life!** He's the Reason governing and holding all things together.

- ❖ *Do you see how relevant this is to us all?* All of us, at some point, have been confronted with the existential question of life's ultimate purpose – the reason behind it all. **Many of us have never found a good answer. So to cope, we've ignored the question altogether.**
  - ▶ Like the Epicurean, we're living life, enjoying life. Pursuing our career, trying to find that special someone, raising our family, planning that next weekend or vacation. *But to what end? What reason? What logos?*
    - The nagging question creeps up on us every so often, but we've gotten good at shoving it back down the subconscious. But you know as well as I do, that it'll keep crawling back up and drive you crazy. You can't ignore it forever.
  
- ❖ **Leo Tolstoy** is famous for giving us masterpieces like *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, but even with the fame and accomplishments, he sank into a deep depression and a profound spiritual crisis. He writes of it in his autobiography, *A Confession*. In the book, Tolstoy keeps coming back to the inevitability of death and how all of life screams for a reason.
  - ▶ *“My question ... was the simplest of questions, lying in the soul of every man from the foolish child to the wisest elder: it was a question without an answer to which one cannot live, as I had found by experience. It was: “What will come of what I am doing today or shall do tomorrow? What will come of my whole life?” Differently expressed, the question is: “Why should I live, why wish for anything, or do anything?” It can also be expressed thus: “Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?””*<sup>1</sup>
    - And he bemoans that fact that suppressing the question doesn't work. *“Had I simply understood that life had no meaning I could have borne it quietly, knowing that that was my lot. But I could not satisfy myself with that. Had I been like a man living in a wood from which he knows there is no exit, I could have lived; but I was like one lost in a wood who, horrified at having lost his way, rushes about wishing to find the road. He knows that each step he takes confuses him more and more, but still he cannot help rushing about. It was indeed terrible. And to rid myself of the terror I wished to kill myself.”*<sup>2</sup>
  
- ❖ Tolstoy is saying that no matter how hard we try to convince ourselves that life doesn't have to have a *logos* or at least I don't need the answer, that I can enjoy life without it – in the end, we know that's a lie. **We instinctively come up with little *logoi* for every season of life, little reasons for why we should even get up in the morning.**
  - ▶ Students are living for that next degree, that next program. Professionals are living for that next promotion or pay raise. Parents are living for their kids. **But if we don't have a grip on the *Logos* (the Big Reason) to live, then one day – if we're as honest as Tolstoy – we'll realize that we are that man lost in the woods rushing about in horror not knowing where to turn.**

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession and Other Religious Writings* (Penguin Books), 34-35.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

- ❖ Now some of us believe we've found the answer. **We've identified the *logos* as a set of principles or values to live by.** If I'm disciplined and live according to these principles, then I'm a good person. I'm living a good life.
  - ▶ But that sounds a lot like Stoicism. For many, that's what their Christianity boils down to. **Being a Christian is about living a certain way, according to a set of principles found in the Bible.** So you claim the *Logos* to be God or Christ, but the god you're actually following is an impersonal set of principles. And your hope is in your own ability to abide by them. So my Christianity is about loving God and my neighbor as myself. Doing to others what I want them to do to me. Forgiving my debtors and loving my enemies. That's my *logos*, my reason to live.
- ❖ But John says, "*No, in the beginning was the Logos . . . . And the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us.*" **The *Logos* is not a bunch principles. He's a person.** A person to be known and trusted. He's the reason to live, the only good reason to get up in the morning.
  - ▶ So do you know him? **Do you have a relationship with the *Logos* of life?** Jesus is what you've been searching for all your life. He's the Reason you always knew was out there. He's the Road that's going to lead you out of those lost woods and back into your Father's arms.
    - Friend, the Road lies before you. But *you* have to take it. Today could be the day some of you take that first step.

### Jesus the Source of Life

- ❖ So John is implying that Jesus is this *Logos* that the Gentiles were always debating. John's choice of words is no coincidence. He's making a rhetorical point by speaking the language of the Greeks. But in the end, John is a Hebrew steeped in the OT, so his understanding of the *Logos* is still more influenced by the OT "*word of God*" that is frequently referenced and attributed with power, especially creative power (Ps 33:6; 107:20; 147:15,18; Isa 55:10-11).
  - ▶ So for John, the Word is not only the reason of life but the very source of life itself. In the beginning, in Genesis 1, God speaks a word and creation happens (Gen. 1:3). He doesn't use any tools to create life. He just speaks. **His Word (*Logos*) is what gives life and existence to all things.** Because in the *Logos* is life and existence itself.
    - Look in v4, "*In him [the Logos] was life*". Jesus has life in himself. No one gave him life. He wasn't created. He exists by himself. Jesus is self-existing.
- ❖ That's an amazing claim. **John assigned to Jesus an attribute that the Jews reserved for God alone. Self-existence is one of the classic incommunicable attributes of God.** We had a whole sermon series on them. The old theological term for this is aseity. The word in Latin means '*from the self*'. What aseity says is that God has life in himself. Nothing in all of creation has aseity. Only the Creator himself.
  - ▶ **So to claim that Jesus has life in himself is nothing short of claiming divinity.** Historically some have tried to argue that John was only suggesting that the Word was a god or that he was godlike.

- ❖ But that holds no water when you read "*the Word was God*" and take into consideration the staggering claims around it. John says he's pre-existent (*In the beginning was the Word*). He's self-existent (*In him was life*). Those are biblical ways of describing God and God alone.
  - ▶ So the Word *is* God. **But he's also understood to be *with* God. That implies the Word itself doesn't comprise the entire Godhead. God is multi-personal.** This hints at the triune nature of God. I'm talking about the Trinity, the belief that our one God eternally exists as a community of three. One God ever lives as three persons Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
  
- ❖ **For all of eternity, the three persons of the Godhead have enjoyed perfect love and perfect communion.** Look in v18, and you see the Son described as being at the side (in the bosom) of the Father. Just think of the intimacy implied there. *How many people in your life are welcomed to just lie down against your chest?* For me, it's just my wife and daughter. Very select company. So what's implied in v18 is a deep intimacy shared within the Trinity.
  - ▶ Their fellowship is infinitely sweeter than any fellowship we can offer God in a relationship with him. The glory each person of the Trinity reciprocates to the other is infinitely greater than the glory we give God even in the highest form of praise.
    - **Bottom line, God is perfectly satisfied in his triune self.** He is completely self-existent, which implies that he's completely self-sufficient. The fact is he doesn't need you. He doesn't need me.
  
- ❖ *But then why did God create us in the first place?* I can see why some would assume God must've been needy of something. Did he want company? Did he need an audience? Otherwise why go through all the trouble? *Why would an utterly self-existing, self-sufficient God create us?* **Because of love.** But if love is the answer, then it still sounds as if God was needy. As if he was lonely and looking for love.
  - ▶ This is where the theologian Daniel Fuller has helped me so much. He makes an important distinction between what he calls **need-love** versus **benevolent-love**. He says need-love is the kind of love that is given with the aim to fill an emptiness within you by means of the object of your love. It's love that says, "*I love you and I need you to love me back. I need you to complete me, to make me whole, to keep me happy.*"
    - But benevolent-love is different. It's the kind of love that is motivated – not by an emptiness in you – but a fullness. It's love that says, "*I'm full. I'm content. I'm happy, so I just want you to be happy. I'm not loving you because I need you to fill me. I'm just loving you because.*" That's benevolent-love.
  
- ❖ **Fuller's point is that God, in creating us, wasn't motivated by a need for something he doesn't have but out of a delight to invite us to share in what he already possesses.** He says, "*The moment we understand that all of God's need-love was met in being a Trinity, then we see that he is free to act toward us, his creation, solely in terms of the freedom of a benevolent love.*"<sup>3</sup>

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Daniel Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible*, 134.

- ❖ Then he gives this good illustration. **He says if God created you out of need-love, it would be like receiving his invitation to a banquet only to discover you're the main course.** If God were a singular person, perhaps he did create you to fill a need in him, to satisfy him.
  - ▶ **But if God is three persons in one, living in perfect fellowship, then he invites you out of pure benevolent-love.** He seats you at his head table. He spreads a banquet before you so you might enjoy the feast with him.
  
- ❖ That's our Triune God. **Because he's the very source of life, because he has life in himself, because he's self-satisfied in his triune-existence, God is the most loving being imaginable.** You've never met anyone like Jesus. You've never been loved by anyone like Jesus. Every person in your life – your closest friend, your spouse, your dear mother – they all love you out of some need. Even if it's harmless, the fact is they're trying to fill some emptiness inside – with you. Don't be offended. We do the same. This is just the human condition in a fallen Genesis 3 world.
  - ▶ **We all have an emptiness inside, and we typically look to others to fill it.** That's why we can get so upset with friends when they fail to meet our expectations. That's why we get so exasperated with those we love the most, and why we find it so hard to forgive when they betray our trust.
    - **But that also explains why Jesus is so slow to anger and so quick to forgive when we fail him or betray him.** It's because of his aseity. His triune-existence – the perfect love he shares with the Father and the Spirit – frees him to love you with pure benevolence.
  
- ❖ Do you know this kind of love? Have you experienced pure benevolent love, love that comes from a place of fullness, that spills over from a heart completely satisfied? **Only the love of Jesus can fill your emptiness, can satisfy you, and free you to love as he loves – with pure benevolence.**
  - ▶ But to receive his love, to be filled by his love, you first have to acknowledge your emptiness. And then come to Jesus seeking to be satisfied, trusting him to be the *Logos* – the very Reason you exist. And from his fullness, you'll receive grace upon grace (1:16).

### **Jesus the Author of Life**

- ❖ This is the Jesus who is the reason of life, the source of life. And lastly, he is the author of life – of my life, of your life. Look at v3, “*All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*” Just as in Genesis, where any thing made was made by God's spoken word, here in John's Prologue, **God's Word – understood to be a distinct person within the Godhead – is the creative agent behind all things** (cf. Col 1:16-17).
  - ▶ Jesus is the Author of life. And we are his creation, the characters in his story. This is such an important category distinction to make. **I think we tend to think about God like we'd imagine an ant would think about us.** To an ant, humans are godlike. We can crush them on a whim. We're like gods to them. But then again, we're not. We're made of the same stuff of the earth. We can crush an ant, but we can't create an ant.

- ❖ **The more accurate biblical image is to see the difference between God and us as the difference between Shakespeare and any one of his characters.** Shakespeare and Macbeth differ not in degree but in nature. One solely created the other.
  - ▶ Now if you think about it, Macbeth has no idea Shakespeare exists. Macbeth has no relationship with his Author. There's no way. It's impossible. **Unless of course, Shakespeare were to ever write himself into the story.**
  
- ❖ But don't you see? That's what Christmas is all about! **The Incarnation was the Author's way of writing himself into his own story.** The Word became flesh. He dwelt among us. Jesus makes the unseen God seeable, the unknown God knowable (1:18).
  - ▶ Jesus is not the kind of author who remains distant and removed. No, in love he comes close and makes himself known, seeking a relationship with his creation. But when he came to his own, his own did not receive him (1:11).
    - **As the author of life, he has authority over life.** The author always has final authority. He gets to decide how his characters ought to live, how his story ought to unfold.
  
- ❖ But in this story, we've gone astray. We've rejected the *Logos* of life and sought for new reasons to live apart from God. We've rejected the Source of life and sought to satisfy ourselves with that which is not God. And we've rejected the Author of life. **We've spurned his authorship and authority and we've tried to write our own story as we want to tell it.**
  - ▶ Jesus has every right to close the book on us. **But instead, in love and mercy, he writes himself into the story and pens his own death.** He could've written himself as a mighty warrior or a regal king with power at his disposal. But instead he gave himself the role of a humble servant who lays down his life for others – the role of a lamb who's sacrificed to take away the sin of the world (1:29).
  
- ❖ Friends, there is no other God. No other God who loves you with such pure benevolence. **If you're not a Christian, if you have yet to receive this love, just know that the invitation is open.** Ask him into your life. Let the Reason of life be your reason to get up tomorrow morning. Let the Source of life satisfy that emptiness inside that yearns to be filled. Let the Author of life tell your story far better than you ever could.
  - ▶ **And for those of you who are Christians, let this season be to you a reminder.** A time to remember what Jesus has done for you in the past, how that shapes your present, and how he gives you hope for the future.
    - **Brothers and sisters, remember that our Author has already finished the book.** He's written the ending, and he's given us a preview: He comes back. And he brings all of heaven in tow. His kingdom will finally and fully come. His will will be completely and perfectly done. On earth as it is in heaven. So as we begin this season of Advent, let's wait for his coming with patience and confidence. Come, Lord Jesus, come.