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The Symphony Begins (John 1:1-9)

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Text

SLIDE – John 1:1-9

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

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

Introduction: John’s Symphony Begins

SLIDE – Sermon

1) When I read the first few verses of John chapter 1, I hear music.

Not just any music mind you: I hear the first few, faint notes of what will become an overwhelming and exhausting thing of beauty.

A work so towering that, although in some sense I get it, I know I'm only seeing the snowy tip of a majestic mountain peak jutting up above the clouds.

SLIDE – Mountain Clouds

Most of it remains hidden from my sight – it's fully accessible yet utterly incomprehensible.

- 2) And, while I can't quite grasp it, I know this: *It moves me deeply.*

It makes me want to dance, and it makes me want to tremble.

Both Augustine and Chrysostom said, in their own unique way, that it is “beyond the power of man to [even] speak as John does in his prologue.”¹

- 3) In these first verses John plumbs the depths of the mysteries of eternity itself and God Himself!

The Word is *with* God and *very* God!

The Word is nothing less than the Creator of all that has been created!

He is the Light that shines in the darkness, who the darkness could neither conquer or understand!

SLIDE – Music

- 4) O, when I read these verses, I hear music! The most *joyful* music!

Specifically, I hear the first faint, tense notes of Beethoven's greatest masterpiece: *The Ninth Symphony*.

¹ Fredrikson, R. L., & Ogilvie, L. J. *John*, in the *Preacher's Commentary Series*, Vol. 27 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1985) pp. 25–26.

I hear notes that can barely contain themselves, that can hardly hold themselves back.

I hear notes that will soon explode into a bombastic declaration of majestic power.

VIDEO – Beethoven’s Ninth

SLIDE – Unpacking the Text

Get Ready Church because we’re going to consider some lofty things together this morning!

The first 18 verses of John 1 make up the prologue to the Gospel. So, let’s begin unpacking the first nine verses this morning.

Unpacking the Text

SLIDE – John 1:1-2

1) **John 1:1-2:** “In the beginning was the Word [answers, ‘WHEN was the Word?’], and the Word was with God [answers, ‘WHERE was the Word?’], and the Word was God [answers, ‘WHO was the Word?’]. ² He was in the beginning with God.

a) The first thing that comes to mind is, ‘Who has the audacity to write like this? To presume to know what was before anything was?’

Only someone who has heard these things from God Himself!

This speaks to the inspiration of these Scriptures!

b) So, let’s begin with the beginning.

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, John writes. Not in THE beginning, but “in beginning.”

The word “the” is not there.

There are lots of different beginnings in the Bible:

In the beginning of creation God “created the heavens and the earth” in **Genesis 1:1**.

Jesus spoke of the “beginning of the world” in **Matthew 24 12**.

Mark speaks of the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in **Mark 1:1**.

John will speak of what he calls the “beginning of the signs of Jesus [or miracles]” in **John 2:11**.

And Jesus, in a hauntingly profound passage, speaks of the “beginning of sorrows” (KJV) that will come upon the world in the end times (**Mark 13:8**).

Oh, there are lots of different beginnings in the Bible! But this, this is different!

This is a beginning that is not a beginning.

It’s not a point in time.

It’s a beginning that’s before every beginning.

It’s a beginning that’s before the creating of “all things” that John will tell us Jesus created in **John 1:3**.

In the early 1900s, philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote in a notebook: “The solution to the riddle of life in time and space lies outside of time and space” – and indeed it does!²

² Bruner, Frederick Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Willian B. Eerdman’s Publishing, 2012) p.13.

This Person whom John calls “the Word” is not *from* this beginning; He is *in* this beginning.

In other words, before every imaginable beginning, before anything had its start, the Word is there.

The word “was” here in the Greek (ἦν) is an *imperfect* active indicative.

The imperfect tense indicates continuing action.

So, I would translate this, “In beginning was continuing the Word, and the Word was continuing with God, and the Word was continually God.”³

c) Who is this Person that John calls “the Word”?

The language can seem a little bit mysterious, so let’s solve the mystery right off the bat.

SLIDE – John 1:14

John tells us who the Word is in verse **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.”

Who is “the Word”? The “Word” is Jesus!

The great Bible teacher Arthur Pink put it this way:

“In this book we are shown that the One who was heralded by the angels to the Bethlehem shepherds, who walked this earth for thirty-three years, who was crucified at Calvary, who rose in triumph from the grave, and who forty days later departed from these scenes, was none other than the Lord of glory.”

³ Cf., Hughes, R. K. *John: That You May Believe* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999) p. 16.

This eternal Person that calls the “Word” is none other than Jesus, and Jesus is none other than God.

SLIDE –Matthew 1:23

Remember too that **Matthew 1:23** declares Jesus to be “Emmanuel” – “God with us.”

SLIDE – The Word

2) Now this word translated “Word” (ὁ λόγος) is a very common word!

It occurs in many other places in the New Testament – well over 300 times – so, the question is, why does John choose to describe the eternal Son of God as the “Word”?

Well, what is *a word*?

If I have an idea in my head and I want to share it with you, I have to somehow express it.

Words are the way we express our ideas.

Furthermore, if I have a good vocabulary – a ‘mastery of words’ – I will be able to *articulate* my ideas clearly.

Through words I make my ideas accessible to others – even if they’re difficult, sophisticated ideas.

Well, Jesus is called the “Word” because He alone has explained God to us, articulated God to us, expressed who God is to us.

SLIDE – John 1:18

To that end, let's anticipate a verse we'll study next week, **1:18**: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

NASB: "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

Jesus is the "Word" because He has articulated for us who God is; He has explained Him, declared Him, Made Him known to us.

3) And how could Jesus do that so effectively?

SLIDE – John 1:1-2

Well, verse 1 tells us.

"The word was God." (The Greek says, "God was the Word.")

Jesus could tell us all about God because He is, and always was, very God!

Not only is Jesus the 'Revealer' of God, but He always was, and still remains, none other than God Himself.

4) But notice the distinction that John makes in this important verse: the "Word" was God Himself, and yet the "Word" was "with God."

This verse perfectly balances one of the greatest truths about God: He is One God who exists in three individual, co-equal and co-eternal, Persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

John perfectly communicates this trinitarian mystery: The Word was *with* God – God's companion – always with the Father and the Holy Spirit – and yet the Word was at the same time God Himself.

So, summarizing these first two important verses ...

In the very beginning, before anything was created, God existed – one God existing in Three Divine Persons: The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit.

The Son of God – who is called “the Word” here – was “with God” and was, at the same time, God Himself.

And He alone has articulated God, explained Him to us.

O, but that’s not all!

SLIDE – John 1:3

- 5) **John 1:3** (2nd ¶, vss. 3-5): “All things were made through him, and without him was not anything [*any single thing*] made that was made.”

All three members of the Trinity were involved in creation, but John emphasizes the creative work of the Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, the One who eventually “became flesh.”

So, John wants us to know that Jesus is not only eternally existing and God Himself, but He is also the Creator of all that has been created.

He shows us this to us by making a *positive* statement and a *negative* statement.

Everything that has ever been created was created through Him.

And we *know this!* God created the heavens and the earth through His WORD:

SLIDE – Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26

Genesis 1:3: And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light,” etc.

The WORD was spoken and the WORD brought the first creation into being, and the WORD is Jesus, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

John is not alone in the depiction of Jesus as the Creator and Revealer of God!

SLIDE – Colossians 1:15-17

Look at **Colossians 1:15-17**:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Are we starting to get a picture of a “bigger” Jesus?

And John’s not done!

SLIDE – John 1:4

6) **John 1:4**: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

Jesus is the author of *life* – every kind of life:

(1) Biological life (which He gives to every living thing);

SLIDE – Ephesians 2:1a

(2) Spiritual life (what we might call salvation – the act by which Jesus makes alive those who are dead in their sins – by which we are born-again); and

SLIDE – John 10:10b

- (3) Abundant life (a new way of living; the “newness” of resurrection life that is available to every born-again child of God, but which few ever lay hold of).

Light is a picture of life and the fruits of life; darkness is a picture of death and the fruits of death.

SLIDE – 1 John 5:12

Jesus is truly life, and, especially, *eternal* life!

That’s why John can say, “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12).

And it’s John who records Jesus saying, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10b).

SLIDE – John 1:5

- 7) **John 1:5:** “The light shines [*present* active indicative of φαίνω – “shines on!”] in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

Now, the word translated “overcome” (καταλαμβάνω) here is tricky.⁴

It can mean *to overcome*, in the sense of gaining a victory over something or someone.

But it can also mean *to understand* something, to “grasp” it.

⁴ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 3rd ed., pp. 519–520.

The ESV prefers the first meaning and translates it “the darkness has not *overcome* it.”

SLIDE – John 1:5, NASB95

The NASB and the KJV prefer the second meaning and so translate it “the darkness did not *comprehend* it.”

So, which of these is right? Well, they BOTH are!

SLIDE – John 1:5

John 1:5, ESV: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

And it never will! There is a day coming when there will be only light and no darkness; only day and no night.

SLIDE – Revelation 22:5

John tells us that in the New Jerusalem, “Night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”

The darkness has never overcome the Light and it never will!

SLIDE – John 1:5, NASB95

But you know what’s also true? “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not *comprehend* it.”

If there’s one thing that characterizes the darkness and those who live in darkness, it’s this: *they just don’t get it!*

SLIDE – 1 Corinthians 2:7-8

1 Corinthians 2:8 says, “None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

Mark it down, the world has never understood the Light and never will.

SLIDE – John 1:5

But this life that Jesus brings *is still shining* in the darkness – it has been since He came.

And although the enemies of God are everywhere, the light continues!

“The darkness has not overcome it,” nor will it ever.

SLIDE – Dogs

G.K. Chesterton once wrote that, when one looks back at church history, “at least five times” – you know the Arian heresy, then Voltaire’s enlightenment, then Darwinism, etc. – “the Faith” had, by all appearances, “gone to the dogs.” But, he writes, “in each of these five cases it was the dog that died.”⁵

SLIDE – 1 John 2:8b

Don’t be fooled! In the final reel, the light will still be shining and the darkness will be a memory!

⁵ Chesterton, G.K., *The Everlasting Man* (1925) in the final chapter: “The Five Deaths of the Faith”.

1 John 2:8b says it all: “The darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.”

SLIDE – John 1:6-8

- 8) **John 1:6-8:** “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.”

These verses are speaking about John the Baptist, Jesus’ forerunner.

Let me just point out three quick things:

First, John tells us that the Baptist “was a man sent from God.”

SLIDE – Luke 7:28

Was he ever! Jesus said, “among those born of women there is no one greater than John [the Baptist]” (**Luke 7:28**).

SLIDE – John 1:7

Second, he came as a “witness” to the Light, to testify that Jesus was indeed the Light who had come into the world!

The Greek word translated “witness” here (**μαρτυρία**) is the word we get “martyr” from.

It refers to someone who is willing to die for the testimony they are bearing witness to.

And if you know John the Baptist's story you know that John certainly lived up to the meaning of the word!

SLIDE – John 1:8

Third, John the Baptist, as great as John was, was NOT the Light; he was its forerunner, preparing the world to receive it.

SLIDE – John 1:23

And he makes that point crystal clear!

When asked who he was, he simply said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’” (**John 1:23**).

He points away from himself and to Jesus – and in this *he becomes the model for every true teacher and minister of God's Word.*

SLIDE – Martin Luther

Martin Luther put it this way: “This is the criterion by which to judge true and false teachers. Pious, Christian teachers direct the people away from themselves and to Christ, as ... as John does here with his testimony.”⁶

SLIDE – John 1:9

9) **John 1:9**: “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.”

⁶ Luther, Martin, *Luther's Works*, “Sermons on the Gospel of John,” 22:60; cited in Bruner, p.19.

“Gives light” or “enlightens” is the present active indicative of φωτίζω – just like “shines on”.

This is a difficult passage that has given Bible scholars fits for two millennia because it could not be more explicit:

Every human being in the world KEEPS ON being enlightened by Jesus – even those who are spiritually dead!

Now, the fact that Jesus “gives light to everyone” does not mean that everyone will be saved!

SLIDE – John 8:24

Jesus made this crystal clear: “I told you that you would die in your sins,” He said, “for unless you believe that I am He you will die in your sins” (**John 8:24**).

SLIDE – John 1:9

So, what is this “light” that Jesus gives to *everyone*? It’s the *conscience*.

God made humankind in His own image and after His own likeness.

We are rational creatures; we have the ability to reason.

And we *all* have a conscience – believer and unbeliever alike – which allows us to know *instinctively* what is right and what is wrong.

That’s why even unbelievers struggle with things like lying or terminating a pregnancy or even cheating on a test.

We are fallen, but we are still *morally enlightened*.

And who gave us this enlightenment? Jesus – “The True Light ... gives light to everyone.”

In fact, in Romans, Paul tells us that even without the Law, our conscience alone is grounds enough to condemn us before a Holy God!

Digging Deeper

SLIDE – Digging Deeper

1) Now let's dig a bit deeper into this text.

In my introduction to this Gospel last week, I mentioned that I've never taught this book verse-by-verse because I've never felt like I've understood it well enough to do it justice, even though I've been reading it for more than 30 years – in fact, I barely do now.

Now, the basic meaning of most of John is fairly straight forward – much of it any way.

But there's a LOT happening beneath the surface here.

John is a carefully crafted book – intricately balancing theological truth and practical Christian teaching.

But it also contains important messages that are not immediately evident – and which are worthy of a lifetime of contemplation.

I want to talk about one of these this morning.

Now, I only have time to lay out the basics this morning, but it will be enough to make us aware of some of the deep things of this Gospel.

2) John likes to use symbolism to communicate important themes that we'd likely miss at first blush.

SLIDE – John 1:1

One is to introduce what has been called *New Creation Theology*.

Now, think with me for a few minutes here.

a) Which Bible verse comes to mind when you read **John 1:1**?

SLIDE – Genesis 1:1

Yes, exactly: **Genesis 1:1** – the record of God’s creation of the heavens and the earth.

How many days are recorded in that creative work? Seven – six days of active work and a day of rest, from which we get our week.

Because of this, seven has always been the biblical number of completion.

That why the book of the Revelation is full of sevens – seven seals, seven trumpets, seven letters to seven churches, etc.

Why? Because in the book of the Revelation *all things are coming to completion*.

Well, John has it’s share of sevens as well!

SLIDE – New Creation

b) John wants us to see the coming of Jesus as the bridge from the Old Creation to a New Creation.

The New Testament is full of this kind of “new” and “old” imagery:

i) There’s a New Jerusalem that replaces the Old Jerusalem.

ii) There’s a new man that replaces our old man.

- iii) There's a new birth to replace our old birth – in fact, only those who are “born again” are saved.

SLIDE – Matthew 19:28a

- iv) There is a “new world” that will replace the old – Jesus told His disciples, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne ...” (**Matthew 19:28a**).
- v) And there's a new life which replaces the old life – the Bible calls this resurrection life, or the “newness of life.”

SLIDE – Romans 6:4

Paul writes, “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (**Romans 6:4**).

Now, if you're familiar with my teaching, you know that this is a real passion of mine.

I think one of the great tragedies of our age is that so few believers ever walk in this “newness” in time.

SLIDE – 1 Timothy 6:12b

Paul wrote to Timothy and urged him to “lay hold of the eternal life” to which he was called right NOW (**1 Timothy 6:12b**).

I think we can do that too!

Well anyway, the New Testament is full of this kind of imagery and so is the Gospel of John.

John wants us to see that with the coming of Jesus everything has changed!

- c) So, John will carefully choose *seven* signs to study. We'll see them all in due time.

SLIDE – John 2:11a

The first of these signs is the miracle at the wedding at Cana and John identifies it as such: “This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory” (**John 2:11a**).

Seven signs.

SLIDE – John 20:30-31

And then, at the end of the book, he tells us why he wrote it: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 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” (**John 20:30-31**).

SLIDE – Seven Signs

In these signs, John is bringing us to a picture of a completely new life.

The seventh sign John chooses is the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

It is miraculous and jaw-dropping, but its *not* a new beginning.

It completes something, but it doesn't start something new.

Why? Because Lazarus was resuscitated from death, but he would eventually die again!

Death had not been conquered!

- d) Now the number *eight* is also an important biblical number – it is the number of new beginnings.

SLIDE – The 8th Day

A boy was circumcised on the eighth day.

Why? Because it was a new beginning – a *covenant* beginning.

Well, as it turns out there is an *eighth* sign in John’s Gospel: The so-called “sign of the prophet Jonah” – the raising of Jesus from the dead.

So, the resurrection of Jesus becomes a kind of “eighth” sign – the one that brings us from the “old” world to the “new,” from the “old” life to the “new,” from the “old” creation to the “new”!

SLIDE – John 1:1

There is a reason why John begins his Gospel with the words, “In the beginning was the Word.”

He wants to pull us back to the creation narrative so he can tell us about a *new* creation, one that has come with the resurrection of Jesus.⁷

Now, I’m just putting these things out there this morning; we’ll see them all in due time.

⁷ N. T. Wright, *Is there hope?*

But consider:

SLIDE – Genesis 2:1

- i) From the cross, Jesus cries out, “it is finished” (**John 19:30**).

Only John tells us this!

It seems to mirror **Genesis 2:1**: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” – speaking about the first creation.⁸

- ii) John emphasizes twice that the resurrection events occurred on “the first day of the week” – the beginning of the “new” week after the events of Holy Week – an “eighth day” (**John 20:1, 19**).⁹

SLIDE – Genesis 2:8

- iii) Where did God set the first man in the first creation? In a garden, “Eden the Garden of God” (**Genesis 2:8**).

SLIDE – Garden Tomb

Where does the resurrection of Jesus take place? Within a garden tomb (**John 19:41**).

Upon encountering the risen Jesus, Mary Magdalene initially thinks He’s “the gardener” (**John 20:15**).

SLIDE – John 20:22

⁸ N. T. Wright, *The Scriptures, the Cross and the Power of God: Reflections for Holy Week*.

⁹ Baylor University, *The Eight Day*.

iv) Jesus breathes on the disciples, saying “receive the Holy Spirit”
John 20:22.

SLIDE – Genesis 2:7

This mirrors God breathing into Adam’s nostrils in **Genesis 2:7**, which animated the old creation.¹⁰

The point should be obvious: there is a new creation that began with the resurrection of this Man who came from Heaven!

SLIDE – Discipleship Point

And that brings me to the discipleship point I’d like us to take home with us this morning.

The Discipleship Point

1) The Gospel of John is not just about finding eternal life for when we die; it’s about truly *living NOW*.

It’s about finding and fulfilling the purpose for which Jesus has called us out of the darkness.

2) And so, Paul pulls this whole “New Creation Theology” together in **2 Corinthians 5:18-19** and in that passage, he marries our “new life” to our true purpose for living.

SLIDE – 2 Corinthians 5:16b-17

¹⁰ Graham Staton et al "The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honour of James D.G. Dunn" 2004 p.71.

2 Corinthians 5:16b-17: “Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer [*we need a bigger picture of Him!*]. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

That’s the *theological* point: Jesus, the Creator (**1:3, 10**) has now Fathered a “new creation”.

But what’s the practical point? Well, Paul tells us as he finishes out his thought ...

SLIDE – 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

2 Corinthians 5:18-19: “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”

- 3) Until we come to terms with our purpose – until we take seriously message of reconciliation that God has entrusted to us, Jesus will always remain the same size to us.

But when we do embrace our purpose – God’s mission for us – Jesus continue to grow bigger and bigger to our eyes until we can barely contain him in our field of vision.

Do you remember the scene in C. S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia*, where Lucy approaches the Lion Aslan, who is a symbol of Christ?

SLIDE – Lucy & Aslan

As she approaches him, she gazes into his large, wise face.

“Welcome, child,” he says.

“Aslan,” she says, “you’re bigger.”

“That is because *you* are older, little one,” he answered.

“Not because you are?” she asked?

“I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.”

Indeed, that’s true. But it only happens when we grow.

Many Christians never do.

They’re content to be saved, and never experience the abundant life that is theirs in Christ.

SLIDE – Sermon

They never hear the symphony.

They never see more than the tip of the mountain jutting up above the clouds.

It is my prayer, and that of all the elders, that that would never be the case with any member of our Church family.

Now let’s take a moment to pause and then let’s kick this around for a few minutes.