

SERIES: Gospel of John: Seeing is Believing?  
 SERMON: *God With Us*  
 SCRIPTURE: John 1:1-18  
 SPEAKER: Pastor Josh Black  
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We know enough about icebergs to know that there is more than meets the eye; however, although we know there is more below the surface, it is difficult to believe because we are only able to see what is above the water.<sup>1</sup> If we were somehow able to see beneath the surface, and see the whole iceberg, we would not only believe; we would be amazed. Someone has created an image that helps us to get beneath the surface.



We will be studying the Gospel of John for the next eight months, until Easter. John's Gospel is an iceberg-type Gospel. John shows us the tip of the iceberg and he takes us beneath the surface to show us the depth of the person of Jesus. It is the most theological of all the Gospels, but is also the Gospel recommended most to new Christians or people who are not yet Christians. Some have said it is like an ocean; it is shallow enough for a child to wade in, but deep enough for an elephant to swim in. We'll try to celebrate the simplicity and the depth of this Gospel. But I will primarily be calling us to a deeper understanding of Jesus Christ throughout this series, and a deeper faith. Listen to John's purpose in writing his Gospel, from 20:31

<sup>31</sup>*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 not only wants us to see; he wants us to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. He actually uses the verb "believe" over 90 times compared to Matthew's 11 times, Mark's 12 times and Luke's 9 times.<sup>2</sup> John will show us over and over again that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and call us to believe in him. But what we will find is that seeing does not always mean believing. That is why I have titled this sermon series, "Seeing is Believing?" and put a question mark on the end of it. Many see the depths of Jesus in the book of John but fail to believe that he is the Savior, the Son of God. But John will remind us at every turn that without believing Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, we will not have eternal, abundant life.

Let's begin to look beneath the surface now. John's Gospel begins with a prologue or a preface in verses 1-18, our text for this morning. In 1:29 we will be introduced to Jesus in the narrative, but before we encounter him in the narrative, John wants us to see that there is more than meets the eye with this Jesus.

We will see three deep truths about Jesus in this passage.

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<sup>1</sup> Illustration taken from Mike Bullmore. "Veiled in Flesh."

<sup>2</sup> John Piper. *Future Grace*.

## 1. JESUS IS THE ETERNAL GOD. (vv. 1-5)

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**Jesus is eternal:** “*In the beginning...*” (v. 1a). Does this sound familiar? John is taking us all the way back to Genesis (Gen 1:1). Jesus was there in the beginning. He didn’t just show up in a manger in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century; he is eternal. But how is this possible?

**Jesus is God:** John tells us that Jesus is actually God. “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*” (v. 1). This is deep. John goes real deep real fast.

Those of you who know Jeremy Krause know he is like this. He goes real deep real fast. He doesn’t keep the conversation on the surface level for very long; he wants to get to the heart of the matter. John is doing the same here.

**The Trinity:** John begins his Gospel with a brief theology of the Trinity. No other Gospel writer does this; John is taking us beneath the surface. Jesus the Son is “*with God;*” that is he had an intimate relationship with God the Father in the beginning. And he also “*was God.*” He didn’t become a god as some heresies put forward (like Arians in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century and Jehovah’s Witnesses today); he *was God* in the beginning.

So, in summary, Jesus is eternal and Jesus is God. He is distinct from the Father, but he is nonetheless fully God. When we encounter Jesus next week in the narrative in verse 29 we need to remember there is more than meets the eye. Jesus is the eternal God.

**Jesus is Creator:** “*All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made*” (v. 3). Being the eternal God, Jesus is the creator of the universe. I remember the first time I was exposed to this deep truth. I had always thought that the world was created by the Father alone, but John 1 makes it clear that Jesus was involved in creation; in fact everything was created through Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

“*In him was life, and the life was the light of men*” (v. 4). In the creation account in Genesis we know that the first words of creation were “*let there be light*” (Gen 1:3), then later God breathed life into his creation (2:7). It was through Jesus, the eternal God, that light and life came to be.

Why is it important for us to know that Jesus is the eternal God who created everything? How do these deep, beneath-the-surface, truths touch our lives? Well to answer that question I need to first explain one other title this text gives Jesus.

**Jesus is the Word:** Jesus is the Word of God. The Greek word for “word” is *logos* and it is a loaded word. The audience John was writing to were Hellenistic Jews. What that means is they were Jews who lived in the Greek world. They were steeped in Greek culture and they were steeped in the Jewish Scriptures – the Old Testament. Both contexts had an understanding of *logos*. So when John says Jesus is the *logos* they would have understood what he was getting at.

**Greek Background:** To the Greeks the *logos* was an impersonal principle of Reason that holds the universe together.<sup>4</sup> John is taking this familiar term and turning it on its head. Jesus the

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<sup>3</sup> See also Colossians 1:16-17 and Hebrews 1:2-3

<sup>4</sup> Andreas Köstenberger. Gospel of John Notes, *ESV Study Bible*.

Word (or *logos*) isn't impersonal; he is by his very nature personal; he is in eternal relationship with the Father. Jesus the Word (or *logos*) isn't a principle of Reason that holds the universe together; he is a person who called the universe into being and sustains the universe by the word of his power (Heb. 1:3); he is also a creator who comes into his fallen creation to save it. This is a very different kind of *logos* than an impersonal principle.

**OT Background:** To the Jews the word *logos* had even deeper roots than it did to the Greeks. Keep in mind, God spoke creation into being by his Word. And since creation, God has made himself known to his people primarily by speaking. That speech is recorded in the Scriptures and is called the Word of God. So when John says Jesus is the Word, he is not only saying that Jesus is the eternal God and creator God; he is saying that Jesus reveals God to us; he is the self-disclosure of God; Jesus makes God known. Jesus lets us see beneath the surface into the depths of who God is.

This is a big deal. We must remember that we couldn't know anything about God if God didn't reveal himself to us. And it is only by God's self-disclosure in Jesus (the Word) that we can know God personally. God desires to be known and so he discloses himself to us. This in and of itself is amazing. But when you couple this with the fact that we don't deserve to know God, it is even more amazing.

**Darkness:** Look at verse 5. *"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."* The world began in darkness, but God through Jesus said, *"Let there be light"* (Gen 1:3) and then breathed life into his creation (Gen 2:7). But as you know it was not long after God created man that God's creation rebelled against their creator. Adam and Eve sinned against God and in so doing turned back into darkness and were given the curse of death. They were no longer able to live in the glorious presence of God; they were banished from his presence.

John uses the metaphor of darkness in two ways. Darkness represents an inability to see God and experience his glorious presence. But darkness also represents evil and sin which is the reason we fail to see God and experience his glorious presence.

But the darkness has not overcome the light. The same God who made light shine in darkness in creation can make light shine in darkness in recreation, for all those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. So while we live in darkness as a result of our sin, we do not have to remain in darkness because there is a light that shines in darkness.

How is this possible? Well that brings us to our second deep truth about Jesus.

## **2. JESUS IS THE INCARNATE GOD. (vv. 14-18)**

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*"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"* (v. 14).

The eternal God became a man; he took on flesh and blood. We call this the incarnation (from the Latin, "in flesh"). Jesus is the eternal God and Jesus became the incarnate God. Jesus is

fully God and fully man. God had revealed himself to his people before, but when Jesus became a man the whole ball game changed (cf. Heb 1:1-2).

One of the reasons I am eager to preach from the Gospel of John is the fact that John makes so many references to the Old Testament. I want us to see beneath the surface of the NT into the depths of the Old Testament. I want for us to grown in our understanding of the Old Testament and especially how the Old Testament points to Jesus Christ. We have already seen in John 1:3 how Jesus was present in Genesis 1-2 as the creator. Now, John 1:14 points back to the book of Exodus, where God made his presence known in the tabernacle and in a personal encounter with Moses.

**The tabernacle:** John 1:14 could be literally translated, “*And the Word became flesh and [tabernacled] among us...*” In Exodus, God commanded the Israelites to build a tabernacle – which became the great meeting place between God and his people. The tabernacle was essentially a tent. After the tabernacle was pitched, God’s presence descended and filled the tabernacle.

Exodus 40:34 says, “*Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.*” God’s glory was seen and he was present at the tabernacle. But when Jesus pitched his tent among us, when the Word became flesh, God’s glory was revealed in a whole new way. Jesus became the new meeting place between God and his people.

**A personal encounter:** John 1:14 says, “*...we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth.*” Remember earlier in the service when Jo read from Exodus 33 and 34 of Moses asking to see God’s glory? I am quite sure that John had these passages from Exodus in mind when he said that we have seen his glory, full of grace and truth. Let me explain.

In Exodus 34 the LORD passed in front of Moses and Moses saw God’s glory, but Moses didn’t actually see God. Instead God revealed his glory to Moses in words that describe his character. He said, “*The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...*” (Ex. 34:6). Or you could translate Exodus 34:6 a little differently. “*The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in [grace and truth].*”<sup>5</sup>

In Exodus, God’s glory is seen, as his character is described in words – the Lord is abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, but God himself is not seen. In John, God’s glory is also seen in *the Word*, Jesus Christ, full of (or abounding in) grace and truth. But now we actually see God, in the flesh. This is a deep truth.

God has always revealed himself to his people in Word, but when *the Word* became flesh and dwelt among us the whole ball game changed. And that is why in verse 16 John says, “*And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.*” Many take this verse to mean we have a multitude of blessings in Jesus Christ. While this is true, that is not what this verse is getting at. What John means is that in Jesus there is a new grace which surpasses the grace of the Old

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<sup>5</sup> Don Carson. Class Notes, ID 5000 Biblical Theology and Interpretation.

Testament. The new NIV translation of verse 16 helps us see the meaning of the verse. *“Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.”* God gave grace in the Old Testament through the Mosaic covenant. And God made his presence and glory known in the tabernacle. But God took things up a notch with the incarnation; he revealed his glory and grace most emphatically when Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us.

Verses 17-18 say it better than I can. *“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”*

Hopefully my explanation of these verses has helped you to see that when it comes to Jesus there is more than meets the eye; there is a lot beneath the surface. We have seen that Jesus is the eternal God and the incarnate God.

When I preach there are always two components to my sermon: 1) What the passage says and 2) How we should respond to the passage. Or in other words, 1) What is true and 2) What to do; 1) What and 2) So What? These first two deep truths have shown us what is true about Jesus; we have seen the “what.” Now it’s time for the “so what” as we look at our third deep truth.

### **3. ONLY THOSE WHO RECEIVE JESUS WILL HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. (vv. 9-13)**

*“The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him”* (vv. 9-11).

In order to understand exactly what these verses are saying we need to first understand what John means when he says “world” and what he means when he says “enlighten.”

**World:** When John uses the word “world” throughout his Gospel he’s rarely referring to it in a generic sense; he’s not talking about how big the world is. When he uses the word “world” most of the time he is using it in a negative sense.<sup>6</sup> The world is dark because of sin; the world is a bad place.

In fact that is what is so amazing about the love of God. John 3:16 is the most famous verse in the Bible and for a good reason, for it describes the amazing love of God. It says, *“For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son...”* The reason God’s love in Christ is so amazing is not because he loved a world that is so big; the reason God’s love is so amazing is that he loved a world that is so bad; God sent his only Son into this dark world as a light.<sup>7</sup> He loves us, oh how he loves us. How deep the Father’s love for us that he would send his only Son to make a wretch his treasure.

**Enlighten:** But when the text tells us that the true light *“enlightens everyone,”* it doesn’t mean that everyone in the world will be saved. It means the light shines upon everyone. God reveals himself to everyone. So, nobody is without excuse; we all have light, but not everyone believes. Or to put it another way, Jesus has made God known and everyone knows about God, but, as

<sup>6</sup> Don Carson. *The Gospel According to John*.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

verse 10 makes clear, not everyone knows God personally. In fact many people reject God as verse 11 says. *“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”*

To help illustrate what I’m saying I want to show you something, but before I show you I have to ask you to close your eyes. [Lights go down] Now open your eyes. Can you see what I have in my hand? Of course you can’t, because there is no light in here. [Lights come up] Ok, now for a second exercise. I want everyone to close their eyes again, but when I say open your eyes I only want this half of the worship center to open your eyes; the other half I need you to be obstinate and refuse to open your eyes even when I tell you to open them. Close your eyes. Open your eyes. Can you see the object now? Obviously those who have your eyes open can see the object. The rest of you can’t because you won’t open your eyes. Alright, everybody can open their eyes now.

For this side of the room, both times you couldn’t see because it was dark. But there are two reasons it was dark. The first was because the lights were turned off. The second was because you didn’t open your eyes. When John 1:9 says the *“true light enlightens everyone”* it means that Jesus has turned on the lights for everyone. But when it says that the world didn’t know him and that his own rejected him it is like those of you who kept your eyes closed and therefore couldn’t see.

**Sermon in a sentence:** Jesus shows God to everyone, but only those who receive him have eternal life.

Jesus has made it so everyone can see; but not everyone will see; “seeing” is not necessarily “believing”. But those who receive/believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, are like those who open their eyes when the lights are on; they have turned their eyes upon Jesus; the light shines in their darkness and they have life.

Look at verses 12-13. *“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”*

The early church fathers had a phrase that ties everything we’ve covered so far together quite well. It goes something like this: The Son of God became a man so that men might become sons of God (or children of God). It is almost unfathomable. The Son of God became a man so that men might become sons and daughters of God. To think that the Son of God who was in an eternal and intimate relationship with God the Father would enter into our darkness in real time and space, take on our flesh and blood so that he could restore us to an intimate and eternal relationship with himself is amazing! To think that God would want to have a relationship with us that is in keeping with the relationship he has with himself in the Trinity is amazing! This is deep truth. How should we respond to this deep truth?

The text tells us that we are to receive him and to believe in his name. You may be wondering how to receive him and believe in his name. Well in order to receive him we must trust him and

embrace him as our Savior and our Lord. And to believe in his name we must believe what *the Bible* says about Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

There are not many people who would contest that Jesus lived in the first century and that he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. This is the surface level, tip-of-the-iceberg stuff about Jesus. But the stuff about Jesus that is beneath the surface is a little more difficult. In order to become a child of God we must believe what John has been saying and will say about Jesus. Jesus is eternal, he is the Son of God, he is the creator, he was sent by the Father to save us from our sin, he was the Messiah, he reveals the glory of God to us, he became a man, he died on the cross for our sins, he rose from the dead, he ascended to the Father, he will come again to judge the world and take those who belong to him home. That is what it means to believe in his name. Do you believe?

For some of you this stuff beneath the surface is really hard to believe and if you are honest you are skeptical that what the Bible says about Jesus is true. If that is the case for you I encourage you to come and talk with me or send me an email. We're in the process of creating a space for people with serious questions about the Christian faith to come and dialogue. But, regardless of where you're at, I challenge all of us to go deeper.

It is my prayer that everyone here would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And the reason I'm praying that way is John tells us that those who believe in him and receive him are children of God. Those who believe in him and receive him are born again and the light of eternal life is turned on. Those who don't believe in him remain in darkness. I want you to believe because I want you to have eternal life and light.

Eternal life is an act of God and it is based solely on faith. It is not based on your family or your good works. That's why John reminds us that Jesus' own people – the people of Israel, the family of Abraham, and those who had the law –rejected him. Salvation is based on faith alone.

I pray that you would see Jesus and that in seeing him you would believe in him and have eternal life.

**Benediction:**

**2 Corinthians 13:14 (ESV)**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

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<sup>8</sup> Andreas Köstenberger. Gospel of John Notes, *ESV Study Bible*.

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