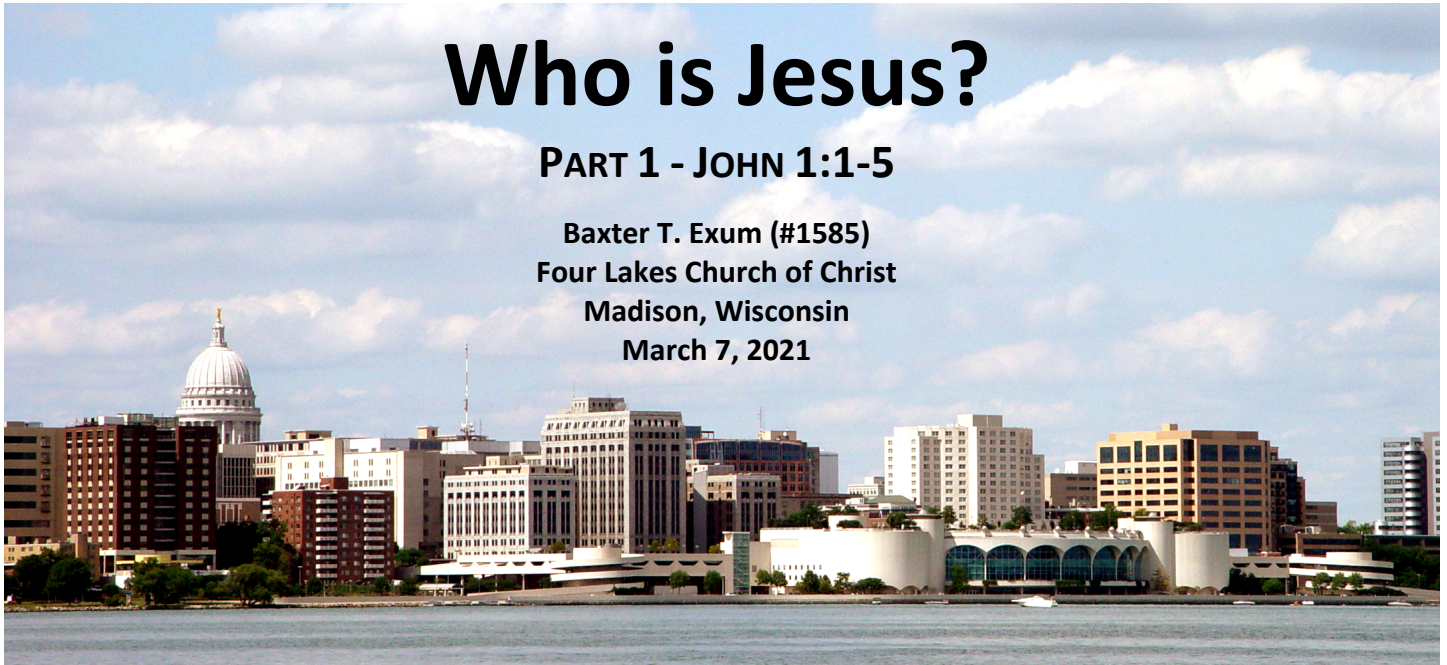


Who is Jesus?

PART 1 - JOHN 1:1-5

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Four Lakes Church of Christ
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*****COVID-19 SPLIT SERVICE*****

It is a great blessing to be together this morning! I hope all of you have the elements for the Lord's Supper (either from home or from the table in the back room), as John will be leading us in the prayers for the Supper right after our study this morning. And then, after the Lord's Supper, Clayton will be leading us in, "Send the Light" (#572).

Some of you might have noticed that we've had some improvements with the phone situation over the past week or so. We have a new number (on the front of today's bulletin) for those of you who join us on the phone each week. The quality seems to be much better, when you call during the week the call starts at the beginning of the lesson (instead of joining in the constant loop), we also now have the ability to hear a number of recent lessons (not just one), and this phone service will call you when we go live if you choose that option (instead of you always needing to call it). So, there have been some improvements, and we are thankful.

I'd also like to take just a moment to ask for sermon ideas again. Several of you have called or texted over the past week. Thank you so much! I need your help in deciding what to cover in sermon form this year. So, if you have any questions or suggestions, a favorite book, chapter, or verse, or an interesting character, I would love to hear from you.

As a reminder to all of us, and since we don't know whether somebody might be joining us online or in person for the first, last, or only time today, we want to start today by sharing the good news, the gospel. The bad news is: We've sinned and fallen short of God's glory; we are lost. The good news is: God sent his Son as a perfect substitute, a sacrifice. He died, was buried, and was raised up. And in response, we obey that good news by reenacting it in our own lives. We believe the message, we turn away from sin, we confess our belief that Jesus is the Son of God, and then we allow ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, for the forgiveness of sins. At that point, we are born into God's family, and the Christian life begins.

And once again, we have an example this week, this one coming to us (again) from Tyler Gilreath at the Gulf Shores Church of Christ in Alabama, as Misty and Dayla were baptized just a few days ago. We are thankful for honest hearts, we are thankful for those who share the good news, and we are thankful for the reminder that

in a dark world, Jesus still saves. If you have any questions, if you would like to study together, we hope you will get in touch.

Years ago, we used to carpool to the elementary school with some of the kids from our neighborhood. And on one of those trips with some of our Hindu neighbors, the little boy suddenly asked, “Who is this Jesus you talk about?” Neither of us remember what the original conversation was about, but both of us were impressed by the honest question that popped up in the back of the minivan. And it is a great question, “Who is this Jesus you talk about?” In fact, it is perhaps one of the most important questions any of us could ever ask. And it’s a question even Christians need to come back to on a regular basis. Who is Jesus?

The picture, by the way, is of the Split Rock Lighthouse and was taken a few weeks ago, on Lake Superior, about an hour north of Duluth. We’re just using it as a background today. But as to the question, some will suggest that Jesus was a great man. Some will suggest that he was a prophet. Others will suggest that Jesus was a moral man, a man who lived an upright life, helping the poor, and so on. But is there more to it than this? This is the most important question of all time: Who is Jesus? Literally everything hinges on the answer to this question.

To try to come to a better understanding of who Jesus really is, I would invite you to turn with me this morning to the book of John. The book of John is one of four accounts of Jesus’ life, but John is different than the others. Matthew, Mark, and Luke known as the “synoptic gospels,” with the word “synoptic” meaning, “to see together.” In other words, the first three gospel accounts are somewhat parallel. They work together through Lord’s life on this earth from beginning to end. John, though, was written a number of years after these books, and by the time John writes, those first three books had already been circulated for many years. John, then, doesn’t repeat those other stories, but John gives us a new perspective. Matthew and Mark were disciples, Luke was a second-generation disciple who gives a well-researched account, but John is one of the Lord’s closest friends. John was in the Lord’s inner circle, and so John, then, saw some things the others did not. John has had some time to think and reflect. And by the time he writes, very few are still alive who had actually seen the Lord face to face, and so John, then, boils it all down. Many years later, this is what is truly important.

Toward the end of the book, John, in fact, tells us why he writes. In John 20:30-31, John says that all of these things ***“...have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”*** The good news is all about Jesus, and John writes, 1.) so that we can have the information we need to believe, and 2.) so that we can have life in his name. And that’s why we are here this morning, to learn more about Jesus. We live in a messed-up, dark, and hopeless world. And we need Jesus. We need the reminder that Jesus is so much bigger than the world we see around us.

Today, then, let’s go back to the beginning of John’s account, to John 1:1-5, and let’s start answering the question: Who is Jesus? We hope to come back to this next week as well, but today we look at the opening verses of John 1, one of the most profound statements anywhere in Scripture, answering the question: Who is Jesus? Let’s look together at John 1:1-5, the words of John –

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. ³ All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵ The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

As we look at this passage, as we allow the word of God to work in our hearts, we answer the question: Who is Jesus?

- I. **And we start where John starts – he starts “in the beginning.” And yet, he really goes back before the beginning, doesn’t he, because Jesus is ETERNAL.**

“In the beginning was the Word.” The ***“Word”*** refers to Jesus (we’ll get to that in a moment). But notice: In this reference to the ***“beginning,”*** John refers to Jesus in the past tense. We have an awkward division of the text here, but it is crucial to understand what’s going on here. Way back at ***“the beginning,”*** Jesus already ***“was.”*** And this is where we start to notice (in the very first line) that John’s gospel account is different, isn’t it? Matthew starts with the genealogy, a list of names from Abraham down to Jesus. Mark starts with the ministry of John the Baptist. Luke starts with the conception and birth of both John the Baptist and Jesus. John, though, takes us all the way back to ***“the beginning”*** and beyond, because in the beginning, Jesus ***“was.”*** He was already there ***“in the beginning.”***

Verse 1 is clearly meant to be parallel to Genesis 1:1, ***“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”*** But instead of, ***“In the beginning, God,”*** we have, ***“In the beginning was the Word.”*** The ***“Word”*** and ***“God”*** are clearly parallel. Again, we will get back to that in just a moment as well. But ***“in the beginning,”*** Jesus was already there. He is eternal.

This agrees with what was spoken by the prophets. We think of Micah, who said (in Micah 5:2), ***“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.”*** The one who would be born in Bethlehem did not begin in Bethlehem! We think of what Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 9:6-7, when he said that the child to come would be called, ***“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”*** How can a newborn child be referred to as ***“Eternal Father”***? Well, he existed long before his birth, from eternity. ***“In the beginning,”*** he already ***“was.”*** Jesus affirmed this himself in a discussion to come later in John (in John 8:58), when he answered the Jewish leaders and said, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.”*** It’s the same description God gives to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3:14, where God refers to himself as ***“I AM,”*** the ***“Great I AM,”*** as we sometimes sing. Well, this is a title Jesus gives to himself in John 8, and the Jews understood exactly what he is saying there, because John tells us that they immediately pick up stones to stone him to death. They saw it a claim to Deity, which it was! The point is: Jesus existed long before his arrival. He is eternal, and we see this in the opening words of John 1.

- II. **Well, very closely intertwined with this, we also see Jesus described as the WORD.**

“In the beginning was the WORD.” Words, of course, are how we communicate. Words are how we express ourselves. A word is a sign or a representation of an idea. So, generally speaking, you can’t really know what I’m thinking until I put my thoughts into words and speak those words. And then, when I say a word, you start thinking my thoughts. If I say a word like “cow,” you might start thinking about a cow. And the more I describe it, the more words I use (a black and white cow, in a green field, by a stream, and so on) – the more words I use, the clearer that image becomes. This is how we communicate. Now, perhaps in a slightly similar way, this is what’s going on here. What God thinks is communicated through Jesus. Jesus reveals what is going on in the mind of God. Jesus is the ***“Word.”***

He is described in this way here in John 1, and also in Revelation 19:13 where John describes Jesus by saying that, ***“He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.”*** Now, with this in mind, let’s think back to Genesis 1. In Genesis 1, God creates, but there’s chaos and darkness. But when he speaks, light appears, and things start to happen. The word of God brings order out of chaos. And if that is true of the universe, it is also true for us. When my life is in chaos, the word of God brings peace and order and understanding. When God speaks, he speaks through Jesus. Jesus is the Eternal Word.

III. And this leads us to the rest of verse 1 and into verse 2, where we find that Jesus is GOD.

John says, ***“...and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”*** Notice: We find here that not only is Jesus God, not only is he Deity, but we also find that he is separate and distinct in some way. Jesus is his own “person,” we might say. And although the word “trinity” is never used in the Bible, we’re seeing some hints of it here. There is one God, Jesus is God, but there is some sense in which Jesus (as the Word) was ***“with God.”*** He is with God, and he is God! We think of other passages where God seems to be described as having distinct personalities. At the creation (in Genesis 1:26), God said, ***“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.”*** What in the world is that about! God is speaking to himself and refers to ***“us”*** and ***“our.”*** That’s our first clue that Deity is made up of a plurality of personalities. In the New Testament, we think of Jesus’ baptism where we have Jesus coming up out of the water, we have the voice from heaven, and we have the Spirit descending like a dove. We have three expressions or personalities of God. But the point here is: Jesus is God.

In terms of practical lessons: We learn here that Jesus is worthy of worship. We also learn that Jesus is a Word worth listening to! And that seems to be where John is going with this. Jesus is not just a moral man. He’s not just a good teacher. He’s not just some guy who can do amazing things, but he is God. He is someone to be believed in and obeyed and worshiped.

I should point out that the Jehovah’s Witnesses do not believe that Jesus is God. They teach that Jesus is a created being (like an angel). So, they have “adjusted” their translation of this passage by adding a word. Instead of saying that ***“the word was God”*** (as John does), they have added a word, suggesting that ***“the word was A god.”*** So, according to them, Jesus is not God, he is not deity, but he is perhaps one of many “lower-case gods.” We just need to be aware of this. If they ever come back to our front porches, remember that their translation has added a word.

According to John, Jesus (the Word) is God – not god-like, not “a god,” but God. He was God, he has always been God, and he will always be God. He is the Eternal Word, God himself. And everything in this book needs to be read with this in mind. Jesus is God.

IV. As we move into verse 3, we also find that Jesus is the CREATOR.

In verse 3, John words it in a positive way and also in a negative way, so as to remove all doubt about what he means, ***“All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”*** So, Jesus made absolutely everything, and nothing that was ever created was created without him being a part of it. Jesus is the Creator. It’s so easy, though, for us to think of God the Father being the Creator. We think of the Sistine Chapel with a very fatherly figure (an old white guy) reaching out with his finger. And yet, that’s not really what we see here, is it? No, Jesus is the Creator. Jesus the Word is the Creator. This world, this Universe, everything we see around us was spoken into existence, created by the Word of God, ***“Let there***

be light,” “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters...,” “Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place,” “Let the earth sprout vegetation,” and so on. And when God spoke, all of this was so. When God spoke through Jesus the Word, everything was created, and nothing was created without him.

And this certainly agrees with what other inspired authors have written – Paul, referring to Jesus in Colossians 1:16-17 says, ***“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”*** In Hebrews 1:2, the author refers to God and says, ***“...in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”***

Practically, Jesus being the Creator means that he has every right to tell us how to live. As our Creator, he knows what is best for us, just as the manufacturer of my Subaru is often the most qualified to tell me how to fix it. We see this in Matthew 19:4-6 in a discussion on marriage and divorce, when Jesus said,

“Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, ‘FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

Do we believe this? Do we really believe this? Do we believe that God created us? As a society, as a nation, we don’t even believe the basis of our founding documents anymore, do we? The preamble to our own Declaration of Independence says, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Do all of us today believe this to be self-evident, that we were created by God? I believe this, you believe this, but we don’t believe that as a culture anymore. We don’t believe that God created us. As a culture, we believe that everything came from nothing, that order emerged from chaos, that life itself is nothing more than billions upon billions of random accidents. As a culture, we don’t believe we were “endowed by our Creator” with any rights. Do we believe that God created us male and female? Not as a nation. Not in our culture. We can’t even agree on the concept of male and female anymore. And yet, scripture tells us that because the Lord made us male and female, marriage is to be a lifetime relationship between a man and a woman. But as a society, we haven’t believed that for a long time, have we?

John, though, reminds us that Jesus is our Creator. Before anything existed, he was, and he created us with purpose, direction, and design, and therefore, as our Creator, he knows what is best for us. This affects how we raise our children, how we manage our finances, how we interact with other people, how we relate to the world around us. We were created by the eternal word of God.

V. Moving into verse 4, we also find that Jesus is LIFE.

He is the source of life, ***“In Him was life,”*** John says. Life itself, both physical and spiritual, comes from Jesus. We normally think of death as a separation, the separation of the spirit or soul from the body. When the spirit leaves the body, the body is dead. A separation has taken place. We go to a funeral, and the spirit of the one we love is no longer there. What’s left is basically an empty shell. The spirit and body have been separated. That’s what death is. In the same way, a spiritual death takes place when a person is separated from God. In Isaiah 59:2, the prophet says, ***“But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins***

have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.” That is spiritual death. A separation has taken place. Well, in John 1:4, John tells us that Jesus brings life. He is the source of all life. And during his earthly ministry, we find that Jesus and death cannot even co-exist in the same time and place. In fact, Jesus never attended a funeral where he did not bring the deceased back from the dead. In Revelation 1:18 (as we learned a few weeks ago), Jesus describes himself as ***“the living One.”*** He is the source of all life. A few chapters later, in John 4:14, he tells the woman at the well that, ***“...whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”*** He is the sustainer of life. Later, in John 10:10, Jesus says, ***“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”*** His purpose in coming to this earth was to bring life, spiritual life, bridging the gap between God and the human race, eliminating the separation of death.

VI. Here at the end, we come to the rest of verses 4-5 as we find that Jesus is LIGHT.

“In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (or ***“overcome”*** it, as some translations say). Light reveals. A few chapters later (in John 3:19-21), Jesus speaks to Nicodemus (at night) and says, ***“This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been done in the sight of God.”*** He’s explaining: This is why most people will reject Jesus. They don’t want their deeds exposed. It’s the same reason why the fine young men trying to break in our car a few months ago did at 4 in the morning and not at 4 in the afternoon. Darkness! Light, on the other hand, exposes us for who we really are. Light tells the truth about a situation.

At the end, the NASB has John saying that the darkness cannot ***“comprehend”*** the light. Other translations refer to the darkness not being able to ***“overcome”*** it or ***“conquer”*** it. The word seems to refer to “laying hold” of something, “grabbing” it or “grasping” it. Spiritually speaking, we live in a dark world, a world full of hate, and greed, and lust, and violence, and death, but all of that darkness will never overpower the light. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:6, ***“For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”*** The gospel is the good news that we no longer have to wander in the darkness. [Ben Hjalmer; The Gospel According to John Blog: The Word (John 1:1-5)]

Conclusion:

As we close, I want us to wrap this up with the “So what?” question. What does all of this mean for us? And I would make three suggestions:

First of all, are we discouraged? Are we stressed out? Are we anxious? Are we overwhelmed right now? If so, let’s remember that our Savior is the Eternal Word, God Himself, Creator of everything we see around us, and the sources of all life and light. If that doesn’t put things in perspective, I don’t know what does! We worship an awesome God! Let’s remember who he really is.

Secondly, if we know him, it seems that this passage invites us to make the introduction. And what I mean by that is: Let’s do what John does here. He takes what he knows about Jesus, and he shares it. Have we personally introduced somebody to Jesus? Our friends and loved ones might not straight up ask us, “Who is this Jesus you

talk about?” like our young neighbor did, but then again, they might. And if they don’t, what if we ask them, “What do YOU think about Jesus?” And when they answer, we might be able to take them to John, because this is what we think about Jesus. Let’s make that introduction.

And then finally, let’s think very carefully about our own relationship with Jesus. Do we personally see him and know him as the Eternal Word, God Himself, Creator of everything we see around us, and the source of all life and light? Have we decided? Are we all in? Have we surrendered completely? Or are we holding back. There really is no middle ground here. This passage is either true or it is not. We can’t really go halfway with this. I’m reminded of something written by C.S. Lewis in his book, *Mere Christianity*, where he lays it out. He’s answering those who try to say that Jesus was simply a good moral teacher (but not really the Son of God). This is his response:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would NOT be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

Very interesting! Jesus is either a liar (claiming to be God when he knows that he isn’t), he is a lunatic (claiming to be God when he thinks that he is but is not), or he is truly the Son of God. There really aren’t any other options. So the question is: Do I personally have a relationship with Jesus? Do I see him as Lord? If there is something we can do to encourage you with this, if there’s something holding you back, or if you are ready to obey the gospel, we would love to help in any way possible. We hope you will get in touch. We also hope you will join us again next week as we continue looking at Jesus in John 1.

As we close, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you for Jesus, and thank you for introducing us to your Son in this passage we’ve looked at today. Thank you for making us a part of your kingdom, the church, your Son’s body. Thank you for making us a part of the Four Lakes congregation, where we can learn to love each other as we should.

We pray that we would open our eyes to the suffering we see around us and that we would have the wisdom to react, not with anger or desperation, but with compassion. We pray that we would “be Jesus” to the world around us.

Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayer in the name of your Son. Lord, come quickly. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com