

The Beginning

January 9, 2022

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

John 1:1-4

Session Outline

1. Jesus Christ is Fully God and Fully Man (John 1:1-2)
2. Jesus Christ Has All Authority (John 1:3)
3. Jesus Christ is Man's Greatest Need (John 1:4)

Theological Theme

Jesus Christ is the Snake Crusher promised in Genesis 3. He is the Promised One proclaimed by Isaiah. He is fully man, but also fully God. Christ is the cornerstone. (See Colossians 1:16-17.)



Leader Guide

The Beginning

Introduction

- ❓ Have you ever been going about your day when you encountered someone who completely changed your plans, your day, or even your life?
- ❓ What happened in this significant encounter?

John included one such episode in his Gospel. In chapter 4, we read the story of a Samaritan woman who was going about the daily mundane business of drawing water from the well to use in her home. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink” (John 4:7). Everything about this episode is backward. Jesus should not have been speaking to a Samaritan woman. Jews and Samaritans hated one another. The Samaritan woman should not have been drawing water in the middle of the day. Early morning or evening were the customary times to draw water so a person did not have to carry the heavy water jugs in the sweltering heat.

This, of course, was no chance encounter. Rather, it was the purpose of God the Father that the Christ would be revealed to this Samaritan woman of ill repute. Her encounter with Christ was life changing. Remember what she did after their conversation: “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” (John 4:29). All people are lost unless they are drawn to Christ by the Father and call upon him for salvation. Further, Christ promised to never cast away those who come to Him (John 6:37).

The person and work of Jesus Christ are the answer to the problem of sin and misery in a broken and corrupt world. He is the only hope for those who have offended a holy God; and the Bible tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, “not even one” (Romans 3:10, 23).

Session Summary

John 1:1-4 is the backdrop for the entire book. These first verses serve as a framework to help us correctly understand the person and work of Jesus Christ. John stated at the end of his account: “This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true” (John 21:24). So, John’s purpose in writing was to serve as an eyewitness of Jesus Christ’s life and ministry. He desired to give a true testimony of the things that happened. This sentiment was echoed in his first letter when he wrote, “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us” (1 John 1:1-2).

1. Jesus Christ is Fully God and Fully Man (John 1:1-2)

By the time John wrote his Gospel (after 70 AD) word about Jesus of Nazareth had spread far and wide. Some people who had seen Jesus with their own eyes were still alive and sharing about what they had seen. One of the early deceptions that false teachers spread was that, although Christ was a mighty preacher and miracle worker, He was not God. Many said He was a prophet sent by God, but He was a mere man. This strategy of Satan has been used since the resurrection of Christ and is even enshrined in major religions, such as Islam.

John wanted to make sure his readers were clear about Jesus’s true nature. He wanted them to know God took on flesh. God the Son humbled Himself: “he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity” (Philippians 2:7). The theological word used for this truth is “incarnation,” which literally means, “putting on flesh.” Jesus was with God in the beginning, and He was God. He is the second person of the Trinity, who has existed from eternity, and He took on flesh. Galatians 4:4-5 says, “When the time came to completion, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”



What do these verses tell us about Jesus’s deity? About His humanity?

Jesus did not cease to be God when He took on flesh. He was still fully divine, though He did set aside some of His rights as God and limited Himself. We must also recognize that Jesus wasn’t less than human. Jesus was fully God and fully man. This was necessary because only a Savior who was fully God and fully human could bring sinful mankind back to God. He had to be fully human so He could obey the whole law of God

So That You May Believe

John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, did not write down this testimony so people would simply have the facts; rather, he wrote “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

perfectly in human nature and then suffer the punishment for human sin. He did both things on behalf of God's people. He had to be fully divine so His obedience and suffering would be perfect and effective to save. Further, His divine nature made him able to bear up under the righteous wrath of God the Father and overcome death.

 Why is the incarnation central to the message of the gospel?

Jesus's incarnation makes it possible for Him to mediate between God and man. The incarnation is central to the gospel message; we should meditate on its reality and rejoice that God has shown such wondrous mercy to humankind. If Christ did not come in the flesh, then there is no hope for sinners. God calls sinners in the grace of Christ, who gave Himself for their sins to rescue them. This is the essence of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. That God "who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!" (Ephesians 2:4-5). Further, "He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him" (Colossians 2:14-15).

This is the sum and the essence of the gospel: to look to Christ's righteousness alone, His blood given for the saving of our souls. The soul that has been saved says, "Nothing but Christ: Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and glorification." But this cannot happen if Christ had not taken on flesh to suffer and die for the sins of many.

 Application: Jesus's incarnation was necessary for our salvation, but it also provides an example to us. What are some ways you can imitate Jesus's incarnation in your daily life?

2. Jesus Christ Has All Authority (John 1:3)

Jesus Christ was with God in the beginning, and He was God. Jesus Christ is fully God. It naturally follows that Jesus Christ has authority over His creation. John expressed this idea by explaining that "All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created" (John 1:3). If all things were created through Christ and for Christ, then of course He has authority over creation and the creation must submit to His power.

 Why is the authority of Christ an important truth to understand?

Consider how Jesus prefaced the Great Commission. He said, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). Jesus’s authority is the basis for a person’s submission to Him. If Christ has no authority, then there is no reason to obey Him.

It is also important because Jesus is the Christian’s King. Christians are needy. They are weak and helpless alone. They have no authority or power upon which to stand within themselves. Apart from Jesus, their King, they can do nothing (John 15:5). Those who are in Christ have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of Jesus, who defeated death and sin on their behalf (Colossians 1:13). Further, in the kingdom of God, King Jesus rules over His people and defends them.



What kind of authority does Jesus have? What does Jesus’s authority have to do with His message?

John and the other Gospel writers clearly portrayed the authority Jesus had and exercised in His earthly ministry. When people heard Christ teach, “They were astonished at his teaching because he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not like the scribes” (Mark 1:22). He even exercised divine authority over the weather (see Matthew 8:27). Even gentiles recognized the Jesus Christ had a powerful authority. Once a Roman centurion said, “just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, having soldiers under my command. I say to this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this!’ and he does it” (Matthew 8:8-9).

All these examples of authority are evidence of what John expressed by telling his readers all things were made through Jesus. He is the Lord of all and one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord of lords and King of kings. Those who are Christians willingly and joyfully confess that now.

The fact that Jesus has authority means His message is also authoritative. In other words, His Word stands over and above all other messages. This is especially true concerning Christ’s teaching about salvation. Jesus said He came to call sinners not the righteous (Mark 2:17). This was because, as we have seen no one is righteous (see Romans 3:10, 23). The essence of the gospel is Christ’s righteousness and His shed blood given for the payment for sins and the salvation of souls. Any other “gospel” message is a distortion, a corruption; it is no gospel message at all. Any aberration to that true gospel message converts it from a message that leads to life to a message that ends in death. The gospel is exclusive because Jesus’s Word is authoritative. It is clearly defined. The gospel message isn’t malleable to fit the times. There is a message that is the biblical gospel and then there are counterfeits.

When a person believes and comes to Christ, they must leave behind their own righteousness and good works, bringing nothing but their sin. Otherwise, Christ is not fit for them, and they cannot be fit for Christ. Christ will be a complete Savior to people or no Savior at all.

 Application: Have you submitted to the Word of Christ concerning the salvation of your soul? How is God calling you to respond to Him?

3. Jesus Christ is Man's Greatest Need (John 1:4)

After establishing Jesus's divinity and authority, John then summarized Christ's relation to mankind. He said that Jesus Christ "was the light of men." This means that without Christ, humankind sat in darkness.

Christianity is built upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christians believe Jesus Christ is God in flesh, eternal, immortal, almighty. They also believe Christ's work on the cross is the only hope poor sinners have for pardon and life.

 Read John 15:1-5. What was the main point of Jesus's words in these verses?

Jesus's thesis statement is summed up in verse five when He said, "you can do nothing without me." Christians are desperately dependent upon Christ for all things and will seek to abide with Him more and more as they grow in their understanding and knowledge of the Scriptures. It may seem counterintuitive, but the more a Christian matures, the more they will depend upon Christ. The Christian who is self-reliant and gives little thought to their need for a connection to Christ reveals their immaturity.

When Jesus said His disciples could do nothing apart from Him, He wasn't speaking in hyperbole. It wasn't an exaggeration. Remember, Jesus Christ is God, in whom we "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Every breath of air we take, every meal we receive, every friendship we enjoy, and our hope of salvation and eternal life all rest in Him. Christ begins by calling people to abide with Him, but it isn't long before they are pleading with Him to abide with them, for they know better than they know anything else that apart from Him they can do nothing.

 Why do Christians need to stay connected to Christ and walk close to Him? How can a Christian stay connected to Christ?

Jesus Christ is the Savior and sustainer. It may be helpful to think of His goodness toward Christians in terms of His three offices in the life of the believer. Jesus is the Christian's Prophet because He reveals God to them.

He is their Priest because He continues to intercede on their behalf and keep them secure in salvation. And He is their King because He directs them and preserves them for His heavenly kingdom. Christians need a prophet because they are ignorant. Christians need a priest because they are sinful. And Christians need a king because they are needy. Christ is all of that as He shepherds His little lambs to still waters and green pastures (see Psalm 23).

Those who are truly in Christ desire to keep close to their Lord and Savior. They long to be at His side, hearing His voice, singing His praises, and being fed from His hand. Christians can do this by keeping two things in mind. The first is doing what they ought. Christians can stay close to the Lord by approaching Him through the precious means of grace He has provided. These include taking up His Word to read, bowing heads in prayer, singing songs of faith, fellowshiping with the saints, and partaking in the Lord's supper.

Doing the right thing must also be complemented by being the right way. Christians hearts must take on the appropriate posture. Jesus called His followers to display childlike faith in Him (Matthew 18:3-4).

 Application: What needs to change in your life so you can follow Jesus fully?

Conclusion

 Why is the incarnation a critical part of the gospel? Why is Jesus the only adequate and sufficient mediator between God and man?

 How should our relationships with one another change if we share salvation in Christ?

 How should receiving such great grace from Jesus impact the Christian's view of those who don't know Jesus?

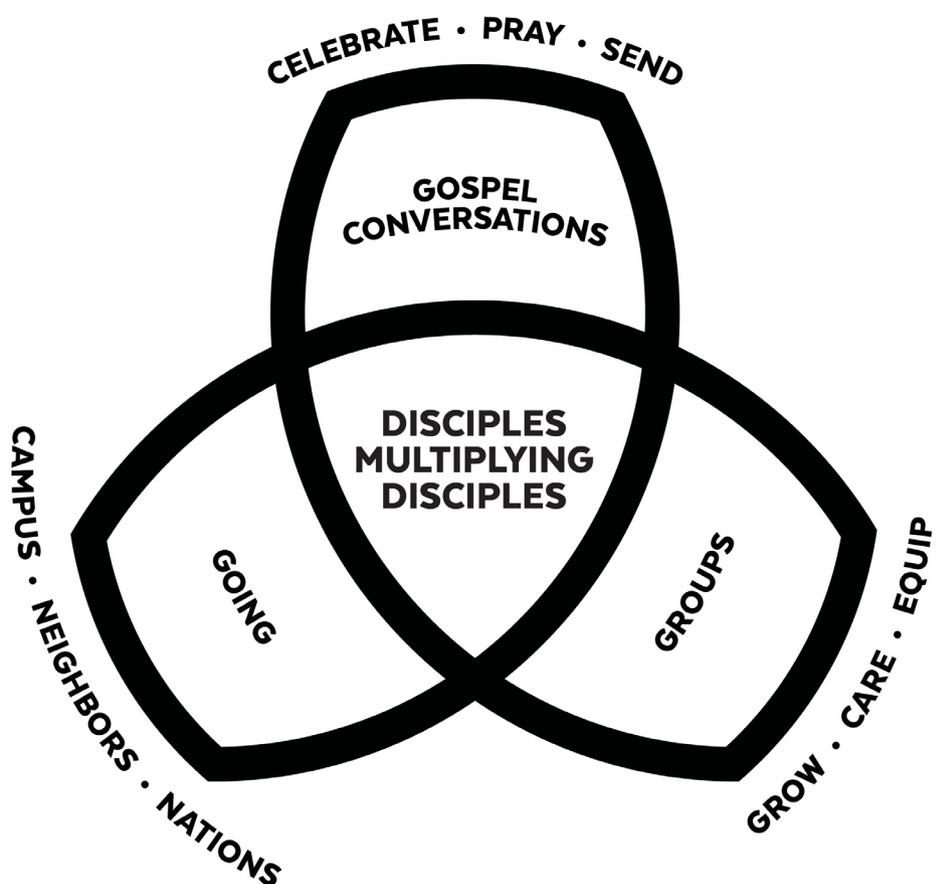
Prayer of Response

Give thanks to God the Father for the great work that He has completed on your behalf by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for sinners. Ask God to humble you and teach you. Ask Him to help you submit to the authority of Christ and abide in Him all the days of your life.

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in John* by Matt Carter
- *Be Alive* by Warren Wiersbe
- *John* by R.C. Sproul

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



DxD This Week

Group Emphasis

As people begin a new year, joining a Group may be something they consider. So who can you invite to our Group over the next couple of weeks? Pray for the unconnected by name whom you know.

For Next Week

Session Title

- The Lamb of God

Main Passages

- John 1:5-13

Session Outline

1. The Witness (John 1:5-8)
2. The Light (John 1:9-10)
3. The Hope (John 1:11-13)

Memorize

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.

- John 1:1-3

Historical Context of John

Purpose

The purpose statement in 20:30–31 indicates that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose, probably seeking to reach unbelievers through Christian readers of his Gospel. If the date of composition was after AD 70, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God’s people in replacement of the old sanctuary.

Author

A close reading of the Gospel of John suggests that the author was an apostle (1:14; cp. 2:11; 19:35); one of the Twelve (“the disciple Jesus loved,” 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20; cp. 21:24–25); and, still more specifically, John, the son of Zebedee (note the association of “the disciple Jesus loved” with Peter in 13:23–24; 18:15–16; 20:2–9; 21; and in Lk 22:8; Ac 1:13; 3–4; 8:14–25; Gl 2:9). The church fathers, too, attested to this identification (e.g., Irenaeus). Since the apostolic office was foundational in the history of the church (Ac 2:42; Eph 2:20), the apostolic authorship of John’s Gospel invests it with special authority as firsthand eyewitness (Jn 15:27; 1Jn 1:1–4).

Setting

The most plausible date of writing is the period between AD 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and 100 (the end of John’s lifetime), with a date in the 80s most likely. A date after 70 is suggested by the references to the Sea of Tiberias in 6:1 and 21:1 (a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the first century); Thomas’s confession of Jesus as “my Lord and my God” in 20:28 (possibly a statement against emperor worship in the time of Domitian); the reference to Peter’s martyrdom, which occurred in 65 or 66 (21:19); the lack of reference to the Sadducees, who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after 70; and the comparative ease with which John equated Jesus with God (1:1, 14, 18; 10:30; 20:28).

Special Features

The Gospel of John is different from the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in that more than ninety percent of its material is unique. John’s Gospel does not focus on the miracles, parables, and public speeches that are so prominent in the other accounts. Instead, the Gospel of John emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how we, as believers, should respond to his teachings.

Extended Commentary

John 1:1-4

1:1–2. Some interpreters have translated the opening phrase of this Gospel, “Before there was a beginning, the Word had been.” Indeed, the familiar repetition of Genesis 1:1 almost looks as if John wrote a Gospel of two beginnings—a creation account that parallels physical birth and spiritual rebirth. But it is important to notice that we are dealing with two beginnings, not creations. The central focus of this verse is eternity. Like his heavenly Father, Jesus always was and therefore existed at the beginning of time.

It is interesting that John should call Jesus the Word rather than some other name to introduce his book—interesting, but not surprising since the Jews often referred to God in such terminology. The doctrine at stake here is the deity of Christ. Jesus is God, and John wanted to make that point immediately. In fact, this prologue (vv. 1–18) begins and ends with a strong statement of this doctrine.

The term Word (*logos*) would have been familiar to the Greeks as well. Their understanding centered on ultimate reason or the rationale of the universe rather than the personal God revealed to Abraham and his descendents. John claimed that the God of creation, the ultimate mind of the universe, had taken on human form; he had become incarnate.

The Bible allows no place for atheism and no room for doubt about how God has spoken—through the Word. Before there was a beginning, the Word had been coequal with God throughout all eternity. But what did the apostle mean by with God? The Greek word is *pros* which literally means “toward,” implying a face-to-face relationship. John would have neither atheism nor unitarianism. He told us later in his Gospel that the Godhead consists of a trinity, but here in verse 1 we learn plurality.

So Jesus, the Word, is eternal and personal. Nothing can separate the heavenly Father from his Son. Verse 2 merely emphasizes verse 1. I like the way Gary Vanderet puts it: “John intends that the entire book be read in light of this verse. The deeds and the words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God” (Vanderet, *Prelude to Deity*).

1:3. Unlike the Gospel writers before him, John tells us that Jesus participated in creation and again states his case twice for emphasis. Surely this is a deliberate link with Genesis, and it sets the stage for other New Testament Scriptures which show us Jesus’ involvement in creation: “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him” (Col. 1:16). “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (Heb. 1:1–2).

Creation is a foundational doctrine of the Christian faith. Virtually every other aspect of theology rests upon our understanding of God as the origin of all life and of the role Jesus

Christ, the Word, in creation. John could hardly say it more clearly: without him nothing was made that has been made—everything from subatomic particles to galaxies. Only God who created all things can redeem them. Creation is the foundation stone of the gospel. Christ could not have been created, for he created all things. There was a “historical Jesus,” but this terminology refers only to his thirty-three years on earth. His life had no beginning, and it will have no end.

1:4. Here we find the first appearance of our key word—life. The revelation of the Lamb was also the revelation of life. No fewer than thirty-six times in John, we find the word *zoe*. Jesus Christ the Creator provides physical life; Jesus Christ the Redeemer provides spiritual life; and Jesus Christ the Savior provides eternal life. In verse 4 John also introduced another key word—light. The life becomes the light of men. Notice these positive terms. What a wonderful contrast to death and darkness.

In the Word, God’s person and power were revealed to humanity. Here again we see a reference to creation since, in the Genesis account, light was the first evidence of God’s creative work. God is always the source of light and life. Christ the Son, the Creator, provides life and light to humanity. He alone is the life-giver and the light-bearer. John is getting ready to write new lyrics to an old melody, “With you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light” (Ps. 36:9).¹

References

1. Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, ed. Max E. Anders (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000).

Author Bio

Kenneth Gangel (John)

Dr. Kenneth O. Gangel (1935-2009): A prolific author and an experienced leader has been influential in the field of Christian education for over forty years. He's written numerous articles and over 50 books, while pastoring, teaching, raising a family and leading schools. His impact reaches around the world through students, co-authored books, and working with leaders of churches and schools.

Matt Carter (Exalting Jesus in John)

Matt Carter serves as the Pastor of Preaching and Vision at the Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, Texas, which has grown from a core team of 15 to over 8,000 attending each Sunday since he planted it in 2002. Matt has co-authored multiple books including a commentary on the Gospel of John in The Christ Centered Exposition Commentary series. Matt also co-authored a novel of historical fiction, *Steal Away Home* which tells the real life story of famed pastor Charles Spurgeon's unlikely friendship with former slave-turned-missionary, Thomas Johnson. Matt holds an M.Div. from Southwestern Seminary and a Doctorate in Expository Preaching from Southeastern Seminary. He and his wife Jennifer have been married for over 20 years, and they have three children, John Daniel, Annie, and Samuel.

Warren Wiersbe (Be Alive)

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of *Back to the Bible*, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as "the pastor's pastor." He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

R.C. Sproul (John)

R.C. Sproul (1939–2017) was founder of Ligonier Ministries in Orlando, Fla. He was also copastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel, first president of Reformation Bible College, and executive editor of *Tabletalk* magazine. His radio program, *Renewing Your Mind*, is still broadcast daily on hundreds of radio stations around the world and can also be heard online.