

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ABOUT CHRIST?

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Brother Homer Hailey, a man I regard highly as one of the greatest scholars of our generation, and that principally because he was a great man of God, authored a book based on the Gospel of John. The book was entitled, *That You May Believe*. At the beginning of his book, brother Hailey wrote the following:

The proposition of the Gospel of John is clearly stated by the writer when he said (in 20:30,31), "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name."

Eternal life depends upon this faith; nothing else will do. Either Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God—all that He claimed to be—or He was and is an impostor. There is no middle ground. This is John's proposition; it is the proposition of this book.

I am reasonably confident that all of you here this morning have fully embraced that proposition, that belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." You do not doubt that. You believe it and in many ways that belief has affected who you are. It affects what you do. Even so, even if you have no doubts, have no questions, even if you are absolutely convinced that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, do you really understand everything that implies. For that reason, and because this week we launched into a study of the Gospel of John, I want to spend some time this morning looking at some of the things that John has to tell us in the first eighteen verses his gospel. I pray that we can do that and in the process strengthen our faith and deepen our appreciation for the One we call, Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

If you will, please open your Bibles and let's read this section [1:1-18] of Scripture together.

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 enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10) He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11) He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12) But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13) who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. 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. 15) (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") 16) And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17) For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18) No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

May God's blessing be upon the reading and the hearing of the scripture, and may He bless it to become fruitful in our hearts and lives.

Notice John begins with a very strong affirmation—*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God."* John wants us to recognize that this one we call Jesus, the Christ, is God Himself.

"In the beginning," of course refers us to the creation of the heavens and earth. The so-called scientific world still has no idea of how to explain the origin of the universe. That's why they continue to make wildly exaggerated and non-provable assertions. Folks, make no mistake about it, scientism, which is faith in the scientific method and faith in the assertions of science is one of the biggest faith system around today!

We may not know precisely when the universe and world were created, but when it did, John tells us that Christ was present. John identifies him as the Word, or Logos. That's an interesting expressions and just what John meant by it we may not fully understand. Was he trying to say something about Christ being the mind behind everything that exists?

John says the Word was present *"in the beginning."* That tells us that He existed prior to the beginning. That implies that He is eternal, and since only God is

eternal and immortal, this implies that the One John calls “the Word” is the eternal God Himself.

Furthermore, John tells us that “*the Word was with God.*” Yes, the One we call Jesus the Christ is God Himself, but at the same time, He is “with” God. That tells us that the Son of God that is called “the Word,” in some sense has a unique identity. Hailey tells us that this idea means more than a simple co-existence. Not only are they together, they are interactive. There is a communication between them, a perfect meeting of the mind or spirit. They fulfill each other. All of this implies that not only is Christ eternal God, but that God is personal.

And then John says, removing all ambiguity, “*and the Word was God.*” In the beginning He was! He was with God, and He was God. Notice John did not say, the Word was “a” God, nor did he say, the Word was “the” God. He says, “*and the Word was God.*” The word was God in his nature, in his essence. In fact, the Hebrew writer will say of him, “*He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature...*” In other words, to see Him is to see the very radiance of God Himself; he is God in every detail.

Open your Bibles to **Colossians 1** and begin reading with me from **verse 15 thru verse 19**:

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. 18) And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19) For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

Notice Paul says, Jesus is the “*image of the invisible God.*”

Furthermore, going back to **John 1**, John tells us in **verse 3**, that in relation to the creation, everything that has been made, that has come into existence, did so because of this one John calls “the Word.” He says, “*All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.*” Well, that’s what Paul said of him as well there in **Colossians 1:16**, isn’t it? “*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*

AND FOR HIM!” Then Paul goes on and says this that is truly interesting: “*And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*” All of that, of course, is very similar to something the **Hebrew** writer said in **1:3**, when he said, “*He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.*”

Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, is the being, or power responsible for the creation. We speak of God as the Creator but what we must understand is that the member of the Godhead who was active in the creation of all things was this one that John calls “*the Word.*” That is why he is called in Colossians 1, “*the firstborn of creation.*” That isn’t meant to imply that He was the first being created. Instead it tells us that He stands before all creation. He is the head of all creation.

We keep reading, John being our teacher (verses 4,5), “*In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*” Let’s trust that John’s words here were very carefully chosen, chosen by the Holy Spirit through John. He has just written of Christ being the creator of everything that exists, and now he tells us that “*in him was life.*” Much or most of the universe is made out of inanimate matter. But there was something else that the Creator/Savior introduced into the creation, and that is something called life. Interestingly, John does not use the word bios, referring to biological life. He uses the word Zoe, which speaks of a kind of life that is not just biological in nature. Zoe life is not just a composite of physical processes. It isn’t about how long you are on top of the ground. Zoe life refers to the essence of life itself; a life-quality if you will. It is the opposite of death and destruction. All biological life has a built-in timer to it that spells death after so long of a time but what is to be found in Jesus, because of His very nature as an eternal being, is the quality or capacity for eternal life! This Zoe life is one of the great themes of John’s gospel. Between the noun and verb forms, it is used about 45 times in the pages of this book.

A second great theme of John’s gospel is the idea of “light,” and John says, in Christ was “*life and the life was the light of men.*” The word *light* is found no fewer than 21 times in John. We all know what light is, of course, but what are we to make of the idea of light in this verse, that “*in him was life and the life was the light of men?*”

Since John took us back to the very beginning, it is natural for us to remember the role that light played in the physical creation. Genesis 1:2, 3 reminds us that at the very beginning the earth was without form and void and there was darkness over the face of the deep. At that time, God said, *“let there be light, and there was light.”* Light was needed in the creation because the Creator is light.

John says several things about this light. Notice **verse 5** where he says, *“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”* Light is superior to darkness. In **verse 9**, he said, the *“true light,”* that *“enlightens everyone who comes into the world.”* That is one way the Scriptures talk about the purpose of Christ’s coming. Christ came to enlighten every person, to make it possible for every person to walk in the light. In **12:35** Jesus said, *“The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.”* In this world there exists both light and darkness. There is both good and evil, truth and error, belief and unbelief, holiness and ungodliness. In **3:19** we read, *“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.”* Isn’t that amazing! Here’s a partial explanation why the world is the insane place that it is; it is because people of the world love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil!

I am glad to read, as John tells us, that even though the light was challenged by the darkness, it could not overcome it!

Then John tells us—**verses 10, 11**—that this one he calls “the Word,” *“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.”* Isn’t that a remarkable statement! Again saying that Jesus was the creator of the world, John says, when Christ came into the world that he had made, the world did not know him. They didn’t recognize their creator! Now, why do you suppose they didn’t recognize Him, and do you think the world would recognize Him today?

Romans 1 tells us that the world *“knew God but they did not honor him as God.”* As a consequence they became *“futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools.”* And of course, what was true of the world generally, especially the Gentiles, was just as true for the Jews. John said even they did not receive him. Isn’t that amazing!

John next says something truly wonderful. **Verse 12**, “*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*” Not only is this one that John calls “the Word,” God, not only is He the creator of everything, not only is He the light that came into the world in order to enlighten every man, and not only is He the one who the world did not recognize, nor even his own people, the Jews; John says that He is the one who gives men the right to become the children of God.

Now, that infers, does it not, that men were not God’s children? That is, because of their willful ignorance and arrogance, because of their sinful choices, mankind had forfeited the right of sonship, even though they had been made in God’s own image. In another passage (Colossians 1:21), Paul will say that they were “alienated.” It was in that same passage—**Colossians 1**—that Paul had written these words [11-14]:

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, 12) giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13) He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

While you may have been alienated from God because of your sins, God went to work on your behalf. He is the one who makes you “qualified” to share in the inheritance of the saints. And He did that through Christ. Because of Christ, you have the opportunity of being “*delivered from the domain of darkness*” and transferred into the Kingdom of God’s Son!

Going back to **John 1, verse 14** says: “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*” Oh, how I wish we had the time, and oh how I wish I had the wisdom and the words to spend some time with you here on this verse, and to explore the wonder of what John wrote there! This is the Jesus that John wants us to see. We need to see this person. We need to stand or bow in awe before this person.

To the Christians in **Philippi (2:5-8)**, Paul will say:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6) who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7) but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8) And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Folks, something happened when Christ came into the world. Many times in the past God had acted and even interacted with people. He spoke, he sent angels, he performed miracles, He gave the law. This time, however, it was different. God didn't just remain aloof from the world. He didn't just speak from heaven, send down an angel. This time, he came himself, even though it took an unbelievable sacrifice on his part in order to do it. Even though he was fully God, Paul said he did not regard that equality something that had to be held on to, or grasped. He let go of something folks! What was it? I doubt we will ever know, or at least not understand completely in this life at least, but in coming into this world, the eternal, immortal, infinite God took on a nature that was temporal, that was mortal, and that was anything but infinite. Are you beginning to see the sacrifice that Christ made for us?

But John continues there in **verse 14**. *"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."* That word "dwelt" is the word for tabernacle or tent. When Christ came into the world, He did the same thing that God did in making himself known in the tabernacle. He came to be with his people. Matthew 1:23 says Jesus was to be called *"Immanuel"* which means, *"God with us."* Now think about that. Where do you want God to be? With you, or somewhere else? Do you want him to be with you, or against you? Christ came to be God among His people.

And John says, *"and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."* In **verse 18**, John tells us clearly that no man has seen God at any time. Not Adam, not Abraham, not Moses, not David or Daniel, not Peter, Paul, James or John. But what John said he did see, the apostles saw, was the Word in His glory, *"glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

If we had been there when John was relating his experiences, we might have asked him, *"what was He like? What did he look like? Was he tall and strong, or short and weak?"* John's most vivid memory of Jesus was that he was *"full of grace and truth."* Dear friends, grace and truth are not opposites. They are not antithetical to one another. Grace insists on truth and truth depends on grace. Jesus came and He was full of both.

And John will go on to say in **verse 16**, *"of his fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace."* That is, everything that God is, the fullness of deity, Christ

came to be among us, and to bestow upon us grace upon grace. **Titus 2:11** says, *“For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all men.”* Through Christ has grace been demonstrated in an abundant, overflowing demonstration. This Word, who was full of grace and truth, not just truth, but grace, and not just grace, but truth, came and when He did, grace sufficient to save the world from sin was offered; grace to save your soul was yours to freely receive. What the Law could not do, that Law that was given through Moses, grace and truth could do, and that is what Jesus came to make known.

The God of grace and truth came into this world. That’s what John, in **verse 18** tells us. *“No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has revealed Him.”*

Now, as you and I sit here today, 2000 years after the coming of this One John called the Word, we take all of these claims for granted. I know there are a lot of people, millions of them as a matter of fact, maybe billions, but you and I here today probably have no doubts about the things that John has just told us about the Christ. But back then, 2000 years ago, and for the millions and millions of people today who do, still question these claims, think about how bold and audacious these claims are.

And so, at the outset of his book, John has set a very high goal. He is going to endeavor, in the course of this book, that we have divided up into 21 chapters, John is going to set forth the reasons and the evidence why any reasonable person should come to the same conclusion about Christ. And for the next five weeks, if you stay with us in these New Testament Studies, you are going to have the opportunity to look at that evidence that John brings forth.

I cannot think of a better way to have your faith strengthened and deepened than by really getting into this study. For now, however, let's close with a question: What do you believe about Christ? What do you believe?

Do you believe that He is God? Do you believe that He is the Creator? Do you believe that you would not even be here this very moment if it were not for that one John calls the Word? Do you believe that He is the light and in that light is to be found life? The world back then, to a very large degree did not receive him, but the question is, what about you and me? What do you believe about Christ?

Do you believe? Do you believe that Christ is the Lord of Lords? If you do believe that, have you obeyed Him as Lord? If you haven't, now is the time to do what you know He wants you to do. We are going to sing this song of encouragement, and if you need to obey Him as Lord today, please come as together we stand and sing.