

John's Prologue:
In the Beginning Was the Word
John 1:1-2

I want to emphasize one dominant idea from the book of John in general, and the first two verses in particular:

Jesus is the fully divine Son of God.

We are going to gaze upon the beauty of Christ's *person* today. We are more comfortable explaining his work (what he did) than the mystery of his person (his person, the union of his two natures), but I pray that the glory of this mystery will lead us to heart-felt worship, restful trust, and steadfast obedience... **[Pray]**

When you're a little kid, adults can seem to be such gigantic people. But as you get older, you get bigger, and realize that the adults are not as big as you once thought! They get smaller as you get bigger (**My oldest son likes to greet me with "What's up Little Man?" as he has now shot up past me**).

But for the mature Christian, there's an important spiritual exception to this rule. Every year we grow, **we find Jesus bigger, not smaller.**

In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C.S. Lewis brings this truth home.

- Aslan symbolizes Christ.
- He's a mighty the Lion, whose majesty is awe-inspiring, and whose goodness is joy-producing.
- In *Prince Caspian*, there's a powerful scene, as Lucy and the others are lost in Narnia, trying to find their way to Prince Caspian's camp.
- She experiences a surprise visit from Aslan, who up this point has been invisible to her other siblings.
- She perceives Aslan as bigger than she remembered.
 - “Welcome, child,” Aslan said
 - “Aslan,” said Lucy, “you're bigger.”
 - “That is because you are a little older, little one,” he answered.
 - “Not because you are?” she asked.
 - He said, “I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.”

Every year we grow, we find him bigger.

- One of the greatest needs of the church today is an **elevated view of Jesus Christ**.
- John probes deeper into God's revelation in His Son than the other gospels.
- We have an exalted vision of Jesus here.
- Here in the month of Ramadan, we are especially mindful of how important it is, to see Jesus, not merely as a prophet, but as the fully divine son of God. .

I pray that in our study of John's gospel, we would come to love Jesus Christ more.

Jesus is presented as:

- Loving beyond our greatest dreams
- Holy beyond our noblest thoughts

- Powerful beyond our highest expectations
- Gracious beyond our deepest needs
- Peaceful beyond our worst fears
- Forgiving beyond our lowest failures
- Dignifying beyond our darkest shame
- Hope-giving beyond our severest pain

There has never been, nor will there ever be, a person so worthy of our affection, trust, obedience, admiration, and emulation.

Based upon John's portrait, we should worship him without cessation, trust him without hesitation, love him without reservation, and serve him without interruption.

We find a glorious vision of Jesus in John's gospel – which in the early church was symbolized by not a lion, but similarly, by *an eagle* – for John's majestic picture of Jesus Christ. Augustine, “John flies like an eagle above the clouds of human weakness and gazes most keenly and steadily with the eye of his heart at the light of unchangeable truth.”

- Are you weak? Then gaze upon the truth, embodied in Jesus Christ!

On the one hand, there's a beautiful simplicity to John.

On the other hand, there's stunning depth to John.

Augustine said that it's “shallow enough for a child not to drown in, yet deep enough for an elephant to swim in.”

The simplicity can be seen in the simple vocabulary – words like *life, light, believe*.

Beginning Greek students prefer it to the other gospels, or Romans!

The simplicity is also seen in the purpose of John – 20:30-31 – it's very clear. “That you may believe.”

- Not a Christian? I can't think of a better book for you to consider. I hope you will come back weekly.

The depth can be seen in John's vision of the person of Christ.

- His incomprehensible nature and glory is conveyed big time.

The depth can also be seen in the “layers” of his gospel.

- He keeps building on concepts (like life/light).
- It's a book you will want to re-read because of its layers.

So why should we study John's Gospel?

Because we need to know who Jesus really is.

Time magazine reported that more books have been written about Jesus than any other person in history. Many of these books focus on the question of Jesus' identity. There has been more controversy about this matter than about any other subject in human history.

Popular Opinion Today

Confusion abounds. If someone says they “believe in Jesus” the follow up question is “which one?”

- **Robert Funk:** Jesus was witty teacher like Buddah or Socrates.
- **J.D. Crossan:** Jesus was a wandering philosopher
- **M. Borg:** Jesus was a charismatic faith healer.
- **Bart Ehrman:** Jesus was a first century apocalyptic prophet, who expected the end of his world.
- **Islam:** Jesus is a prophet inferior to Muhammad.
- **Ghandi:** “I cannot attribute exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as Krishna, or Rama, or Muhammed, or Zoroaster.”
- **Susan Haskins:** “Jesus was a feminist.”
- **Gorbachev:** “Jesus was the first socialist.” (Gorbachev)
- **Rollo May:** “Christ is the therapist for all humanity.” (Rollo May)
- **Scientology:** “Jesus is an implant forced upon a Thetan about a million years ago” – *Vintage Jesus* (Whatever that means)
- **Lakota Tribe:** – “Jesus is the buffalo calf of God.” (Lakota tribe) (VJ)
- **Jesus of Pop Culture:** he’s on T-shirts, TV: Simpsons, South Park, the movie Major League, Talledaga nights...

How you answer this question matters more than any other question.

- more important than who is my spouse, what should I major in? Where should I live?

C.S. Lewis doesn’t want you to merely claim him as a religious teacher:

“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 patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher.” (C.S. Lewis)

I say we fall at his feet and like Thomas in John 20, call him “Lord and God.”

With that, let’s consider now, (1) **John’s Purpose**, and (2) **John’s Prologue**.

#1: **John’s Purpose (20:30-31)**

Some of you are **sick of writing term papers**. You have suffered death by footnotes! You are ready for summer break, perhaps. But this is a divinely Inspired thesis.

John 20:30-31.

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ 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.

Why did John write these things? That you may believe! (Twice)

- The tense here is that you may “go on believing.”
- **Non-Christian:** Believe!
- **Christian:** Keep on believing! Maintain a “believing allegiance” to the Christ.
- Believe what? **That Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God**
- Believe why? That you may have **life** in his name.
 - Not just life that goes on and on and on.

- But a certain quality of life, abundant life, that begins *now*, and extends forever.

There may be **other reasons for John's gospel** such as: (a) doctrinal heresies present at the time regarding Jesus (particularly among the Asian churches), (b) a growing John the Baptist cult, and (c) the need to show Judaism as an inadequate system of religion that rejected its promised Messiah (1:11).

Be that as it may, everything in the book falls under verse 31 – Believe.

“Believing” today is popular, but like the popular view of Jesus, it's rubbish.

- People are essentially told **“believe in belief.”**
- **“It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you believe”**
- **The high priest of this philosophy for years has been Oprah.**
- She once had an atheist on her show who described the sense of wonder she experienced when standing at the edge of the ocean. Oprah responded: **“Well, I don't call you an atheist then. . . . I think if you believe in the awe and the wonder and mystery then that is what god is. . . . It's not a bearded guy in the sky”** (in CCE).
- The problem of adopting this “believing in belief” is this: **You're ignoring the object of faith.**
- John isn't calling us to “just believing in something” (the ocean, the birds, kale, or Jesus – it's all the same).
- He's calling us to us to believe in Jesus, as **the Christ**, the **the Son of the Living God**
- **We are saved by the object of our faith: Jesus.**

Why must you believe in him? That you may have **LIFE!!!**

Life is in Him! – He is the resurrection and the life.

Just who is this “John” that's writing these things?

Turn the page to chapter 21: He is anonymous, but he's identified as the beloved disciple – that is, **“the disciple whom Jesus loved”** and was a close companion of Peter. Read: 21:20, 23-24. This is John, one of the sons of thunder (brother of James), the fisherman, the elder and seer. John, the beloved.

Church tradition affirmed this to be the Apostle John, the brother of James.

Notice also, the last verse - 21:25

²⁵ Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

What a verse!

So John's purpose is not to write a comprehensive biography of everything Jesus said and did. He doesn't even include everything the other gospels include.

And he includes some stuff they don't include.

He is writing **history with an agenda – that you may believe!**

Unique Features of John (ht: Akin)

- John includes no parables, but includes a lot of one-on-one encounters with Jesus.

- Very little about the demonic.
- Majors on events in Judea (south), with less about in Galilee (north).
- Emphasizes Jesus' ministry in the city to religious intellectuals, while the Synoptics emphasize His country ministry to the common people.
- Builds his Gospel on seven key miracles and is more thematic in arrangement than are the Synoptics.
- He starts with a Christology from above, rather than below.
 - **He starts with the eternality of Christ in the Prologue not the way the others start (with Abraham, Adam or Isaiah)**
- He provides extensive treatment on the Holy Spirit, and on the Son's relationship with the Father, thus giving us important truth on the doctrine of the Trinity.
- Twenty-three total times we find our Lord's meaningful "I am" (Gk. ego eimi) in this Gospel. In seven of these He joins His "I am" with seven metaphors that express His saving relationship toward the world.
 - "I AM the Bread of Life" (6:35, 41, 48, 51)
 - "I AM the Light of the World" (8:12)
 - "I AM the Door of the Sheep" (10:7, 9)
 - "I AM the Good Shepherd" (10:11, 14)
 - "I AM the Resurrection and the Life (11:25)
 - "I AM the Way, the Truth, the Life (14:6)
 - "I AM the True Vine" (15:1, 5)
 - In John 8:58 there is something of a climax as His "I AM" declaration echoes Exodus 3:14 and is a clear and overt declaration of His deity.

Outline of John (How John goes about this purpose)

- I. John's Prologue (1:1-18)**
- II. Jesus' Public Ministry (1:19-12:50) ["Book of Signs"]**
 - 7 Great Miracles
 - 3 Years of Public Teaching
- III. Jesus' Private Ministry (13:1-17:26) ["Book of Glory"]**
 - A Few Days
- IV. Jesus' Passion (18:1-20:31)**
 - Trial, Crucifixion, Resurrection
 - A Weekend
- V. John's Epilogue (21:1-25)**

#2: John's Prologue (1:1-18)

Sproul: "No portion of the NT captured the imagination and attention of the Xian intellectual community for the first three centuries more than this brief section of John's gospel."

John introduces many of the themes that we find throughout the book of John (Carson), and it demonstrates John's overriding concern in the gospel to rightly articulate the identity of Jesus Christ.

	<i>Prologue</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
The pre-existence of the Logos or Son	1:1–2	17:5
in him was life	1:4	5:26
life is light	1:4	8:12
light rejected by darkness	1:5	3:19
yet not quenched by it	1:5	12:35
light coming into the world	1:9	3:19; 12:46
Christ not received by his own	1:11	4:44
being born to God and not of flesh	1:13	3:6; 8:41–42
seeing his glory	1:14	12:41
the 'one and only' Son	1:14, 18	3:16
truth in Jesus Christ	1:17	14:6
no-one has seen God, except the one who comes from God's side	1:18	6:46

One way you could think of this Prologue is as an **overture to an opera – a piece of music that serves as a teaser for the rest of the musical. It introduces you, in succinct artistic form, to what's to come.**

The prologue is John's overture. He introduces us to some glorious concepts related to Jesus before he unfolds them.

There's no birth narrative — instead John reaches back in eternity past, prior to creation to show us the deity of Christ.

I'm breaking into three parts (3 weeks of sermons):

- **In the beginning was the Word (1:1-2)** – a focus on Jesus' deity.
- **The True Light (3-13)** – a focus on Jesus' work creation, revelation, and salvation.
- **The Word became flesh (14-17)** – a focus on Jesus' incarnation.

One overarching question in the prologue is this: Who Is Jesus Really?

In verses 1-2, we find three clues that help us arrive at an important aspect of this question.

Marveling at the Divine Son of God [3 Proofs of His Deity]

#1: An Unfathomable Characteristic (1-2)

Jesus has a trait that boggles our minds: **eternity!**

Notice two words that denote Jesus' eternity, "**In the beginning was...**" "the Word **was** with God ... "He **was** with God in the **beginning**..."

John locates Jesus existence in **eternity past with God.**

"In the beginning" harkens back to the opening of Genesis 1:1.

- The readers would have **anticipated** "God" being after this phrase.
- John says "**the Word**" – which we find later in the passage (**v 14ff**) to be Jesus (**17**)
 - "**John bore witness about "him"** (v. 15) – the Word is a *person*, a man.
- The word "**beginning**" is "**arche**" in Greek – it bears the meaning "**origin.**"
- **Jesus was the originator of all things, or *the agent of creation*** – notice verse 3, "**all things were made through Him.**"
 - **Colossians 1:15-17**
 - **Hebrews 1:2-3**
- **In the beginning, the Word was already in existence, and all things were made through him!**

"Was"

- Jesus' eternity is communicated with this little word: "**was**"
 - Lit, "**was continuing**"
- "**Jesus always was *wasing*.**" He is the Alpha and Omega.
- **There never was a time in which Jesus was *not*** (to paraphrase Athanasius)
- **John 8:58** – "Before Abraham was, I am."
- **Headache? "What was God doing before creation?"**
- **Someone said, "Creating a hell for people who asked such questions!"**
- **We will see he was enjoying a perfectly happy and harmonious intra-Trinitarian relationship.**

"Word"

Why the strange name?

The Hebrews had an exalted view of the word. God's word did stuff.

- **God created by his word** (eg, Gen 1:3; Ps 33:6)
- **Further, God revealed himself through His words.** (eg, Gen 15:1)
- The Word here is **God's self-revelation of Himself.** (V. 14, vs. 18).
- **Hebrews 1:1-3**, The supremacy of Jesus. (**Read**).
 - God has revealed himself finally, most magnificently and most definitively in the Son.
- **There is no greater revelation of the character God than in Jesus.**
- **Pink (Arthur, not the pop singer) says that Jesus reveals God's mind, expresses God's will, displays God's perfections, and exposes God's heart.** (Pink, John, 21)

Greeks were familiar with Logos also. They had a philosophical concept of the Logos not a personal God. They saw the *Logos* as “the reasoning principle,” the ordering principle, that brought rationality to the universe, not a personal God behind it all (Morris)

But John fills this idea with new meaning; he claims that the God of creation, the ultimate being of the universe, had taken on human form; he had become *incarnate*, in the person of Jesus Christ.

Keller, “This statement fell like a thunderbolt onto the world of the ancient philosophers ... John affirms that there is a telos, or purpose to our lives — something we were made for... He proclaims that the world is not just the product of blind, random forces ... the meaning of life is *not a principle ... but a person*.”

Jesus is the pre-existent, eternal, and now incarnate Word.

Despite the cynicism in our culture, there’s still a hunger for the transcendent — just look at the popular show like *Stranger Things*, and the endless number of Superhero films. Here we find the fulfillment of that human longing in Jesus Christ.

What makes Christianity unique is that the transcendent, immortal God, has come to earth in the person of Jesus Christ, becoming vulnerable to suffering and death — all for us.

- That he may atone for our sin, and take the punishment we deserve.
- That he may conquer death through death and resurrection.
- There is never been a great act of self-giving love than in this.
- We call it “the gospel,” the good news.
- It’s not us reaching up to God, trying to behave well enough to live forever, but it’s God coming down to us, living the life we couldn’t live, dying the death we should have died.
- **God has taken the responsibility for our salvation; this is liberating and life-giving.**
- And to receive this salvation, all you need is *need*.
- Cry out with your need for Jesus, and believe in his perfect work on behalf of sinners.

#2: A Unique Relationship (1-2)

Notice another little “w” word – “with.” The Word was “with God.”

Jesus was/is in a perfect relationship with God.

The word “with” can be translated “toward” (pros); **perhaps denoting face-to-face relationship, intimacy.**

Jesus has a one-of-a-kind relationship with God the Father.

- **John 1:14b** – “the only Son from the Father”
- **John 3:16** – “He gave his only Son”
- **John 5:18** - “For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.”
- **John 20:17** – Notice Jesus’ important distinction.

- We have a relationship with the Father too; and we are his “sons” too (Rom 8), his children (Jn 1:12), but not in the same way that Jesus has a relationship with the Father, and the way that Jesus is the Son of God.
- In none of John’s writings does he call anyone a son of God other than Jesus (John, 1, 2, 3 John, nor Revelation).

This glorious relationship is displayed magnificently in Jesus’ prayer in John 17.

“And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with *the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*” (Jn 17:5)

- The Father and the Son and Spirit are in perfectly harmonious relationship.
- In the gospel, we find Jesus communing with the Father, and accomplishing the work of His Father.
- Which makes his cry on the cross, “**why have you forsaken me**” so powerfull.
- Jesus felt forsaken momentarily, so that you and I may never be forsaken by God. “He will never leave you nor forsake you.”

We are made in the image of God, and part of what that means is that we are made for relationships – a relationship with God and others.

“You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you” (Augustine).

How do we enter a relationship with God – verses 12-13.
Receive Him and become a child of God.

We find **the building blocks of the Trinity in these opening verses...**

#3: An Unrivalled Essence (1b)

In verses **one** and **two** John repeats the first two concepts – namely, Jesus’ pre-existence, and his relationship with the Father.

But then right **in the middle**, you find **an unambiguous statement of Jesus’ deity**:
“The Word was God.”

“Jesus shared the essence of the Father though they differed in person.” (Wallace)

There has never been a moment in which the Word wasn’t in the very essence of God.

The Word is full deity.

- He is not “a god,” “god-like” or “nearly God” or “a really great human being.”
- He’s God.
- He possesses an unequaled deity.
- John says in 14ff that He was also fully human.
- The **hypostatic union** is the teaching of Christ’s two natures united in one person.

- Bird, student, “this is irrelevant.” Then went to a mosque, and the Imam said, “Can anyone explain how Jesus is both God and man?” The student perked up, “have you ever heard of the hypostatic union.

We will get to verse 14 later, today we’re underscoring what John is emphasizing, namely Jesus’ deity.

Colossians 1:19: “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.”

John 5:18: This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, *making himself equal with God*.

Thomas will later confess in chapter 20, “My Lord and my God.”

To be clear, Jesus doesn’t make up the entire Godhead; but the divinity that belongs to the rest of the Godhead belongs also to Him’ (Tasker)

Jesus is in the very essence of God (Phil 2).

“very God of very God, begotten not made” (Nicene Creed)

Jesus shares the same substance as the Father, *not merely a similar substance*.

When **Jehovah’s Witnesses** read from the New World Translation, this verse reads, “The word was **a** god.”

- They argue since there is no article before the word “God” that it should be understood as “a god” but just because there’s no article in front of “God” doesn’t mean that should be the rendering. There are many places where the article isn’t used and is yet **specific**, like in John 1:45 (the same chapter!), “You are the King of Israel” has no article, but it’s **not** to be translated as “a king of Israel.”
- Further, There is another word to convey the idea of something like “**divine**” if you wanted to discuss a **lesser deity** (*theios*).
- Finally, a **simple reading of the context and book of John says otherwise!**

Jesus is not something less than God. He is in the very essence God.

• Again, we find here another important aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity: **“God is one in essence and three in persons.”**

- **We are monotheists, not Trithiests** (believing in three gods)
- **Nor are we modalists** (thinking that there’s one God who puts on a mask in one of three persons).
 - **Jesus is not the Father,**
 - **Nor is He the Holy Spirit.**
 - **The Father didn’t die on the cross, as some people pray!**
- **God is one in essence and three in persons.**

What a mystery — the Trinity.

We can’t fully comprehend the arithmetic of heaven.

The main point here in John 1 is that Jesus is full deity.

- We sing it every Christmas, “**Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate, Deity.**”

Here’s the good news — **God has come down to us.**

- Other religions are trying to reach up to God.
- The gospel is that God has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ.
- “He existed in the very essence God, but didn’t consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, he emptied himself...”

Do you love this Jesus? The purpose of John’s theology here is that you would be driven to faith and worship and obedience. Not to simply have the right answers.

- Theology isn’t an end in itself.
- It’s essential for rightly understanding the truth, including the truth about Jesus.
- But if you love a theological system more than Jesus, you’ve missed the purpose of theology.
- Love Jesus more than your system.
Theology itself can’t save you from your sins, but believing in Jesus can.
- Theology itself will never love you back, but Jesus will.

Conclusion

“John intends that the entire book be read in light of this [first] verse. The deeds and the words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God” (Vanderet, *Prelude to Deity*).

Just look at the next chapter:

- Jesus turns **water into wine**. People say, “**You don’t believe that do you?**” “**You don’t believe Jesus did miracles, right?**”
 - If you believe the first verse of John, you can believe it!
- Jesus **cleanses the temple**. People say, “**You don’t believe Jesus had the right to do that, do you?**”
 - Yes we do. Why? Because we believe v. 1! Jesus is very God of very God!
- John 3 – **Nicodemus**. Jesus tells him that he must be “born again.” People say, “**You don’t believe that “born again stuff do you?” Why not just have a religion with the sermon on the mount, and do good to people? Why must you insist on being born again?**”
 - **Because this is Jesus very God of very God – and he says it!**
- **John 19:30** — “**It is finished.**” How can the death of a Jewish man 2,000 years possibly have any eternal significance? **His death is of infinite value because of the infinite value of his person.** The blood of the God-man has power to save.
 - **Acts 20:28.** Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of **God**, which he [God!] obtained with his [God’s] own blood.
 - **Watts** put it powerfully:

**Well might the sun in darkness hide,
and shut its glories in,**

**when God, the mighty maker, died
for his own creature's sin.**

John's whole book is to be read in light of verse 1.

If you believe verse 1, then you can believe all that follows.

Who is Jesus Christ really?

Based on verses 1-2, we find that He has an unfathomable attribute: eternity; He has a unique relationship with the Father, and He has an unrivaled essence as God.

What does all this mean? It's this:

Jesus is the fully divine Son of God.

Believe on Him, and find life in his name.