

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (5-12-1972 Strandtown Baptist Church)

John 1:1

Additional bible reading: John 1:1-18; Genesis 1:20-28

The Word

Introduction

John's Gospel is different from all the others. Ninety two per cent of the material in John's Gospel is peculiar to him. Matthew opens his Gospel with the announcement to Joseph by the angel. Mark begins with the preaching of John the Baptist, and Luke with the birth of John the Baptist. But John starts before John the Baptist, indeed before the Old Testament and creation – he starts in eternity past.

John 1:1-18 is a most wonderful passage, every word is so important, each statement is vital. John's precision and accuracy are most careful. Nowhere else in the Bible is there such a clear and direct statement about the divine nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every statement deserves to be carefully weighed. Not a single word could be altered without opening the door to some heresy.

Yet much is beyond our understanding. Going to try and make it plain and simple, to illustrate and explain, but even then there is much our minds cannot take in. We must merely be content to humbly believe. "It is rashness to search too far into it. It is piety to believe it. It is eternal life to know it. And we can never have full comprehension of it till we come to enjoy it" (Bernard).

Jesus Christ is the Word

This is strange and peculiar statement to us, but not to the original readers, hence John does not try to explain it. John knew who would read this book, and he had to make the truth about Jesus Christ clear to them in a way they would understand. He knew what they believed and thought. We can only understand if we see who these people were and what they believed.

Some of the readers were Jews, living in Palestine and all over the Roman Empire. They would have had two ways of thinking of the "word". God used "word" to create the world, i.e. God said "Let there be light", and there was light (Genesis 1:3), and so on. By what means did God create? How did he make the world? **By the word of the Lord were the heavens made** (Psalm 33:6; Proverbs 8:22). The word of God was creative and powerful.

By saying that Jesus Christ is the Word, John implies that Jesus Christ is the means and agent God used to create the world. **All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made** (John 1:3). **By him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth. All things were created by him and for him** (Colossians 1:16). **His Son whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world** (Hebrews 1:2). Therefore Christ was the creator, and not a created being.

The second way of thinking about “word” is the sense in which it is used as a message or revelation, e.g. **Then the word of the Lord came to me** (Jeremiah 1:4); **the word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest** (Ezekiel 1:3). So taken in this sense, Jesus Christ is God’s revelation and message to men. Words, both written and spoken, are the means of expressing our thoughts. Therefore for the Jews, the statement that Jesus Christ is the Word meant that He was the agent for creation, and He was the agent of revelation. Thus God was revealed through Jesus Christ. In Him was life and light.

Some of John’s readers would have been Greeks. They were increasing in the church as the Jews declined in numbers, and the “Word of God” had a special meaning for them.

They looked at the world – its splendid and dependable order, night and day coming round without fail, the seasons of the year, the stars and planets in unvarying laws, the tides ebbing and flowing. They knew this was produced by the word of God (or the mind of God). Men have power to think and know, enabled by the word of God dwelling in men, telling us the difference between right and wrong. Therefore to the Greek mind, the means whereby the universe is controlled, and men are able to think and reason is the Word of God, or God’s mind. This person is Jesus Christ. By Him God creates, guides and directs the world.

In summary, Jesus Christ is the Word implies He is the agent of creation, revelation, direction, power of men’s knowledge and reasoning and thought. This Word is Jesus Christ, who came to earth. Men could see Jesus Christ – the agent, the truth of God, the Mind and Power of God.

Jesus Christ is eternal

In the beginning was.. (John 1:1; c.f. Genesis 1:1). At the very beginning, the Word was existing. It did not begin to exist when the heavens and earth were made. Much less did He begin to exist at Bethlehem. The word “was” is most important. He already was existing when the earth was called into being. However many thousands of years ago that was – Jesus Christ was already existing. **Glory which he had before the world was** (John 17:5). **Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world** (John 17:24). Before time began, before the first star twinkled, before the first mountain was formed, before the first breeze blew, or the first flower bloomed – Jesus Christ was already existing.

Jesus Christ as a person distinct from God the Father

The Word was with God – here we focus on the word “with”. The Father was eternal, the Son was eternal, and they existed together in the closest connection. They existed face to face, and took supreme delight in each other. Their’s was eternal love and close fellowship. They did not just exist side by side, but they had active intercourse and perfect communion.

This is one of the deepest and most mysterious truths. No mental powers to explain this. Augustine tried to describe this relationship in terms of the sun and its rays, of fire and light. Two distinct things, but inseparably united, for where one is, the other

is also. The Father and Son are two distinct Persons, co-equal and co-eternal, who with the Holy Spirit (also co-equal and co-eternal) are united in the one Godhead. Three in person, and one in substance or essence or being. Not three gods, or three forms of God into which He changes Himself.

Jesus Christ was God

The Word was God – in nature, essence and substance. Jesus Christ is very God. Jehovah's Witnesses would say he was *a* god. But this plain and unequivocal statement tells He was God, just as the Father and the Holy Spirit are also God. He was not semi-God, not made of a mixture of God and man, not an angel, not an inferior spiritual being, nor merely man, but Jesus Christ is God.

There are deep mysteries here no mind can comprehend, and no language can adequately express. Three persons in the Trinity – and yet one God in essence. How Christ can be *in* the Father (the unity of the essence of God), and yet *with* the Father (the distinction of His person).

Some modern translations try to express it differently. **From the first, the Word was in being** (v.1a), **when all things began, the Word already was** (v.1b), **The Word was face to face with God** (v.2a), **God had the word abiding with him** (v.2b). **The Word was God Himself** (v.3a), **What God was, the Word was** (v.3b). Various creeds have tried to rework it, e.g. the Athanasion Creed – “There is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of Father, Son and Holy Ghost is all one, glory equal, majesty co-eternal... equal to Father as touching His Godhead and inferior to Father as touching His humanity.” The Creed of Nicaea – “And in one Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God... God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father.”

Conclusion

What importance does the fact that Jesus Christ is the Word have on my life? He is the means whereby God made the world, sustains it and reveals Himself. He is an eternally distinct person, yet fully God. He gives light and life.

God came to earth so that we need no longer grope and guess. We have seen Jesus, we know God exists. We have seen Jesus, so we know what God is like. God loves, cares, God is interested, God is involved with the world.

Jesus Christ was not only revelation, but also power. By Him the world was created. Our sin is so great that only One who was with God and who was God could remove it. We can know the strength of His grace, and rest on God Himself. **Our help comes from one who is mighty** (Psalm 89:19). He is the strong foundation stone; He was able to bear the weight of the world's sin.