



Theanthropos Study Guide

"The God-Man"—Expositions of the Incarnation of Christ

Lesson 1: Who Is This?

Main point: John provides evidence for the deity of Jesus so that readers might believe it and commit their lives to Him.

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.

JOHN 1:1-2

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Introduction and Purpose:

The story is told of a Christian student in the University of Edinburgh who thought he would be what Christians call a “good witness” by going into his philosophy lecture early and writing on the blackboard, ‘*Jesus is the answer,*’ before heading out of the lecture theatre. When he returned with his fellow students, he was somewhat pleased to see that his chalk-written words were still there for all to see. But underneath someone had written ‘*What’s the question?*’

Many of you here today agree with the university student, as I do, that *Jesus is the answer*. But the question many are asking outside this room, and even inside the church today, is, why are you a Christian? Or, why be a Christian as opposed to a *Mormon, Muslim, Buddhist, or an Atheist?*

There is only one answer to *why you are a Christian or why be a Christian*, and John gives us the answer in his gospel. It is because of *Jesus Christ*. This is not a soundbite answer or a cute cliché.

- *If Christ is NOT God*, then what we are doing here in this gathering is *idolatrous*, and we ought to stop. However, *if He IS God*, and we fail to worship Him, we are *the worst rebels of all*.
- *If Christ is NOT God*, then He was a *blasphemer, a fake, and an impostor*. We cannot even accept Him as a good man, because His claims to deity were clear. However, *if He IS God*, but we talk of Him only as a good man, it is we who are the *blasphemers*.

There is no question so crucial and as far-reaching as this one: *who is Jesus?* Is He, or is He not, God? What does the Bible teach?

From the very start of John’s gospel, **the Apostle’s intent** is not merely to lay out historical data concerning the story of Jesus, and then to insist, “Just believe and have faith in Jesus.” Dear friends, you can’t believe—you can’t have faith—without knowing something about the One you are to believe in. We are not Christians because we took a “blind leap of faith.” True faith is not blind. We believe because we see Jesus. David Robertson, the author of *The Dawkins Letters*, once said, “Blind faith is a rather successful lie put about by the Father of lies, (the devil, not Dawkins!).” John’s purpose is to present the evidence of Jesus Christ in the hope that we will *see and believe, love and adore, commit and follow* Him for the rest of our days (*John 20:30-31*).

The reason why you need this message today is not that you might load your theological pistol to fire at non-believing skeptics or family members. We are not Christians because of *arguments*, though our faith is based upon factual, historical evidence. You need this study because, as one struggling soul put it, “*My life is in need of a workable and available deity.*” Not a God who works *for* us, but works *in* us and *despite* us, in *every aspect* of our lives and personalities. We have a need that only an all-sufficient Savior can satisfy! And this God in Christ is available and accessible by faith today!

Now, if Jesus was *only* a man, then you can safely forget Him and go your own way. But if He is God—as *He claimed to be*, and as *all true Christians believe*—then you must yield your life to Him and worship and serve Him faithfully.

To help us, John makes a three-fold declaration about Jesus Christ in verses 1-5, designed to introduce us to Christ, that we might believe and obey Him. John declares that...

- Jesus Christ is God. (vv.1-2)
- Jesus Christ is Creator. (v.3)
- Jesus Christ is invincible. (vv.4-5)

Today, we'll look at the first declaration, and Lord willing, the second and third in the weeks ahead.

Transition:

John's gospel begins with a prologue (*pro-before, logos-word, speech, discourse*), which is like the foyer of a building or the front door of a house (*John 1:1-18*). The prologue takes us into the home of the gospel so that we might meet the Owner. In the preface, the main themes of the gospel are played beforehand in anticipation of the entire mission of the Son. The rest of the book is nothing other than an expansion of the theme stated on the outset.

John divides or structures his argument in three simple divisions like slices of a pie: the first slice features seven specially selected "*signs*" (*John 1:19-12:50*—there were more signs that were not recorded *John 21:25*). The second slice is *the secrets* spoken to His disciples in the Upper Room discourse (*John 13:1-17:26*). The third and final slice of the pie is *the sorrows* (*John 18:1-20:31*). Both *the signs* and *the secrets* contain seven "*I am*" sayings which marshal compelling and convincing evidence that we might believe and commit ourselves to Him (*John 6:35; 8:12; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1*).

Although the basic structure is simple, John *surprises* us. He says the *simplest things*, uses the *simplest words*, puts together the *simplest phrases* and *sentences*—and in five short verses, he plunges us into the most mysterious, mind-staggering truths of the Bible about Jesus Christ. I like what Alan Redpath says about this book, "John is shallow enough for a child to wade in but deep enough for an elephant to swim in." Let's come to the text.

Exposition:

Every clause is beautifully and carefully crafted in poetic form. Using a technique called "staircase parallelism," John introduces a concept at the end of one line, and then he takes it up at the beginning of the next, and lays truth-upon-truth, like brick-upon-brick, creating step-after-step which leads us to the Son. The first declaration that John makes is that *Jesus Christ is God*.

- 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.

John transports us through words to the time before time. He takes us back to *eternity past*—when all there was, was *God alone*. This was before God *created the heavens* and *the angelic beings* that surround His throne. John gives us three declarations about the divinity of Jesus Christ.

A. Jesus was preexistent—“*In the beginning was the Word...*”

The first three words are familiar to us because John wants us to connect what is said about Jesus to what is said about God in Genesis 1:1, “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*”

Later on, in 1 John 1:1, John says this,

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

The Bible teaches that *Jesus existed before* His conception and birth. His birth did not mark His origin, but only His appearance as a man on the stage of history. If Jesus is not preexistent, then He is not God.

This is in line with what Jesus said about Himself. Jesus was conscious of His deity.

- **John 3:13**—No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven. Jesus asks His hearers this question, which implies His preexistence.
- **John 6:62**—What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?
- **John 16:28**—I came forth from the Father and have come into the world.

All these statements are Jesus’ own public testimony of *His preexistence*. But who can forget that prayer Jesus offers in John 17:5?

- Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

Jesus was not only conscious of His deity, but He exercised *divine prerogatives and displayed divine attributes*. Only God can forgive sins (Luke 5:18-26), and Jesus forgave sins. Only God can command life, and Jesus spoke healing life to the paralytic. Only God can raise the dead, and Jesus claimed power, “*not only to lay His life down but also to take it up again*” (John 10:17-18). Only God is worthy to receive worship, and Jesus received the worship of Thomas, who confessed Him as “*My Lord and My God*” (John 20:28).

We not only have *the public testimony of Jesus*, but we have *the testimony of, according to Jesus, the greatest man* who has ever lived—John the Baptist. Jesus said, “*among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist*” (Matt.11:11). And listen to what John said of Jesus.

- **John 1:15**—This was He of whom I said, “He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.”

Now some quick thinker challenges this and says, “Alright—the Bible is clear about His *preexistence*, but that does not mean *He is God*. Preexistence prior to creation does not prove deity. After all, the angels existed prior to creation, but they are not divine, right?” Yes, you are right, but you are still making a monumental mistake that gets it all wrong.

A group made the same mistake of people in the early centuries of the Christian church called the Arians (not white supremacists). This group said they were willing to accept that Jesus was preexistent, but they still saw Him only *as the greatest of all creatures through whom God created everything else*. Many fall

into this lethal logic today. The Jehovah Witnesses, the Bahai faith, the Mormons—they would all agree that Jesus preexisted, but He could not be God in the same sense that the Father is God because He was created. To that, John says, “No...Jesus was not only preexistent...

B. Jesus is coexistent—“*In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was with God...*”

The tiny preposition “**with**” (*pros*) is significant with meaning. It describes that which is “distinct from, in the direction of, on the side of, or towards—namely face-to-face in divine relationship and fellowship,” with God. Here is a statement of the separate, distinct personality of the Son. John is pressuring us to speak of God as a Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 2:6 says, “*although He [Jesus] existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.*” In John 10:30, Jesus said, “*I and the Father are one.*” In John 14:9, Jesus said, “*anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father.*” Co-equal in glory, power, and honor. Distinct in personality, one in essence. There are not two Gods, but one. As Christians, we are not polytheists or tritheists, but monotheists who agree with the Shema (Deut.6:4—*Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!*).

True Christians embrace the mystery of the Godhead—*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*—which means we cannot describe God as more than One, but there is enough revelation that we cannot deny the existence of three Persons. Don’t get entangled in metaphysical disputes. John drives home his point and shuts the door on any speculation by saying, Jesus is not only *preexistent*, but He is also *coexistent*. Just in case you have any doubt about what John is saying about the divinity of Christ, He shuts the front door by declaring that Jesus is full deity.

C. Jesus is self-existent—“*...and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.*”

Everything that can be said about God the Father can be said about God the Son.

- **Colossians 2:9**—In Him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form...

R.C. Sproul described the word “fullness” (*pleroma*) as the kind of fullness that indicates full satisfaction. If I take my glass and put it under the water faucet at home and say, “I am going to fill up this glass,” and I filled it right up to the edge of the glass, that still would not be *pleroma* or fullness. In order to get to what Paul means, I would need to leave my glass under the water faucet so that the water flows over the top, where it is at the bursting point. That’s *pleroma*, a fullness that is so full that there is no room for another ounce, spec, or drop of anything to be added to it. That’s what the Bible says of Jesus. He not only came in the “*fullness of time*” (*Gal.4:4*), in Him also was *the fullness of God* so that nothing needed to be added, and nothing could be taken away.

- **Hebrews 1:3**— And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature.

What does that mean? It means that *all the brightness of God’s glory shines forth in the Son*. His was no lesser glory. He is the real, substantial, adequate representation and the manifestation of the King—eternal, immortal, and invisible, God only wise. The Lord Jesus is the perfect picture of what God is like. He is the very impress of His substance. The mystery baffles us, but we cannot deny it and be true Christians. And so, we sing at this time of the year...

Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see,
Hail, the Incarnate deity.
Please as man, with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.¹

Here are the three facts about Jesus that we must be sure about: *Jesus was preexistent, Jesus is coexistent, and Jesus is self-existence*, which all say without equivocation, that Jesus is God.

Application: Now, why is it important to understand these three facts about Jesus Christ?

Facts, like checks, are not useful unless we know how to cash them. The greatest and the most important reason to understand these facts about Jesus is this: what you think of Jesus is the most essential question you or anyone else will ever have to face. If you miss it with Jesus, you have missed it all!

Illustration: C.K. Lee is a native Christian leader from China, and when he was here in this country a few years ago, he spoke at a church in California. At the conclusion of his message, a young college student asked him this penetrating question, "Why should we export Christianity to China when you have Confucianism in your country?" And he replied, "There are three reasons. First of all, Confucius was a teacher, and Christ is a Savior—and China needs a Savior more than she needs a teacher. Second, Confucius is dead, and Christ is alive—and China needs a living Savior more than a dead teacher. Third, Confucius is someday going to stand before Christ to be judged by Him—and China needs to know Christ as Savior before she meets Him as Judge."

Now, these are the three reasons why the facts about Jesus Christ need to be acted on by you today.

- You need a Savior more than a teacher—*for a teacher can tell you what you need to know, but a Savior can give you what you really need.*
- You need a living Savior, more than dead religion.
- You need to know Him as Savior before you meet Him as Judge.

Let's backtrack and seek to understand why John uses the descriptive term "**the Word**" for Jesus. What is meant by "the Word"?

We know something about the power of words. They can build us up and tear us down. And many of our best memories are connected with what someone said to us. But the most important thing about words is that *they can reveal in a moment what is otherwise entirely hidden.* Socrates said, "Would thou have me see thee? Then speak, for speech reveals the man."

- To both Greeks and Jews, a "word" was an *expression*. By words, we articulate our speech. The Word of God then is Deity expressing itself in audible terms.
- A "word" is also a means of *communication*. By words, we transmit information to others. So then, Christ, as the Word, is the Divine transmitter, communicating to us the life and love of God.
- A "word" is not only an *expression* and a means of *communication*; it is also a means of *revelation*. The moment I clothe my thoughts in words and say them, it reveals my level of intelligence and moral character. And Christ, as the Word, reveals to us the attributes and the perfections of God. He

¹ Charles Wesley, *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*

manifested *God's wisdom*, He exhibited *God's holiness*, He made known *God's grace*, and He unveiled *God's heart*! In Christ and nowhere else, is God fully and finally revealed.

- There is an interesting title given to Jesus in Revelation 1:8. Jesus is called, "*the Alpha and Omega*," which is God's alphabet. So, we can say that *Jesus is God's alphabet—He is the One who spells out Deity, the One who utters all that God has to say.*

Every person in this world needs two things: *a Word from God and a Way to God*. And in Jesus, we have both. Do you see, dear friends, what John is saying to us in these opening verses? He is saying to us that all we need is found in Jesus—for, in Jesus, the Infinite God can become intimate with us. In Him, the Creator becomes the companion of all who loves and trusts Him! It might interest you to know that if you asked a Buddhist, do you love Buddha? Or a Muslim, do you love Allah? They would all say, "Love? No! Believe? Yes! But love? No!" But Christianity is the only faith where loving its Master is required and granted by the Holy Spirit! So, let me ask you, do you love Jesus today? "*If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed*" (1 Cor.16:22). And if so, then what will follow is *the obedience that leads to joy and peace that He freely offers*—Amen!

What does John want you to get from these opening verses? Perhaps this example might help.

On the BBC network, there was a program series called "*Everyman*." One of the documentaries was on "How to get to heaven in Montana." It was a fascinating insight into the life of the Hutterite community (radical Anabaptist group). The pastor of the group had died, and his children had, in Hutterite terms, 'gone wild.' They dared to go into town, visit the movie, and even drink alcohol! Then some got converted, and as a result, a split developed in their community. The *Everyman* team spent a year with the community and recorded how the two sides lived together. It was well done and offered some great insights. One of the insights that came out was when the pastor's son (*one of the Born A-gains, who had become the leader of the new group*) was asked by an interviewer, "What does Jesus Christ mean to you? His answer was unforgettable.

His eyes filled with tears, and he spoke in a soft voice and said, "Jesus? He is beautiful...He is my everything...He is my magnificent obsession."

Oh, that this would be ours as well today and during the holiday season. Jesus, my All, my everything! But that still leaves us with the question of where do we find Jesus?

Where do you find Jesus?

Most reality TV shows are, as my boys say, "Trash!" But there is a great deal of reality to some of them. One such program was called *Parent Swap*. The kids in one home go to live with the parents in another home, and vice-versa, and in this episode, a teenager from England—drunken, sexually promiscuous, rude, and ignorant teen—went to live with a Black pastor and his wife in Atlanta. As they struggled to understand and come to terms with what they had in common, the cultural clash was brutal. When the experiment was over, a producer from behind the camera asked the young man, as he headed back to the airport, what he thought of the whole event. He opined, "These people are all right. They are really into this Jesus, aren't they? Jesus seems all-right. Where can I find Jesus in England? Is He in the yellow pages?"

This is a haunting question. Here was a young man who was shown respect and love because of Jesus, and he wanted to know where he could find Jesus in his home country. How could he or anyone find Jesus?

The answer is that *He has to find us*. We are so blinded by nature to *who He is* that He Himself has to come and reveal Himself to us. It is as if we have arranged to meet someone at the airport, but we don't *know who they are* or *what they are like*. So, you stand there with a piece of paper with their name of it. Then there is that wonderful moment when they approach you and identify themselves. You have been looking for them, but they are also looking to reveal themselves to you. That's what Jesus does. He is the One we were looking for, and He is the One who is looking for us.

Life and light to all He brings, risen with healing in His wings.²



² Charles Wesley, *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*

Lesson 1: Review and Apply

Main point: John provides evidence for the deity of Jesus so that readers might believe it and commit their lives to Him.

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.

JOHN 1:1-2



Discuss It

- If Jesus is not God, how would that change the Christian faith?
- If Jesus is not God, He is a liar. If He is God, we must obey Him. Do you see any other options here?
- John asserts three declarations about the divinity of Jesus: He is preexistent, coexistent, and self-existent. How are each of these declarations vital in Jesus' claim to deity?

Discover It

Read these verses from the Bible where Jesus claims Himself as Deity. Can you identify His claim to preexistence, coexistence, and/or self-existence in each one?

- **John 8:58**—Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.”
- **John 3:13**—No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven. Jesus asks His hearers this question, which implies His preexistence.
- **John 6:62**—What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?
- **John 10:30**—I and the Father are one.
- **John 8:24**—Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins.
- **John 16:28**—I came forth from the Father and have come into the world.
- **John 17:5**—Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.
- **John 14:9**—anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father.
- **John 6:35**—Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.”

Apply It

When I was a kid there was one question in my heart that often haunted me. I don't recall the first time I had heard the name, "Jesus," but I do know I heard that name from several people on several occasions. I recall one day asking my mom, "Who is Jesus?" At that time, her answer to me was that Christians believe He was the Messiah, but Jews do not believe He was. I was never satisfied with any answer I received. A continual bedtime prayer of mine would be, "God, I love You. And, if Jesus is God, tell Him I love Him too." This question that haunted and troubled my soul for many years, is the most important question for every human soul to answer. **Who is Jesus? Who do you say Jesus is?** How you answer this question will determine your eternal destiny. Each person must answer this question in their own hearts. Do not pass it by. Do not base your conclusion on what you have heard others say. Examine the claims He made. Study the Bible for yourself. May our hearts be restless until they find their rest in Jesus.³

³ See Augustine's Confessions, 1.1.1

Lesson 2: Creator King

Main point: John provides evidence for the deity of Jesus so that readers might believe it and commit their lives to Him.

All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him, nothing came into being that has come into being.

JOHN 1:3

INTRODUCTION:

John's opening words are staggering. What John tells us, in essence, is this: the same unfettered sovereignty manifested in creation was revealed in the Person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Who is it that speaks, and the winds obey? Who is it that commands and hidden invisible evil spirits obey? Who is it that speaks, and disease and decay reverse their course, and new life is restored? Who is it that stops a funeral where death has choked out life with its vise grip and commands resurrection life to return, and it does? Only Jesus.

In only twenty words in English, fewer in the Greek, John declares in verse 3 that everything in the universe that exists is created, sustained, and subject to its Creator—the Lord Jesus Christ.

From the macrocosm in the furthest galaxies yet to be discovered by man to the microcosm of sub-nuclear particles, all created reality exists, according to John, because of Jesus Christ; and in Him, it *adheres* or *holds* together.

The burning question is, *Does the God who brought these things into being, exercise real, constant control over all things? In other words, who rules and who governs every part of life?*

The personal question is, *is it possible to know Him in an intimate, warm, and saving way?* The entirety of John's gospel is written to persuade you and me that the answer is YES! When John says, "Jesus is God," what does He mean? With unmistakable clarity, our text sets one truth before us: the Deity of Christ.

EXPOSITION:

There are three simple headings I want to place before you to help unpack this doctrine and guide our thinking on this subject. Would you consider with me, the deity of Christ—1) *biblically defined*, 2) *explicitly stated*, and 3) *practically applied*?

A. The Deity of Christ Biblically Defined

Two undeniable proofs of the deity of Christ are offered in this verse. Proof number one, the Creator of all things must Himself be uncreated. Proof number two, throughout the Bible—in both the Old and New Testaments—God is portrayed (set forth) as the Creator (*Gen.1:1; Ps.102:25; Is.40:28; 42:5; 45:18*). In verse 3, what John wants us to know is that the eternal Son—or the Word, who became flesh (1:14)—is, in fact, the Creator of the universe. To cover all sides and in the middle, John states it from *the positive point of view* and then gives us a striking contrast in the second part by saying the same truth from *a negative point of view*. First, the positive view.

1. **Jesus is the originator of creation**—"All things came into being through Him..."

Explained: The words “**all things**” are one word in Greek (*pas*), and it leaves no room for exceptions. It means *each and every part that applies*. I’ve studied the word “all” in both the Hebrew and the Greek, and I’ve discovered that “*all*” means *all*, and that’s *all*, *all* means. Everything that is created, from the 100 billion galaxies in the universe to the smallest particles of an atom (proton, electron, neutron), is the creation of *Jesus Christ*. Both *invisible* and *visible*, on land, in the sea below, and in the skies above. Everything in the universe was made and put there by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Applied: Now, what that means for you is that because Jesus Christ is the Creator God of all things, we can trust such a God with everything. It also means that because He is Creator, He knows just what His creation and His people need.

2. **Jesus is the *sustainer* of creation**—‘*All things came into being through Him.*’

Explained: This truth is found in the phrase “**came into being...**” (*ginomai*). “*All things came into being through Him.*” What did the Creator use to create the world? Nothing. The world was not created out of some preexisting matter or eternal primordial goo. But instead, *out of nothing*, God spoke, and everything that has come into being came into being. Creation is not the result of some evolutionary process. The writer to the Hebrews adds,

- **Hebrews 11:3**—By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

What this truth implies is that *everything that is created by Christ owes its dependence upon Him*. In other words, Jesus Christ not only *created* the world, but He also *sustains* and *upholds* it. The author of Hebrews opens his epistle with this very declaration.

- **Hebrews 1:3**—And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.

He is the glue of the galaxies, the mighty Atlas who upholds the world and, as the song puts it,

He’s got the whole world in His hands, (along with the itty, bitty baby and you/me sister and brother)⁴

Applied: This truth is a crucial polemic (defense) for every believer today. When you talk to your Buddhist or Hindu neighbor or co-worker, remember, they have been erroneously taught that there is *no distinction between God and the world*. They say that God is in all things, and all things are a part of God. Some of you remember the song back in the ’70s by the Stylistics, “You are Everything, and Everything is You.” It was influenced by this Eastern teaching that deifies nature and claims that God can be experienced directly through nature.

Ah, but John points out that God is distinct from the world so that when creation dies, God does not die. When nature is contaminated, God remains holy. The writer to the Hebrews said in chapter 1:10-12

⁴ Traditional Spiritual, *He’s God the Whole World in His Hands*

- And,
 "YOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH,
 AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS;
¹¹ THEY WILL PERISH, BUT YOU REMAIN;
 AND THEY ALL WILL BECOME OLD LIKE A GARMENT,
¹² AND LIKE A MANTLE YOU WILL ROLL THEM UP;
 LIKE A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED.
 BUT YOU ARE THE SAME,
 AND YOUR YEARS WILL NOT COME TO AN END."

The universe is not *eternal*, as some of the secular scientists proclaim. "*All things came into being through Him*," that is, there was *a point in the past when it was not*, and then the universe came into being and continues by the very Word of Christ.

Jesus is the *originator* of creation. Jesus is the *sustainer* of creation. But John tells us something else here...and that is,

3. **Jesus is the *agent* of creation**—"All things came into being *through Him*..."

Explained: When John declares that "*All things came into being through Him*," he does not lower the Word to the rank of a simple instrument. Rather, John merely implies that Christ's relation to creation was not detached from it, but intimately involved with it. The word "**through**" (*dia*) is a preposition from which we get our English word *diameter*. When someone asks you what the width of something is, they are asking you to explain *the measurement of something from one side to the other*. When John uses it here, "*All things came into being through Him...*," he is seeking to explain to us that the Word was the *instrument*, the *agent* through which the world was made *from one side across the other*. In other words, Jesus is not only the cause of creation, but He is also the agent through which it was made.

- **1 Corinthians 8:6**—yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.
- **Colossians 1:16**—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.
- **Romans 11:36**—For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.

Oh, how clear and emphatic the Bible is about the deity of Christ!

Applied: William Barclay tells of a little girl from the inner city who was taken on a trip into the country. She was in awe of the trees and the beautiful bluebell flowers. She asked one of the teachers, "Do you think God would mind if I picked some of His flowers?" I know we sing, "*This Is My Father's World*," and that is absolutely true, but it is also true that this is My Savior's World—God is a Savior, and His name is Jesus!

Now there is much more biblical evidence, but let me flip the pancake to the other side so what we might enjoy it. On the positive side, in an economy of words, John says, Jesus Christ is the originator,

agent, and sustainer of creation. Then he concludes his positive declaration by with a negative one for emphasis by saying...

4. **Jesus is the *exclusive* creator**—“...*apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*”

John is a master evangelist, and this is one of the stylistic ways he communicates. For example, when the Jews sent the priest and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?”

- **John 1:20**—And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”
- **1 John 1:5**—This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

Explained: The adverb “*apart*” (choris) is used 41 times in the New Testament, and it means *without*, independent from, or separate from. Another way of saying this would be, “Without Him, nothing was made in the made category.” If He made everything that has been made, then He is not in the “made category” because you cannot create yourself.

One last insight from this precious and power-packed verse. John changes the tense *aorist* to the *perfect*. Notice, he says, “*all things came into being through Him.*” That’s the aorist, which conveys the idea that *creation is in its totality*. In other words, it happened once and for all. It came into being in one act (over six days), or ten words of utterance (“And God said, ‘Let there be...!’”), and “*apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*” In other words, creation is a completed act. The creation is finished. It is not a process that is still going on. When researchers find some new creature, it has been there all along, and they just didn’t know it. But God did. Creation is not in a process; it is a finished product.

Applied: Now, this has some very personal applications. One, if Jesus is the Creator, then He is God, which means, I am not God...and neither are you! This is one of the most fundamental lessons of life. Two, if He can create everything, then surely He can give help in my distress. Nothing is too difficult for Him! So, the next time you are in trouble, humble yourself and look up to the exclusive Savior who made the heavens and the earth. Finally, if Jesus is God, He is not in control of MOST things, but ALL things—which includes your trials too!

B. The Deity of Christ Explicitly Stated

Now I have sought to open up the verse and the doctrine for you, but there is no better preacher than the text of Scripture. So, let me just set before you a small sampling of the verses that explicitly state that Jesus is Creator.

1. Colossians 1:15-17

- He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

Watch out for the Jehovah's Witnesses, who will say, "firstborn here means first created." Prototokos was either the eldest child in the family or a person of preeminent rank, and in this context, Paul says the latter. He is the originator—*by Him*. He is the agent—*through Him*. He is the goal—*for Him*.

2. Ephesians 3:9

- and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;

3. Acts 17:24-27

- The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; ²⁵ nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things; ²⁶ and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷ that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

To a religious group of people who had no clue about who God is, Paul tells them five things about God that we all need to know: 1) *God is the creator of life*, 2) *God is the ruler of life*, 3) *God is the giver of life*, 4) *God is the controller of life*, and 5) *God is the revealer of life*.

4. Exodus 20:11

- For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

5. Psalm 146:5-6

- How blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
Whose hope is in the LORD his God,
⁶ Who made heaven and earth,
The sea and all that is in them;
Who keeps faith forever;

6. Revelation 4:11

- Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.

It was said of Charles Steinmetz, the mechanical genius and friend of Henry Ford, that he could build a motor in his mind, and if it broke down, he could fix it in his mind. So, when he designed it and actually built it, it ran with precision. One day the assembly line in the Ford plant broke down. None of Ford's men could fix it, so they called in Steinmetz. He tinkered for a few minutes, threw the switch, and it started running again. A few days later, Ford received a bill from Steinmetz for \$10,000. Ford wrote back, "Charlie, don't you think your bill is a little high for just a little tinkering?"

Steinmetz sent back a revised bill: "Tinkering—\$10. Knowing where to tinker—\$9,990." Only [the Creator, the Lord] Jesus knows *where* the tinkering should be done in our lives to keep us in perfect running order. Christ always knows which *screw to turn*, which *belt to loosen*, and the most beneficial octane [for each of His creatures].

The doctrine of the deity of Christ as creator biblically defined, explicitly stated, now let's come to the "so what" of the message, and consider what this means for us practically applied.

C. The Deity of Christ Practically Applied

1. As Creator, Jesus has creator rights.

Creator rights mean *sovereignty authority to orchestrate whatever He deems best in your life* (whether people, negative or positive events, or experiences) to accomplish His will and move you from where you are to where you need to be.

- He divinely appointed a prison for Joseph.
- He mysteriously led Melchizedek to Abram.
- He sovereignly orchestrated Jethro and Zipporah to be the first family for Moses.
- He graciously knitted together the friendship of Jonathan and David.
- He unquestionably brought Barnabas (the son of Encouragement) to a newly called apostle Paul.

And everything in your life has a purpose too, dear friend. It is "custom-designed" and "tailor-made" by the Master's hand.

Spurgeon said it this way:

"You have seen a painter with his palette on his finger, and he has ugly dabs of paint on the palette. What can he do with those spots? Go and see the picture. What splendid painting! In an even wiser way does Jesus act toward us. He takes us, poor smudges of paint, and He makes the blessed pictures of His grace out of us. It is neither the brush nor the paint He uses, but it is the skill of His own hand which does it all!"

2. As Creator, Jesus has recreative power.

Although His work of creation is finished, His work among creatures is not. When God made you, He didn't make any mistakes, but sin cracked the mirror in which His glory was to shine in you. Sin polluted the stream through which His life might flow. Sin corrupted the desires and faculties that He designed for your good and His glory.

The cracks are through every part of our lives. The pollution has infected every part of our souls. The corruption is not merely skin deep; it is bone deep.

Are we then lost and ruined forever? Shh! Listen! I think I hear a voice saying,

- *"Come unto Me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt.11:28). "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall now perish but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (John 3:16-17).*

I hear some saying, "But certainly, there are some who are worse than others, and who need help more than me?"

- *"But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish," Jesus says (Luke 13:5).*

"But how can I repent if I have no desire to? How can I turn when I feel paralyzed by my sin?"

- *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63).*

I am hearing that if I but act on the words of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, I can be forgiven of my sins and brought into a personal relationship with my Maker, the Savior.

- *All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise Him up on the last day (John 6:37-40).*

But what about my faults? My weaknesses? My past? My ignorance? My stubborn heart?

- *"If any man be in Christ, He is a new creature, old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor.5:17).*

He who has the sovereign right over you also has the power to change you and make you new.

3. As Creator, Jesus deserves worship and praise.

Is there anyone higher and more worthy of praise than He? We don't even know who wrote this hymn, but you can own it if you believe what John and the entire Bible seeks to teach us.

*Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature,
O Thou of God and man the Son,
Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor,
Thou, my soul's glory, joy, and crown.*

*Fair are the meadows, fairer still the woodlands,
Robed in the blooming garb of spring;
Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer,
Who makes the woeful heart to sing.*

*Fair is the sunshine, fairer still the moonlight,
And all the twinkling starry host;
Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer
Than all the angels heav'n can boast.*

*All fairest beauty, heavenly and earthly,
Wondrously, Jesus, is found in Thee;
None can be nearer, fairer or dearer,
Than Thou, my Savior, art to me.*

*Beautiful Savior! Lord of all the nations!
Son of God and Son of Man!
Glory and honor, praise, adoration,
Now and forevermore be Thine.⁵*

⁵ Anonymous, *Fairest Lord Jesus*

Lesson 2: Review and Apply

Main point: John provides evidence for the deity of Jesus so that readers might believe it and commit their lives to Him.

All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him, nothing came into being that has come into being.

JOHN 1:3

19

Discuss It

- Is God actively involved in His creation, or did He just sort of “set it and forget it”?
- Jesus is the **originator** (“*all things came into being through Him*”), **sustainer** (“*came into being,*” Cf. *Heb.1:3; 11:3*), and **agent** (“*through Him,*” Cf. *1 Cor8:6; Col.1:16; Rom.11:36*) of creation, and therefore Jesus is the **exclusive** creator (“*apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being*”). How do these truths bring comfort and/or confidence to your heart? Perhaps these truths bring fear instead. If so, explain.

Discover It

Read these verses and see you can identify the proclamation of Christ as Creator.

- **Colossians 1:15-17**— He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.
- **Ephesians 3:9**— and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;
- **Acts 17:24-27**— The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; ²⁵ nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things; ²⁶ and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷ that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;
- **Revelation 4:11**— Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.

Apply It

1. Jesus has creator rights.

Whatever situation you find yourself in right now is under the complete sovereign control and care of the Creator. This reality is easier for us to accept when things are going how we would like them to in our lives—we have a steady income and a well-paying job, our health is in good shape, our children are safe and doing well in school, our spouse is kind to us. On the other hand, it can be really difficult to accept when we are facing extremely difficult things—we are struggling to make ends meet and wondering how we will pay next month's rent, we have struggled for years with debilitating health issues with no relief in sight, our grown children have left the church and are in trouble with the law, our spouse is abusive and mistreats us.

At times it may be difficult to understand how God is working through hardships. Yet, if we are honest with ourselves and even look at the testimony of saints of old, we know that the greatest refining work God has done in our hearts has been, not through the easy times of life, but rather the extremely difficult times. As we trust Him for His grace through the difficulty, God uses these trials to make us more and more like Jesus. Any suffering and heartache on this earth that we will experience is nothing in comparison to the suffering Jesus endured and neither is it anything in comparison to the glory to be revealed. **Trust your Creator.** His character is good.

2. Jesus has recreative power.

Our hearts are filled with sin, brokenness, and shame. Our lives are filled with weariness and trouble. Jesus is the only one who can give us rest in this fallen world. That doesn't mean He will always deliver us from sorrow. He provides an internal rest that sustains through the sorrow. **Come to Jesus. Rest in Jesus.**

3. Jesus deserves worship and praise.

Since Jesus is our creator and, as believers, He has recreated us, He deserves all the praise. We are worshippers. The question is: whom will you worship? Whom will you worship this moment, tomorrow, the next day, and in twenty years from now? Jesus deserves our worship for all our days and into eternity. This worship is shown in lives lived in obedience to Him and praise flowing from our lips to our Maker. **Sing to Jesus with your life and lips.**

Isaiah 61:10-11—I will rejoice greatly in the LORD,
My soul will exult in my God;
For He has clothed me with garments of salvation,
He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness,
As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its sprouts,
And as a garden causes the things sown in it to spring up,
So the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
To spring up before all the nations.

Lesson 3: The Invincible Christ

Main point: John provides evidence for the deity of Jesus so that readers might believe it and commit their lives to Him.

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.

JOHN 1:4-5

INTRODUCTION:

A couple of months before Christmas, the wife of a mail carrier was killed in a car accident. The husband was overcome with grief and was trying to work through his sorrow, and he had stayed late at his post office, sorting through the mountain of mail that always comes through at Christmastime. His job that day was to go through the mail that had been lost and to find out where it should be re-routed.

He came across a letter that was addressed to "*Santa Claus*," and he noticed that the address at the top of the letter was his own address. So, he opened the letter. Looking down at the bottom of the page, he saw that it was his only daughter's signature, and he read:

"Dear Santa. My mommy died two months ago, and since then, my daddy has been crying himself to sleep every night. He says that only eternity will heal him. Would you please send a little bit of eternity to my dad this Christmas?"

Well, God not only sent us *a little bit of eternity*, but He sent us *the very heart of heaven*. The question is WHY?

- Why did the Creator desire to become a part of His creation?
- Why did God take upon Himself a human nature and walk among men?
- Why did Jesus come into this world to live and to die?
- What is the purpose of Christmas, and how can its message bring eternal life into your challenging world today?

You've heard it said that "a picture is worth a thousand words." And here in verses 4-5, John sets before us four tightly constructed sentences, packed with divine truth, which frames his picture and mission of *the Lord Jesus Christ*. It's not difficult to see the divisions. Let me set the four parts or heads before you, which will guide our thinking in this message.

1. "*In Him was life...*"—tells us that *Jesus embodies life*. In His very being is the source of life itself.
2. "*...and the life was the Light of men...*"—tells us that *Jesus reveals reality*. In Jesus, the knowledge of God is perfectly displayed.
3. "*The light shines in the darkness...*"—tells us that *Jesus exposes sin*. His coming was like an aggressive march into the enemy's territory for the purposes of conquest and occupation.
4. "*...and the darkness did not comprehend it.*"—tells us that although men's blindness and evil tried to snuff out the Light, it could not because Jesus is invincible—*Jesus overcomes evil*.

Transition and prayer

The truths contained here are some of the most unfathomable revelations given to finite men. They take us into a dimension of God's character that no one is capable of adequately measuring. Yet, the mere fact that they are given in John's gospel says to us that God wants us to understand something, if only a gleaning, of His glory. Such knowledge is impossible apart from divine aid. So, let us ask God if He would be so pleased as to *stoop* and condescend to us by the power of the Holy Spirit so that we are enabled to see and believe, and be struck by the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Why should you listen?

Is the Gospel of John for a particular audience? A common mistake that believers make when approaching John's gospel is to think that he writes only to persuade *unbelievers to believe*. This is clearly one of the purposes for this gospel (*John 20:31-32*), but this gospel was also written that believers might "*abide*" in the truth, and so prove to be His disciples (*John 8:31-32*). So, whether you stand in need of *faith or fuel to keep the faith*, John's gospel supplies both. Come up close and listen. We begin with the first declaration that...

EXPOSITION:

A. JESUS EMBODIES LIFE—"In Him was life..."(v.4a)

Explained: The "**Him**" refers to "*the Word which was in the beginning with God the Father,*" according to verse 1, who is God the Son. The "**Him**" is connected to the uncreated eternality of the Son, who was "*in the beginning with God,*" according to verse 2. The "**Him**" refers to Jesus Christ, who is the *originator*, the *sustainer*, and the *agent of all creation* in verse 3. Now, John says, in "*Him,*" that is, in Jesus Christ *was life*.

What does John mean that in Jesus was life? Is it *physical life*, *spiritual life*, *abundant life*, or *eternal life*? It is all the above but so much more. First, I want you to notice that this word "**life**" is an important one, for it bookends John's entire gospel. John begins by saying, "*In Him was life,*" (1:4) and he concludes the gospel in chapter 20:30-31, "*Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these 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."*

- In John 14:6, Jesus declared that He is the source of life: "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*"
- In John 5:40, Jesus pointed out that men are "*unwilling to come to [Him] so that [they] may have life.*"
- In John 10:28, Jesus says of those who do come, "*I will give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.*"
- 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.*"

In all, the word "**life**" occurs more than thirty-five times in John's gospel; it is an essential theme that John wants us to understand about Jesus.

Second, note that John wants us to understand that *if Christ created all things*, He must be *the Fountain of life* or the life-giver. The Greek word for "**life**" (*zoe*) here means the *inherent capacity for producing and maintain living beings*. Creature-life is found in Jesus, "*for in Him, we live and move and have our being*" (*Acts 17:25*), but spiritual life, resurrection life, and eternal life are found in Him as well.

Theologians describe this attribute of God's nature, as His *asceity* (a *se* in Latin means "from himself"). "Asceity" means that God is *self-existent* and *independent*. And as God, Jesus has all *life, glory, and blessedness* in and of Himself. What this means is that God has no needs and needs no helpers, defenders, or worshippers. Some people think that God lacks glory and created us to supply it for Him. So, the reason He takes care of us, they say, is to be *rewarded with fame*. But God declared through David in the psalms,

- **Psalm 84:11**—For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
The LORD gives grace and glory;
No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

The sun needs no light; it *supplies* light. And God needs no *glory*, but He gives *undeserved favor* (grace) to the sons of men. Others say that God needs love, and therefore He created us to *love Him*. He was lonely, and He created us to keep Him company. But the Scripture refutes that idea.

- **1 John 4:10**—In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

God does not need *glory* or *love*, but neither does He need help. There are others who imagine *that we are necessary* in the world because God is unable to bring sinners to Himself, so He requires our help to carry out His work of salvation as witnesses. But listen to God's own declaration of self-sufficiency in Psalm 50.

- **Psalm 50:10-12**—For every beast of the forest is Mine,
The cattle on a thousand hills.
¹¹ I know every bird of the mountains,
And everything that moves in the field is Mine.
¹² If I were hungry I would not tell you,
For the world is Mine, and all it contains.

William Barclay tells of a little girl from the inner city who was taken on a trip into the country. She was in awe of the trees and the beautiful bluebell flowers. She asked one of the teachers, "Do you think God would mind if I picked some of His flowers?" "*The earth is the Lord's and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it*" (Ps.24:1). Why would He need our help if it is already His?

God has *no needs* and *needs no helpers*—neither *personally* or *practically*—to carry out His will. He is the strength of earthly life, the secret of effective life, and the source of eternal life.

There are great depths in this word "**life**" that John would have us to know about Jesus. Labor with me for a minute longer. If God has *no needs*, He *needs no helpers*, and He needs no defenders. If God needs defending, then He is not God, for what God would need a human defense? Clearly, if we have opportunities to speak for God before those who dishonor His name and malign His character, we ought to do so. *But even if we should fail, we must not think that God is deprived or threatened* in some way. Spurgeon said, "The Word of God is like a lion. You don't have to defend a lion. All you have to do is let the lion loose, and the lion will defend itself." The God of the Bible is the self-existent One who is the real defender of His people.

God has no needs, no helpers, nor defenders, but finally, God does not need worshippers, yet the wonder of wonders is that He *seeks worshippers* as an overture of His grace (John 4:24). Jesus said, '*But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers*' (John 4:23).

Bottom line: God gains nothing from us and is not obligated to us as creatures in any way. But you do need Him. John declares that *Jesus embodies life itself*. He is *self-sustaining, eternal, and necessary*.

- **Psalm 90:2**—Before the mountains were born
Or You gave birth to the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.
- **Acts 17:24-25**—The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;²⁵ nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;

Applied: There are many applications or "uses" of this doctrine for us today. Think about these in light of your own life.

- *Seeing that there is a God, with the power of life and death in His hands, there should be the arresting of fear in your heart if this God is against you (Ezek.22:14, Ps.50:22; Ps.90:11). God is revealed in His Word as either the best of friends or the worst of enemies. If God is your *enemy*, what in the world can stop Him from carrying out His fierce anger on you? You ought to tremble with fear if you be without Christ.*
- *Seeing that there is a God, with the power of life in Himself, this should cause us to depend upon Him in whatever situation we find ourselves in. Because He is *all-sufficient* (Gen.17:1), He can *supply all your wants, scatter all your fears, resolve all your doubts, and conquer all your temptations*.*
- *Seeing that there is a God, with the power of life in Himself, we ought to labor to gain an interest in Him. It is of little comfort to *know* there is a God unless He is *ours*. The good news is that God offers Himself to be our God in Christ (Jer.31:33). If we believe that *God is God*, and *we need Him*, then we should always live under His eye. David said, "*I have set the Lord always before me*" (Ps.16:8). Living before the face of God will be a harness for our sin, a spur to our duty, and it will add wings to our prayer.*

When John says, "*In Him was life*," we are to conclude that apart from Him, that is Christ, there is *no physical life, spiritual life, eternal life, or abundant life*. It is *all in Him*. Do you see how necessary Christ is? When Paul declared that "*in Him, we live and move and have our being*," (Acts 17:28) he was saying that what gives us *being* is not the secondary laws of nature, but the life of Christ Himself! We cannot *move, breathe, or even exist* apart from Him. *In Him is life*—my life, and your life.

B. JESUS REVEALS REALITY—"And the life was the Light of men." (v.4b)

Explained: This verse contains a difficult knot that needs to be untied. What does John mean by saying that *the life of Christ was the Light of men*? Notice there is a clue supplied by the translators that loosens John's meaning. The NASB capitalizes the "L" on **Light** to signal to us that the image of "light" is John's way of referring to *God Himself*. This is the way light is used in both the Old and New Testaments. For example;

- **Psalm 27:1**—The LORD is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the defense of my life;
Whom shall I dread?
- **Psalm 36:9**—For with You is the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light.
- **Psalm 104:1-2**—Bless the LORD, O my soul!
O LORD my God, You are very great;
You are clothed with splendor and majesty.
²Covering Yourself with light as with a cloak,
Stretching out heaven like a *tent* curtain.
- **1 John 1:5**—This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.
- **John 8:12**—Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."
- **1 Timothy 6:14-16**—that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him *be* honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

So again, what does John mean when he says, "In Him was life and the life was **the Light of men.**" In what way is Christ the light of men? He cannot mean that Jesus is the salvation of all men, because in verse 5 he says that "darkness of men did not comprehend it." And in verse 10, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him." Jesus is not *the salvation of all men* because not all men will be saved.

There are two possibilities. First, by *the Light of men*, John could mean that Jesus renders all men accountable as creatures. That is, every rational man is morally enlightened in their conscience (*Rom.2:15; 1:19-21*), and Jesus, by His very life, makes men responsible. Those who hold this view add verse 9 as a support which says, "There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." Jesus renders every man accountable to the light given to them when they were created. There is truth in this view, but I don't believe that this is what John is saying because in order to arrive at this understanding, you have to "stretch the text" too much.

The second possibility is that this reference to Jesus as "*the Light of men*," is John's shorthand way of saying, that Jesus is *the Creator of men* (v.3). John combines the metaphors of *life* and *light* for the purpose of clarity and contrast. Just as you cannot separate *God from the Word* (vv.1-3), because they are of the same essence, you cannot separate the *life from the Light* (v.4). So, when we look at Jesus, we are staring into the face of our Creator. We have no excuse.

Applied: Stop and ponder this for a moment. John tells us that our Creator was not some distant deity who created the world and human beings then left them on their own to function and survive and to figure out who He is. He actually *came* and *dwelt* among His creatures as one of us. John wants us to be *awestruck with wonder* as we think about the incarnation of Christ. John will elaborate on this truth more fully in verse 14.

Sometimes John uses images that have a double meaning. If we translate "**life**" as *self-existence* (v.4), then what John is saying is that this *self-existent One* was the "*Light of men*"—that is to say, Jesus is not only *the source of man's physical existence*, but Jesus is also *the source of spiritual illumination*. His life gives men illumination or understanding. Understanding of what? Of three things: 1) who God is, 2) who we are, and 3) what we need. Light is a medium by which we see things. It picks up and reveals *shape* and *color*. In the dark, we cannot see how large or small something is, but turn the light on, and its measurements become clear. In the dark, we cannot see how beautiful or horrendous something is, but when the light comes, its colors (and lack thereof) are exposed to view. So it is with the coming of Christ. This is why David says, "*in His light that we see light*" (*Ps.36:9; Cf. 2 Tim.1:10*).

What does the coming of Christ reveal to us about who God is? His coming tells us that *He is the mediator of salvation and revelation*.

You can look at *creation* and even listen to your *conscience* and know about God, but you cannot *know Him personally* or have a *personal relationship with Him apart from Christ*. General revelation gives us enough light to render us *without excuse*, but not enough to grant us *saving faith*. Before the coming of Christ, the world was in darkness. The world, Paul says, "*did not know God*" (*1 Cor.1:21*). Christ came. His light shone before men; then, men had "*the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*" (*2 Cor.4:4*). Jesus is the mediator of salvation.

- **1 Timothy 2:5**—For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

He is not only *the mediator of salvation*, but He is also *the mediator of revelation*.

- **John 1:18**—No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

The word "**explained**" is *exegeomai*. It means that Jesus has brought the truth out in the open for all to see. He has made known, declared, expounded, and provided detailed information so as to tell finally who God is. And Jesus is God.

Applied: If it were not for the coming of Christ, we would be groping in darkness and never able to find God. Lost and unable to find the way in the pitch-black darkness of this sin-cursed world. Sadly, this is where some of you are now. You are like a blind man in a dark room looking for a black cat that isn't there. You think happiness is found in how much money you have, or in how much pleasure or prestige you can achieve. Nothing in this world brings the kind of life you need. But Christ has come, and as John says in 1 John 5:20—“*we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.*”

What does the coming of Christ reveal to us about who we are? His coming reveals that *we love darkness.*

- **John 3:19-20**—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.²⁰ For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

The coming of Christ was a judgment on man's unbelief. Mankind, in its fallen condition, not only is *in* the dark, but *loves* the darkness—that is, man prefers ignorance, error, and superstition to the light of truth. And the reason men love darkness is that their deeds are evil.

What does the coming of Christ reveal to us about what we need? His coming reveals that *if we are to know God, we must follow Jesus.*

- **John 8:12**—Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”

Applied: Now, what is your response to that? It can be one of two things. You can secretly despise Christ and suppress the light. You can try to get rid of His presence in your life, but you will fail. You will only spiral down into deeper darkness and despair in your life. Or, you can do what God wants you to do. He wants you to acknowledge that your heart is full of unbelief and that unbelief is sin against Him. He wants you to recognize that all your good works fall short of His perfection and can never save you from punishment on Judgment Day. He wants you to believe and welcome Christ in your life as your Lord, repent of your sins, and call upon His name today. He has come to save His people from their sins.

C. **JESUS EXPOSES SIN**—“...*The Light shines in the darkness...*” (v.5a)

Explained: In the next statement, John resorts to the use of *metaphors* to communicate the saving mission of Christ. Having said that *Jesus is God incarnate*, John now describes the coming of Christ into a dark world with the vibrant image of light “**shining**” in the darkness. John changes from the *imperfect tense* to the *present tense* to teach us not only *was* the light shining in the past, but *it is still shining* today in the midst of this world's darkness. His coming into the world was like a beam of light breaking into a dark room. It was like light piercing, penetrating, and invading the thick darkness of a fallen world and it will never cease to shine! (Cf. Rev.21:23-22:5)

The word **darkness** is a metaphor for *blindness*. Ever since our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned in the garden of Eden, the long shadow of sin has been cast over this world, leaving us in darkness (Rom.5:12). Adam's first sin has passed down from generation-to-generation leaving all mankind in *spiritual blindness*. Every person born into this world is born *spiritually blind* to live in a world of *spiritual darkness*. We are like a blind man living in a dark cave. It is double thick darkness, according to Scripture. The first layer of darkness is from *sin* (Rom.3:23). The second layer of darkness is from *Satan* (2 Cor.4:3-4). The first is from the *inside*, and the second is from the *outside*. Sin has cast every human being into the pitch-black night of *unbelief*. This explains the black gloom of despair and the dark cloud of ignorance about God that we see all around us.

Listen to how the Bible describes *the darkness* into which mankind has been plunged. Sinners are described as...

- **Proverbs 2:13**—From those who leave the paths of uprightness
To walk in the ways of darkness;
- **Proverbs 4:19**—The way of the wicked is like darkness;
They do not know over what they stumble.
- **Ephesians 5:8**—for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.
- **Colossians 1:13**—He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.

The Word of God presents a realistic view of this world, and it is a world that is shrouded in spiritual darkness and inhabited by men and women, as well as boys and girls that are spiritually blind.

Applied: This metaphor speaks of the *total depravity* and *radical corruption* of the human race languishing in spiritual darkness. But Jesus came as the Light of men to bring the knowledge of God to us. Rejoice today if you know God! Rejoice today if your heart has been changed by His power! Rejoice today if you have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ!

One of the ways that you discern that true salvation has come to your life is that you recognize—by the power of the Holy Spirit and through the Gospel of Christ—that you were once living in the darkness of sin and ignorance, and you did not realize it. How can you be saved until you see that you are lost? How can you call out for a Savior, unless you know that you need deliverance? You cannot. But if you are born again, you clearly understand that there was a time when you were dead in sin.

It was into this world of *spiritual darkness* that Jesus came. When Jesus started His Galilean ministry, He fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah who wrote,

- **Isaiah 9:2**—The people who walk in darkness
Will see a great light;
Those who live in a dark land,
The light will shine on them.

As Jesus inaugurated His public ministry, it was like *the rising of the sun racing across the horizon*. His coming *beamed forth* the truth of the knowledge of God and salvation and *shined into* that darkened land with the light of forgiveness, redemption, and hope. *Jesus alone* brings the light of salvation to this sin-cursed world. To the darkness of sin, Jesus is the light of holiness (Luke 5:8). To the darkness of lies and errors, Jesus is the light of truth (John 8:46). To the darkness of ignorance about God, Jesus is the light of wisdom (Col.2:2-3). To the darkness of sorrow, despair, and depression, Jesus is the light of joy (John 15:11). To the darkness of death, Jesus alone is the light of life (John 11:25).

We see His *holiness, truth, wisdom, and joy* on display throughout His ministry. It was on one such occasion when the Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery that His truth exposed man's darkness. The religious leaders were seeking to test Jesus on where He stood in relationship to the Law of Moses, so that they might accuse Him (John 8:1-6). He stooped down and with His finger began writing on the ground. What He *wrote*, we will refuse to speculate upon. What He *said* when He stood is the point of the account. He said to them, "*He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.*"

- **John 8:9-12**—When they heard it, they *began* to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center *of the court*.¹⁰ Straightening up, Jesus said to her, “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?”¹¹ She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.”¹² Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”

Jesus exposed their sin and ours. The purity of His life, the perfection of His words, the holiness of His example exposed men and exposes us today. By this, Jesus meant that He alone is the true knowledge of God that came into this world to bring people to the Father. *Jesus embodies life. Jesus reveals reality. Jesus exposes sin.*

D. **JESUS OVERCOMES EVIL**—“...*And the darkness did not comprehend it.*” (v.5b)

Explained: The keyword in the last clause is the word “**comprehend.**” It is a word with at least three meanings. Let’s see if you can figure out which one fits best. On level one, the term can be translated “to seize” or “to apprehend” *physically*. This is the thought in John 8:4, where the scribes and Pharisees claimed that they “caught or seized” the woman taken in adultery. On the second level, the word can mean “to understand” *intellectually*, and that is how the word is translated in the KJV. Number one—*physically seize*. Number two—*intellectually grasp*. But the third way this word can be translated is *completely overtaken*, or “to overcome in pursuit.”

The only other place where this use occurs is in John 12:35, where Jesus said,

- ³⁵ So Jesus said to them, “For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes.

This third use takes us into the sports world of the New Testament day. When a Greco-Roman wrestler laid his hand upon an opponent, the victory was not his until he was able to “*takedown*” the challenger and pin him on the ground.

I believe that the way John uses the term is in all three ways: The darkness did not *extinguish* the light of Christ *physically*. The darkness did not *comprehend* or understand the light of Christ *intellectually* (Jn.1:10-11; 1 Cor.2:8), but the darkness of man’s sin and rejection was never able to *takedown* or *defeat* the Light of Christ—why? Because *Jesus is invincible*. John did not view the world as a stage on which two equal and opposing forces battle; He tells us that Jesus is *superior* to the forces of darkness that sought to overcome Him but could not. John anticipates the outcome of the story that he would tell of Calvary. Darkness tried to defeat Him, but it could not stop Him.

*Up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph o’er His foes;
He arose a victor from the dark domain, and He lives forever, with His saints to reign!*⁶

Dr. S.M. Lockridge said,

“His life is matchless. His goodness is limitless. His mercy is everlasting. His love never changes. His word is enough. His grace is sufficient. His reign is righteous. His yoke is easy, and His burden is light. Well, I wish I could describe Him to you. But He’s indescribable. Yes. He’s incomprehensible. He’s invincible. He’s irresistible. I’m trying to tell you; the Heavens cannot contain Him, let alone a man explain Him. You can’t get Him out of your mind. You can’t get Him off your hands. You can’t outlive Him, and you can’t live without Him. Well. The Pharisees couldn’t stand Him, but they found out they couldn’t stop Him. Pilate couldn’t find any fault in Him. Herod couldn’t kill Him. Death couldn’t handle Him, and the grave couldn’t hold Him.”

⁶ Robert Lowry, *Christ Arose*

Jesus has risen. Jesus is alive. Jesus is victorious. Jesus will return. Jesus reigns. Jesus saves. Jesus triumphs.

Is He your king today?
Is Jesus your light?

Applied: Remember the *warning* and the *command* that Jesus gives.

- **John 12:35-36**—So Jesus said to them, “For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes.³⁶ While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.”

The threat is that *if you don't walk in the light, you will be swallowed up by the darkness*. The command is to *believe in the Light. Walk in the light, respond to the truth*—you are not strong enough to overcome the darkness, but He has overcome. The longer you wait, the more you will be overcome by the darkness of sin.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th' eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.⁷

CONCLUSION:

James Hamilton Jr. tells the story of a time in his life that everyone here is destined to face if you have not already, and that is the death of a parent. In this case, it was the death of his father.

“Sitting uneasily in his chair, straining for breath, he tilted his head toward his wife, nodded in the direction of my three sons, and said, “It’s good for them to be here.” Looking at me, he continued, gasping out the words, “We wanted to hide things like this. But it’s good for these boys to see me dying. Death is real.” Later that night, his wife of more than fifty years became a widow.

Knowing that life was leaving his body, he saw right through our medicated, sanitized, hedonistic culture. He could ignore death no longer, and he was convinced others shouldn’t either. There was no avoiding it, so he looked it in the face and affirmed the goodness of the true story of the world. His approaching death was like a strong wind blowing away the fog of falsehood. A better understanding of the world broke through, as it had been doing since he was born again.”

What we think and *how we live* is largely determined by the story of the Gospel in which we interpret our lives.

- Does your story enable you to look death in the face?
- Does your story give you a hope that goes beyond the grave?

⁷ Charles Wesley, *And Can It Be?*

In the throes of death, Jim's father was rejecting the false stories of the world. He refused to live his last moments informed by stories that would have people pretend that death isn't real or fear what lies beyond it.

His three boys were ages six, three, and one at the time. And his father had enough spiritual courage to say, "it is good for children to see..."—death? No, but that *the Bible's story is real*. The Gospel of Christ saves and enables all who believe to face life and death in triumph. Its narrative arc begins at creation, rises over all that *has been* and *will be*, and lands at the end of all things—with *Christ*, the One that we sing about at this time of the year and who rules over a kingdom with all who receive Him as Lord and trust Him as Savior.

You are not *invincible*. He is. Come to the *invincible, indestructible, unstoppable* Christ by faith this very moment.

Lesson 3: Review and Apply

Main point: John provides evidence for the deity of Jesus so that readers might believe it and commit their lives to Him.

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.

JOHN 1:4-5

Discuss It

- What are some things that people, in general, find life in? What things are you personally tempted to find life in instead of Christ?
- What does the light of creation (general revelation) show us about God and ourselves? Is this light enough to save a man?
- What does the light of the Word of God (special revelation) show us about God and ourselves?

Discover It

In the verses below, identify the references to light and darkness. Underline them. How are these two terms used to describe God's character, His works, our nature, and/or how we are to respond to Him.

- **Psalm 84:11**—For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
The LORD gives grace and glory;
No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.
- **Psalm 27:1**—The LORD is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the defense of my life;
Whom shall I dread?
- **Psalm 36:9**—For with You is the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light.
- **Psalm 104:1-2**—Bless the LORD, O my soul!
O LORD my God, You are very great;
You are clothed with splendor and majesty,
² Covering Yourself with light as with a cloak,
Stretching out heaven like a *tent* curtain.
- **1 John 1:5**—This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.
- **John 8:12**—Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."
- **1 Timothy 6:14-16**—that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him *be* honor and eternal dominion! Amen.
- **John 3:19-20**—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. ²⁰ For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

- **John 8:12**—Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”
- **Proverbs 2:13**—From those who leave the paths of uprightness
To walk in the ways of darkness;
- **Proverbs 4:19**—The way of the wicked is like darkness;
They do not know over what they stumble.
- **Ephesians 5:8**—for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.
- **Colossians 1:13**—He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.
- **Isaiah 9:2**—The people who walk in darkness
Will see a great light;
Those who live in a dark land,
The light will shine on them.
- **John 8:9-12**—When they heard it, they *began* to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of *the court*.¹⁰ Straightening up, Jesus said to her, “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?”¹¹ She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.”¹² Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”
- **John 12:35-36**—So Jesus said to them, “For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes.”³⁶ While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.”

Apply It

Most people don't enjoy going to the dentist. It used to not be that big of a deal to me until they got that ultrasonic water pick. That thing is not enjoyable. My son doesn't like one thing at the dentist—the light. They give all the kids a pair of sunglasses to wear to help with that, but it's not enough for him. In fact, they have it notated on his chart that he wants, not only the sunglasses, but one of their surgical masks on top of them to keep the bright light out of his eyes. Dentists need that light so they can see inside our dark mouths. Without this light, they could miss plaque and tartar buildup that they need to remove, or even do damage to your gums with their tools. Worse, they could miss spotting a cavity eating its way into your teeth. They absolutely need that light!

In a similar way that my son doesn't like the bright light at the dentist office, sinners cannot stand Jesus, the Light of the World. They suppress that light (sunglasses) by ignoring His general revelation in creation and then suppress it more (surgical mask) when faced with the truth of God in His Word. Thank God, He can break through the darkness! Just like the dentist still makes his way into my son's mouth to take care of the harmful things inside, Jesus makes His way into the heart of sinful men to expose sin and bring sinners to a place of repentance and faith.

Have you been turning away from the Light? Ask God to give you a new heart that is soft toward, and even delights in His Light.

Lesson 4: Christ Alone

Main point: Jesus alone answers the greatest problem, from the highest position, and the nearest relationship with the clearest revelation.

No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

JOHN 1:18

INTRODUCTION:

Heinrich Emil Brunner was a Swiss Reformed Theologian in the late 18th and early 19th centuries who once preached a memorable sermon in which he made these three points: "Every man has a past, a present, and a future. Every man has a problem in his past, a problem in his present, and a problem in his future. The problem of his past is sin, but God has an answer to that problem. The answer is faith in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The problem of his future is death, but God has an answer to that problem also. The answer is hope in Christ's return based on the fact of His historical resurrection and promises. The problem of his present is hate, and God's answer to that problem is the love of Christ lived out in the lives of those who trust Him."

Brunner's preoccupation with Christ is the same emphasis that John has been making in the prologue of His gospel. And it brings before us a question that we all need to ask ourselves this morning, and that is, has Christ become the answer to the problems in your life?

We all have problems, and precisely, the issues that Brunner referenced in his message—the problem of sin, death, and hate in our hearts. Who is fit to deal with the problem of sin in our hearts? Your parents cannot, for they passed the sin nature down to you, and they are sinners themselves. The pastor cannot, for he is a mere man with breath in his nostrils and no power to save. Psychiatry and psychology will tell you that the answer lies within yourself, your will, your determination, your self-effort, or your self-awareness. Yet the prophet Jeremiah asked the citizens of Jerusalem a rhetorical question that was designed to reveal to them and us our utter need for God's intervention. He asked in Jeremiah 13:23,

- "Can the Ethiopian change his skin
Or the leopard his spots?
Then you also can do good
Who are accustomed to doing evil.

Here is the bad news. We can no more change our hearts than a dark Ethiopian can change the color of his skin or the leopard his spots. Our problem is not skin deep; it's bone-deep and so thoroughly ingrained that we need a new nature. Spurgeon said, "The question of the text is, 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin?' The answer is no, no, no, no, no. Here is the other question—Can the Ethiopian's skin be changed? The answer to that is, yes, yes, yes, yes." The good news is that Jesus Christ and Jesus alone can give the new birth, and He is the only One who will ever answer the problems of our lives completely.

TRANSITION:

What John tells us in his summary statement in verse 18, is that Jesus stands alone as the complete revealer of God. He is the ultimate disclosure of God Himself. He is the only one qualified to exegete or interpret God to man, and therefore, He is the answer to the problems in our lives.

So, why should we look to Him and trust Him alone with our very lives today? John explains three reasons why.

- A. Jesus addresses **the greatest problem**—*No one has seen God at any time;*
- B. Jesus has **the nearest relationship**—*the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father,*
- C. Jesus provides **the clearest revelation**—*He has explained Him.*

EXPOSITION:

A. The greatest problem—*No one has seen God at any time.*

What is the greatest problem that we have as human beings? It is not social, and it is not relational. It is not educational or economic. Our greatest problem is spiritual. John begins with,

1. The fact of God's invisibility

Explained: *The invisibility of God* has been a problem for mankind from the very beginning of time when our first parents rebelled against God. How do *you* deal with that fact? How did *God* deal with that fact? Let us first acknowledge that it is a significant problem and fact. "*No one has seen God at any time.*" "**No one**" is an absolute negation—*absolutely no one*. Now by this, John means that no one has seen God in His full and complete essence.

It was a problem for **Job** who asked,

- **Job 11:7-8**—Can you discover the depths of God?
Can you discover the limits of the Almighty?
⁸ *They are* high as the heavens, what can you do?
Deeper than Sheol, what can you know?

God's depths are unfathomable. God's limits are unsearchable. There is nothing that a man can do to know Him unless He chooses to reveal Himself.

It was a problem for **Moses**, who said, "*I pray You, show me Your glory!*" And he was told, "*You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!*" (*Ex.33:18, 20*). To see God in all of His glory would bring instant death to every sinner (*Gen.32:30; Deut.5:26; Judg.13:22*). And for that reason, Moses was only allowed to see "God's back" or the trailing edge and afterglow of divine glory. Although Moses is said to have spoken with God "*face-to-face*," it was only figurative language to express the direct communication without the presence of a mediator that Moses was privileged to enjoy. But even Moses suffered from the greatest problem of the invisibility of God.

It was a problem for **Isaiah**. In the sixth chapter he was given a vision of "*the Lord seated on His throne...with but the hem of the Lord's garment filling the temple*," and this vision was so vivid, so terrifying, and so close to the real thing that he would cry out,

- **Isaiah 6:5**—Woe is me, for I am ruined!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I live among a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

It was a problem for **Philip**, who stood in the queue of all human beings through the ages. He knew that there was no higher experience, no greater good, than seeing God as He is, in unimaginable splendor and transcendent glory. So he asked Jesus for direct access or an immediate display of God Himself.

- **John 14:8-9**—Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, 'Show us the Father?'"

Jesus is the only One uniquely qualified and fully able to reveal and represent God—because He is God in the flesh. "*No one has seen God at any time.*" It is a universal fact and problem. During His ministry, Jesus indicted the

Jews who claimed to be true followers of Moses, but they did not hear God's voice in Him or see God's glory in Him.

- **John 5:37**—And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form.

Later on, Jesus said,

- **John 6:46**—Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father.

I've been seeking to explain the great problem and fact of God's invisibility. No one has seen God at any time.

Applied: Children often ask, what is God like? Where is He? Why can't I hear His voice? What does He look like and sound like? We point them in a straightforward direction—Jesus! In moments of frustration, as we deal with the problems of sin and suffering—sometimes we say, "If only God will speak to me and show me what do to!" And the case that John has been making in this chapter is, there is good news in Christ! Christ is the answer; the question is, what are you doing with Jesus?

Now let us ask,

2. **What is the reason for the invisibility of God?** We move now from *the fact of God's invisibility to the reason for God's invisibility.*

Explained: It was at the well of Jacob in Sychar that Jesus revealed to a Samaritan woman who wanted to know where people ought to worship. She thought it would *either* be with the Samaritans on their holy mountain or with the Jews in Jerusalem, and Jesus' answer must have surprised her, for He said, "Neither." A new time was arriving when all such places of worship would be obsolete. Christ explained in,

- **John 4:23-24**—But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Jesus explains the reason for this invisibility is because *God is spirit*. In this concise statement, Jesus gave us a fundamental description of God's nature or essence. Notice, Jesus does not say that God is "a spirit" like other spiritual beings such as angels. He said, God is spirit; that is, He is not a *material substance*. He is incorporeal: He has no body. Just as "*God is light*" (1 John 1:5) and "*God is love*" (1 John 4:16) and "*God is holy*" (Ps.77:13), "*God is spirit.*"

John Calvin said it this way: "His spiritual nature forbids our imagining anything earthly or carnal of Him. People may imagine God to be an old man who lives in the sky, but in reality, He is spirit."⁸

Physical bodies exist in particular places and times, but God created all places and physical matter and launched time itself. He is present everywhere. "*Do I not fill heaven and earth? Saith the Lord*" (Jer.23:24). Bodies have dimensions, but God's being is infinite, for "*the heavens and the highest heaven cannot contain Him*" (2 Chr.2:6). God's invisibility means that God has no size, shape, or color that our eyes can behold in Him. God is not a blind force, but a *personal, intelligent, spirit Being* who seeks or purposes or desires true worshippers.

⁸ Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, p.609

Now, Mormon teaching objects to this doctrine taught by Christ. Joseph Smith and Lorenzo Snow said, "As man now is, God once was: as God now is, man may be." In other words, God is a glorified man, and we can be gods too. This is nothing more than men trying to equate themselves with the living God, which is blasphemy!

Because God is spirit, He has no body, and because He has no body, He cannot be seen. He is invisible.

Paul affirms this same fact. This is not something we are forcing on the text of Scripture. It just "leaps out" of the pages of the Bible everywhere.

- **Colossians 1:15**—He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

God is invisible, and Jesus is the image (*eikon*)—the likeness or copy—of God. Sometimes an image meant an imprint on a coin or a reflection in a mirror. And this is saying that Jesus is the perfect image and the exact likeness of God.

- **1 Timothy 1:11**—Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.
- **1 Timothy 6:16**—[Christ]...who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see.

If He could be seen, we are not fit to see Him because we are sinners and because He dwells in unapproachable light and is inaccessible to us. God is spirit. God is invisible. And the reason for God's invisibility is God's very essence.

Applied: Now, the reason this matters for us is because if we are not clear in our theology of God's nature or character, we can begin to ask for visible signs or proof of God's presence. This was a problem for the Jews in Old Testament days. They were extremely embarrassed by *the invisibility of God*. Their pagan neighbors actually taunted and teased them for actually worshipping a God that they could not see. "You say you believe in God," the heathen said, "then where is He! We can't see Him. Come to our temples, and we will show you our gods! They have eyes and ears and feet and hair and noses; we have plenty of visible gods, come to our temples, and we will show you! But where is your God?" They laughed in derision at the Jews who worshipped a God that was invisible. A part of their reply to the heathen is found in Psalm 115:2-8, where we read,

- Why should the nations say,
"Where, now, is their God?"
³ But our God is in the heavens;
He does whatever He pleases.
⁴ Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of man's hands.
⁵ They have mouths, but they cannot speak; (no sound)
They have eyes, but they cannot see; (no sight)
⁶ They have ears, but they cannot hear; (no hearing)
They have noses, but they cannot smell; (no senses)
⁷ They have hands, but they cannot feel; (no sympathy)
They have feet, but they cannot walk; (no actions)
They cannot make a sound with their throat.
⁸ Those who make them will become like them, (lifeless and powerless)
Everyone who trusts in them.

To worship some image and someone other than the true God invisible is not only idolatrous, but it results in emptiness! This is why the prophet Isaiah would pray in Isaiah 64:1-4,

- Oh, that You would rend the heavens *and* come down,
That the mountains might quake at Your presence—
² As fire kindles the brushwood, *as* fire causes water to boil—

To make Your name known to Your adversaries,
That the nations may tremble at Your presence!
³When You did awesome things which we did not expect,
You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence.
⁴For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear,
Nor has the eye seen a God besides You,
Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him.

It was hard for the Jews to come to terms with *the invisibility of God*. But it is also the same way for a generation of people today. These are people who want to examine God like a laboratory rat or observe Him in some type of scientific, analytical way, and experiment. These are people, both educated and uneducated, who refuse to believe God unless they can test Him by their five senses (*taste, touch, hear, smell, and see*). But God is spirit. So how can *sinner*s believe in a God they cannot see? How can we believe in a God that we cannot see? The greatest problem and fact of the invisibility of God is answered for us in this text.

3. How has God solved the problem of His invisibility? The Bible answers that question with at least four answers.

God began to solve the problem of His invisibility through theophanies of the Old Testament. The Old Testament theophanies were Old Testament appearances of a Person who appeared to be human, but in the context, it was plain—that He was divine. The appearances were preincarnate appearances of Christ before He was born of the Virgin Mary. Often, this Person identified himself as “the Angel/Messenger of the Lord.” Usually, the Son made these “cameo” appearances fulfilling specific roles and communicating particular truth—but it was all in anticipation of the incarnation. These appearances were *partial or diminished* revelations of the glory of God. They were not full or complete. They were revelations of “His back” and not “His face.” God partially solved the problem of His invisibility through the Christophanies or theophanies of the Old Testament.

God has completely solved the problem of His invisibility in the incarnation of Jesus. This is clear in verse 14, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” This is why Jesus was able to say in John 14:9, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father...” that is, all the glory of the Father is in Me. When Jesus said in John 14:11, “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me,” He was explaining to us that we must believe that the Father and the Son have one life, one glory. In John 10:30, Jesus said, “I and the Father are one,” that is, one in essence. Distinct in personality, one in Person. I am God in the flesh.

If anyone wants to see God or know God, the Bible answers, “Look at Jesus.” He is the visible image of the invisible God. But what about now? Jesus is not here. We cannot see Him. That was 2000 years ago. Is there a way that God makes Himself visible today? Yes.

God continues to make His invisibility clear today in the love of the Christian community. In 1 John 4:12, we read these words:

- No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

The invisible God who once made Himself visible *in Christ*, now makes Himself visible in *Christians*, IF WE LOVE ANOTHER. The love between Christians is unlike any other love. Jesus said, “By this, all men will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). What a remarkable and powerful statement!

Don't try to explain it away. Jesus tells us, the same God who once made Himself known in His own Person will continue to make Himself known through the lives and love of His people. God has dealt with the problem of His invisibility. First, in the *theophanies*. Second, fully and completely, *in the incarnation of the Son*, Third, He

continues to make Himself known in *the love of the Christian community*. And finally—there is one more way, not that God *has* revealed Himself, but that HE WILL reveal Himself, and that is,

God will overcome the problem of His invisibility by the final appearing of the Lord Jesus on the last day. The clock is ticking when the time will be up for human history, and history will be swallowed up in eternity. We have not seen the final revelation of the glory of God. We await the full and final disclosure when Christ returns at His Second coming in power and glory.

- **1 John 3:2**—Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

No longer will we seek to see Him as in the blurred reflection in a mirror, but then *face-to-face*. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.” Peter says in 1 Peter 1:13, “Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Saving grace was brought to us in *regeneration* when we were born again. Sustaining and sanctifying and persevering grace was and is brought to us throughout our lives on this earth. But one day, in the last act of grace, glorifying grace will be brought to us when Jesus returns.

In one of the last words given to us in the Bible, when the devil has been cast into the lake of fire, along with every unbeliever who rejects the Son, then we read of God lifting the curse and restoring all things. And listen to these words:

- **Revelation 22:3-5**—There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; ⁴they will see His face, and His name *will be* on their foreheads. ⁵And there will no longer be *any* night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

Theologians call it *the beatific vision*—a direct sight and experience of God Himself.

Application: How do we as Christians live “in the meantime, in-between time? Between the “already and the not yet?” He has *revealed the fullness of His glory in Christ*, and He shall reveal *the fullness of His being when Christ returns*. Are you ready for that day? How do we live? Remember,

- *God's invisibility prohibits fashioning idols in His image.* He forbids the use of material things to represent Him visibly or to serve as some focal point to which we direct our worship (*Ex.20:4-6*).
- *God's invisibility demands simplicity in worship and calls for sincerity and understanding of who He is.* God is not pleased with *mindless worship* or *hypocritical lip service*.
- God's invisibility calls us to deal with not only sins of the flesh but sins of the spirit like pride, envy, malice, greed, self-righteousness, and covetousness. God is to be worship through Christ in spirit and truth.

B. The nearest relationship—*the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father*

Explained: We examined this word in verse 14, so there is no need to go into detail here. **The only begotten Son** (*monogenes*), who Himself *is* God, means *the unique, one of a kind, One and Only*. No one can do for you what Jesus can do.

1. He is unique in His *origins*.
2. He is unique as the *channel of God's blessings*.
3. He is unique as the *source of grace and truth*.
4. He is unique as the *only One in whom you and I may see God*.

But John adds, “**who is in the bosom of the Father.**” Now, what does this mean? This phrase depicts the eternal relation of unbroken fellowship that Jesus enjoys with the Father. A similar expression is used to describe Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom (*Luke 16:22-23*), and John resting on the chest of Christ at the Last Supper (*John 13:23*). It speaks of intimacy, mutual love, and knowledge. Jesus spoke of this closeness in His high priestly prayer in John 17.

- **John 17:5**—Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

When we understand this, we feel the horror of the cross when Jesus bore our sins, and He cried out, “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me*” (*Matt.27:46*). It is interesting that Paul, in his description of the judgment of unbelievers, does not emphasize the fiery torment, but the eternal separation from God.

- **2 Thessalonians 1:9-10**—These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,¹⁰ when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.

Applied: Oh, here, dear friends, John presents to us the unique Christ! You cannot see God on your own, but in Christ, God came to men in a way that enabled men to know Him! There is no true knowledge of God apart from Him. Do you want to know the love of God? Don’t search for it in unstable feelings that shift like the wind! For “*God demonstrated His love for us in this: while we were sinners, Christ died for us*” (*Rom.5:8*). Are you searching for the wisdom of God? Stop looking to the opinion of men and look to Christ “*in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (*Col.2:3*).

The greatest problem

The nearest relationship

C. **The clearest revelation**—*He has explained Him*

The “He” is strongly emphatic. John points his bony finger to the eternal Son. “He” and He alone. He and He singularly, solely, and sovereignly. He *preeminently* and *immediately*. In other words, *Jesus gives us a direct revelation of God*. He has explained Him.

What does John mean by He has explained Him? When Luke records one of the early post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, he tells us of two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Jesus joined them, but His identity was hidden from their eyes. They were swallowed up in sorrow and unbelief, and Jesus said to them,

- **Luke 24:26-27**—Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

Jesus unfolded, declared, made plain, brought out the meaning, disclosed, elucidated, interpreted, and cleared up all obscurity about His suffering and glory of His third-day resurrection.

- **Luke 24:44-45**—Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

And what has Jesus explained?

- God is more than force and intelligence.
- God is a personal Being.
- God is a Father with a heart.
- God is a God of self-denying, self-sacrificing love. (*John 3:16*)
- God is to be worshipped in spirit and truth. (*John 4:23-24*)
- God is to be known through faith in Jesus. (*John 14:6*)

- God requires a righteousness that exceeds outward righteous and repentance. (*Matt.5:20*)
- God calls you to trust in Him entirely, or you shall die in your sins.
- God will not cast out or turn away the person who comes by faith to Christ alone.

All of the cults which deny the deity of Jesus and the humanity of Jesus cannot bring anyone to God. Jesus and Jesus alone saves.

CONCLUSION:

In 1614, Guido Reni painted a beautiful fresco on the ceiling of a Roman palace. It was one of the most impressive works of his day. But visitors could not fully appreciate the masterpiece because they had to crane their necks to see it. To solve the problem, palace officials placed a large mirror on the floor beneath the painting, enabling viewers to study the reflection and more fully appreciate its beauty.

Jesus does precisely this for us when we try to get some notion of God. He interprets God to our dull hearts. God becomes visible and intelligible to us. We cannot, by any amount of searching, find God. The more we try, the more we are bewildered. Then Jesus appears. He is God stooping to our level, and He enables our feeble thoughts to get some real hold on God Himself.

If John the Apostle was a songwriter, I could imagine him agreeing with the lyrics written by Graham Kendrick:

All I once held dear, built my life upon
 All this world reveres, and wars to own
 All I once thought gain I have counted loss
 Spent and worthless now, compared to this
 Knowing you, Jesus
 Knowing you, there is no greater thing
 You're my all, you're the best
 You're my joy, my righteousness
 And I love you, Lord
 Now my heart's desire is to know you more
 To be found in you and known as yours
 To possess by faith what I could not earn
 All-surpassing gift of righteousness
 Oh, to know the power of your risen life
 And to know You in Your sufferings
 To become like you in your death, my Lord
 So with you to live and never die⁹

⁹ Graham Kendrick, *All I Once Held Dear*

Lesson 4: Review and Apply

Main point: Jesus alone answers the greatest problem, from the highest position, and the nearest relationship with the clearest revelation.

No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

JOHN 1:18

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Discuss It

- Why is God invisible? (*Cf. John 4:24*)
- If God were not invisible, why could we still not see Him? (*Cf. 1 Tim. 6:16*)
- How has God solved the problem of His invisibility?

Discover It

Read the following verses and identify how Christ has explained God and what He requires.

- **John 3:16**—For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
- **John 4:23-24**—But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.
- **John 14:6**—Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”
- **Matthew 5:20**—For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Apply It

God’s invisibility:

- Prohibits us from fashioning idols in His image.
- Calls for us to worship in spirit and in truth.
- Requires us to, not only deal with sins of the flesh, but sins of the spirit like pride, envy, malice, greed, self-righteousness, and covetousness.
- Tells us that we cannot see God on our own; He came to men in Christ, enabling us to know Him.

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