

## Living Word Weekly Bible Study (October 24-29, 2016)

### Monday: John 1:1-3

When John writes “The Word”; he is writing about Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is The Word. At the beginning of his Gospel, John says three things about Jesus.

1) The Word (Jesus Christ) was already in existence when God created all things. The very first verse of the Bible says: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). What John is saying is this—the Word is not one of the created things; the Word was already in existence before anything was created. The Word is not part of the world which came into being in time; the Word is part of eternity and was there with God before time and the world began. John was thinking of what is known as the pre-existence of Christ. If the Word was with God before time began, if God’s Word is part of the eternal scheme of things, it means that God was always like Jesus; in other words, the God of the Old Testament is exactly the same as the God of the New Testament. Sometimes we tend to think of the Old Testament God as stern and avenging, and the New Testament God to be loving and full of grace. This is simply not true. The whole New Testament tells us, this passage of John especially, that God has always been like Jesus. What Jesus did was to open a window in time that we might see the eternal and unchanging love of God. In other words, God did not change, but when Jesus came, our UNDERSTANDING of God changed.

2) John goes on to say that the Word was with God. What does he mean by that? He means that there has always been complete unity between the Word and God; in other words, there has always been the most intimate connection between God the Son and God the Father. That means no one can tell us what God is like, what God’s will is for us, what God’s love and heart and mind are like, except Jesus. Let us use human language because it is the only language we can use. John is saying that Jesus is so intimate with God that God has no secrets from Him; and that, therefore, Jesus is the one person in all the universe who can reveal to us what God is like and how God thinks and how God feels.

3) Finally, John says that the Word was God. What this means is that the Word was of the very same character, quality, essence, and being as God the Father. So right at the beginning of his Gospel, John lays it down that in Jesus, and in Jesus alone, we see what God always was and always will be, and all that God feels towards, and desires for us. John wanted to make this truth crystal clear; because at the time John’s Gospel was being written, a terrible heresy was plaguing the church, a heresy known as Gnosticism (Pronounced NAH-steh-sism). **Look up Gnosticism on the web: <http://www.theopedia.com/Gnosticism>.**

To combat Gnosticism, John lays down two basic Christian truths.

1) Christianity has always believed in what is called creation out of nothing. We do not believe that the world began with an essential flaw in it. We do not believe that the world began with God and something else. It is our belief that behind everything there is God and God alone. God created all that is out of nothing, and when God completed it, creation was good.

2) Christianity has always believed that this is God’s world, therefore God is intimately involved in it. The Gnostics tried to put the blame for the evil of the world on the shoulders of its creator. Christianity believes that what is wrong with the world is due to sin. But even though sin has “broken” the world and kept it from being what it might have been, we can never despise the world, because it is God’s. If we believe this, it gives us a new sense of the value of the world and a new sense of responsibility to it.

- How can Jesus Christ be “with” God and be God at the same time?
- Why is the Trinity such a foundational belief of Christianity?
- Can you be a Christian without accepting the truth of the Trinity?

- Do you see Gnosticism's influence in the church today? How? Where?

## **Tuesday: John 1:4-5**

Light and Life are two of the main themes of John's Gospel. The Gospel of John begins and ends with life. At the very beginning, we read that in Jesus was life; and at the very end, we read "But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing in Him you will have life by the power of His name" (John 20:31). Jesus constantly spoke of true life: It breaks His heart that people will not come to Him that they might have life (John 5:40). He teaches that He came that people might have life and that they might have it in great abundance (John 10:10). He claims that He gives us life and that we will never perish because no one will snatch us out of His hand (John 10:28). He claims that He is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). In the Gospel, the Word life occurs thirty-five times and the verb to live or to have life is used fifteen times. What does Jesus mean by life?

Quite simply He means that life is the opposite of alienation, brokenness, destruction, condemnation and death. God sent His Son into the world so that all who believe should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). The person who hears and believes the Word has eternal life and will not come into judgment (John 5:24). Those to whom Jesus gives life will never perish (John 10:28). In truth, until we accept Jesus and take Him as our Savior and enthrone Him as our King, we do not have a life at all, we merely have physical existence. It is the will of the Father who sent Jesus that everyone who sees Him and believes in Him should have life (John 6:40). Jesus is the giver of life because the Father has set His own seal of approval upon Him (John 6:27).

What does it mean to believe? It means two things.

1) It means that cognitively we must be convinced that Jesus is the incarnation of God, and our personal Lord and Savior. If Jesus is only a man, there is no reason why we should give Him the complete obedience that He demands any more than we would give any person complete obedience.

2) But there is more than an intellectual belief in this. To believe in Jesus means to have a one on one personal relationship. To believe in Jesus means to take Jesus at His Word, to accept His commandments as absolutely binding, to believe without question that what He says is true. Jesus said: "But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash" (Matthew 7:26-27). Belief means the conviction of the mind that Jesus is the Son of God, the giving of the heart in love to Jesus, and the personal trust that everything Jesus says is true.

The second of the great words which John uses is Light. This word occurs in the Gospel of John twenty-one times. Jesus is the Light of all people. The function of John the Baptist was to point out that Light which was in Christ. Twice Jesus calls Himself the Light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5). This Light can be in people (John 11:10), so that they can become children of the Light (John 12:36), "I have come," said Jesus, "as Light into the world" (John 12:46). The Light Jesus brings is the Light which dispels chaos. In the creation story, God moved upon the dark, formless chaos which was before the world began and said: "Let there be Light" (Genesis 1:3). The new-created Light of God destroyed the empty chaos from which it came. So Jesus is the Light which shines in the darkness (John 1:5). He is the one person who can save a life from becoming chaos. Left to ourselves, we are doomed. The Light which Jesus brings is a revealing Light. It is to our shame that we loved the darkness rather than the Light, and we did so because our deeds were evil; and we shunned the Light lest our sins are exposed (John 3:19, 20). The Light which Jesus brings is something which shows things as they truly are; it shows them in their true character and their true values. The Light which Jesus brings is a guiding Light. If a person does not possess that Light, he walks in darkness and does not know where he is going (John 12:36). When a person receives that Light and believes in it, she no longer walks in darkness (John 12:46).

The word darkness occurs seven times in John's Gospel. To John, there was a darkness in the world that was as real as the Light. The darkness is hostile to the Light. The Light shines in the darkness, but, however hard the darkness tries, it cannot extinguish it. Sin loves the darkness and hates the Light because the Light shows up too many things. So John is saying: "Into this world, there comes Jesus, the Light of the world; there is a darkness which would seek to eliminate Him, to banish Him from life, to extinguish Him. But there is a power in Jesus that is undefeatable. The darkness can hate Him, but it can never defeat Him." There are certain passages where the darkness seems to stand for ignorance. Jesus says: "I am the Light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the Light that leads to life" (John 8:12). Jesus says to his disciples: "My Light will shine for you just a little longer. Walk in the Light while you can, so the darkness will not overtake you. Those who walk in the darkness cannot see where they are going" (John 12:35). Jesus shows us the way, and which lights the way every step of the way.

There are times when John uses this word darkness symbolically. He uses it at times to mean more than merely the dark of night. He tells of a time the disciples were in their boat and were crossing the lake without Jesus; and then He says, "And it was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them" (John 6:17). John tells of the Resurrection morning and of the hours before those who had loved Jesus realized that He had risen from the dead. He begins the story: "Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came while it was still dark" (John 20:1). She was living at the moment in a world from which she thought Jesus had been eliminated, and the world like that was dark. He tells the story of the Last Supper. John tells how Judas left to betray Jesus; and he says with a kind of terrible symbolism: "Judas took the bread Jesus gave him and immediately went out. It was night" (John 13:30).

To John, life without Jesus was life in the dark.

- What does it mean to believe in Jesus?
- Can you truly claim to believe in Jesus if you are not actively following Him and obeying Him?
- Do you suppose there are people who think they are Christian, but are not?
- What does Jesus mean when He says that He is "the Light of the world"?

### **Wednesday: John 1:6-18**

God sent John the Baptist as a forerunner to Jesus Christ, to be a herald and a sign that the long-awaited Messiah had come. This was to prepare people for the Incarnation---to make certain they did not miss the most important event in the history of the world. So that people might see and believe that John was sent to proclaim that Jesus Christ was coming, and that He was the Light of the world, and He was coming to save the lost. Then, John calls for people to repent, to embrace righteousness, to trust and obey, and to become God's child, purging the grip of darkness forevermore. John was not the Light; rather, he was a witness of the Light, a testimony of the new covenant of grace from God to us. Even though Christ made the world and all things, darkness corrupted everything. Sin blinded people from the Truth so they needed the Light of God to know God and to live. John's witness is so that people may now see the Light, the Hope, and Love of God, accept His saving grace so to become the children of God and be reborn - all of which can come only from God. To prove and make this happen, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, became a human being and lived amongst us. He remains pure and His Light shines to show us the Love and plan of God. John passionately points this all out to the people so they may change their ways, telling them someone greater than he (John) is coming so that all we who trust in Him can receive His rich blessings. God's unfailing love through the faithfulness of Christ is available to us and we can see God by seeing Christ.

This passage continues the prologue, introducing to us Jesus Christ---who is God made flesh---the incarnation of the Great I AM, who is eternally existing and who now comes as fully God and becomes fully man. God Himself becomes flesh and dwells among us. God is now one of us, God among people, personally conveying His Love, personally giving us His Grace! In John's Gospel, there is a lot of word repetition; this was a Jewish literary device to bring emphasis on the importance of what was being said. What is more important than God becoming one of us in order to save us?

To know Jesus is to know God because Jesus IS God; Jesus is the face of God, the One who eternally lives and reveals to us the Father. He is the One who gives you life and the Light of the Word for your salvation! We know God by knowing Christ, who is God. We know Him by knowing His written Word that carries to us His living Word.

- Are you living your life because of Who He is and what He has done for you?
- Are you forever devoted to Christ as LORD?
- Does your character reflect Who Christ is and what He is doing in you?
- Do you believe in the eternal Christ? Are you living up to what you believe with trust and hope? If not, why not (1 Peter 4:19)?

Christianity is a relationship with Jesus Christ; therefore, it cannot be earned or presumed; it is not learned or reasoned or inherited or purchased. It is something that no price can ever lay hold of - except the price paid on our behalf by Christ! Yet once we have it, we can lean, learn, reason, inherit God's character and eternal life, and continually build upon it. For us to have real effectual faith, we have to receive Jesus Christ as our own. Not through our parents or our church or our religion, but ours alone - faith that is real, relevant, and personal. Our faith and knowledge in Christ must be received initially, a move that the Spirit enables us to do.

- What does it mean to you that God is now one of us?
- How would you communicate to someone that God lived amongst people, personally conveying His Love by personally giving us His grace?
- How can Christ be more within you as the ultimate purpose and meaning of life and all things we are to do?

#### **Thursday: John 8:48-59**

After Jesus gave some starting insight to His Divinity, the spiteful religious leaders reacted viciously. We see that not much has changed from then until now---instead of intelligent dialogue---the people who disagreed with Jesus simply resorted to brainless name calling and categorizing. Rather than a meaningful discussion of what the Scriptures say, they resorted to calling Him a devil, saying that He was possessed and even threw in a racial slur. Jesus again stood up for His position and defended it by saying His purpose was to honor His Father. As the religious leaders were seeking to glorify themselves, Jesus was pointing to the Father and proclaiming Him as the Judge. Then, He reassured those faithful ones who were listening that whoever believes in me will never die! This further aggravated His opposers and insulted their pride and positions; they then just called Him more names. They wrongly cited Abraham and tried to trap Jesus in a contradiction, but they did not succeed. They could not wrap their minds around the fact that God was there in their midst, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe in their very presence---so all they could do was call Him childish names. They exclaimed, who do you think you are? Jesus answered them, I do not boast about myself; rather it is my Father who says these glorious things about me. If you say our Father is our God, then why do you not know me? You all are liars; you do not know God. I know Him and I obey Him; you do not. Your ancestor Abraham looked forward to and overly rejoiced in these events as I do here. The leaders, replied, you are not even fifty years old! Do you think you knew Abraham when he is long dead? Jesus then blew what was left of their minds by saying that before Abraham was, I am. They understand of course what Jesus was saying. It is not that Jesus has poor grammar---Jesus is intentionally saying "I AM"; which is the Hebrew name for God. Jesus was saying that He came before Abraham because He is the eternal God.

How has the Truth, set you free both for eternity and for the here and now of daily life? Why did the religious leaders react so viciously instead of debating by the Scriptures or by the Law? Keep in mind; these were the most educated people of their time and knew better.

- What helps you to wrap your mind around the fact that God, the Creator, and Sustainer of the universe is here in your midst, giving you grace?
- How would you describe Jesus' role in the universe and in your life?
- Why do some Christians see their lives of faith like a buffet, picking and poking only at what looks and feels good, ignoring what is needed to be fed and healthy? What can you do to make sure this is not you?

### **Friday: 1 Peter 1:1-2**

God's grace and abundant mercy are available to us both now and as an inheritance to come! This passage is about salutations and greetings, acknowledgments and hope. Peter writes to a group of struggling Christians, whose hope is on the verge of extinction and whose options are limited. These are mostly Jews who have been disconnected from their homeland and all that they know, but also Gentile converts who are scattered from their families, careers, and status because of their faith. They are all really aliens in a foreign land; they are all-both Jew and Gentile-scattered physically and spiritually. Now, they realize, when we are in Christ, we are one with God; because Christ is God. Because we are one with God, the world is not our real or permanent home; rather, our true home is to come. We become scattered from all that we know and need so to honor and embrace our Lord Jesus Christ more firmly, more fully, and more joyfully - to enjoy Him.

Thus, Peter starts off his letter with a song of praise for what God has done, so we can express our gratitude and worship to Him (**Read Ephesians 1:2-14**). Then he gives us a litany of loaded theological words filled with power and meaning, showing us who our God is and, more prevalently, what He has done for us. We have to realize - for the ability to survive and to thrive on this earth - we are precious in His sight! We have a Hope who is real for us now and eternally. God gives us kindness, protection, and understanding beyond what we can fathom, love and forgiveness beyond comprehension, and the ultimate gift of our salvation that will never decay even when we totally do not deserve nor could ever merit it. We have a precious inheritance, expectation, privilege, and power in Jesus Christ, our loving Savior, and Lord. We have HOPE!

- Why do you suppose Peter starts off his letter with a song of praise? Have you ever done that in your correspondences? Why, or why not?
- What does it mean to you that God's grace and abundant mercy are available to you now as well as being an inheritance to come?
- If your hope was on the verge of extinction, your options limited, and you felt desperate, what would it take to reassure you? How have you responded to people in these circumstances?
- Have you realized that when we are in Christ, we are all foreigners? This world is not our real or permanent home; rather, our true home is to come! What does this mean for your trust and growth in Him?
- A lot of Christians today do not see the importance of theology. Why is that?

### **Saturday: Philippians 2:5-11**

Scientists have succeeded in causing chickens to sound like quail. Researchers took tissue from parts of the quail brain thought to control the bird's call and implanted it in the brains of five chicken embryos. The experiment worked! The hatched chicks sounded like quail rather than chickens. When you believed in Christ, God implanted His mind into yours and you became a new creation. However, unlike the chickens who sound like quail forever, you will not sound and act like Christ for the rest of your life without continually fostering and putting on His mind. This can be done most effectively by corporate worship, through daily Bible reading, and fellowshiping with other Christians who encourage you in your walk with the Lord, and spending time getting to know Christ Himself through prayer. Though there are a variety of things you can do to renew your Christ-like mind, the key is to do something every day. I think it's easy to make the mistake of trying to accomplish too much too soon. Of course, when we fail to achieve our goals, it's tempting to want to quit because we feel like a failure. However, God's heart is that you and I would take baby steps and make forward progress each day. In other words, don't try to cram; instead, just do at least one thing to cultivate the mind of Christ. Today, you can grow in grace and truth by asking God to give you an attitude adjustment. Maybe you are coasting as a Christian---giving Jesus the scraps of time you have left over in your busy schedule (as long as you have some left over). Perhaps you need to acknowledge selfish and greedy attitude? Maybe you are a chronic complainer who needs to see God's perspective on your suffering and trials? Regardless, every

Christian can benefit from an attitude tune-up. Ask God to search your heart today and reveal the attitudes that grieve Jesus.

Here St. Paul fleshes out what our lives should look like when we use Jesus as a model. In Philippians 2:6, he writes, "...although He [Jesus] existed in the form of God, [He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped..." Before Christ became incarnate, He existed in the form of God. Notice Paul does not say that Jesus "came to exist" or "entered into existence." Instead, he uses a present tense participle translated "existed" to indicate ongoing existence. Since the time frame of the passage is clearly eternity past, Paul asserts that Jesus Christ existed eternally "in the form of God." The English word "form" can be misleading here because it suggests shape or outward appearance. Yet, the Greek word translated "form" (morphē) refers to the essential nature of something or someone. In this context, Paul is saying that Jesus' nature and character are the same as God. In Paul's day, the word morph was used as a Roman stamp. Official government documents were sealed with wax. While the wax was still hot, they would press a ring or stamp into it bearing the emperor's insignia. The impression made in the wax was an exact representation of the insignia on the ring. We do something similar today when we wet a rubber stamp with ink and then stamp it on a piece of paper. The impression on the paper is the exact image of what is on the rubber stamp. Paul says, "That's the relationship Jesus Christ bears to God the Father. Jesus is the exact representation of who and what God is. Jesus has never been a junior partner to God, but rather a full-fledged member of the Godhead, equal with the Almighty Father in every way, shape, and form, from eternity past. So when you and I talk about Jesus Christ, we are not talking about someone less than God. We are talking about someone who is the "express image" of God.

Though Jesus was fully God, He "did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." Jesus was not grasping to get something; He already possessed deity. However, He did not regard being equal with God something to be used for His own advantage. Though equal with God or equally God, Jesus did not seize this as an opportunity to further His own interests at the expense of the Father. Jesus willingly released all of His personal rights. Some have suggested that the expression is identical to the phrase "in the form of God." More likely, however, the expressions differ. "The form of God" speaks of Jesus' essence or nature as God, whereas "equality with God" speaks of the glories or prerogatives of God. Together the two expressions are "among the strongest expressions of Christ's deity in the New Testament." Therefore, it is imperative that I emphasize to you that Jesus Christ is God. Perhaps you're saying, "Isn't that a given?" It may have been in years past, but this can no longer be assumed...even in evangelical churches. A recent survey reveals that 22% of Christians strongly agreed that Jesus Christ sinned when He lived on earth, with an additional 17% agreeing somewhat. This is tragic! Jesus Christ claimed to be God and He demonstrated that He was and is God! If Jesus is not God, then life has no purpose and salvation is a farce. We might as well go party! Fortunately, the Bible is clear that we can stake our present life and the life to come on the deity of Jesus and the salvation that He offers.

- Why is it IMPERATIVE that we understand and accept the truth of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ?
- What changes if Jesus was just a good human being, like Moses, or Mohammed, or Buddha, or Gandhi?
- Jesus repeatedly claimed to be God. So, if He is not, He is a liar. Could Jesus be a good teacher if His teachings are lies?

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