

THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF JESUS CHRIST

(John 1:1-5)

In this opening section of John's gospel, John expresses the most profound truth in the universe. And John does this in the clearest of all terms, even a child can understand the language.

One writer said, "Though easily understood by a child, John's Spirit-inspired words convey a truth beyond the ability of the greatest minds in human history to fathom: the eternal, infinite God became a man in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ."

The deity of the Lord Jesus Christ is an essential, nonnegotiable tenet of the Christian faith. In John's gospel the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ is emphasized. John affirms that Jesus is God. In fact, all New Testament writers affirm that Jesus is God.

In verse 1, John says, "In the beginning was the Word." "In the beginning" is a phrase that John uses to express a profound truth. The beginning that John has in mind is the beginning of the universe as depicted in Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." This is the beginning that John refers to. But John also expresses a profound truth in this phrase: "In the beginning was the Word." Observe the fourth word in this phrase: "was." That's an important word. "In the beginning was the Word." The Word was not made, as the heavens and earth, and the things in them were. No, before time began, the Word (Christ) was already in existence with God. John in verse 1 gives us a look into the doctrine of the pre-existence of Jesus Christ.

In the first six words of John chapter 1 and verse 1, John transports us into a realm that is absolutely beyond comprehension – a realm in which Jesus Christ was already in existence when the heavens and the earth were created. The first six words compose a statement that surpasses human thought.

Prior to the creation of the universe there was eternity, a realm in which it is hard for us to think. Yet, in this eternity past there was God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And all three are one and not three, another statement of Scripture which surpasses all human thought.

The Word was in the beginning of beginnings, and that's just a phrase that takes us into a realm that we don't fully understand. But John's point is clear: The Word was not created, the Word has no beginning, and the Word always was and is. And before God set out to create this world the Word was already there with Him.

Verse 1 is written in simple language. Yet, the truth that verse 1 presents is profound. Some have approached verse 1 with their intellect and it doesn't work. You will never be able to explain it to the mind. It's hard for the mind to think in terms of no universe – no

world as we know it. If you approach verse 1 with your intellect you will come away with all kind of problems. You can only come to the gospel of John with your heart and with faith. You'll never understand verse 1, just believe it. Jesus has always existed; there was never a point when He came into being.

Now that brings us to this question in the first phrase in verse 1: Why did John call Jesus the Word? Why didn't John say in the beginning was Jesus? Well I think the answer lies in the culture too which John writes. It has all to do with that culture and their beliefs – the day in which John lived. John was writing for the benefit of the Greek mind and the Jewish mind. Both groups understood the concept of Word. The meaning of the word “Word” is “logos.” Logos means word, thought, concept, and the expressions thereof. And both Greek and Jew would understand this meaning of Word.

One writer said, “To the Greek philosophers, the logos was the impersonal, abstract principle of reason and order in the universe. It was in some sense a creative force, and also the source of wisdom. The average Greek may not have fully understood all the nuances [the slight degree of difference] of meaning with which the philosophers invested the term logos. Yet even to laymen the term would have signified one of the most important principles in the universe.

To the Greek, then, John presented Jesus as the personification and embodiment of the logos. Unlike the Greek concept, however, Jesus was not an impersonal source, force, principle, or emanation. In Him, the true logos who was God became a man – a concept foreign to Greek thought.”

The logos was not just a Greek concept, but a Jewish concept also. The Greek philosophers believed that God's mind and will was existing somewhere in space floating around and it gave man the ability to reason and the ability to act and respond intelligently. God's mind was alive and moving around somewhere in space, but this mind of God was impersonal, it was not a person. But the logos to the Jew was a person and that person was God. The Jew believed that the logos spoke the world into existence. The logos (Word) was to the Jew an expression of divine power and wisdom.

The expression “the word of the LORD came unto” is an expression used all through the Old Testament. To the Jew this was not an impersonal force, but a person. And that person who spoke was God. And the Word (logos) they heard was the Word of God. So the Jewish mind would have a better understanding of the logos that John sets forth in verse 1 than the Greek. The Jews were well aware of this term. Therefore, John presents unto his Jewish readers the Word in flesh – Jesus Christ. John presents Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word. Jesus Christ is God's final word to mankind. The writer of Hebrews said, “God who at sundry [many] times and in divers [various] manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Then John in verse 1 takes it a step further: “and the Word was with God.” The Word was not with men; the Word was not with angels; for He was before either of these – He is the eternal preexisting One. But, John says, the Word was with God.

Teachers of the Greek language tell us that we miss a great deal of the fullness, a great deal of the richness, that’s in this text in the English translation. There is far more here than merely the Word existing with God.

One writer said it gives “the picture of two personal beings facing one another and engaging in intelligent discourse.”

Another writer said, “... and the Word was face to face with God. In the Greek language that identifies the most intimate possible relationship of communication and communion and fellowship.

In eternity past God was face to face with Jesus Christ. Tremendous reality. He was there with intimate communion and He loved it.”

This intimate communication, and this intimate fellowship, was what Jesus had in mind in John 17, where He said, “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:5).

The truth expressed in verse 1 is a nonnegotiable tenet of the Christian faith. In 2 John and verse 10 John warned, “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. The “doctrine” in which John refers is the biblical teaching concerning Christ. John says, if they don’t believe in Christ as Scripture teaches, then, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting.

The reason for John’s boldness is because “many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist” (2 John 7).

For anyone who claims to be a Christian and be confused about the deity of Jesus Christ is inexcusable. This is inexcusable because the biblical teaching regarding Christ is clear and unmistakable.

So John says in verse 2, “The same was in the beginning with God.” John in verse 2 just reinforces what he declared in verse 1. Jesus is the pre-existent God. He is the true God, the great God, the living God, and the eternal God. In His essence, essence is what He actually is, and in His essence He is God. In His nature He is God. In His person, in His personality, in His character, and in His attributes, He is God. Jesus is all that God is. All the essential characteristics of deity can be seen in Jesus. There is no question when it comes to Scripture, Jesus is God, and Jesus is the Christ (Messiah).

Now, in verse 3, John enters a realm that is beyond our ability to comprehend on a natural level. In verse 3 John's subject is twofold: creation and Jesus. John says in verse 3, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."

Only God has the ability to create something out of nothing. Only God can create in this way. Verse 3 tells us that Jesus created "All things." Everything was created by Jesus. The universe came into being by a divine act of Jesus Christ. Therefore, this is another proof that Jesus is God.

The Creator of all things must first be uncreated, and only the eternal God is uncreated. And that eternal God is Jesus. Paul said, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible, and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Colossians 1:16-17). Not only does Paul confirm the truth that Jesus created all things, Paul goes beyond the creation itself and says in verse 17, "and by him all consist." In other words, Jesus not only created everything, He holds everything together in unity.

The first phrase in verse 3, "All things were made by him." The language is simple, but the subject is profound. The subject is far-reaching. John in these few words tells us of the One who created everything. The One to whom you and I call Lord. You know Him. I know Him. Yet, in these words John is saying more than that. Verse 3 is a proof of all that John has said before; as that He was in the beginning; and that He was with God the Father in the beginning; and that He was God.

If verses 1 and 2 are not true of Jesus, then verse 3 cannot be true either. For the One in verses 1 and 2 is the One who creates everything in verse 3, otherwise all things could not have been made by Him, had either of these been untrue.

John reinforces his position in the last part of verse 3, where he says, "and without him was not any thing made that was make." Did you get that? Do you understand that? "Without him," without Jesus, there is nothing. The universe is not real, and you are not real. But we know that the universe is real, we know that we are real. Therefore, it was Jesus (God) who created all things.

John Phillips said, "The scientist takes his or her telescope and focuses it on the reaches of space. Out there are distances so vast that a special unit of measure is needed with which to express those concepts. The astronomer's yardstick is a light year: the distance light travels in one year (at 186,273 miles per second – the equivalent of encircling the earth at the equator seven and a half times). In round numbers, that is about six trillion miles. Our sun, by that yardstick, is eight light minutes away. But out there in space are suns and stars

believed to be billions of light years away. Nor can we count the stars or guess how many billions there are.

Some stars are large beyond all thought. The star Antares, for instance, could hold sixty-four million suns the sizes of ours. In the constellation Hercules is a star that could contain one hundred million stars the size of Antares. Our galaxy, the Milky Way, is 100,000 light years in diameter. It is revolving at a speed of two hundred miles an hour. It takes two million years to complete one revolution on its axis.

Not only are we awed by the size of space and the prodigality [extravagant, lavish] with which the creator has strewn it with stars, but we are overwhelmed by the precision with which all the vast orbs pursue their appointed paths. Our planet, for instance, does not travel in a true circle. It travels in three directions at the same time. It revolves on its axis, it travels around the sun, and its path is deflected by other planets. Yet it does not lose more than one one-hundredth of a second every one hundred years.

Let us turn from the world of the infinitely large to the world of the infinitely small. The building block of the universe is the atom, an entity so small that each one is less than one hundred fifty millionth of an inch in diameter. If the molecules of a single drop of water could be converted into grains of sand, there would be enough sand to build a concrete highway half a mile wide and one foot thick all the way from New York to San Francisco.

That is the world of inanimate things. When we turn to living things the complexities that confront us on every hand are incredible. Each cell in a living creature contains two hundred billion molecules of atoms.

The nucleus of a cell (a complex life factory) is less than four ten-thousandths of an inch in diameter. The membrane that encloses the cell's component parts is only one half of that, or one-millionth of an inch thick.

Jesus made it all. "Without him," says the Holy Spirit through the inspired apostle, "was not anything made that was made." The form of the text in Greek is even more emphatic: "not even one thing."

The present world, however, is different from the original creation. The original creation was altered for ever in Genesis 3 and verses 6-7: "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons."

When Adam disobeyed God, the original universe, at that very moment was altered. The catastrophic results of the fall not only affected the human race, but also the entire creation.

Paul said to the church at Rome, “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.”

In verses 4 and 5, John displays again another proof that Jesus truly is God: “In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”

These two verses express the purpose of the incarnation. The word incarnation means “in flesh.” Jesus Christ who is God came to this earth in flesh. In other words, God took a human body. Jesus Christ while on this earth lived in a human body, yet, He was God in the flesh. That’s the doctrine of the incarnation.

There are two very important words in verse 4: “life” and “light.” While there are distinctions made between the two words, the Bible shows no disconnect. Life and light taken in the context of John’s writing cannot be separated. John says in verse 4, “In him was life; and the life was the light of men.” The statement “the life was the light” stops any disconnect between the two. Where there is life there is light. There is no way to disconnect the two. This is clearly seen in John chapter 8 and verse 12: “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

In Jesus “was life.” There are two things in this phrase: First, it refers to Christ having life in Himself. Theologians refer to that as self-existence.

Only deity, only God is self-existent. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, have life in themselves – they are self-existent. This is a foundational doctrine in the Christian faith.

There was point when the universe did not exist. But there was never a point in which God did not exist. The universe is dependent on the life of God. But God is not dependent on any source of life outside Himself. He is life. He is from everlasting to everlasting.

Second, in Jesus “was life” refers to spiritual life as opposed to physical life. Man by natural birth is dead to God. Paul said, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). The word “dead” that Paul uses is a word that means “by natural birth man is separated from God.” Man is separated because of “trespasses and sins.” This is spiritual death. And if man rejects the life of God, his spiritual death becomes the second death – eternal separation from God.

Listen to John words in Revelation 20 and verses 12-15: “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death

and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

All of these people had natural life. And many had a religious life, but not one of them had the life of God. The life of God is in Jesus and in Jesus alone. John said in verse 4, “In him was life.” In Jesus and in Jesus alone is the life of God – the life that assures one of heaven and not hell. Jesus is the source of physical and spiritual life.

Now in the last part of verse 4 John takes us a step deeper into these wonderful truths: “and the life was the light of men.” The source of “life” is also the “light of men.” “The life,” which is Jesus Christ, “was the light of men.” That’s a wonderful phrase – a wonderful truth to grasp. Now prior to light there was darkness. Man in his darkened state is a natural man. And in this darkened state, many, in their own eyes, feel themselves too be wise concerning God. But we know that this is not so. Paul said, “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Yet, man in his darkened state feels himself wise. He refuses to believe what Scripture teaches. The darkness of the religious mind leads wise intelligent people to believe many strange things about God.

The darkness of the philosophical mind speculates vainly about the origin of things. The darkness of the carnal mind is entrenched with many hostilities against God. The darkness of the scientific mind is bewildered with the complexities of the universe. This mind-set sees life as only chemistry. Therefore, belief in God is not reasonable – there is not reason to believe in God. This is man prior to light. Light in this context is the life of God – spiritual life. And Jesus is the source of that life.

Seventy times, I believe, in John, John talks about having the life of God by believing. What does believing mean? First, it means that you are convinced in your mind that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Secondly, it means that you from the heart trust everything Jesus said is true. Thirdly, it means you commit your life to those two things. That’s believing.

One writer said it this way, “It’s not just to say oh yes He’s the Son of God. It’s not just to say oh yes I believe what he said. It’s to do that and then commit your life to those beliefs.”

John now moves into the struggle of light and darkness in verse 5: “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”

The last phrase in verse 5, which says, “comprehended it not” means “overcome it not.” It’s not that “darkness” didn’t understand “the light,” darkness fully understood the light. The

darkness, Satan's kingdom, fought furiously against the light. The assaults were endless. The assaults were vicious.

The thrust of the verse, then, is not that darkness failed to understand the truth about Jesus because the kingdom of darkness did understand the truth about Jesus. In fact, Matthew records a message from this dark kingdom: "And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" (Matthew 8:29). James said, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). The demons not only know the truth about Christ, but they also believe it.

The existence of darkness is very real. Darkness has one goal in mind; prevent the light from shining in darkness. That, however, is beyond the power of darkness. Verse 5 makes this clear: "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended [overcame] it not."

That same light shines brilliantly in the lives of many of you. And Satan hates it and he fights it but he can't turn it out.

Jerry W. Arnold
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