

John 1:1-5 – “Introducing Jesus”

(Pew Bible Page: 886)

Intro: If you’re a normally attentive reader of your Bible, you will recognize that of the four gospel accounts of Jesus’ life, the last one – John’s gospel – is distinct from the Matthew, Mark, and Luke accounts. Those gospels, the so called “synoptic” gospels, roughly follow a common outline that we do not find in John’s gospel. Why is that? Matthew, Mark, and Luke follow a common chronology, but John seems to be on a different plan. What’s that about? Matthew, Mark, and Luke record many of the same details of Jesus’ life, but John’s gospel seems to largely contain materials those gospels don’t include. What’s going on here? Tonight, we’ll begin a series of studies from the Book of John, hoping in the coming weeks to clear up some of those mysteries. Our studies will begin with the first five verses of the “Prologue” in which John gives us a fresh introduction to Jesus. So, tonight, we’re “Introducing Jesus.” In tonight’s study we’ll be following an outline taken from J. C. Ryle’s exposition of verses one through five.

Proposition: Jesus is the Light of Life that brings men out of the darkness of sin. Worship Him.

Billboard: Our Lord Jesus Christ is Eternal
 Our Lord Jesus Christ is God
 Our Lord Jesus Christ is Distinct
 Our Lord Jesus Christ is Creator
 Our Lord Jesus Christ is Life

Preparatory Notes: Before we begin to study the Prologue, it will be helpful to the studies we will be doing in the coming weeks to insert a Prologue to the Prologue – several points to keep in mind as we work our way through the Book of John.

John’s gospel differs from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the “synoptics,” in that it is not organized chronologically. Matthew, Mark, and Luke follow a common chronological thread through their stories of the life of Christ. Each one includes slightly different material, but all basically flow through the story using a common arrangement based on the chronology of Jesus’ three-year ministry first given in Mark’s gospel and adopted by Matthew and Luke as the timeline for their gospels. John’s gospel does not follow this chronology. John wasn’t trying to repeat what had been done in the synoptics. His purpose was not biography – that had already been done. John, the last of the four evangelists, wrote for a different purpose. John wrote a “*spiritual gospel*” – an account of the life of Jesus centering on seven “*signs*” proving that Jesus was the Christ. John famously stated his purpose in **John 20:30–31** - **30** *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* Because the arrangement of John’s gospel is thematic rather than chronological, John feels free to move things around. The cleansing of the Temple – an event the synoptics place during Passion Week, John inserts immediately after his account of the wedding at Cana in Galilee. Nicodemus interview with Jesus comes next in John’s gospel, but likely occurred just before the cross during Passion Week as well, or perhaps around the time of the Feast of Dedication in December of the previous year. John’s freedom to rearrange the timeline to suit his needs causes much heartburn to modern commentators but is something the ancients weren’t greatly bothered by. As we study John’s book, I would encourage you not to worry about it either. Just go with the flow and refuse to be distracted by what is essentially a non-issue to the Author. Remember, it’s the Holy Spirit who is truly the writer of this gospel, and if He chooses to rearrange the sequence to suit His purposes, that should probably be fine with us!

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Pay attention to “light” and “dark” in John. The terms are used by John to signal the knowledge of God (“light”) and ignorance of God (“dark”). If we recall this to our mind as we study, we’ll make interesting discoveries we might miss otherwise.

Notice also that John’s writings, both his gospel and his first epistle use the symbols of “water and blood” to represent an important spiritual truth. John uses these recurring symbols to signify the important truths of washing from sin and atonement by Christ’s blood. His seemingly casual mention of this in John 19:34 for example will puzzle us if we don’t realize that John is speaking beyond the literal facts and into spiritual truths when he does this.

Bear in mind too that when John uses the word “Jews” he isn’t usually talking about the nation in general; John often uses that term to refer to the *leadership* of the nation. I mention this because some infer a kind of antisemitism from John’s use of the term, “*the Jews.*” John was Jewish, and so was Jesus. No one should read antisemitism into the text if they are aware of John’s special meaning for this term.

Most importantly, be aware that in John’s gospel Jesus is always pointing men to spiritual realities but is constantly mistaken as speaking to men about earthly matters. Jesus was always speaking of the vertical – heavenly truths; His listeners were always listening for the horizontal – earthly things. This happens repeatedly in John, and I’ll try to point this out as we work our way through our various studies.

Finally, bear in mind who the man was who is writing to us. Ryle puts it this way:

Who is the man to whom this gospel was given? He was an eyewitness to all Christ’s ministry. A pillar of the Church. He saw Jairus’ daughter raised. He witnessed the Transfiguration and saw the agony in the Garden. He leaned on Christ’s breast at the Last Supper and at Christ’s command from the cross, cared for Jesus’ mother, Mary. John watched Him die and saw Him raised. *“He was the disciple who was specially inspired to write the deepest things concerning Christ.”*¹

(v.1) Our Lord Jesus Christ is Eternal - John 1:1 - 1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...* With these famous words echoing the opening words of Genesis, John places Jesus in eternity before the creation of the world: **Genesis 1:1 - 1** *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.* It is evident that John’s uses the term “Word” as a synonym for Jesus. All doubt about that is removed when we read **John 1:14–17 - 14** *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15* *(John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’ ”) 16* *For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17* *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.* What John is telling us then is that Jesus is eternal, existing “*in the beginning*” – eternity before creation, “*with God.*” The Bible is very clear about the fact that Jesus existed before the creation – a time when only God Himself existed and *the Word was with God.* Jesus himself acknowledged this in **John 17:5 - 5** *And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Jesus is Eternal.

¹¹ J. C. Ryle, “Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John – Volume 1, Banner of Truth Trust, Carlisle, PA.

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[APPLICATION] Why is this important? Because it eliminates any idea that Jesus is somehow a created being like angels or men descended from Adam. In an age when men are anxious to teach that Jesus was merely human, it is important for us to know that our Bibles tell us just the opposite – Jesus was “*with God... in the beginning.*”

(v.1) Our Lord Jesus Christ is God – Because Jesus was “*in the beginning... with God*” we inevitably conclude that “*the Word was God.*” Jesus is divine, God Himself. Jesus was not an angel or a mere human being – both creations of God inferior to the Father. Jesus rather was “*the only begotten son of God*” (John 3:16) meaning the only man who shared God’s nature and thus is equal with the Father - sharing the same uncreated substance as the Father. Jesus himself acknowledged this truth **John 10:30 - 30** *I and the Father are one.*” Everyone understood that this was a claim to deity as the following verses plainly show: **John 10:31–33 - 31** *The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. 32* *Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” 33* *The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.”*

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Jesus is God.

[APPLICATION] The divinity of Jesus is a non-negotiable truth that cannot be compromised without throwing away the gospel itself. For Jesus to be our savior, He must be at the same time both fully human and fully divine. If He was not fully human, He could not die for our sins. If He was not divine, He could not suffer infinitely the penalty to atone for our sins. Jesus must be at one and the same time both God and man if the gospel is to be true.

(v.2) Our Lord Jesus Christ is Distinct – This is taught in verse one but driven home in verse **John 1:2 - 2** *He was in the beginning with God.* Many wonder why John seems to “circle back” to restate what he had already told us in verse one – that Jesus was “*in the beginning with God.*” John did this because he was anxious to emphasize that “*our Lord Jesus Christ is a person distinct from God the Father, and yet one with him.*”² The Father and the Word, Jesus the Son, though joined in substance in an ineffable union, remain two distinct persons. The Father is not the Son, nor is the Son the Father, nor are the Father and the Son the Holy Spirit. To confound the members of the Trinity is incorrect doctrine. We must be careful here to express the Bible’s teaching concerning the Trinity. Each member of the Trinity is a distinct person, and yet all three persons are one in indivisible union in the Godhead. We cannot get our minds around this, but it is true, nonetheless. “*Happy is he who can receive it as a little child, without attempting to explain it,*” says Ryle.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Jesus is Distinct.

[APPLICATION] Why is this important? It is important because confounding the members of the Trinity is a heresy condemned in the early years of church history. While this is not a ‘fatal error’ by any means, those who are well versed in doctrine will inevitably call into question the understanding of those that unknowingly confuse one member of the Godhead for another. For clarity’s sake, we must be careful to follow the Bible’s pattern when we speak of who God is.

² J. C. Ryle, opus cited.

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(v.3) Our Lord Jesus Christ is Creator – John affirms that because God is the Creator of all things, and Jesus is God, He must necessarily be Creator: **John 1:3 - 3** *All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.* This point too is crucial to the gospel and is affirmed several places in Scripture. **Hebrews 1:1–2 - 1** *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.* Again, in **Colossians 1:16 - 16** *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Jesus is Creator.

[APPLICATION] This is important because it gives Christ *authority* over all things since He is the *Creator* of all things. All things belong to Him by right of creation. Jesus has authority because He is Creator of all things.

(vv.4-5) Our Lord Jesus Christ is Life – John tells us that Jesus is the source of all spiritual life and light: **John 1:4–5 - 4** *In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* Jesus stands at the center of human history. All who came before Him who received spiritual life received that life because of His sacrifice. The Old Testament sacrificial system could never take away sins (cf. Hebrews 10:4). Those sacrifices looked away toward Mount Calvary and the sacrifice of “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). All who receive Christ in our day are only saved because of Jesus: **John 6:44 - 44** *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.* There is no other way to the Father except through Jesus Christ our Lord: **John 14:6 - 6** *Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* Furthermore, Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s plan to bring the knowledge of Himself to the world. In the beginning God said, “*Let there be light,*” (Genesis 1:3). Now Jesus has come proclaiming, **John 9:5 - 5** *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”* The fifth and final verse of our study tells us that **5** *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it,* reminding us that the light that shines in Jesus today has always shown in the darkness of man’s ignorance of God and that man has largely refused to come into the light. Jesus spoke of this in **John 3:19 - 19** *And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.* But the Light still shines, and the darkness cannot overcome it.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Jesus is life.

[APPLICATION] Ryle suggests that there are two applications emerging out of tonight’s verses:

As we read these verses and are gripped by the wonderful truth of who Jesus is, we should feel humility and be sobered. Jesus is the eternal, unique Son of God, the Creator, and the only pathway to spiritual life. Considering all that He is, “*If no one less than the eternal God, the Creator and Preserver of all things, could take away the sin of the world, sin must be a far more abominable thing in the sight of God than most men suppose.*”³ One of man’s great weaknesses is that we take sin far too lightly. We too easily excuse ourselves, not realizing the tremendous nature of what God has done by becoming one of

³ Ryle, opus cited.

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us so that we can be healed. If this is who Jesus must be for us to be forgiven, how profound must be our need, how deep must be our darkness!

Secondly, by looking intently into all that Christ is in these verses, we ought to find a great hope arising in our souls. *“Let us mark that the Savior in whom the believer is bid to trust is nothing less than the eternal God, One able to save to the uttermost all that come to the Father by him.”* Indeed, Jesus is *“Emmanuel, God with us.”* Let us thank God that One so mighty cannot fail to save all who put their hope in Him.

Conclusion: Who is Jesus? He is the eternal God. He is the unique Son of God. He is the God who created everything, and all things belong to Him. Best of all, He is the Light of Life. Who is Jesus? He is all we’ll ever need, and He is the only One worthy of our worship.