

“First Word”

(John 1:1-18)

August 21, 2011

Order of Worship for August 21, 2011,
Pre-service Song
Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: Missions with Dennis Hurt

Call to Worship: Psalm 119:145-160 and Prayer

Installation of Dr. Keene as Principal of OCS & Dedication of the Oroville Christian School Faculty & Staff

Songs of Worship:

“Come, Now is the Time for Worship”

Overhead

“How Great is Our God”

Overhead

“Our God Reigns”

Song # 372

“Thy Word”

Song # 184

Offering and Offertory

Skit: (I do not know the title)

Message: “First Word” (John 1:1-5)

by Pastor Bronson

Closing Song:

“I Bow Down”

Song # 154

Parting Word of Grace

Sunday Evening in the Word
Heroes of the Faith, Hebrews 11:16-31
5:30 to 7:00
The Henneker Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

August 21, 2011

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **Sheryl Jackson at William Carey Academy**, Chittagong, Bangladesh: Miss J’s return to Bangladesh is safe and timely; the Lord’s people fully support her and the Academy in finances and prayer; the Lord secures the mission and opens many hearts to the gospel
2. **President Obama**: the Lord will open his eyes to what is true, good and wise for the nation; the Spirit will draw him to an ever deepening love for his wife, daughters and nation; he will be protected from sickness & evil
3. **Nominating Committee**: they will be led by the Spirit to those individuals He is preparing to serve in elective office for the congregation; they will be united in prayer , waiting on the Spirit; they will greatly encourage the Boards and congregation through their contacts
4. **Military Personnel of the Week: Pri. Cody Henneker** (grandson of Dick and Jane Miller):
5. **Young Adult of the Week: Sam Sundahl graduate of Perry Technical Institute** (son of Kirk and Marcia Sundahl):

There are four gospels in the Bible. Actually, there is one gospel in the Bible that is presented in four different ways. That is why the proper title for each of the four is “The Gospel According to...” The blank will then be filled in with Matthew or Mark or Luke or John. There is considerable overlap between them. Today we begin a study of the Gospel According to John.

It is helpful to realize from the outset that none of the gospel is a biography of the life or even of the ministry of Jesus. The life of Jesus was between thirty and thirty three years long; the ministry of Jesus was about three years long. But even Luke, who gives us the delightful and helpful account of the birth of Jesus and his cousin John the Baptist as well as the story of Jesus’ brief time in the Temple speaking with the teachers and amazing them with his knowledge and insight, is not giving a biography of Jesus. All four writers are seeking in their own way to call us to faith. RC Sproul in his commentary makes this observation:

“I believe the inclusion of the prologue has to do with John’s overriding goal, throughout his Gospel, of making a case for the identity of Christ. John says later that he wrote what he did ‘that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.’ (20:31) Simply put, John is not interested in being a detached observer and chronicler of the life of Jesus. He is trying to persuade his readers of the truth of Christ so that they might become His disciples.”

That is why these are sermons and not a lecture series. In a lecture the teacher’s aim is to impart accurate information and help the student to think clearly in light of that information. I certainly hope to accomplish both of those things. But beyond that it is my great desire to persuade you all of the truth of Christ so that you will truly become His disciples. I not only want you to know the truth and to think clearly, I hope you will come to believe passionately.

Sproul refers to John’s prologue. A prologue is simply a brief introduction to the main topic which follows; it is the word which goes before. John’s prologue is the first eighteen verses of chapter I. Please follow along as I read those verses:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will; of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

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. 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.” And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

Sproul’s opinion is that John wrote the prologue in order to indicate Jesus’ **credentials** as the Messiah or Christ, the Anointed One of God, from the outset. Credentials are designed to answer the question, “who are you” that I should listen to you, trust you, hire you, or whatever. That was the question Pharaoh asked Moses when he and Aaron arrived with God’s command request that he let the Israelites go (**Exodus 5:2**). “*Who is the Lord that I*

should obey His voice and let Israel go?” That is also the question which people in our land today are asking us: who is Jesus that we should put our trust in Him. We need to have a good answer to that question.

What John says stretches the mind in ways that nothing else does in the Gospels. Generally people consider that the great challenge for faith, especially in our materialistic age in which the only things people accept as real are those which can be fully described and known according to their material causes, are miracles. Miracles are by definition events for which the material cause is unknown. They are occurrences which are contrary to the normal patterns or laws of cause and effect by which natural things operate. To the secular materialist angels are not miracles; they are myths or fairy tales. But the birth of children either by women long past the child-bearing age or, even more, without the participation of a father are miracles. These are rejected by secular materialists, and these dominate the media, education, political culture and even many that claim to be Christian churches today. However, what John says of Jesus in his prologue is leagues beyond the merely miraculous. John says the man Jesus was first and always is the divine Word. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”*

That God could become a man doubtless involves a miracle at some point, but the miraculous is not the main point here. The main point has to do with God and His dealings with humanity along with the rest of that which He created. Put differently, the question is not, “How did God become a man?” The question is “Why did God become a man?” After all, if we are speaking of God, isn't it a bit beside the point to wonder whether or not and just how He might do something? That was the gist of Paul's objection to the response amongst the Jewish leaders and the Roman rulers of Palestine to the claim regarding the resurrection of Jesus. He asked (**Acts 26:8**), *“Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?”* While it is not always the case, still most commonly when people are trying to decide whether or not they believe in miracles, what is really at issue is whether or not they believe in God, for if God is God, then miracles are scarcely an issue.

The objection which the Jews had to the idea of a full or real incarnation of the divine as human was not fundamentally what we would term a scientific one, puzzling over how the infinitude of the divine could occupy the finite dimensions of a singular human mind, body and soul – that very question became a huge debate amongst Christians in the second and third centuries after Christ. The primary objection by the Jews was a moral one; how could the holy divine occupy that which was profanely human? Luke answers that question with the miracle of Jesus's conception in Mary's womb through the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit: Jesus is a unique creative act by God.

However, what follows in John's prologue is not an account of miracles; it is a look at God's dealings with what He had made, including humanity (1:1-2). *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”* The need to reveal God to humanity was the consequence of sin. That is critical to remember. Before the fall, God walked with Adam and Eve on what appears to be a daily basis; in the cool of the day is what we read in **Genesis 3:8**. There was no need to “reveal” God to man at that time: they were daily companions. “Know” in this instance is not “to know all about”. The knowledge which Adam enjoyed regarding God was “to know as trustworthy” or “to know as a friend” or even “to know as a father and benefactor”. There was complete openness between God and the creatures He had made. That Adam and Eve were naked and not ashamed is not a statement about their liberated sexuality but about their innocence, the fact that there was simply nothing about them that wanted or needed to be hidden. When sin came it was not God's being as the infinite and omniscient and omnipresent and all mighty Creator which separated Him from His creatures; it was His holiness, His absolute purity which was simply incompatible with Adam and Eve's sin.

We need to take a moment and have clarity about the sinfulness of sin: why is sin so awful? That sin is awful is not obvious to us. We scale sin from the really bad to the scarcely bad at all. Generally speaking we rate sins according to the severity of their observable consequences. So we say that murder is really bad but calling someone an idiot or a fool is no big deal. This flies in the face, however, of the words of Jesus as recorded by **Matthew (5:21-22)**, “*You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.*”

The sinfulness of sin derives from or is a result of its origin. Sin was born from believing a lie, more specifically, lies about God. When the serpent set out to turn Eve and Adam from righteous children to faithless sinners he first planted doubt in Eve’s mind regarding God’s word – “*Did God actually say...*” – then he flatly rejected God’s word – “*You will not surely die.*” Finally, he attacked God’s character by implying that God’s empty threat of death was designed to prevent Eve from becoming like God Himself: “*For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*” With the last step taken sin removes God being the ultimate moral authority and asserts the self instead (**Isaiah 14:13-14**): “*You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’*” In effect Satan presents God as just what Satan himself is: a liar with evil motives seeking to preserve his position and power by means of deceit. When we sin, when we agree with Eve in choosing to say no to what God says is good and right and opt instead to decide what is good and useful on our own and for ourselves, we like Eve tacitly even if unknowingly agree with Satan and we come under his controlling influence. That is why in **Genesis 4** we are immediately given the short account of sins full flowering: Cain is a man of faithless ambition seeking to impress God and buy his favor with his offering who becomes so furiously jealous of Able, whose offering was accepted by God, that he murders him. We say to ourselves, “I would never murder anyone; that is awful.” But who knows what the angry heart might do, especially if egged on by the father of lies who was a murderer from the beginning?

Message as preached 8/21/11

Today we begin a study of “The First Word”. That Word you have already met. The “First Word” is Jesus. That word is the Word that we most desperately need to hear. That word is the Word which when spoken into our hearts and our minds gives to us a true understanding not just of the world around us, but a true understanding of ourselves. So having just completed a long study of the book of Ephesians which talks about the church, I thought it would be good for us to step back and look at the foundation. The foundation of the church, its living core, its heart, is Jesus Christ. By turning to the gospels we will have a chance to see what it is the Word of God has written down for us that we would know Him the One whom God sent that we might receive the gift of eternal life.

There are four Gospels in the Bible. But it is wise for us to remember two things about them: the first is that there is really only one gospel. Properly each of the four Gospels is entitled “the Gospel According to...” The second thing to remember is that the Gospels are not biographies. As we begin to look at the account it is important to remember that none of the four, none of the Gospels are biographies, so you will be very frustrated if you pick up one of the gospels if you expect to get some sort of a consistent and detailed account of the life of Jesus. That is not the purpose for which in fact the Gospels were written. RC Sproul in the English Standard Version Study Bible makes this comment:

“I believe the inclusion of the prologue [a specific introductory portion of the Gospel According to John] has to do with John’s overriding goal, [why did John write his Gospel?] throughout his Gospel, of making a case for the identity of Christ. John says later that he wrote what he did ‘that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.’ (20:31) Simply put, John is

not interested in being a detached observer and chronicler of the life of Jesus. He is trying to persuade his readers of the truth of Christ so that they might become His disciples.”

So at the outset I would ask for each one of us to think for the moment: is that what I am? Am I a disciple, that is, a disciplined student that follows Jesus and receives from Jesus instruction in the truth for life?

Sproul refers to John 1:1-18 as the prologue. Let us read that prologue together. These first eighteen verses are an introduction to the whole rest of the Gospel. They help us to orient ourselves to what John is doing when he talks about our Lord Jesus Christ. This is what he writes:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will; of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

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. 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.” And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

Sproul makes this observation about the prologue. He says that in this section what John is trying to do is to give the credentials of Jesus. What are credentials? Credentials are those things that qualify a person: why would you pay any attention to this person. You want to know on what ground he stands, by what right does he speak? This answers a very essential question. If you were to turn to Exodus 5:2 you might there run into an account. The account is the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh. God had called Moses to go back to Egypt, walk into the presence of Pharaoh, the ruler, the king, and say to Pharaoh, “God, the God of the Israelites who are your slaves – about six million of them – God says, ‘Let My people go into the wilderness to worship Me.’” How do you suppose Pharaoh responded? He asked a question. “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice and let Israel go?”

Beloved, my contention is that today, in the United States of America the people around us are asking that question. They are asking that question of those who believe in the Lord. They are asking, “Who is the Jesus that we should obey Him?” Why are they asking that question? [They are asking that question] because there are many even within the church who no longer believe the credentials of Jesus Christ. They no longer believe that He is the Son of God. They no longer believe that He performed miracles. They no longer believe in the incarnation. Ah, but more than that, there are many in our country who claim to be Christians who no longer believe in the Word of God, who no longer believe in the moral law of God, who no longer attempt to abide by the word that has been given to us. So people from the world around us look and they say, “Christians act like everybody else, Christians don’t believe in anything different than anybody else. Why should I pay attention to Jesus; why should I believe in Jesus; why should I obey Jesus?” The question that you and I have to answer is this: do I know why? That question rides on top of something more fundamental by far. “Do I obey?”

The church, so-called, of Jesus Christ does not obey. This is one reason why our moral standards within the church are no higher than the moral standards outside. So we have to ask, why should anybody believe what we have to say? Perhaps what we need to do ourselves is to refresh our minds and recapture that understanding of who Jesus really is in order that we would allow ourselves to experience His glory.

What am I talking about? Remember that there are two ways of understanding glory. The Greek word speaks of radiance. So the question would be this: Is my acquaintance with God through the Word such that the brilliance of the truth causes me to step back, much as the children did from the leper? There is a scene in one of the Gospels, indeed it is the Gospel of John itself. It is the scene when soldiers are led by Judas and they are going to arrest Jesus in the Garden. They come up in the Garden amidst the olive trees and they approach Jesus and they ask where He is and Jesus turns around and He says, “I AM.” Do you know what the soldiers do? They fall to the ground.

The second way of understanding glory: Hebrew, great, massivity. So, does my knowledge of God, does my experience of God, does my faith in God cause me to fall down? Does it weigh on me? Does it press on me so that I sense the reality of His presence and I know that He is the One who shapes me? How many of you are familiar with the story of the potter? The potter takes a lump of clay. Takes the lump and throws in on the wheel; sets the wheel to spinning. Now, what we like to think is that the potter steps back, pumps the wheel, the wheel spins and the clay spontaneously turns itself into something magnificent. That is called freedom; free choice. I will become all that I think I should be! That is not a biblical image. What the Bible says is that the potter now takes His hands and He presses and He shapes. So, to experience the glory of God is to experience the hands of God pressing and shaping. Do I know the glory of God? Am I acquainted with the One whom the Gospels present as the Savior?

For contemporary man, the modern era, the great challenge to faith seems to be the miraculous. I suspect that even as we watched the play this morning the questions may have gone through our minds: I wonder how that really happened? How did the leprosy really go away? We are trained to do that.. We are trained not to believe things the way they are presented but to assume that somehow the truth is “hidden behind.” More than just that, our culture has taught us to believe that miracles are impossible because they pretend to operate according to laws other than the laws of material cause and effect. All things operate according to the laws of material cause and effect. So we say to ourselves, “What could Jesus have possibly have done? How could there be a material effect if there was no material cause?” That is what our culture asks all the time. So, the secular materialists that dominate the media, the educational system, the political culture and even many that claim to be Christians today reject the miraculous out of hand. When they read the Bible they edit it constantly: ancient stories, mythological approach, different world view, an ignorant people not yet acquainted with the real causes of things; fine moral principles but you can’t believe most of what it has to say.

Now I think that it is highly instructive, and very interesting for us to recognize that as we take up the prologue of this Gospel, John does not deal with miracles. Biblically miracles were actually put there, were acted out or performed in order to confirm faith; for us it is a challenge to faith. But what we encounter in the Gospel of John is something profoundly different. Notice again what he says. “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” What is it that John wants us to think about? We are, as a scientific culture, obsessed with how things happen. But that is not what John is talking about. The question that the Bible confronts us with is not “how”, the question is “why”. Not “how did the Son of God become incarnate?” The question is “Why, why would God Almighty become a man?” That is the question. After all, if we are speaking of God, isn’t it a bit beside the point to wonder how He does things? That was the gist of Paul’s objection to the response amongst the Jewish leaders and the Roman rulers of Palestine to the claims regarding the resurrection of Jesus. They said, “How can a man be raised from the dead?” “How?” Do you know what Paul’s answer was? Look in Acts 26:8, “*Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?*” What do you think? God Who creates life;

God who creates the stars; God who creates the heavens: what are we fussing about? The issue is not miracles; the issue is God. If you believe in God, miracles should be no problem at all.

The objection which the Jews had to the idea to a full or real incarnation of the divine as human was not fundamentally what you and I would call a scientific objection: how. Rather it was a moral objection. How can a holy God become a man, for the divine is absolutely pure, but you and I are not? That is the question; that is the issue.

It is important for us to remember as we take up the Gospels or any other portion of the Word of God that the need to reveal God to humanity is a result of sin. If you go back to Genesis, before the Fall, what was the situation? Did anybody need reveal God to Adam and Eve? The implication is that they walked around in the Garden with Him each evening in the cool time. Think about that. They didn't need to have a revealed God: they knew Him. That helps us to understand that there are a couple of different ways of understanding what it means to know. Adam and Eve knew God. In the state of innocence, Adam did not know all about God; he knew God. How did he know Him? He knew Him as a friend, someone to be trusted, someone to be relied upon, someone to listen to with an obedient heart. He knew Him as friend or a father. That was how he knew Him. What was the consequence of sin: [it was] the loss of trust. There was complete openness between God and the creatures He had made. That Adam and Eve were naked and not ashamed is not a statement about their liberated sexuality, but about their innocence, the fact that there simply nothing about them that wanted or needed to be hidden. When sin came, it was not God's being as the infinite and omniscient and omnipresent and almighty Creator which separated Him from His creatures. It was His holiness, his absolute purity that caused the separation.

I want to take just a moment and review the truth about sin. Here is the question: why is sin so awful? In all honesty, we don't believe it is. We believe some of it is, but not all of it. We like to scale sin. We rank them. There are the “BIG SINS”, and then there are the “inconsequential sins”. For instance, “sticks and stones may break and bones, but words and names will never hurt me.” “You are a big...” “O Johnny, just ignore it.” On the other hand, there are the “bad sins”. What are the “bad sins”? They are the ones that are violent, like murder. How many know what I have just done? You will know now. Turn with me to Matthew 5:21-22. In Matthew 5:21-22 Jesus is making some comments in the application of the Law. This is what Jesus said: *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says...”* “You're a big fat...” *“will be liable to hell...”* Liable to hell: “You have got to be kidding!” “You cannot be serious!” “Such a law would make life intolerable!” And therefore we edit the Bible as we read it.

The sinfulness of sin derives from its origin. Sin is born from believing a lie, more specifically lies about God. I illustrated one of those lies just now: God is not serious about words. When the serpent, as recorded in Genesis chapter 3:1-7, set out to turn Eve and Adam from righteous children to faithless sinners he first planted doubt in Eve's mind: “did God really say?” “Did He really say?” The best way of protecting doubt, by the way, is by not reading the Word. If you just stay away from reading the Word of God, you can gradually convince yourself of whatever you want to believe. First there was doubt and then he followed doubt with rejection: “God certainly did not say...” That is rejection. But the third stage is most interesting. The third is that he attacks God's character: “You know why God said what He said? It was to keep you from all the good things, and the best thing that God would keep you from finding out is that you could become gods!” *“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”* With the last step taken, sin removes God from being the ultimate moral authority and asserts itself instead: you will be gods. Have your heard that recently? Indeed! It is good for us to be aware of what we are told in Isaiah 14:13-14. Think about this: *“You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of*

assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights in the clouds; I will make myself like God." When you and I claim moral autonomy, when you and I claim the right to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong, we are simply putting ourselves in the position of God. When we decide, "It doesn't make any difference if I use whatever words I want to use; as long as I don't hurt somebody physically, it's no problem," you have just rejected the Word of God, you have exalted yourself, and you have put yourself in the position of ultimate moral authority. And that is equally true of any other of the commandments of God.

When we sin we agree with Eve in choosing to say no to what God says is good and right, and we instead opt to decide what is good and useful for ourselves. At that point like Eve, tacitly even if unknowingly, we agree with Satan and we come under his controlling influence. That is why Genesis 4 follows Genesis 3. What do you find in Genesis 4? Cain murders his brother, and Lamech, his descendant, takes two wives to himself – because he is such a man one won't do – and he kills those who insult him. Nothing like macho masculinity! By the time you get to Genesis 6 God says, "The stench of human sin is so great I regret..." and He sends the flood and He wipes them all out.

"In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." That Word is the Word that you and I must hear and obey.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father we thank You that You have not left us in the silence of our rebellion, that though our hearts are encased with sin, and our minds are blinded by self-deception, You in Your grace penetrate the darkness with the Word of truth, and You bring to us the way of escape, so that we are not eternally condemned to death, but rather are called to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is of Him that we would learn, for we would walk with Him as those obedient, and therefore as He says, as His friends. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. What is the difference between knowing something and believing something? On this see Romans 1:18-22.

2. What sort of credentials do you look for in a speaker, teacher or witness? What sort of credentials do you think the “average” American looks for in a witness for Christ?

3. Christianity involves belief in revealed truths and recorded miracles. Does this mean that Christianity is irrational?

4. Is the concept of God subject to rational analysis if “rational” only refers to discovering material cause and effect relationships?

5. What knowledge of God is lost when sin separates us from Him?

6. What is so sinful about sin, regardless of its “scale”?

7. What was the greatest challenge confronting God with the fall of Adam and Eve?

8. What was God’s answer to that challenge?

9. What is your response to God’s answer?