

John 1:1-13
Genesis 1
Psalm 73

“In the Beginning”

February 16, 2020

Genesis 1 reminds us that we were made to be with God!
God made all things good!

If you keep reading in Genesis, though, we humans made a big mess of things!
We were created to be in fellowship with God –
but because of sin, things don't work as they should –
we don't work as we should!

Sometimes the mess gets so bad that we nearly forget who we are!
That's what happens in Psalm 73.

Only it's worse:
The Psalmist nearly forgets who God is!

Only when he comes into the sanctuary –
only when he enters worship –
only when he deliberately places himself before God –
does he finally see what God is doing.

Psalm 73 asks “whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

It is good to be near God.

If you devote yourself to something –
don't be surprised when you wind up being shaped and molded by that thing!

The habits and practices that we devote ourselves to
will shape us!

Sing Psalm 73A
Read John 1:

As we come to the study of John's Gospel,
I would like to remind you of Jesus' parable of the sower and the seed.
The seed is the Word of the God;
the soil is your heart.
What kind of soil are you going to be?
Will you be the wayside--where the seed is snatched up by the birds of the air?

Will you be stony soil--where the seed only takes root for a short time?
Will you be the thorny soil--where the seed is choked by the cares of the world
OR will you be the good soil--where the seed takes root and bears much fruit?

John Chrysostom, the great 5th century pastor,
began his sermons on John by asking this of *his* congregation.
I can find no better words than his:

"Allow us then to sow in good ground;
Allow us, that you may draw us the more to you.
If any man has thorns [is drawn away by the cares of the world],
let him cast the fire of the Spirit amongst them.
If any has a hard and stubborn heart,
let him by employing the same fire make it soft and yielding.
If any by the wayside is trodden down by all kind of thoughts,
let him enter into more sheltered places,
and not lie exposed for those that want to invade for plunder:
that so we may see your cornfields waving with corn.
Besides, if we exercise such care as this over ourselves,
and if we apply ourselves industriously to this spiritual hearing,
if not at once yet by degrees,
we shall surely be freed from all the cares of life." (Chrysostom, John 1:1)
The Word has the power to change your life!

What kind of soil will you be?

This is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.
If you will hear it--and it is planted in your soul,
then you will live forever.
As Paul says:
"faith comes by hearing--and hearing by the Word of God"

1. In the Beginning Was the Word (v1-5)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

"In the beginning was the Word."
What does that mean?

Why does John start his gospel this way?
Mark starts with Jesus' public ministry:

he wants to show who Jesus was and what he did in his life and death.
Matthew starts with Abraham:
 showing that Jesus is the one who fulfills what God had promised to Israel.
Luke starts with Adam--tracing the line of Jesus as the one succeeds where Adam fails

You might think that starting with Adam is as far back as you can go!
 And with all other humans, that is true.

But John goes back before Adam.
 John starts in the Beginning!

What are the very first words of the book of Genesis?
 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

But how did God create the heavens and the earth?
 What does it say?
 And God SAID...let there be light
 God spoke, and it was so.

Let's think about how John says this:
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God.

"In the beginning was the Word"
 Before time, before space, before anything was created,
 "in the beginning was the Word."
And the WORD was with God,
 How could it be otherwise?
 Is it possible that God could exist without his Word?
 The Greek word LOGOS--or "word", can also be translated, "reason" or "logic"
 Is it possible that God could ever have been without his reason.
 Of course not!
 For God to have no reason; for God to be speechless!--is unthinkable.

And the WORD WAS God.
 HE was in the beginning with God.

Not just "it."

He – the Word – is a person.

What do we mean by that?
 Well, think for a moment.
 If God was simply *one person* –
 then *in the beginning* there would simply have been God.

And God would have been *alone*.

Now, it is true that God is entirely self-sufficient.
He does not need anything outside of himself.

But God has revealed that he *loves*.

Indeed, he *is* love.

How can a being who is entirely self-sufficient *love*?

John helps us understand this.

God has always loved – and that love has always been expressed –
it was there *in the beginning* –
because *he* – the Word – was in the beginning with God.

The Word was *with* God – and the Word *was* God.

You have to say both!

If all you say is “the Word *was* God” –
then you might think that *Word* is simply another name for God!
But no, the Word who *was* God is also *with* God –
he is *one* with the Father – but he is *not* the Father –
he is *with* the Father.

This is the very heart of the mystery of the Holy Trinity!

God is one.

The Father is God – the Son is God – the Spirit is God –
and yet God is one.

The Father is not the Son – the Son is not the Father.

But they are *one God*.

The Word *is* God – but the Word is also *with* God.

God has always been love.

The reason why *we* love – the reason why *we* communicate –
is because we are made in the image of a God who has *always* loved –
who has *always* communicated!

Because God has never been *without* his Word!

And in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth *through his Word*:

³ *All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

Everything that is was brought into being by the Word.

The Word who was with God – the Word who *is* God.

When we talk about the *word of God* what do we mean?

What IS the Word?

There are three answers to that question:

- 1) The Word is Jesus Christ--the eternal Son of God himself
- 2) The Word is written in our Bibles
- 3) The Word is preached.

Hebrews says that the Word of God is living and active,
sharper than any two-edged sword.

What does that mean?

Do you think that your Bible is alive?

Well, no!

Romans 10:17 declares that "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God"

If you think about the Word as meaning Christ, Scripture, and Preaching,
then it makes sense.

After all, does the Bible, all by itself, change lives?

No--a person can read the Bible every day of their life and go to hell.

Does Preaching, all by itself, change lives?

No--a person can hear the proclamation of the Word every Sunday, and go to hell

But does the Word change lives?

You betcha!

And when I say Word,

I mean 1) Jesus Christ, 2) Scripture, and 3) Preaching

Jesus himself IS the Word of God.

He is the eternal Word.

He is the one who speaks through Scripture.

He is the one who speaks through me.

And because HE is living and active,

his power gives life to his Word as we read it, and as we hear it.

When Paul says that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God,

he is saying that you can only believe

if the Word opens your eyes and your ears.

You can read your Bible all day,

but without the Word opening your eyes, you will not see.

You can listen to me preach for months and years,

but only the WORD can change your heart.

Only Jesus Christ – the eternal Word of God – can save sinners.

But at the same time, the Bible is the Word because it is the written proclamation of the gospel.

Scripture is the Word because it proclaims Christ.
It proclaims the WORD
 If the Word was with God in the beginning,
 and if the Word was God,
 then when God himself speaks to us in Scripture,
 then his speech IS the Word.

When you read your Bibles, you are reading God's own proclamation.
It is the infallible revelation of the Word.
It is the infallible preaching of Christ.

But thirdly, preaching is also the WORD!
After all, Paul didn't say that faith comes by *reading*, but faith comes by HEARING!
That's why Paul says, "how shall they believe unless someone preaches to them?"
 Preaching is the oral proclamation of Christ.
 It is human speech--and so it is fallible,
 but it is the proclamation of Christ--who is the Word

It is my task to speak to you the very Word of God.
I may not say whatever I want.
I must proclaim to you the message that GOD has declared in Christ.
I am God's messenger--his herald--announcing HIS tidings--his gospel!

And what IS that gospel?!!
 After all, that is what John writes for us – which John announces in verses 4-5:

⁴ In him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John's Gospel begins "In the Beginning" because the Word is Life
 We've seen that the first connection between Genesis and John is God's speech
 "in the beginning"
 But what did God say?
 And God said, "Let there be LIGHT"
 God SPOKE light into existence.
 It was the WORD which brought light into being. (v3-4)

Psalm 119 declares that "your Word is lamp unto my feet, and a light to my path"
 The picture is that God's Word--the Scripture—
 is a light that points in the direction that we should go.
 God's Word gives light--it gives direction.
But here, John helps us to understand something more:
 what is the light of men?
The light of men is the LIFE that is in the Word.
 "In him was life."

In other words, we see again that true light shines from Christ himself,
through the Word written in Scripture, and spoken through preaching,
but the SOURCE of light is the LIFE that is in the Son of God.

In him was life – and the *life* was the light of men.

It is THIS light which shines in the darkness.
Jesus Christ himself IS the Word of God
He IS the light of the World
He IS the Life of the World

What does it mean when it says "in him was *life*?"
You and I have life, right?
But do you have *life itself* in you?

There is a simple way of testing this.
If you die, are you able to come back to life – in yourself?
My father died Wednesday night.
The only way he will ever come back to life is the by the power of God!

Jesus had life in himself.
When death came for him – when death seized hold of him –
he had the power of life itself within him!
And so death could not hold on to him!

The Word, John says, had life in himself: "in Him was Life"
It's not just saying that he was alive.
It's saying that The WORD has life in himself.
As Jesus says later in John 5:26,
"The Father has given the Son to have LIFE IN HIMSELF"

He did not say, "had a beginning," but he "was in the beginning";
that little word "was" tells us that the Son is without beginning.
Why does this matter?
Because only if he has life in himself,
can he give life to us!

I could lay down my life *for* someone.
I could die in order to prolong someone else's life – for a little while.
But I cannot *give life* to someone else!

What can I do?
I can bear witness about the light!

As John says regarding John the Baptist:

2. The Word Is the Light of the World (v4-9)

⁶ *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.* ⁷ *He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.* ⁸ *He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.*

We'll hear more about John later in chapter 1 –
but he is introduced here *as a witness* –
as one who testified concerning the Light.

When Jonathan Bonomo was ordained and installed as our associate pastor,
the preacher used this text at his ordination.

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.”
There is a way in which every preacher is a “John” –
one sent from God to bear witness about the Light.

God has sent me – as well – to bear witness to *you* – that *you* might believe!

The preacher is not the light – the Word – the Lord Jesus himself – is the Light.

⁹ *The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.*
The eternal Son of God is the true light who enlightens every man.
In ourselves, we don't see clearly –
we don't understand why things happen – or what we are doing here!

It is only as the true light illumines our lives that we see ourselves aright!

Listen to how John says this (in verse 10):

3. The Word Gives the Right to Become Children of God (v9-13)

¹⁰ *He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.*

This is remarkable!
The world was made through him – but his own creatures did not recognize him.

What is more:

¹¹ *He came to his own,^[b] and his own people^[c] did not receive him.*

This language is carefully worded.
He came to his own things – his own place –
to Israel – to Bethlehem – to Jerusalem – to the temple!
But his own people did not receive him.

John has been using the language of creation –
and yet here he reminds us that the language of creation
is also the language of Israel.

It is the language of *new creation*:

¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

There is a new birth – a new creation –
where Jesus joins us to himself – in order that we might be born again!
not through human effort – but through God’s own will!

If you have received Jesus by faith –
if you have believed in the name of the Son of God –
then he gives you the right to become children of God!
And this is not your own doing – no one gives birth to himself! –
rather, this new birth is the work of God’s own will!

4. Because the Word Is the Only-Begotten Son (v14-18)

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only[-begotten] Son^[d] from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Many modern translations say “glory as of the only Son from the Father.”
But I don’t think that this fully captures what John is saying here.

John has just said that we are *born*
by the will of God through faith –

and then in the next verse (v14)
he says that the Word is the only-begotten Son from the Father.

Some argue that the word ‘monogenes’ just means “unique” or “one-and-only” –
but the *genes* root is at the heart of the word for “born” in verse 13.

John is saying that that the eternal Word is the only-begotten Son of God.
This is where we are taught the doctrine of eternal generation.

Put simply: eternal generation is the doctrine
that the Son of God has always been the Son of God.

The Father has always been the Father.

You fathers, there was a point in time when you became a father.
Before that you were NOT a father.

But that is NOT the case with God.

God has always been Father.

He has always been begetting the Son.

There was no point in time when the Word--the Son--
came into existence;
the Son has ALWAYS been the Son of His Father!

Why is the doctrine of eternal generation important?

Why does it matter?

Well, in the early church,
there were people who taught that the Son was a creature.
(Mormon's and JW's still teach this).

They claimed that there was a point before creation,
when the Father had existed all by himself.

And then he created the Son and the Spirit, and they created the world.

But pastors like Athanasius saw that this was heresy!

Because if the Son is not eternal,
then the Son is not God.

And if the Son is not God,
then he has not reconciled us to God!

Think about it for a minute.

If the Son is not God,
then that means that he is only an angel--he is only a creature.

And that would mean that his death would only reconcile us to the angels-
to creatures!

There are two basic problems with that:

1) If we are only reconciled to creatures,
then we will never be reconciled to God

And the Bible says that we ARE reconciled to God.

II Peter 1:4 tells us that through God's great and precious promises,
we have been made partakers of the divine nature.

How?

Because Jesus Christ has united us to himself!

But if Jesus Christ isn't God

then he could not have made us partakers of the divine nature!

2) If Jesus is only an angel, then he is no more powerful than Satan.

In fact, some of these heretics even taught
that Jesus and Satan were brothers.

But if Jesus is going to defeat the powers of sin, death and the devil,
then he must have sufficient life, righteousness and authority to do so.

After all, to defeat sin, he must be the righteous One.
To defeat death, he must have life in himself ("in him was life").
 and to defeat the devil, he must have an authority higher than the devil.
Yet even the angels in Scripture do not have authority over the devil.
 Jude tells us that the archangel, Michael,
 could only rebuke the devil by saying, "the LORD rebuke you"
But Jesus speaks as one having authority in himself.
 He is no mere angel.
 He is God himself.

And John explains this in verses 15-18:

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.^[e] ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God,^[f] who is at the Father's side,^[g] he has made him known.

In one sense, the gospel of John is perhaps the least "practical" book of the Bible.
(So if you are looking for *practical* sermons come on Sunday evening – for Proverbs!)

John himself tells us in chapter 20, that he wrote this book
 "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." (John 20:31)

He wrote so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ – the Son of God –
 He wrote so that by believing, you might have life in his name!

In one sense, that doesn't sound very practical!
 But I suspect that John would say that there is nothing in all the world
 more practical than *believing in Jesus*.

Are you discouraged?
Are you weary?
 Are you nearly frantic with all the things that have to get done?

Put all those things aside.
Sit down with your wife...your husband...some brother or sister in Christ,
 and open your Bibles and simply READ the Gospel of John together.
Read slowly...read with meaning...don't stop and chat about it...but simply HEAR the Word.

It takes a couple hours to read through the whole book,
 about the same amount of time it takes to watch a movie!

But as you read, look at who Christ is!

Listen to the eternal Son of God.

He is the one who for us and our salvation, became a man, and died for our sins.

He is the one who was raised from the dead and now sits at the father's right hand.

Let his light and his life penetrate your hearts.

In this way you will be like the good soil in which the Word takes root,
and bears much fruit.