

John 1:1-18

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[0 : 00] So, John's Gospel is unique, isn't it? It's unique in its simplicity, it's unique in its sublimeness, the way that it presents the Christian truth.

! So if you look at verse 18, it's really a summary verse, I think. No one has ever seen God, the only God, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known.

It's a great positive statement, but you'll see that it's preceded by a negative statement. And that's in many ways one of the most important things that we understand when we come to John's Gospel. Very often it's not possible, is it, to say the positive without saying the negative. And John's Gospel is full of necessary negatives. It's no good saying, meet me under the clock at Waterloo Station, if there's two clocks there, if there's three clocks there. There's no point saying that.

You have to say, meet me under the clock by platform 11, whatever it is. It's the clock at platform 11, not the clock at platform 24. And John uses this approach in a way that's in some ways unique to himself. He wants to define again and again what the Christian faith is.

[1 : 18] And so already towards the end of the New Testament era, rivals have come in. Different Gospels have come into the Christian church, and the church is beginning to divide, and there's misunderstandings.

So John, he's the most careful, he's the most exact. He wants to tell us that God has revealed himself by Jesus, and he makes that very plain. And he wants to say again and again, there's no other way.

So let's start with the positive statement. He says, God, God's only son, who is at the father's side. What does that teach us? That teaches us, if he's at the father's side, he's very close to him.

He's intimately connected with him. God's son has made the father known. And so he begins the Gospel by saying that. God has been made known.

The theological word is revelation. The Lord Jesus has revealed what God the Father is like. It means unveiling, doesn't it?

[2 : 17] And so you go to a hospital, and as you go into the hospital, there's a plaque on the wall, and a little curtain by the side of it, and it will tell you on which day it was opened by some famous dignitary.

And if you've been to one of those events, say, dignitary kind of pulls the curtain and unveils the plaque, and all is revealed. And you see what's been hidden. And so this word unveiling, the word revelation, is one of the great themes of the New Testament.

God is veiled. God is hidden. We don't know what's going on, do we? We don't know what's going on beyond the grave.

We don't know what's going on behind. But God himself has opened the curtains. He's unveiled it. He's unveiled himself, and he's done that by his son, the Lord Jesus.

I love the way the Gospel begins. Let me read this one. In the beginning was the word. In the beginning, God spoke. God has always wanted to speak.

[3 : 22] We don't live in a silent universe. We're often told, aren't we, that the universe is cold and empty and vast. And maybe so scientifically and technically, but never to a Christian.

John 1 verse 1 stands against the idea that this world is a cold, meaningless universe. In the beginning, there is a word. And the word was with God.

And the word was God. And then look at verse 14. The word became flesh and lived among us. God has spoken.

So why are you here today? Well, you are here to listen, aren't you? You are here for speaking and listening. So if I was to stand up here on a Tuesday lunchtime, however impressive my gestures might be, however nice my shirt and jumper might be, or however comfortable your seat is, if I was

to stand here for 20 minutes without saying a thing, you would leave saying that was a complete waste of time.

A total waste of time. And so after I finish speaking, because the COVID police aren't here, you can turn to one another and you can speak to one another and you can make yourself known to one another.

[4 : 42] You open your lips and you say, what is your name? What do you do? How are you? Where do you come from? Civil questions. That's how we communicate. We speak to each other and we hear.

We introduce one another. And so John is saying right at the beginning of his gospel that God speaks. And God desires to introduce himself to you.

He sent his word into the world and he's going to reveal himself. And that is tremendously important because it distinguishes Christianity and the message of the Lord Jesus from every other religion. Religion speaks, doesn't it, of man's efforts to get to God.

You do this and you might get into heaven. You do this and you might get to know God. So I've told you this before, isn't it? The bane of my life is signing passports and references.

And somebody comes to me with a passport and I have to fill in my title. And my title is officially a minister of religion. But it's not that.

[5 : 42] I don't want to do that. Christianity is not religion. It is a revelation. It's not man's ladder getting up to God. It is God coming down and speaking to man.

So I always want to sign the reference, APDV, Minister of Revelation. But they never do. You get a call, don't you? Open your Bible dictionary.

And religion of a good Bible dictionary is a very short article because the Bible isn't really interested in religion. And this is how it summarizes it in 18 or 19 lines.

It kind of gives you a little picture of religion. But Christianity is not really interested in religion. The faith of the Lord Jesus Christ isn't presented as one of the religions of the world, but it is unique and final truth.

The New Testament knows nothing of comparative religion. But it speaks about the revelation of God through Jesus Christ. It's not man struggling to God. It's God coming to man.

[6 : 47] And so he makes a great negative statement at the beginning of verse 18. He says, no one has ever seen God.

It's very, very simple, isn't it? No one has ever seen God. I don't think you can come to me after this talk and say, well, that depends on your interpretation. You can't misinterpret that, can you?

If you can think of anything else that these words might mean, come and tell me. Words in John's Gospel typically are no longer than one syllable. So look at verse 18. No one has ever seen God. It's as clear as Christophe. No man, no woman, no boy, no girl, no man has ever seen God. No man has ever seen God.

Got it? What does this mean? Well, it means three things. It means graceful that God is unknown. If you can't see anything, you can't measure it. There can be no knowledge of it, no scientific knowledge of it.

[7 : 51] And if there's no scientific knowledge of it, we can't know it. So we can't know God in any real way because he is invisible. He is out of our reach. He's what theologians call transcendent.

God is simply beyond us. And not only that, we are sinful. And the New Testament tells us that because we're sinful, our ideas about God are all over the place.

It's the skew-iff. And even if God was a noble, we actually wouldn't be able to know him. So I don't know what grades you've got at school, what A-levels or A-stars you've got.

But it doesn't matter, does it? It's the start of verse 18. It doesn't matter how many A-levels you've got. You cannot know God because we are sinful. And we can't understand him. And if we could see something of him, we'd misinterpret it.

And so we don't know God. You know I go to the rugby club. There's a boy at the rugby club, Elliot Miller Mills. His nickname is Killer, which is a nice nickname, isn't it?

[9 : 01] And Killer often says to me, of course, I'm agnostic. And I use the Dick Lucas line where you say to him, agnostic. Do you know the Latin equivalent? The Latin equivalent is ignoramus.

And no one has ever come up to see me and said, Paul, I'm not a believer. Actually, I'm an ignoramus. And yet many people say, I'm not a believer. I'm agnostic. They don't realize what they're saying.

Killer doesn't know what he's saying when he says that. He's saying, I'm ignorant. And we want to say, well, yeah, you are, actually. And so am I. We cannot know God. No one has ever seen God. We can't know him. The second thing is it tells us about the religions of the world. The religions of the world are a testimony to man's ignorance. So we know that, don't we?

We know that those who have been around on Sunday mornings from Acts 17. Do you remember as Paul walks around Athens? He talks to supremely intelligent men and women.

[10:05] Athenian culture is very intelligent. And he says, I see that you are supremely ignorant. He says, I see you've got a shrine.

You've got an altar to the unknown God. Let me tell you about it. And he tells them about God. And he finishes his sermon in this way, doesn't he?

He says to these great brains, these great thinkers. He says, you ought not to think of God as you do. With all these temples of ideology. But your ignorance, God is willing to overlook.

Because now he has sent the gospel to you. Now you can know. The unknowable God has made himself known. That's wonderful. It's almost as if it's me getting all Ealing Council leaders together. And government leaders together. And saying, listen, men and women. You don't know how to run the council. You might want to do that. Or you don't know how to run the government. And so here is Paul standing in front of intelligent men and women.

[11:08] Saying you don't know anything about God. You've searched for him. You've thought about him. And you know absolutely nothing about God. If no man has ever seen God.

Then religion must be futile. Unless God gives us a clue. So God is unknowable. And secondly, religion is no way to find him.

And thirdly, no claim to know God. Is acceptable. Unless it comes through knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

That's what this verse is saying. No claim to know God can be acceptable. Unless it is through knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Can you see what he's saying in verse 14 to 18?

He's saying there, isn't he? God has been made known to us. Through his only son. And his only son became flesh. Through flesh.

[12:08] But I think it's really important to understand that Christian revelation. We know God through the life and teaching of Jesus. Through the incarnation. Through the body, the words, the wisdom of Christ.

That's really where we know. And Christians do not believe that revelation comes in any other way. That means we're not mystics. John lived in a kind of mystery religion.

Lots of people try to offer knowledge of God. To those who kind of were in the know religiously. And John is saying there's no knowledge of God that way. There's no knowledge of God.

Even though he may stand up in a Christian church. And say that God has spoken to him. God does not speak to us. The word of God. Does not come to preachers.

The preacher goes to the word of God. So I can't get up on a Tuesday or on a Sunday. And speak to you.

[13:08] Unless I've opened the word of God. And turned to the word made flesh. And studied what the word says to me. The word of God does not come to me.

I go to the word. And so I think that's really important isn't it? That there are lots of crackpots today. That say they've got a special word for the church. Because God has spoken to them.

Personally and individually. I think John would say that's nonsense. He would say no man has ever seen. Don't listen to anyone who says he has. God reveals himself out through his son.

Who was made flesh. And that is given to us. In his testimony. In his word. The idea that we search for God.

And you put all the world's religions. And man's tremendous effort. To try and find some meaning to the universe. John says all that's a waste of time.

[14:10] He says there's no such journey. Man isn't looking for God. Man is running from God. Flying away from him. Man is a rebel. Man is a rebel. And because man is a rebel. He's not trying to please God.

It's complete nonsense. But he brings us the marvellous news. That at Christmas time. What has happened is that God has come down. He's come down to a level. In a person.

Who could be seen. Untouched. Unhandled. So let's look at this person. Look at the relationship. Between this person and God. In verses 1 and 2. He was with God in the beginning. Well he must know something about God. Wasn't he? And look at him. In relationship to creation. In verse 3 and 4. Through this person.

All things are made. And without him. Nothing was made. That was made. Do you see the necessary negative? You can go through John. And underline them. They're brilliant. So this son. This Christ.

[15:07] This word. Made flesh. He. Made you. And he made me. And through him. All things were made.

And without him. Nothing was made. And you see. It ties in. The revelation of Christ. All of life. It refuses to say. Doesn't it? That religion. Is a kind of little.

Tiny pocket. For those who are interested. In such things. It refuses to say. Well Christianity. That's what you do on Sunday. But it's got no application. For the rest of your life. As if. Some people are into DIY. Some people are into.

Golf. Some people are into. Gardening. And some kind of. Weirdos. They're into religion. Do you see what it says? It says. The one who made flesh. Made everything in the world.

Everything in the world. Can only find its meaning. Through the word made flesh. You can't understand anything. In this world. Without it properly. Look at the next verse. Look at the verse 9 and 10. It says.

[16:06] The true light. Which gives light. To everyone. Who's coming into the world. He was in the world. And the world. Was made. Through him. He's the light.

For the whole world. And for every people group. For Hindus. For Buddhists. For Muslims. For council workers.

For the agnostics. For the unbelievers. For the minister. Everybody. All people. He came into this world. And yet the end of verse 10. Yet the world did not know him.

And verse 11. He came to his own. And his own people. Did not receive him. And the world is foolish. Foolish. Enough to turn away from him.

Look at the word. In relation to the prophets. In verse 6. In the Old Testament. This is what is said of him. There was a man. Sent from God. His name was John. He came.

[17:05] As a witness. To bear witness. About the light. So that all might believe. Through him. He was not the light. But came. To bear witness. About the light. See the necessary negatives. Verse 8.

He was not the light. In verse 15. John bears testimony. About him. And cries out. This was he. Of whom I said. He who comes after me.

Raps before me. Because he was before me. John the Baptist. He summarizes. The whole of the Old Testament. And he says. This is the one.

Who is to come. Who surpasses me. In verse 17. For the law. Was given. Through Moses. Grace and truth. Came through Jesus Christ. John picks up. The whole of the Old Testament.

Moses. Elijah. The law. The prophets. John the Baptist. And he folds them up. And he says. This was the foundation. Of the one.

[18:01] Who has come to speak. He's the one. Who has come to fulfill it all. So listen to him. And that leads me. To my final thing. No one has ever seen God. Verse 18. But many people saw Jesus.

And John. Particularly shows us. As you go through his gospel. That seeing. Is believing. And John is a great enemy. To the kind of preaching.

That says. Faith is a leap in the dark. So the only thing you get. From a leap in the dark. Is a broken enclosure. And John is not inviting you.

To do that. John is saying. We saw. We saw our eyes. We heard. We handled. We touched. And John says. Come with me.

Because I will show you. What I saw. God unseen. You can never see him. Jesus says. Yes you can see him. And therefore.

[19:00] Because Jesus. Is the perfect revelation. Of God. As you see him. You can know him. And as you know him. You can know him. You can know the unseen God.

Let's practice. Thank you.