

The First Word Is the Last Word

(John 1:1-18)

I. Introduction

- A. Sometimes language and cultural barriers makes it difficult to communicate.
1. Sometimes things just get lost somewhere in the translation
 - a. Notice examples of signs in other countries translated into English (sorta)
 - **Austrian Ski Hotel:** Not to parambulate the corridors in the boots of ascension.
 - **Hong Kong Tailor:** Ladies may have a fit upstairs.
 - **Bangkok Dry Cleaner:** Drop your trousers here for best results.
 - **Rhodes Tailor:** We will execute customers in strict rotation.
 - **Hong Kong Dentist:** Teeth extracted by latest Methodists
 - **Copenhagen Airline:** We take your bags and send them in all directions
 - **Moscow Hotel:** If this is your first visit to Russia, you are welcome to it
 - **Roman Doctor:** Specialist in women and other diseases
 - **Tokyo Dress Shop:** Our nylons cost more, but they are the best in long run
 - b. Sometimes some just get lost in the translation!
 2. This has caused problems for products being sold in other countries
 - a. Coca-Cola in Chinese symbols comes our “*Bite the Wax Tadpole*”
 - b. KFC’s “Finger licking good” in Chinese is “*Chew your fingers off*”
 - c. “*Jolly Green Giant*” translates into Arabic as “*Intimidating Green Ogre*”
 - d. General Motors’ “*Body by Fisher*” in Belgium was “*Corpse by Fisher*”
 - e. Miami T-shirt maker promoted a visit by John Paul II in Spanish; instead of “*I saw the (el Papa) the pope,*” shirts read “*I saw (la papa) the potato*”
 3. Sometimes something is lost in the translation, and that can be a problem
- B. How was God going to communicate His message of love and salvation?
1. We don’t speak with the tongues of angels, so God would have to translate.
 - a. He had to communicate spiritual truth to those who didn’t speak language
 - b. Because things can get lost in translation, God chose His words carefully
 2. God’s word of salvation was spoken to us through the Ultimate Word
 - a. John begins his gospel with God’s first and last word—Jesus Christ
 - b. Yesterday reading was **John 1:1-18**, often called “*Prologue of John*”
 3. This is like the Rosetta Stone, the key to the translation of John’s story

II. Jesus is the First Word (John 1:1)

- A. “*In the beginning was the word...*” Why does John refer to Christ as “*the Word*”
1. The word **λόγος** often refers to individual packets of meaning... “*words.*”
 - a. But here, it has a special significance as a title for Jesus Christ.
 - b. Only other such use is **Rev 19:13**, “*His name is called The Word of God.*”
 2. But **λόγος** was a word with history, loaded theological & philosophic term.
 - a. **Greeks:** the **λόγος** was law of nature, logic, ordering principle of cosmos
 - b. **Babylon and Egypt:** the **λόγος** was energy behind all things (“*the force*”)
 - c. **Jews:** The **λόγος** was an extension of the creative power of God
 3. So John begins, “*In the beginning was λόγος.*” *Sound familiar?* (**Gen 1:1-3**)
 - a. Similarity between the beginning of Genesis and John is no accident!
 - b. In creation, God broke thru chaos and created the universe by His word
 - 1) He spoke and separated light from dark and water from dry land.
 - 2) God’s word spoke things into being; His word called things to order.
- B. John says God’s word has broken into our world once again in a powerful way.
1. This time, the Word speaks into being the creative miracle of salvation
 - a. God's Word broke through the darkness of sin to bring spiritual light.
 - b. Word came into a vast wasteland of wickedness to bring water of life.
 - c. Word created spiritual life where there was once only chaos and despair.
 2. John’s portrait of Christ as **λόγος** speaks to the spiritual longing in us all.
 - a. Ancients saw **λόγος** as an *ordering principle* which overcame chaos.
 - b. In our experience, words are often used to hurt, deceive and manipulate.
 - c. We a need words we can believe in, a word in which we can invest life
 - 1) Some seek the word in science, politics, success, fame... *empty words*
 - 2) Others seek it in mysticism, witchcraft, horoscope... *conflicting words*
 3. John says the first Word is the last Word; Word was with God and was God
 - a. There is one ordering principle that makes sense out of the chaos.
 - b. God has spoken one word for all people of all time— the word is Jesus!
 - c. The word was with God, was God—Jesus is the word of God for all time
 4. In his prologue, John shares with us some key points about Jesus Christ.
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III. The First Word is the Last Word

A. First, Jesus is the Divine Word. (John 1:1-3)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

1. This is the most amazing statement concerning the identity of Christ.
 - a. “*In the beginning*” speaks of His **origin**— *He existed before time began.*
 - b. “*With God*” speaks to His **home of origin**—*from the beginning with God*
 - c. “*Was God*” speaks to His **essence**— *He shared the Father’s very nature.*
 - d. “*Through him all things were made*” speaks of creative power & majesty
2. Matthew and Luke stress the beginning of Jesus on earth—birth narratives.
 - a. While they point to his divine nature (*virgin birth*), they stress his flesh.
 - b. John will point to coming in flesh, but emphasizes His divine nature.
 - c. John wants no doubt as to who is center of his story—*the Word is God!*
3. Several years ago, *Newsweek* ran a cover story entitled *Visions of Jesus*
 - a. It looked at how world religions see Jesus, and he’s very popular
 - 1) Jews see Him as important if not somewhat misunderstood Rabbi
 - 2) Muslims see him God’s son and Messiah (*uses many honorific titles*)
 - 3) Hindus have a tradition of a teenage Jesus going to India as a guru.
 - b. While these world religions salute Jesus, they don’t see Him as divine
 - c. *Newsweek* concludes at what is the dividing line in story of Jesus—cross
The cross is what separates the Christ of Christianity from every other Jesus. In Judaism there is no precedent for a Messiah who dies, much less as a criminal as Jesus did. In Islam, the story of Jesus’ death is rejected as an affront to Allah himself. Hindus can accept only a Jesus who passes into peaceful existence... There is, in short, no room in other religions for a Christ who experiences the full burden of mortal existence—and hence there is no reason to believe in him as the divine Son whom the Father resurrects from the dead.
4. So John is very careful to make sure we understand the person of Christ.
 - a. His story will move relentlessly and inexorably toward the cross.
 - b. But first he wants us to be sure of what will happen at Golgotha.
 - 1) It isn’t about a gallant hero or sacrificial martyr— Jesus is both.
 - 2) It isn’t about a political revolutionary or a radical philosopher
 - c. It’s nothing less than story of a God who gives Himself for his people
 - 1) Before we understand the cross, we must understand who died there.
 - 2) Word of salvation is of a God who became vulnerable to death for us

B. Second, Jesus is the Word of Life and Light. (John 1:4-5,9)

In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it... The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

1. John introduces here two key words that he will use often in his book
 - a. He uses “*life*” 36 times, often on the lips of Jesus referring to himself
 - 1) To Martha at death of Lazarus, “*I am resurrection and life*” (**11:29**)
 - 2) To disciples before death, “*I am the way, the truth and the life*” (**14:6**)
 - b. The reason John writes what he writes is so we can have **LIFE** (**20:31**)
These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ and that by believing you may have life in his name.
2. But not only is Jesus the source of life—He is **light** come into the world
 - a. “*Light*” can point to **holy**, “*God is light, in him is no darkness*” (**1 Jn 1:5**)
 - b. But “*light*” often refers to the revelation of God’s love in Jesus Christ.
 - 1) In Jesus, God’s love penetrates into our lives darkened by sin.
 - 2) So Christ refers to himself as the “*light of the world*” (**John 8:12**)
“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”
3. John portrait of Christ makes Him the center and essence of existence.
 - a. He is **light** keeping us from being blind and **life** that keeps us from dying.
 - b. John doesn’t want us to read and say, “*Jesus really was a nice guy.*”
 - 1) He doesn’t want **admirers** of Jesus; He has way too many admirers!
 - 2) He wants Jesus to become our light and our life—**center of our life**
 - c. John’s eloquent prose here all but screams— *you must see who Jesus is!*

C. Third, Jesus is the Word for All. (John 1:10-13)

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

1. The world of Jesus was a world of THEM and US — of Jew and Gentile
 - a. Jesus did away with that petty distinction— Savior of the whole world.
 - b. For John, it’s still *them and us*— those who accept and those who don’t.
 - c. Those who accept Jesus are children of God; those who won’t don’t.
2. Our multicultural world has a hard time with Jesus as the last word.
 - a. He won’t share the stage with Buddha, Krishna and Mohammed
 - b. Jesus is **non-exclusive** (*savior of all world*) and **exclusive** (*only savior*)
3. John records words of Jesus, “*No one comes to the Father except thru me*” (**14:6**)

D. **Fourth**, Jesus is the Word Made Flesh. (**John 1:14, 18**)

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth... No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

1. This what makes the story of Christ different from any story—God as flesh
 - a. Philosophers and rabbis could not conceive of **λόγος** becoming human.
 - 1) **Philosophers** emphasized the ideal as invisible and eternal *forms*
 - 2) **Rabbis** saw a great gulf between God and men; never God as a man.
 - b. In Jesus, the **λόγος** became flesh and lived (lit. “*tabernacled*”) with us
 - 1) This is what makes many reject Jesus—idea that man was really God
 - 2) For John, this is the part of the story that really is the story
2. Joan Osborne’s “*One of Us*” became something of Gen-X theological anthem

If God had a name, what would it be and would you call it to His face
If you were faced with Him in all His glory, what would you ask if you had just one question
What if God was one of us, just a slob like one of us
Just a stranger on the bus, trying to make His way home

 - a. Never really liked that song, but it does capture something of a longing.
 - 1) John would answer, “*Joan, God really did become like us*”
 - 2) God does have a name, and desperately wants you to call on it!
 - b. God did become one of us; God does know what it means to hurt like us
 - c. We don’t have to imagine— that is precisely what happened at cross!
3. John’s begins with FIRST word which is also LAST word—LET’S SING

IV. **Conclusion**

- A. As we read through John, we will see Jesus say and do some amazing things.
 1. Some of what we read is so familiar, we may miss just how astonishing it is
 2. But everything He says and does is predicated on foundation of **John 1**.
 3. Jesus is God in flesh; the divine **λόγος** is God’s first and last word
- B. We’ll always remember Regis Philbin asking, “*Is that your final answer?*”
 1. John points us to Jesus the Word and asks, “*What is your final answer?*”
 - a. We suggested, “*Jesus doesn’t need more admirers, he needs disciples.*”
 - b. It is not enough to appreciate Jesus; you have to give Him your life.
 2. Jesus is God’s first word and His last word. *Is He your final answer?*
- C. Song isn’t time sensitive, but the question is, “*Why not Jesus; why not now?*”