

INTRODUCTION

Some of you may be curious about what the sermon plan for this year will be. We say that our new church theme is “Renew Our Mind, Imitate Christ.” In order for us to renew our mind like Christ and to follow His example we need to learn from Him first. Last week, I had a chat with Pastor Mark about his sermon plan. By divine coincidence both of us have decided to preach on the life of Christ from the gospels. Rather than preaching from one gospel sequentially we will select individual episodes of the life of Christ from all four gospels. For myself, I will roughly follow the chronology of Jesus’ earthly journey. Also, I will try to pick passages that I have not spoken on before.

For today, the first message of the series is titled “Jesus the Everlasting God.” People often ask: “Is Jesus a man or a god?” John, the gospel writer told us that the answer is “yes.” When we read the four gospels we are studying the records about God descending into human history. Jesus is not a person who thought he was a god, or someone whose followers perceived to be a god. Jesus is the only true God from everlasting to everlasting. Brothers and sisters: we do not only need to understand what we believe, we also need to have a firm conviction about the identity of Christ. As we study John 1:1-18 we need to keep in mind that the historical Jesus is the eternal God.

EXPLANATION

1. 耶穌是道 Jesus is the Word

John began his gospel by telling us that Jesus is the Word. He said in **verses 1-2**: 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. When John used “the beginning” he was referring to the instant before the existence of the world. John said Jesus is the Word. This Word had been around before the creation of the world. The Word was with God, meaning that the Word was together with God. Then John said the Word was God. By putting the three ideas together John was telling us that Jesus, the Word, was with God the Father in eternity past, and that Jesus Himself is God. Our focus today is not on the doctrine of Trinity. But let me briefly mention that according to the Bible the Father is God, Jesus Christ is God and the Holy Spirit is God. However, the Bible also tells us that there is only one God. Therefore, theologians coined the term “Trinity” to describe the truth that while there are three persons in the Trinity there is only one God. This concept is beyond our human reasoning because we know that three is not one, and one is not three. But isn’t there a lot of things about God that do not seem to make sense to us? The Bible says that God parted the Red Sea so that the Israelites could walk on dry land, God caused Mary to be pregnant while she was still a virgin and Jesus rose from the dead. On and on there are many examples that show the nature and work of God are beyond our comprehension.

Back to the notion that Jesus is the Word. Why did John use “Word” to describe Jesus? The primary audiences of the gospel of John were the Greeks. They believed that there was a rational mind that rules the universe. Therefore, when the Greeks heard the term “Word” they understood

that John was referring to that principle. To the Jews the idea of God being the “Word” was not foreign to them. The whole Old Testament is a collection of God’s spoken words through the prophets and other messengers. Besides, the Jews understood that there was power behind God’s words. In the context, John connected the Word with God’s creation. He said in **verse 3**: Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. Then, also in **verse 10**: He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. The world was created through Jesus Christ. Through His creation God speaks to us. **Psalm 19:1-2** tell us: 1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. 2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. Pay attention to the verbs used in this passage – declare, proclaim, pour forth and display. This Word, our Creator, is using nature to prove His existence and His power to us. Many of us like to appreciate different forms of art work like paintings, music or writings. Through an artistic creation the artist is revealing part of himself and is trying to communicate a message with his audiences. The same is true for our great Creator. Through His creation God tells us that He is rational and wise. The concept of “Word” does not only speak well to the Greeks and Jews, it is also communicable to the Chinese. Word can be understood as the principle behind nature, it can also be referred to a pathway to know God. When we share the gospel we are introducing the Word to others. Concepts like holiness, justification and reconciliation may sound like foreign language to seeker friends. We have to illustrate truth in plain language. For example, we can describe sin as a debt that we owe God. Sin separates us from God just like we have a fight with a family member. God’s grace is like a free gift to us. Our sins are forgiven in Christ just like a tumor is completely removed from the body. Besides, a great tool to consider is the use of pictures like depicting the cross as a bridge between people and God over the chasm of sin. Here is a challenge for you and me: if what we share can easily be understood by a three-year-old kid and an eighty-year-old grandmother then we are effective messengers of the gospel.

2. 耶穌是光 Jesus is the Light

The historical Jesus is the eternal God. Jesus is not only the Word, John said He is also the Light. He said in **verse 5**: The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. Then also in **verse 9**: The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. One important use for light is illumination. When you look for things under the bed or in the basement you switch on a flashlight. When you camp in the wilderness you light up a fire at night. When John used terms like light and darkness he was describing the spiritual realm of things. Our world is deprived of light because of the epidemic of sin. Jesus came as the True Light. Jesus illuminates the path of righteousness for us. He testified for Himself in **John 8:12** by saying: ...“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” As Christians we are messengers of the Light. Verses **6-8** of the passage read: 6 There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. This John was John the Baptist rather than the author of the gospel of John. He was the person who baptized Jesus. This John professed in **verse 20** of the same chapter: ...“I am not the Christ.” He made it clearly that he was only a witness for Jesus, who was the Christ prophesied in the Old Testament. As Christians we are messengers of the Light. In our lives we should be reflecting the Light we have received. When you look into the headlights of your car you can find a reflector like the shape of an egg shell. The purpose of

the reflector is to mirror the light emitted by the bulb. The reflector cannot produce any light, but by the shiny surface it helps direct the light to the right direction. When pedestrians look at an incoming car at night they would not say “how bright the reflector is.” Instead they would say “the light is too bright!” Brothers and sisters: are you a reflector of the True Light in your lives? If people only see that you are a nice person and do not know the reason behind your conduct then you are not witnessing for the Light. Years ago after I started a new job very soon my teammates knew that I was a Christian. At one time a colleague cursed because an instrument she was using was malfunctioning. I was in the same room. Knowing that I am a Christian she quickly apologized. The Light shone into her heart at that moment. Someone said it right: rather than cursing the darkness it would be better to turn on a lamp. Is your surrounding become brighter because you are there? Do people see the Light in you through the way you speak and do things? What about your value system? Are you attracting people to the Light or they find it more comfortable to live in darkness? Jesus is the Light, and we should be His reflectors.

3. 耶穌成為人 Jesus Became a Man

The historical Jesus is the eternal God. In this passage John told us that Jesus is the Word and He is the Light. John continued to tell us that Jesus became a man. John said in **verse 14**: 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. Jesus humbled Himself by submitting Himself to the limitation of time and space and became a man just like you and me. When Jesus became a man He had all the normal functions and needs of a man. He had emotions, He talked and walked and He had to eat and sleep. However, Jesus did not cease to be God. He performed miracles to heal the sick, cast out demons and calmed the storm. He knew the thoughts in people’s mind. John described Jesus as “One and Only” of the Father. The same word also appears in verse 18 and the well-known John 3:16. Recite it with me if you can. The term can refer to a single child of the parents, just like post 80’s and 90’s young people sitting here. But John used the term to emphasize a close relationship between Jesus and God the Father. Jesus is the only, unique and beloved Son. By describing Jesus as the Son, it does not make Him inferior to the Father. The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are equal in their power and glory. The designation of “Son” points out the fact that Jesus was being sent by the Father into the world, and throughout His earthly ministries Jesus displayed a model of submission to the Father’s will. We can say many things about the example Jesus set up for us – His sacrificial love, humility and compassion, etc. But here John highlighted two attributes of Jesus. John described Jesus as “full of grace and truth.” In verse 16 John added “the fullness of his grace.” Finally, in verse 17 John pointed out Jesus’ “grace and truth.” Jesus came into the world to exemplify God’s truth. Jesus proclaimed in **John 14:6** ...“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Jesus is the only truth through whom one can come to the Father. Not only did Jesus display God’s truth, He also showed God’s grace when He came into the world. Jesus loved those who were abandoned by the society, He was merciful to the weak and He was patient toward His disciples when they were lack of faith. We often think that truth and grace are contradicting ideas. If one upholds truth then there is no room for grace, whereas, for a person to show grace then everything is permissible and truth will be nullified. Those are our conclusions because we do not look at grace from God’s perspective. In the Bible grace does not only mean free lunch. It means free lunch because God has taken care of the tab for you. Because our God is the God of truth, He requires us to fulfill His requirements perfectly. He demands us

to be holy and righteous just like Him. But no one is able to attain His perfect standard. God loves us too because He is also gracious. Both the truth and grace of God can be preserved because truth and grace intersect at the cross. On the cross Jesus fulfilled the requirements of God's truth because He substituted us for the penalty we deserve. On the cross Jesus also illustrated His grace by loving us first while we are still indulged in sin. We as imitators of Christ are called to demonstrate God's truth and grace. Someone said a church is like a hospital. It is not for healthy people but for patients. So don't be surprised to see imperfect people around here because we all are! Therefore, as a church we should openly welcome people with different background. After all, we are all born-sinners, though we commit different sins. God hates sins; that shows His truth. However, He loves sinners; that demonstrates His grace. We should follow His example. Also, since all of us are pursuing to imitate Christ we need to show more grace to each other. When a coworker commits a mistake, normally we would admonish the person for the wrongdoing. Instead of scolding the person we can show grace by asking: "How may I help you make up for the error?" In doing so we embrace truth because we do not lower God's standard for us. At the same time we exercise grace by giving people room to grow.

4. 耶穌邀請人 Jesus Invites Everyone

The historical Jesus is the eternal God. Jesus is the Word and Light. Jesus also became a man to dwell among us. Jesus came not only to show us how God is like. He also invited us to build an eternal relationship with Him. However, John told us that people rejected Jesus instead of welcomed Him. John used three verbs to describe the rejection Jesus faced. In **verse 5** he said: The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. The world rejects the Light because it does not understand who Jesus was. Then in **verse 10**: He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. The Jews in Jesus' days did not realize that He was the Savior prophesied in the Old Testament. They were expecting a warrior to deliver them from the bondage of the Romans, but Jesus came to deliver us from the bondage of sin. The third reason for their rejection is in **verse 11**: He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Jesus came into the world that He created but it did not welcome Him. The world rejects Jesus. But in **verse 12** John changed his tone 180 degrees and told us the positive outcome of those who welcome Jesus: Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. John said those who receive Jesus into their hearts will be given the privilege to become children of God. Every human being by virtue of creation is a child of God. Though the Father acknowledges His children, the children do not recognize their Father. Only when we receive Jesus as our Savior and Lord our relationship with the heavenly Father can be restored. John told us that those who receive Jesus are the people who believe in His name. To the Jews a person's name represents his character. The name John means a gift from God. Apostle Paul was one of the most important apostles and Bible writers. However, his name actually means small. When a person receives Jesus into his heart and believes in His name it means that he wholeheartedly embraces the full essence of who Jesus is – that He is the Creator, sovereign Master of the universe, Savior for our sins and Lord of our lives. Dear friends: today Jesus is extending His invitation to you. The eternal Word has spoken to us through His creation and He came into our world. He continues to speak to us through the Bible. The Light has shone into darkness. If you confess your sins and accept Him into your heart by faith then you too can become a child of God. However, if you reject Him then you will remain in darkness. Jesus invites you to come to Him.