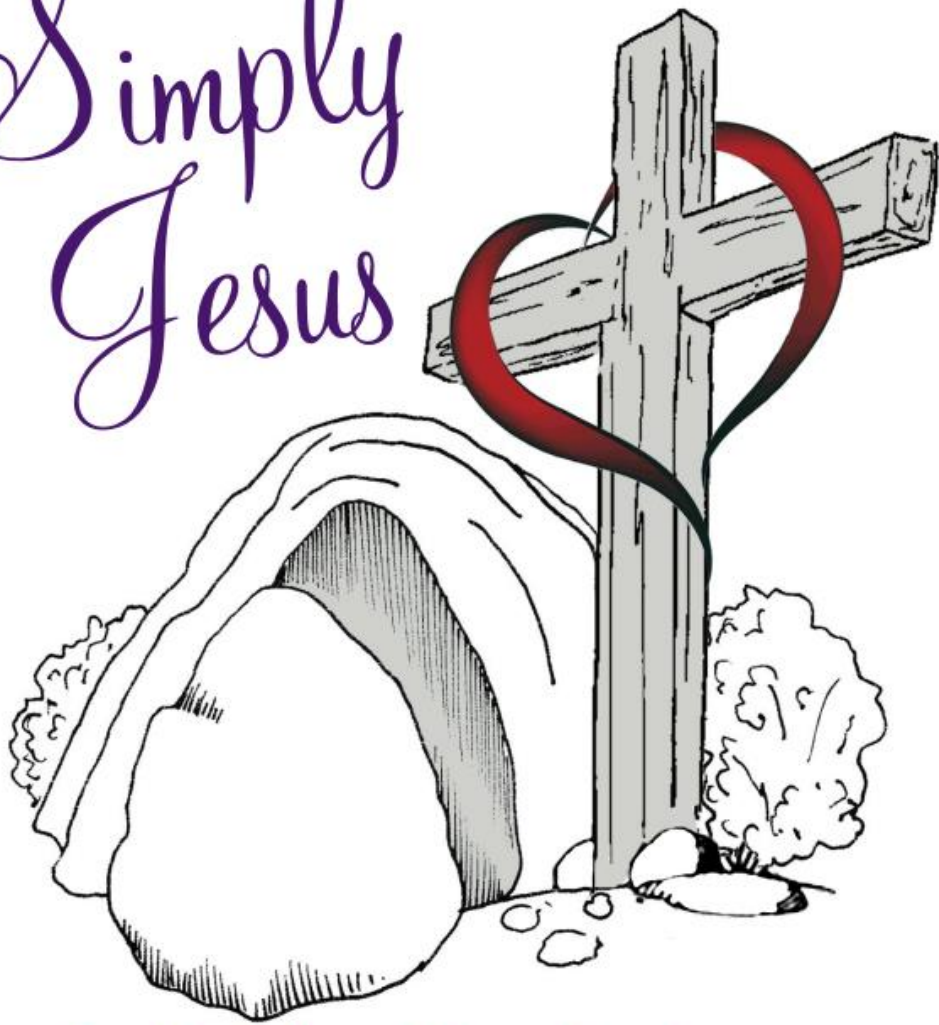

Simply
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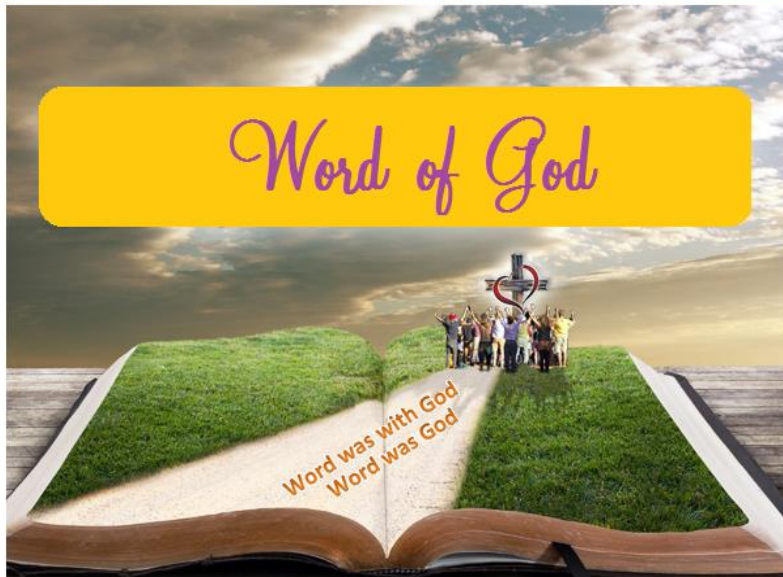


But Not a Simple Jesus

Paul R. McCuiston

Teaching **4** Jesus
MINISTRIES

Word of God



*The Word
became Flesh*
John 1:14



Chapter 6

The Word of God

John 1:1-18

In a paper I wrote several years ago, I stated that a writer intended to be understood. Why write, if no one can figure out what you are saying. The writer of Genesis 1:1 would expect to be understood. Without any explanation, he states, “In the beginning, God!” This was an undefined reality. He just knew that the readers would know which God he was talking about. No proof was needed. It was obvious to the reader that this was the only God who could have possibly been able to create.

What makes this even more unique is that the writer uses a very general term for God (‘lohim; pronounced el•o•heem). It’s not that he didn’t know the personal name for God. You know, that was the one Moses was given at the burning bush – Yahweh. He used this name in Genesis 2:4, so they knew it. The personal name doesn’t *scream* power like ‘lohim. This name was unique to the Jewish writings. It isn’t found anywhere outside of the OT. Only the Jews knew God by this name. Of course, this isn’t surprising. Every language has an expression that represents the idea of “God.” Here are a few examples:

<u>Language</u>	<u>Word used</u>	<u>Language</u>	<u>Word used</u>
Albanian	Zot	Catalan.....	Déu
Basque	Jainkoaren	Croatian	Bog
Belarusian	Ёгор	Czech.....	Bůh
Bosnian	Bog	Danish	Gud

The normal response is, “Well, we all believe in the same God!” I’m going to go out on a limb here and say that may not be true. Did you see the movie “Mask?” There was a Norse god that empowered the mask. His name was *Loki*. He was a trickster. Is that your God? Some would say, “Well, that’s a myth.” Some may not think this is true but to others, he is still a god. Thor, Zeus, and Diana were all gods to someone. Let’s make it a bit more contemporary. What about Buddha or Allah? Are they all just different names for the same god? I don’t think so.

What distinguishes a real God is how he reveals himself. Israel’s God revealed himself in his actions. His covenant and the names that depicted what he did tell the whole story. For instance, *Jehovah-Jireh* (Genesis 22:14) means *the God who provides*. *Jehovah – Raphe* (Exodus 15:26) is the *God who heals*. The most definitive action that clearly reveals God’s nature is covenant (*b^erit*) and lovingkindness (*chesed*). These expose the very heart and soul of God when the writer of Deuteronomy proclaims “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one,” he is explaining God’s full focus of his nature into Israel’s life and worship.

In light of the way the Jewish bible understood God by his names, we can conclude that one way to understand God is through the *words* that describe him. The words can be names or descriptions. Nonetheless, they are still words. After all, words are really all we have to express the fullest ideas about God. It is in a *word* that John makes a connection. What is interesting is that John had two choices for words that represent speech. One dealt more with the actual words and the other with the intent or logic of the words. John used the second one. Most have probably heard this word used in a sermon or Bible class. It is *logos*. We get our English word *logic* from this term. Please allow me to share a way I’ve used to explain Jesus as the logic of God.

Simply Jesus

God was in heaven, thinking about how much he loves us. He was thinking about how much we needed him and how he wanted us to be his friends again. Wanting to do something to make this happen, he took those thoughts and clothed them in flesh and called him Jesus.

John's intent is to use this expression to introduce Jesus to his readers. However, to make sure that they understood Jesus' true nature (more than just a man), he first needed to show a relationship between God and Jesus. He does this masterfully.

First, he connects the Word to the God of the Jews with the expression "In the beginning." Next, he shows a direct relationship between God and the word by saying that it was with God. It would be helpful at this point if you knew what the Greek term does in this verse. Notice, I did not say what the term means or says. It is a word that emphasizes the idea of a close relationship. "With" in this case is not just in the same place. It is much more than this. It is personal. When John states that the "Word is with God," he is saying that they are interconnected. Not to be misunderstood, John paints the third picture with the phrase "the Word was God!" This is emphatic. By the way, don't pay any attention to the Jehovah's Witnesses who say that the Greek here does not have an article, so it means "a god." They are full of beans, as we would say in East Tennessee. Jesus is called "God" with the article in Hebrews 1:8 by God himself (both with the article in Greek). End of argument. The Word is God!

To get the main idea of this passage, let's run ahead in Jesus' life to the time when he met Moses and Elijah on the mountain (Matthew 17:1-8). God spoke that day like he did when Jesus was baptized. Just like that time, God said he was pleased. This time, he adds something that is critical – "listen to Him!" The God of the universe, the creator of all we see and can't see is telling us to listen to Jesus. The requirement to listen brings us to the main point that we are taking from this passage of John's Gospel.

Proposal

WE MUST LISTEN TO THE ONE WHO PLEASURES GOD TO HAVE THE RIGHT TO BECOME THE CHILDREN OF GOD. Why listen to Jesus? John gives us three reasons.

- I. Jesus is the Creator, and Everything was Created for Him (3)
- II. Jesus is the True Light (4-13)
- III. Jesus has revealed the true nature of God (14-18)

Listening is a learned skill. It requires that you pay attention to the person speaking. If there is a real passion for knowing what that person is saying, you listen intently. If there is a deep desire to know more about the person, then you listen intently. The practice of listening to Jesus is vital to getting to know him. By becoming good listeners, we become better acquainted with his nature that gives him the authority to lead our lives. Once we learn to listen and respond positively to what we hear, we are more willing to turn control over to him. In losing control over ourselves and giving it to him, we find much more freedom than we had when we were in control. With this said, let's move into the first characteristic of Jesus that John shows us.

He is the Creator and Everything was Created for Him (3)

John makes a connection to Israel's God with the phrase "In the beginning." Like Genesis, he wants to connect the timeless God to what he is about to say. Let me draw you a picture of the way John wrote this:

Word → Beginning → Creation

It was important for John to put the thoughts in this order. How could "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (3) unless he was there at the moment of *the beginning*? You may recall that we discussed this in the Colossians passage. "For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him, all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17). Paul's used this argument to defend Jesus' position of being the firstborn of all creation. Creator and head of the church place Jesus in the respected position of being first in all things.

John states his position on this first positively and then negatively. "All things came into being through Him" is the positive declaration of Jesus' power to create. Negatively, he states, "apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:3). There are no exceptions to this principle. Well, maybe one! Jesus was not created. I mentioned this earlier. This idea started a big battle in the fourth century. Arius was preaching that Jesus was not a full God. Arius said Jesus was a lesser god, created by God because God was too pure to have anything to do with the physical world. Funny, they thought God could not be part of the world he created. John didn't agree with them. Instead, he understood Genesis in light of who Jesus was at the time of creation. John moves to this point by reversing the order of Genesis in verse four to state that Jesus brought life, which was light for humanity.

In Genesis one, there is a logical order that begins with the creation of light. "Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. God saw that the light was good" (Genesis 1:3-4). The process separates the world by *hammering out a huge plate*. The concept of a huge plate more closely expresses the idea of the word translated *expanse* in Genesis 1:6-8, NASB. We should not be surprised that scientists have discovered the plates on which the continents sit. This *plate* made a garden for vegetation (9-13). The creation story moves back to light, using it to set up the seasons. Growing cycles were based on this natural law. Genesis states this because they are "signs and for seasons and for days and years" (14). Finally, the world is ready for life that moves (24-25). Plants are living. If you don't believe this, ask my wife. I often hear her say a plant has died. The form of life that Genesis is talking about is animal life, which was energy with physical form. Finally, the world is ready for God's image that is to be its caretaker. We discussed this in "The Story of Jesus and Why it Matters."

What John writes in verses three and four provides the background. John has linked Jesus to creation. Now, rather than creating life, because that has already happened, John states that the life was in him. Literal word order in Greek is *in him life was*. They put the words they wanted to emphasize at the end of the sentence, so the emphasis is that the life that came to be was found in Jesus as the Logos. This idea agrees with Jesus since God *spoke* life into existence. John will deal with this again when he writes, "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so, He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself" (John 5:26). Genesis suggests that life is natural to God. He "has life in himself," as John stated. Since Jesus shares the same substance as God

Simply Jesus

(Remember the *Play-Doh* in “The Image of God?”), he would naturally have life in himself. This is why John says that God gave it to him. John understood that Jesus shared a common nature with God. I’m confident that you remember that we studied this in the Philippians’ chapter, “The Form of God.”

John keeps using the theme of Jesus as life in other parts of his Gospel. On three other occasions, Jesus will say that he is life (Bread of Life, 6:35; Resurrection and life, 11:25; the Way, the Truth and the Life, 14:6). In the Bread of Life account, many of Jesus’ followers left him because he did not feed them on the second day with bread and fish. Instead, he fed them with a spiritual banquet of the Bread of Life. After they had left, Jesus asked the Apostles if they were leaving. I love Peter’s response, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life” (6:68). Peter understood that Jesus was life and that life came from his words Jesus spoke (see John 12:48).

Life to Light

John moves from life to light. As we’ve shown you, Jesus is, by nature, life. So, true life will produce true light. We’ll say more about *true* light shortly. First, we need to think about the idea of light and darkness. John states that darkness could not control the light. This idea is found in the word translated *comprehend* or *apprehend*, which are the most common translations. To illustrate, listen to the story of the Sun and the Cave.

One day the sun and a cave struck up a conversation. The sun had trouble understanding what “dark and damp” meant, and the cave didn’t quite get the hang of “light and clear” so they decided to change places. The cave went up to the sun and said, “Ah, I see, this is beyond wonderful. Now, come down and see where I have been living.” The sun went down to the cave and said, “Gee, I don’t see any difference.”

We understand the meaning of this story – light destroys darkness. This is why we use a flash light when we need to move through or find something in the dark. On the other hand, we also understand the issue of going from darkness to light. We’ve all come out of darkness into bright light, shielding our eyes from the glare. It takes time to adjust. This is what John is saying. We live in darkness. When the light of Jesus shines, we have a tendency to cover our eyes. Paul deals with this same concept in the verses leading up to his high praise of Christ that we studied in “The Image of God.” There, Paul will state that Christ came to rescue us from a kingdom of darkness. This concept moves us to the next reason why we must listen to the one who pleases God to have the right to become the children of God. The reason Jesus can do this is that he is not *just* light. Rather, he is *true light*.

He is the True Light (4-13)

John makes it clear why we need a *true* light. “The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend (overpower) it” (John 1:5). As stated above, darkness loses control when the light exposes the deeds that are hidden. John will develop this idea up again in 3:19-20. He expands it there with these points:

1. Light brings judgment
2. Men love darkness and hate light
3. Light exposes their evil deeds
4. They fear being exposed

The expression John uses that is translated as *exposed* also conveys the idea of convicting someone. John uses it like this in 16:8. Here, the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment. As we will see, that light is Jesus.

Witness to the Light

John seems to be a little distracted from his message about the Word of God by talking about John the Baptist. If you just look at these few verses, you would think he was right. Then, you look down at verse 19, and it starts to make sense. After John finishes this great hymn of praise, he states, “This is the testimony of John.” The important thing to understand is that there was a need for a witness. When the religious leaders came out into the desert to see John the Baptist, they asked who he was. They thought he might have been the Messiah. John said “No!” Ok then, are you the prophet Elijah who is supposed to come before the Messiah? Again, he says “No!” OK then, “Who are you?” His answer was clear as a bell. “I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’” (1:23).

John had a reason for including the story about John the Baptist. The reason is obvious if you see the word play that the writer is using. Three times in verses seven and eight he uses some form of a word for *witness*. John will use this word thirty-three times before he gets to the end of the book. Using the word this many times makes us wonder if John is trying to give us some hidden message. No, it’s not hidden at all. In light of John’s purpose to produce faith (John 20:31), it should be obvious that Jesus is relying on witnesses. Why? Simple, Jesus is not here to speak for himself. He has left many voices that speak around the world. They speak in multiple languages, yet they all tell the same story. Hopefully, you know that story by now.

The One Minute Story

There was a popular management book some years back entitled *The One Minute Manager*. This book began a series of *One Minute* books. If you Google “one minute book series,” you will come up with a long list of books with this in the title. There is the *One Minute Cure*, the *One Minute Millionaire*, and many more. Several times in this book I’ve given you a very short and concise way to tell Jesus’ story. Here is a *One Minute* version of the story. This story includes all the features we’ve discussed so far.

After bringing order to chaos, God was pleased with what he had made, but the pleasure did not last long as humanity came into conflict with their creator. Because Adam and Eve chose

Simply Jesus

to serve creation instead of the Creator, they were sentenced to live in bodies that would die. This punishment separated them from God. Praise God, that's not the end of the story. God had planned to win back confused humanity by coming to see them. This time, he emptied himself and became a man. He took the name Jesus because he would rescue people from the curse. He then chose to die as a man so that he could release creation from its curse. He did, but he did even more than that. He then took away the sting of death by offering eternal life back in fellowship with him. The only thing he asks is that you love him and agree to serve him in his kingdom. Seems like so little considering his willingness to come and die for us.

Witness to the Story

Do you realize that you could type this out and read it and be a witness for Christ! I'm sorry, but I just took away one of your main excuses for not sharing Jesus. You can no longer say you don't know enough. Learn this story, and it is all you need to be a witness for Jesus. Sure, this short version may raise questions. If you study this book, you will know many of the answers. I guarantee this but you do have to study. In reality, few people want to discuss Jesus. However, once they hear this story, they will probably either walk away or want to hear more. Unfortunately, more will walk away than want to stay and learn.

True Light's Purpose

As we have learned, light is intended to help us see reality. It exposes our dark nature. To emphasize the nature of light, John said it was a *true* light. The word he used expresses what is real. It gives an accurate picture of what is valid. It not only reveals evil deeds, but it shows why they are evil. It compares those deeds to the one who is the light. John will later put these words on Jesus' lips, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6). Jesus was saying the same thing that John is saying in chapter one. Jesus' nature is pure light that points only to truth. The truth is that we have the right to become children of God.

It would not surprise me if some thought that this verse is the climax of this section. That would certainly fit the "It's all about me-ism" that I find in our churches. "You see," some would declare, "It is about my rights and privileges." Oh, how we misunderstand John. When we finally open our eyes and quit looking at ourselves, we see something great. With a clear vision, we see that we are offered the rights and privileges that belong to the family of Jesus. No, you misread John. The right is to become a child of God. Responsibilities come with that right. While it is not the purpose of this lesson to point these out, John has laid one on us – witness. We have the right and privilege as children of God to talk about our family and what it means to be part of the family of God.

The Friendly Church

I've seen many church signs and vision statements that declare their friendliness. Isn't it amazing that we have reduced the purpose of the body of our Lord and Savior to being friendly? Don't get me wrong. We certainly don't want to be unfriendly. The story of Jesus is about becoming a friend of God. If you recall, this is what the word reconcile means. However, the point is that *being friendly* should not be what we want to be known for. Let's get back to Jesus. Let's see what John has to say about this Word.

Jesus has revealed the true nature of God (14-18)

Please allow me to remind you of our proposition. **We must listen to the one who pleases God to have the right to become the children of God.** Why? John unfolds the third reason – to uncover God’s true nature. This passage could almost stand alone with three ways in which Jesus presents God to us.

Jesus took a body

Before Jesus, the great God of the universe was known through what he created or initiated. We saw his power and divinity in what was created (Romans 1:20). In the covenant, his nature was shown. In the law, his authority was displayed. Now, in Jesus, he is given a body. He has now visited humanity. He is experiencing the world he created. He is viewing his creation from a different perspective. John’s perspective is that he experienced flesh. The *taking of a body* brings us back to Hebrews 10:5 where Jesus expresses to God the necessity of a body. The reason: to become a sacrifice. This is what Paul gave us in Philippians. God became a servant who would die. To die, God needed a body.

“The Word became flesh” is a powerful statement of love and affection. Allow me to share this illustration to show you what I mean. One day, God was sitting in heaven, thinking about how much he loved us. He saw how we lived under the curse of creation. He empathized with us over our struggles. Overwhelmed by our great need and inability to care for ourselves, he took his thoughts of love from his heart, clothed them in a body, and called him Jesus.

The Word is the very heart, mind, and logic of God as he expresses himself in his Son. In the next lesson, we will come across this statement, “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son” (Hebrews 1:1-2). When God needed to speak his most powerful word, he said Jesus. When he thought of how to rescue us from the dark kingdom, he said Jesus. When he needed a servant who would be faithful to death, even death on a cross, he said Jesus.

Jesus reinforced this when he said, “the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told me” (John 12:50). This statement is based on the understanding that his words were to be taken with the same authority as the Father’s word. He explained it like this, “the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day” (John 12:48). When Matthew reported his version of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ authority rings loud and clear every time He said, “*But I say to you!*” (Matthew uses this expression 53 times). Jesus, the Word of God, was in human form.

John has no difficulty in understanding this. In fact, he goes a step farther to impress on us that it was in Jesus’ flesh (his body) that “we *saw* His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14). Please consider the fact that somehow John was convinced that Jesus was able to wear his glory on the outside. People could see what John calls *glory*. We will talk more about *glory* in the next lesson. John will record Jesus’ great prayer in chapter 17 where he states “I shared alongside you” (John 17:5). It was a shared glory they both possessed. After all, “the Word was God” (John 1:1).

This *viewing* of God in the flesh is the impact of “we saw.” John confirms this in his letter. He wrote, “we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life” (1 John 1:1). He will mention seeing two more times and hearing once in the first few verses of 1 John 1. Simply put, the Jesus on the inside was what you saw on the outside.

Grace and truth *became* by Jesus

Notice what I did there. Grace and truth *became* by Jesus. The term John used carries this impact. Was there grace and truth in the world before Jesus took a body? Of course, there was. The covenant with Abraham was the product of God's grace. The Law of Moses declared the truth of God, but, in Jesus, it was realized fully. Why? That's simple. He was God in the flesh!

As I write this, a friend comes to mind who has a problem understanding how God can be in two places at one time. We studied this before. This same experience happened two times – Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3) and transfiguration (Matthew 17). In John 17, Jesus is praying to God, and in Hebrews 10, he is talking directly to God. How can this be possible? Do you remember the Play-Doh in *The Image of God* lesson? That's how. The Father in Heaven and the Son in the Flesh shared the same essence. I like the word *Godness*. Yes, it is a *made-up* word. It means that there is a divine nature in both, and this divine nature is equal in both. I explained this in the Play-Doh illustration. Being in nature God, he was able to be in more than one place with more than one expression (Colossians – image; Philippians – form) of himself. If they share the same nature from a single source, then the form is of little issue. After all, **he is God!**

If you've noticed, I've not hesitated to call the Word Jesus. This is because I know the whole story. When you read this the way John presents it, you will see that the Word is not identified as Jesus until now. I think John is trying to show how the story flowed from the beginning. He starts in verse one with the comparison of the Word and God. He then moves through creation. Finally, the Word has a body. Note something else. John calls him *Christ Jesus*. Technically, Christ is not a name. It is a description. Most would know that it means *anointed*. It is better to use the term Messiah. The messianic concept connects it to the Jewish covenant promise God made to Abraham and Israel. He was God's unique ambassador. In my Master's thesis, I called him the *prototype* Apostle. Hebrews 3:1 states that he is the Apostle and High Priest of our calling. That is, he is the one sent to serve us.

Now, we are ready for John's final point. It is one we have expressed several times in different ways. Here, John is saying it in the simplest words – Jesus explains God.

He explained God

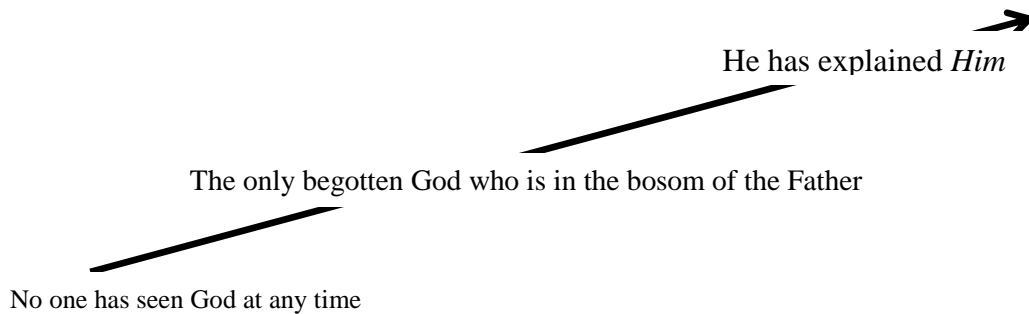
Why does God need explaining? John answers this question. "No one has seen God at any time" (John 1:18). At least, no one has seen his face. God told Moses that he could see his back (Exodus 33:18-33). The reason he can see only his back is because Moses will die if he looks at God's face. God is so gracious to Moses in this story. He told Moses, "there is a place by me, and you shall stand *there* on the rock" (Exodus 33:21). Moses was allowed to stand *near* God.

With Jesus, there was a new *rock* to stand on and see God. Paul reminded the Jewish believers in Corinth of the story of their ancestors wandering in the wilderness. While there, God took care of them. Paul said, "They were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). You see, standing on the solid rock of Jesus, we can see God fully. We can look him in the face without fear of dying. In fact, by looking him in the face, we can live. After all, his is life and light.

As John closes out this great hymn of praise to Jesus, the very last word in the last sentences is *he explained*. Let me give you a short lesson in Greek. You see, they would build their sentences on an ascending line. Like us, every sentence has meaning. They started the

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sentence with words that supported the main point or word in the sentence. Look at this illustration of the way John built his last sentence. Maybe this will help:



John is building to a climax. Notice that I even made the letters larger as we moved to the top. This is a good way to understand how John wanted us to understand Jesus. No one has done what Jesus has done. No one else can give us all the details of God in such a systematic form as Jesus.

Wrapping up

This lesson started by reminding us that God spoke when Jesus was baptized and at his meeting on the mountain with Moses and Elijah. Both times, God said he was pleased. The second time, he adds something that is crucial – “listen to Him!” Our God, the creator of all we see and can’t see, told us to listen to Jesus. This requirement brings us to the main point that we are taking from this passage of John’s Gospel.

WE MUST LISTEN TO THE ONE WHO PLEASES GOD TO HAVE THE RIGHT TO BECOME THE CHILDREN OF GOD. Why listen to Jesus? John gives us three reasons.

- I. Jesus is the Creator, and Everything was Created for Him (3)
- II. Jesus is the True Light (4-13)
- III. Jesus has revealed the true nature of God (14-18)

Do you want the rights and responsibilities of being a Child of God? Then, listen to Jesus. Do you want to enjoy the love and fellowship of the family of God? Then, listen to Jesus. Do you want to have table fellowship with Jesus on a very intimate level? Then, listen to Him!

Simply Jesus

NOTES

Discussion Questions

1. Do we all serve the same God? What makes the Christian God different from the rest? How does Jesus impact that image of the Christian God?
2. Two of the three passages (the last one will include creation as well) make some connection between Jesus and the creation of the world. What is the significance of this? How does this show the relationship between Jesus and God?
3. What does it mean that *life was in Jesus*? How can life be “in” someone? Discuss this in relation to the passages on life listed in the chapter (Bread of Life, 6:35; Resurrection and life, 11:25; the Way, the Truth and the Life, 14:6).
4. There were two statements about light and dark used that needs to be discussed. Please discuss “light destroys darkness” and “darkness loses control.”
5. Obviously, the concept of witness is important to John. List reasons why we don’t witness to our faith.
6. Discuss the *One Minute Story* (pages 83-84). Does this tell the whole Gospel? What questions could arise from this? Note that no scripture references are in the story. Does this matter? Do you need to quote scripture to someone to tell them the Gospel?
7. Is there validity to the statement, “It is about my rights and privileges?” How do we balance our *rights and privileges* with the preeminence of Jesus? What are our *rights and privileges*?
8. By now, it should be evident that there is much emphasis placed on the concept of Jesus having a body. Why is this important? What does it mean that he *shared* flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:14)?
9. Discuss the following statement: “‘The Word became flesh’ is a powerful statement of love and affection.” Try to create your own illustration of what John meant by this phrase. Is this an easy concept to illustrate? Why? Why not?
10. Relate the story of Moses wanting to see God and Jesus showing us God. Discuss the statement, “Jesus was God so he could look at us eye to eye.” How does this *explain* God?