

The Nature of Jesus- John's Prologue

Valleys Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 17th November 2013

Intro-

- Last time looked at John's Gospel chapter 15 and looked at Jesus' command to love one another.
- This time we will look at the start of John's Gospel, at his prologue. In a prologue there is often a summary of what someone is trying to get across in a condensed form. In it we will try to get a snapshot of the nature and mission of Jesus.
- John is someone who really knew Jesus. He called himself the 'disciple whom Jesus loved'. He was one of the inner three disciples chosen for particular tasks- e.g. the Mount of Transfiguration, the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead. He leaned against Jesus' breast at the last supper and had Jesus' ear about who would betray Him. John was known to the High Priest and when Jesus was arrested, whilst the others had fled, he followed Jesus through into the High Priest's courtyard and was able to ask the woman on the door to let Peter in too. If anyone could summarise the nature of Jesus it would be John.

Read John 1;1-18

4 aspects of the nature of Jesus from John's prologue:

1. Jesus is God- v1 '...and the Word was God'.

- Muslim person in Sierra Leone trying to make out that Muslims and Christians both accepted Jesus in the same way. We cannot say of Jesus that He is merely a good man, or merely a prophet, or merely a moral teacher. Here John is making it clear- he is God.
- Uses Genesis as deliberate thing- 'In the beginning' is the first line of the Bible 'Bereshiyth' in the Hebrew Bible, the Book goes under the first word which is 'In-(the)-beginning'. John attributes this 'In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth' to Jesus- this would be complete blasphemy if Jesus was not God!
- The Jehovah's witnesses insert 'a' before 'God' -'and the Word was a God'. Greek has the definite article (the word 'the') but no indefinite article (the word 'a') so you put an 'a' in where the context demands it. However, here they have put an 'a' in not because the context demands it but because their twisted understanding demands it. It's interesting that they are not consistent in adding the 'a' in other places in this passage where the word 'God' is used like v6 'there was a man sent from a god' or v12 'gave the right to become children of a god' or v 18 'No one has seen a god at any time'- in these places it looks like nonsense just as much as it looks like nonsense when they add it to verse 1.
- John clearly understood Jesus was claiming to be God. Later in his gospel in John 8:58 he records Jesus saying to some fellow Jews '...before Abraham was I AM'. Here Jesus is using the same name God used at the burning bush (Ex 3:14) when Moses asked Him His name. They knew that He was claiming to be God because they tried to stone Him for blasphemy. The Jehovah's witnesses try to twist things here by deliberately mis-translating it 'I have been' which in their own Greek interlinear can clearly be seen to be a deliberate mistranslation of the Greek 'I AM (ego eimi)'.
- John goes on using two particular terms referring to Christ: Word and Light. These are significant in Jewish understanding. At the time of Jesus the common language the Jews spoke was Aramaic rather than Hebrew. Hebrew was the language the

scriptures were written in. When the Scriptures were read in the Synagogue they would be read in Hebrew and then a translator would translate them into Aramaic. Often this translation would also include a bit of additional interpretation or paraphrasing. These interpretations were never supposed to be written down, but eventually someone did- and these are called the Targums (meaning 'translation' or 'interpretation'). Often in these Targums in places where God was seen to be doing things which humans do it would say 'the Word of the Lord' did such and such so as to distance God from doing anything too 'human' (anthropomorphisms). In this way the 'Word' was seen as creating and doing all sorts of things. John makes use of this Jewish concept of looking at God and says that the Word is Jesus and that He is God and Creator, but shockingly for this Jewish anti-anthropomorphic concept: 'The Word became flesh!'- verse 14.

- The rabbis were also aware that God had spoken light into being before the sun was created and they debated what this light might be. They came to the conclusion that it was the light of the Messiah linking it to such verses as Psalm 36:10 'in your light we see light' and Dan 2:22 'He knows what dwells in darkness and light dwells with Him' and Is 42:6 & 60:1-3 -the Messiah seen as 'the light to the Gentiles'. The Aramaic word for light was 'Nahora' and this was seen as a code-name for the Messiah. John uses this concept also to reveal Jesus to them. In 2Cor 4:6 Paul too identifies this light of glory which existed before the sun with the light of Jesus which shines into the believer's life to give them the knowledge of the revelation of God- hence the phrase 'he's seen the light!'
- So John is presenting Jesus as much more than just a 'good person'- this was none other than God Himself becoming flesh. C.S. Lewis said this: A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (*Mere Christianity* pg. 52)
- **Application:**
- **Trust in Him-** Jesus knows you, understands you, loves you (formed you in your mother's womb). He has a plan for you (Jer 29:11 'For I know the plans I have for you' declares the Lord, 'Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future') and can empower you to fulfill it as you lean on Him (Prov 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths). Trust Him for salvation- He alone is able to save, as He alone has the power to do so, stop trusting in your own good works- they will never be enough.
- **Do not give way to superstition (fear)-** 1:5- 'The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not comprehended/overcome it'. Light dispels darkness- as soon as you switch on the light darkness flees. We need not be living in constant fear of the enemy- Jesus is victorious! Dualism is a lie- Jesus is god and Satan is not- Yin and Yang is a lie- give up any unbiblical ideas based on equal good and evil- Jesus is in charge of the Universe.
- **Surrender to Him and honour Him-** As He is God and He made us, He deserves our worship- that's what worship is- honouring Jesus for the King that He is, thanking Him for what He has created and for His wonderful works.

2. Jesus loves to work through people- v6 'there was a man sent from God..John..to bear witness of the Light'

- John the Baptist is being referred to here. John was accepted as a prophet generally by the people, but the leaders didn't like what he said. Herod had him firstly imprisoned and later beheaded – his conscience was pricked when John told

him he should not be married to his brother Philip's wife (Herodias) and when her daughter Salome danced before him and he offered to reward her she was prompted by her mother to ask for John's head on a plate, which Herod felt obliged to give.

- Jesus could have opted to avoid using people altogether and do it all as God, but in His grace He has chosen to use people as His witnesses. This is reflected by the huge number of messages he gave people concerning what He would do, hundreds and thousands of years before He did it: Eve was promised that her 'Seed' would crush the serpents head. Abraham held onto the promise that somehow through his 'Seed' great things would happen and all nations would be blessed. Speaking of Jesus, Moses said a prophet like him would be raised up from among the Jewish people and they must listen to that Prophet. Isaiah spoke about Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. David spoke in the psalms about it too and also Jesus' resurrection. Daniel predicted the time that Jesus would visit the earth. All of these people God used as prophets to bring His message to the people and to point to Jesus.
- John, however, was called by Jesus as the greatest of the Old Testament Prophets. It was because John was His forerunner- His herald announcing His arrival. All the Prophets in some way pointed to Jesus, and there were some very specific predictions made which came true, but John was the most privileged in pointing lastly to Jesus, preparing the people to receive Him and actually physically identifying Him as the Messiah.
- Jesus said, however, that remarkably, the least in the New Covenant is greater than John the Baptist (Matt 11:11)- this means that we have a greater privilege of understanding the cross from its fulfillment and living under the grace of it and pointing back to it as a witness- i.e we have a better vantage point than John had of the grace poured out for us. John knew that Jesus was the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' but so much was still a mystery and even he stumbled at one point when he asked if Jesus was the one who was to come or if we should expect another (Matt 11:3).
- John was a witness (John 1:7) to Jesus being the promised King. The Greek word used here is 'marturian' and our English word 'martyr' comes from this Greek word for 'witness'. The fact was that for many of the followers of Christ in the New Testament martyrdom was a reality if they witnessed for Christ. John the Baptist himself was beheaded for his witness.
- Jesus says to us in Acts 1:8 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' Being a witness to Christ will have a cost, but let's be willing to witness to Him.
- **Application:**
- **Be aware of and thankful for the awesome privilege we have of being witnesses of Christ.** We have been called by Jesus as 'greater than John'- that means we are even greater than Isaiah, Moses and all the Old Testament Prophets because we know things they longed to know but they remained a mystery to them (Luke 10:23-24 Turning to the disciples, He said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them." , 1Peter 1:10-12 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.)
- **Be responsive to God using YOU in situations-** Jesus said to the disciples 'YOU give them something to eat' when the 5000 were fed- we are the pizza delivery people, speaking out the manna from heaven so the people can receive it. The

pastor won't be able to reach the people that you can reach with the Good News of Jesus. You have unique contacts which no one else has. God wants you to make the difference in their lives.

- **Take courage-** when was the last time you did something for the first time? Everyone gets fearful when they do something for the first time, but we can get lazy and stop growing in life- life was never meant to plateau- God will give us opportunity to step out into new things right up until He takes us into glory- let's not miss the opportunities He gives because of fear.
- **Take the Great Commission seriously-** (Matt 28:19-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."). This is our job description- how are we doing?
- **Be a good witness-** At work be a witness to Christ by doing a good job- Work is the place where we are to work. If we are sharing our faith but not doing a decent days work we will be a bad witness to Christ. We must be diligent and humble and honest in how we serve our bosses. We are called to work 'as to the Lord' and 'not just when the eye is on us'.

3. Jesus is a catalyst- He causes a reaction – v10-12 '...the world did not know Him...His own did not receive Him...but as many as received Him..he gave the right to become children of God'

- Mrs Thatcher, Marmite, The Only Way Is Essex, Big Brother- you are either going to love it or hate it. It's similar with Jesus – He gets a reaction. People don't hit their thumb with a hammer and say 'Oh Buddha!' or 'Oh Vishnu'. It's Jesus who is used as a swear word, or as a word of praise – 'Thank you Jesus'. People who seem okay about Jesus on the surface can get quite annoyed when you start to tell them what Jesus claimed -to be God, or to be the 'only way to the Father' etc.
- Here John points out the great paradox- that although Jesus is the creator, much of His creation does not want to know Him. In John 3:20-21 he goes into the reasons why 'Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.' Here then are two big reasons John gives- firstly that some people don't want to give up their sinful lifestyle and secondly that they want to keep their sinful lifestyle hidden. For these reasons they have a valid interest in Christianity NOT being true.
- 'That which was His own'- John is probably speaking here about the nation of Israel and the fact that at the time the chief religious leaders of the nation did not receive Jesus as the Christ. Paul takes up this paradox in his letter to the Romans and comes to the conclusion that there is always a remnant who still do believe (Messianic Jews) and that Israel has gone through 'a hardening in part' but in the future will again respond in significant numbers, but that it has meant the Gospel has been received by the Gentiles in significant numbers and that at some point this will result in a spiritual jealousy to a significant proportion of the Jewish population leading them to a revival in coming to Christ (see Rom 9-12). The Gentiles mustn't become boastful or arrogant about this, but rather thankful that they have been 'grafted in'.
- **Application:**
- **Don't follow the crowd-** It takes a living fish to swim against the tide of dead fish floating downstream. We don't have to follow the crowd in doing things which compromise our faith. We also don't have to hide our faith- being a Christian publicly will get a reaction from others, but it is what we've been called to- me in 6th form common room, Psych nurse on nights out being the driver, waiting for a

Christian wife, giving thanks in Macdonalds etc.

- **Don't allow a rejection of the message to stop you sharing with people-** Jesus said to the disciples 'Matt 10:14 'If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. (Matt 10:23 'When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.'). **Paul and Barnabas opposed by Jewish leaders in Pisidian Antioch and then move on** (Acts 13:51 'So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium').

4. Jesus identifies with people- v14 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us'

- Word became flesh=God became a man. Song- 'What if God was one of us?'- He was. First Minister doing the weather yesterday because he resembles the weather man. Prince Charles doing the weather.- dignatories and royalty coming down to the shop floor and getting their hands dirty- Jesus came to identify with us.
- Jesus could have stayed in the glories of Heaven, but in order to save us He had to become like us. He chose to be fully human whilst fully God, but not exploiting His attributes as God but living as a person lives with all it's constraints. He did this because He loves us and wanted to save us.
- Disasterous camping holidays in the rain in Tenby
- The word 'dwelt' in verse 14 is literally 'tabernacled' and this is used deliberately by John to conjure up the picture of the Tabernacle (God's tent) in the Old Testament. This Tabernacle was the place where God would dwell and meet with mankind. His glory would come as a cloud and fill the tabernacle and hover over it. John immediately follows this with the words 'and we beheld His glory'- John literally did on the Mount of transfiguration when the cloud of God's glory came down and surrounded them and Jesus' light shone from His body- John is here making the parallel between Jesus and the glory of God which filled the tabernacle.
- Setting up tent means being mobile and roughing it living in a place you don't normally live. Jesus roughed it to come to earth, He left the glories of Heaven to tabernacle with us on the earth. He was 'incarnational'- He became like those He came to save, chose to identify with us and relate to us.
- **Application:**
- **Work at relating well to those around you-** Paul said the following: (1Cor 9:19-23 'For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.) **Paul** desired to relate to those he was trying to reach- we need to be sensible here- not cheesy or overdoing things, but rather attempting to understand culture and find the common ground, learn the language, take an interest in and show respect for those around us. People know when we are interested in them or not. Visitors to the Church know whether we are truly interested in them or whether they are just another bottom on a seat.
- **Learn to bridge cultural gaps-** The Church should be a place where all ages, backgrounds, gender etc can feel loved and accepted rather than judged or isolated. Let's look for ways to make people belong before they believe. Jesus reached out and touched the lepers when others avoided them for fear of becoming 'unclean'- do we make people feel valued or outcasts? What practical things can we do this week to make people feel part of God's community?
- **Don't get too comfortable-** Jesus was nicknamed 'friend of sinners'- are we? Are we known for hanging out with anyone who is 'undesirable', or do we only choose to relate to righteous people. Jesus answered that 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick, I have come to call sinners to repentance, not the righteous'. We need to be wise in this- if we have recently come to God from a background

where those around us have been against God and leading us into sin we might need a season around 'righteous' people if the temptation is to go back into a sinful lifestyle, until bad habits are broken. However, for many Christians they have forgotten what it is to even have any friends who are not Christians.

Summary

John reveals Jesus' nature in his prologue in the following ways:

- **Jesus is God**
- **Jesus loves to work through people**
- **Jesus is a catalyst- He causes a reaction**
- **Jesus identifies with people**

Song

You laid asise Your majesty/Meekness and Majesty/ He walked where I walk