

Champion Forest Baptist Church

Life Group Lessons 1

The Context Bible

January, 2014

John 1:1-8

The Theme from Creation

Genesis 1

In John's gospel, we have a running echo of Genesis that is found in the words of the gospel as well as the structure. John chapter one begins with the same phrase as Genesis one found in the Greek version of the Old Testament. We read both in English as "In the beginning..." In Genesis, the next word is the verb "created" followed by the subject who did the creating, "God." In John, we have "In the beginning" followed by the verb "was" and then the noun "the Word." Genesis one continues to tell *how* God created. God created all things into existence by speaking them into existence. God *said*, "Let there be light." God *said*, "Let us make man." It was the word of God that brought all things into existence. It was the word of God that gave structure and meaning to the world as we know it. It was the word of God spoken and expressed in the beginning. No Hebrew could have read John's gospel and not understood that John was echoing Genesis and the word God used to bring forth life and meaning on this world.

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| Genesis 1:1 | Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς |
| John 1:1 | Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος |
| A comparison of the first phrases in Genesis and John shows the similarities | |

The thrust of John's opening is not simply to remind one of Genesis. It is to show the pre-incarnate Christ co-existent with the Creating God. Calling Christ the Word, John explained that he was already present at Genesis 1:1. He was present with God and as God:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were

made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made (Jn 1:1-3).

It helps us unpack John's significance given to Jesus when we consider the other Old Testament passages that are associated with God as Creator.

Psalm 136

In this Psalm, we are told to give thanks to God because "he is good" and because "his steadfast love endures forever" (Ps 136:1). This is shown in God's deeds like creation, which evidence that God "alone does great wonders" (Ps. 136:4). Those wonders, John tells us, are to be linked to Jesus as well. In Jesus, we witness one who was present and doing the works of creation, but also one who would become that greatest deed and cause for thanks. Jesus becomes the incarnate picture of God's "steadfast love" that "endures forever."

Isaiah 40:12-40:31

Isaiah used creation to contrast the smallness of nations and people. "The nations are like a drop from a bucket" or "dust on the scales" (Is. 40:15) compared to the one who "measured the waters in the hollow of his hand" (Is. 40:12). In Isaiah, creation is an indicator of God's unsurpassed greatness, but also God's unique purposes and insights. Isaiah asks,

Who has measured the Spirit of the Lord, or what man shows him his counsel? Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? (Is. 40:13-14).

This is profound as we apply this principle of creation to Jesus. John will unfold the ministry of Jesus as one that not only was not done in consultation with man, but as one that man did not even understand. Jesus knew a justice that surpassed the justice of the people. Jesus possessed knowledge of God and insights into God's character that were not understood.

Isaiah asked if there was anyone who could be compared to "the Holy One" (Is. 40:25). The answer is "no one." John had the same emphasis with one exception. Jesus could be compared to the Holy One because Jesus *was* the Holy One! Jesus was there at the beginning and nothing was made without him. It is Jesus, then, who appropriately "gives power to the faint" (Is. 40:29), and renews the strength of those who wait for him (Is. 40:31).

Psalm 104

In this Psalm, God as Creator calls forth from his people blessings and songs of praise. The glory of creation reflects the idea that God is clothed with splendor and majesty. Nature answers to God, not the other way around. God's many works evidence the wisdom of God. Nature is built in a way where it tends to itself. Water sates thirst, food stock grows, trees plant themselves through seeds, seasons and time march on regularly, animals breed and both consume food and become food. This reflects a world put together with unbelievable wisdom and insight. As the Psalmist breaks into praise, he sings that the "glory of the Lord" would "endure forever" (Ps 104:31).

John lets us know that Jesus was part and parcel of this creating wisdom. In Jesus, we are seeing the one who created and sustains the world. We are seeing a human picture of the "wisdom" of God. We see the "glory of the Lord" that will endure forever. We can see Jesus and join the Psalmist in proclaiming,

Bless the Lord, O my soul! Praise the Lord! (Ps 104:35).

Job 38-42:6

Job is a fascinating book where the fallout from spiritual warfare destroys much of Job's life. His health is shot. His children die prematurely; his wealth evaporates. Job's wife and friends alternately urge him to repent of his own sin or to curse God and die. Job does not see his sin, nor does he view it right to curse God.

In the process of trying to come to grips with his most pitiful circumstances, Job begins to make some accusations against God. Job wished he could "find" God, as if God was hiding! Job said he would then lay out his case before God and get answers (Job 23:1-5).

Finally toward the end of the book, God comes out and answers Job. God used his own creation as evidence that his ways should be beyond Job's challenges. Job had no real ability to stake claim on understanding and knowing God and his thoughts (Job 38-41). Job's words are "words without knowledge" (Job 38:1). Job then backs away a bit when God challenged him, "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?" (Job 40:1-5). As the Creator, God demonstrated an independence and a wisdom with which Job could not contend. This is the same authority that Jesus brought as he came into the world.

Job finally repents after thinking through the Almighty's creative works. Job answers,

I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted (Job 42:2).

This strong message echoes in John's proclamation of Jesus existing not only in the beginning, but that all things were made through him. Not only does it invoke a recognition that Jesus is beyond our challenge, but even stronger, it warns us as we go through the gospel account of Jesus that as Creator, we know "no purpose" of Jesus "can be thwarted."

The Theme of Light and Life

John wrote that in Jesus was "life," and that life was the "light" of men. This light "shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (Jn. 1:4-5).

On its own, this picture makes perfect sense. Anyone who has been in a dark room and turned on a light has seen that in a battle, light always triumphs over darkness. Darkness never wins that contest.

John takes it a step further, however, because he is using themes that are well founded in the Old Testament.

Psalm 27

In many ways, this Psalm evokes truths that become most apparent in the life, ministry, and work of Jesus. This Psalm begins acknowledging that the Lord is both "light" and "salvation," as well as the "stronghold" of "life" that removes "fear" (Ps 27). That is Jesus. As light, Jesus brought salvation into darkened, sinful lives. As life, Jesus secures and holds an eternal life for those who place their trust in him.

The Psalmist make his one request and goal, to

dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon
the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple (Ps 27:4).

John will explain in his gospel that Jesus brings his followers into the house of the Lord. In Jesus, we gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. We see God's love manifested in the midst of hatred, ignorance, hostility, selfishness, and other dark sins. We will see next week, how Jesus becomes a physical truth of the temple, and in that sense, one who lives in Jesus, lives in the temple.

The psalm ends with an affirmation that the Psalmist will "look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Ps 27:13). This was done and is done in looking upon Jesus, the light and life of God who walked this earth shining salvation and eternal life.

Psalm 36

In this Psalm, darkness is contrasted with light. The “wicked” live lives oriented to sin, proud of their own insight and without fear of God. God, on the other hand, is full of steadfast love and righteousness. God provides in abundance for his children, sheltering them and providing a refuge.

For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light (Ps 36:9).

This sets God up as the reference point for a perspective that is true, not deceitful. John tells his readers that Jesus is this life and light. Jesus reveals sin for what it is, and points the willing to the way of life. Jesus evidences the steadfast love of God that gives eternal security to those of faith.

Psalm 119:105-112, 129-136

Psalm 119 is a composite Psalm, meaning that it can be seen as 22 related Psalms. Each of the 22 sections of Psalm 119 is set up as an acrostic. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and each section has all of its verses beginning with the appropriate letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So, for example, Psalm 119:1-8 has eight verses that each start with the Hebrew letter “*aleph*” (א), the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet.

Verses 105-112 each start with the Hebrew “*nun*” (נ). These verses speak to God’s “word” as a lamp to one’s feet and a “light” to one’s path (Ps 119:105). The Psalmist is struggling with events in life, but knows that life will come from the Lord. The route for the Psalmist is to carefully walk in the ways of God’s word.

John’s gospel echoes these ideas in profound ways. John explains that Jesus *is the* Word of God. Jesus is the light that shines into our difficulties, showing us the way. We are to look to him and learn to walk in his ways.

Verses 129-136 each start with the Hebrew letter “*pe*” (פ), pronounced like the English “pay.” Here the words of God again are said to give “light.”

The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple (Ps 119:130).

This is what we have in Jesus as the Word. As his life unfolded, it brought a light that does not take a rocket scientist to appreciate or accept. It is a simple trust that is seen in a child.

1 John 1:5-1:10

In addition to his gospel, we have letters written by John. Not surprisingly, they use many of the same words and phrases and explain his thoughts in a more didactic or teaching sense. 1 John 1:5-1:10 exemplify this.

John taught that “God is light” (1 Jn 1:5), which then allows one to see that without question John saw Jesus as God. God and Jesus are not “a” light. They are the pure light that has no darkness. Jesus was not a good man. He was not a great man. He shone forth God’s perfection.

John then applies this truth to the believer. We are to live faithfully trusting in the truth of who Jesus is. We confess our sins and receive forgiveness. We do not parade as ones who are perfect on our own. We are not the light; we reflect the light.

Colossians 1:11-14

Here Paul set into his prayer life, as well as his theology, the concept of Christ bringing the believer out of the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of light, which is the kingdom of the Son. This deliverance comes with redemption, with the forgiveness of sins. Christ was not merely coming to earth to point the way from darkness to light, he came to make the way, redeeming people from darkness to light.

John the Baptist

John set out an introduction to John the Baptist as one who was not the actual light, but one who attested to the light. John was one who brought other people to the light. Jesus had many people “ripe” for belief as people who had been convicted by the ministry of John the Baptist. We get more insight into this by looking at the synoptic gospel accounts, as well as Isaiah’s prophetic promise of John’s ministry, written 600 years earlier.

Luke 1:1-1:25, 39-80

Luke wrote his accounts after researching from eyewitnesses. Luke was a physician, and as such, would be one of the few men in Jewish society who was comfortable talking with women. We lose track of this because we see Jesus and Paul so readily talking to women as well as men. Yet Jesus and Paul were rare in this way. (Interestingly some today view Paul as a chauvinist, comparing him to

21st century standards of language and behavior rather than those of his day. In fact, he was much the opposite.)

Luke was able to interview people, much like a doctor takes a history to help in diagnosis. His gospel account references names as he readily gives sources for his knowledge that others missed. Not surprisingly, it was Luke the doctor who got the information on Jesus' virgin birth. (It is easy to envision. Luke: "Now, exactly *how* did you get pregnant without ever having had relations with another?").

Similarly, the birth of John the Baptist piqued Luke's interest and made his gospel history. John was born to a couple (Zachariah and Elizabeth) that had been unable to have children. Much like Abraham and Sarah with Isaac, or Hannah with Samuel, God worked his child of promise into the lives of this couple. Zachariah believed he would father a child at his age about as well as Sarah. While Sarah laughed, Zachariah just challenged the angel bringing the news.

The angel pronounced muteness upon Zachariah to last until John's birth. Zachariah was also told how to rear John. Although John was born to a priest father and a mother who descended from priests, the concern was not to rear John as a priest. The focus of instruction was on John abstaining from strong drink or wine as he lived filled with the Holy Spirit. John was set to go in the spirit and power of Elijah leading the people to the Lord.

Mary the mother of Jesus was a cousin to Elizabeth, the mother of John. Mary was pregnant with Jesus and Elizabeth with John when Mary went to see her cousin. As Mary entered the house, the baby John within Elizabeth jumped in joy, with the Holy Spirit attesting to Jesus through John, even before birth. Elizabeth was past childbearing age, and was much older than Mary (who would have been in her teens). Not surprisingly, Elizabeth gave some marvelous wisdom to her younger cousin, blessing her for the baby she carried. From this we have "Mary's song," a marvelous song attesting to God's greatness.

In due course, John was born, Zachariah regained his speech, and a path was set for John's life as a precursor to the light of the world. Luke also included Zachariah's prophetic song that sang of the coming Messiah, and the fact that Jesus would "give light to those who sit in darkness" as well as guide "feet into the way of peace" (Lk 1:29-79), harmonizing the words and concepts used by John in describing Jesus.

Mk 1:1-1:8 and Isaiah 40:1-5

History teaches that Mark recorded Peter's gospel.¹ Reading Peter's proclamation of the gospel to Cornelius in Acts 10, certainly lends additional credibility to the historical record. Peter's presentation reads like a miniature version of the Gospel of Mark in Acts 10:37ff. Peter began with John the Baptist, as does the Gospel of Mark, ending with Jesus resurrected and appearing to witnesses.

Mark (Peter) set out the prophetic promise of Isaiah 40:1-5 seen as fulfilled in John the Baptist. John was God's messenger. His message was one of repentance that prepared the way for Jesus. John used baptism to help direct the people to see the need for washing sin as a part of repentance. This was something that would become a hallmark of the church.

John drew a large following of people impressed with his earnestness and his message. Yet John never allowed it to become the "John the Baptist Show." For him, there was a constant push for people to realize that after him, would come one mightier than him, one whose sandal John was not worthy to stoop down and untie. While John baptized with water, Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Luke 3:1-3:17

Luke used the same Isaiah passage as Mark when describing the ministry of John the Baptist. Luke added more of the message of John, giving content of some of his sermons. He urged people to live holy lives rather than rely on their heritage as children of Abraham. Their birth was not to their credit or control, but how they lived was personal choice. That was the attention that would focus people on Jesus. If people do not realize their sin, they have no need for a savior.

QUESTIONS FOR HOME

¹ The early church was unanimous that Mark authored the second gospel, emphasizing that Mark took the task of writing Peter's stories and recollections securing Peter's preaching of the gospel. The fuss of the early church was over whether Mark wrote it with Peter's permission, acquiescence, at Peter's request, or even after Peter's death. Papias (c.60-130) wrote,

Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed in order, whatever he remembered. (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.14-17).

Clement of Alexandria (c.150-215) also confirmed Mark as recording Peter's proclaimed gospel message, but not at Peter's request, just with Peter's awareness:

The Gospel according to Mark had this occasion. As Peter had preached the Word publicly at Rome, and declared the Gospel by the Spirit, many who were present requested that Mark, who had followed him for a long time and remembered his sayings, should write them out. And having composed the Gospel he gave it to those who had requested it. When Peter learned of this, he neither directly forbade nor encouraged it. (*Ibid.*, at 6.14.5-7).

Irenaeus wrote that Mark recorded Peter's gospel after the death of Peter, while Origen (c.185-c.254) thought that Peter had instructed Mark to write the gospel. (*Ibid.*, at 5.8; 6.25).

1. John places Jesus at the beginning – at the beginning of the world as well as every beginning. What does it mean that Jesus was thoughtfully present at the start of every moment in our lives?
2. Jesus as the light and life is a lamp to your feet. How does Jesus illuminate to us how to live and thrive in the midst of our interaction with the world?
3. John the Baptist was set out as one to ascribe glory to God by pointing to Jesus and preparing people to receive the gospel. How can our life help others prepare for the gospel, even if we do not speak to them the actual gospel? What traits of John are transferable to you and me?