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To Those Who Believe in Him

John 1:1-18

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY **201st General Assembly**

- **TUESDAY (SESSION) @ 8:00 AM IN ROOM 100,
RYAN BLDG.**
- **TUESDAY (WEEKLY) @ 12 NOON IN THE
CAFETERIA**

Capitol Commission Bible studies are held on Tuesdays. Two times are available to meet for Bible study: (1) a legislator Bible study from 8:00-8:45 AM in Room 100, Ryan Bldg. (during session weeks); (2) an open-to-all Bible study from 12:00-12:30 PM in the Cafeteria (please bring your lunch). The Bible studies are nonpartisan and non-denominational. During session weeks, we will be studying the Gospel of John for the 2017 General Assembly.

I pray that this study will be a help to you in your walk with Jesus. My sole intent is to serve you, and to be a resource to you for pastoral care, counsel, and prayer. Please accept this study, taken from the word of God, as evidence of my desire to serve you in this manner.

– Jeff Whitebread, Pennsylvania State Minister, Capitol Commission

John 1:1-18: “To Those Who Believe in Him”

‘It’s in the middle of the village just outside of Cambridge,’ my friend had said. ‘You’ll see where to turn – then it is right next to the corner market.’

It sounded straightforward enough, but it was my first time driving in England and I was a bit out of sorts. Here was the village. I drove slowly past the pretty cottages, then some other shops and the old church and continued right outside the village.

To begin with, I thought I must have misheard him. There did not seem to be any houses where my friend described. So, I parked the car and went on foot to do some further exploring. There is a charm of being in a different context and walking among a litany of structures that have existed for hundreds of years.

Then I came to a stone opening that I had missed, with an old wooden sign with the right name on it. I knocked and my friend emerged from the door to greet me and welcomed me into the house. My friend never told me he lived somewhere like this!

Approaching the John’s gospel can be a bit like arriving at a grand house. Many who read the Bible know that this gospel is not quite like the others. They may have heard, or maybe discovered for themselves, that it has a hidden depth of meaning. Accordingly, to one well-known saying, this book is like a pool that is safe for a child to paddle in but deep enough in which an elephant can swim. While the book is imposing in its structure and ideas, it is not meant to scare you off. It is designed to make you feel welcome, as the Friend above all friends comes out to meet you.

The Word, The Logos

(John 1:1) Like many grand houses, the book has an entrance, which brings you off the street, telling you something about the place you’re entering before you arrive inside. These opening verses, are such a complete introduction to the book that by the time you get to the story you know a good deal about what’s coming and what it means.

The entrance to this grand house is formed in the unforgettable opening words: “In the beginning was the Word.” At once this launches the reader back to thoughts of the start of Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, and we are entering a place that is both familiar and strange at the same time. Whatever else John is going to tell us, he wants us to see his book as the story of God and the world. This is not just a story of one character in one place at one time. This book is telling of the creator God acting in a new way within his much-loved creation. This long story which began in Genesis is reaching the climax that the creator has always intended.

And it will be done through “the Word.” In Genesis 1, the climax is the creation of humans, made in God’s image. In John 1, the climax is the arrival of a human being, the Word became “flesh.”

When considering a word spoken, in a sense, it is part of me. It is a breath that comes from inside of me, it makes the noise I give it with my throat, mouth, and tongue. What people hear, they assume I intend it. If our deeds do not match our words people say, ‘But you said...’. We remain responsible for the word we say.

John opens with the assertion that Jesus is the divine “word” or logos, no small claim. The Jewish mind would have remembered verses such as Psalm 33:6, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.” God’s word is the one thing that will last, even though the people wither and die (Isaiah 40:5-6). God’s word will go out of his mouth and bring life, healing and hope to Israel and the whole creation (Isaiah 55:10-11). This is all part of John’s choice of his use of ‘Word’ in this passage, as a way of telling who Jesus really is.

In addition, John probably expects some of his readers to see that what this opening passage says, about Jesus himself, was what some writers had said about ‘Wisdom.’ Many Jewish teachers grappled with the question: How can God be both remote, holy and detached, and also intimately present. Some answers included the ‘word’ and wisdom.’ Some combined them with God’s promise to place his ‘own’ presence with the Temple in Jerusalem. Other saw them preserved in the Jewish law, the Torah. All of this is present in John’s mind as he writes about God’s word.

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One other factor, not to be overlooked, is the thinking of pagan philosophy, for they too pursued an unending quest to understand the nature of the universe. Some spoke of the 'word' as a kind of principal of rationality, lying deep within the whole cosmos and within all human beings. Get in touch with this principle, they said, and your life will find its true meaning. Well, it is possible, John is saying to them; the Word is not an abstract principle, it's a person. And I'm going to introduce him to you.

Jesus is Intimately Close to the Father

(John 1:1-2) This introduction to the Word begins and ends by stressing that the Word was with God and is God, and is intimately close to God. John knows perfectly well that he is making language go well beyond what is normally possible.

(John 1:14) But we see, it is Jesus that makes him do it because the Word became flesh, that is, became human, he became one of us. He became the human being we know as Jesus.

(John 1:18) As John brings to close his introduction he says, "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. That is the theme of this gospel: if you want to know who the true God is, you must take a long and hard look at Jesus.

Jesus Challenges the Darkness

(John 1:3) The rest of the passage clusters around this central statement. The one we know as Jesus is identical, it seems, with the Word who was there from the very start, the Word through whom all things were made, the one that contains both light and life.

Once again, going back to Genesis, the Word challenged the darkness before creation and now John tells us that Jesus challenges the darkness that is found, tragically, within creation itself. The Word is bringing into being a new creation, in which God says once more, "Let there be light."

But the world's response to God sending the Word is to pretend it does not recognize him. This is the central problem which dominates the whole gospel story. Jesus comes to his own people, and God's people do what the rest of the world does: they prefer darkness to light.

In this conflict, we find a continual resistance of the light to the darkness and the inability of darkness to triumph despite the utmost that hatred and unbelief can do to the Word. This is an encouragement to all who receive Jesus and seek to bring their life into the light.

(John 1:16) In the face of this opposition, fresh grace is needed, on top of the grace already given by God. The law was given to point us in the right direction, but like Moses, it does not take us to the promise land. For that you need grace and truth that comes through Jesus the Messiah, the son of God.

Jesus Provides the Way to God

(John 1:12) The most exciting thing about the entire opening passage is that we're included in it too: "To anyone who did accept him (v12) - that means anyone at all, both then and now. You don't have to be from a particular family or part of the world. God has flung the door wide-open and he wants all men everywhere to be born in a new way, which begins in Jesus and has since spread throughout the whole world.

Anyone can become a 'child of God' which goes beyond the fact that all humans are special in God's sight. Something can happen to people in this life which causes them to be a new people, a people who believe in his name.

Jesus came to provide the way for us to join the life found in God with our life. We spend much time on this earth journeying without the Lord, without a connection to the Eternal Life. This leads to countless difficulties and troubles as we seek to manage our kingdom using our own strength and wisdom. John is telling us that receiving Jesus is the way we enter this life, this is how we begin the journey of becoming children of God, those who increasingly bear the family resemblance.

This great drama of God and the world, of Jesus and Israel, of the Word who reveals the glory of the unseen God - this great drama is a play in search of actors, and there are parts for everyone, parts for both you and for me included.

Books referenced:

Wright, NT. John for Everyone. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2004

Thank you for allowing Capitol Commission the privilege of providing you this Bible study. If you have any questions, please talk with us, or contact by email or phone.

About Capitol Commission

Capitol Commission state ministers are pastors/missionaries who teach Bible studies for legislators, lobbyists, and staff members. These Bible studies are hand-distributed to each legislative office, emailed, and made available throughout the Capitol community. Capitol Commission is a ministry of the church that seeks to proclaim the good news of Jesus, and help believers mature in Christ through an intentional approach of seeking to be like Jesus. In the Bible, we learn of God's love for the world, especially those who have been placed in authority. This is the foundation of our ministry to you.

God's-people are instructed to submit and honor their leaders (Rom 13:1-7), and to pray for their salvation; their redemption from sin and its impact upon their life (1 Tim 2:1-4). The desire of Capitol Commission is to witness God transform the hearts and lives of elected officials, lobbyists, and staff members. We do this through a ministry of presence at the Capitol, as help those open to Jesus learn how to do all things, whether word or deed, just as if Jesus himself were doing it.

Legislator Bible study: Tuesday, February 7th at 8 AM, Room 100 Ryan Office Building
Open-To-All Bible Study: Tuesday, January 31st at Noon in the Cafeteria (please bring your lunch)

