

JOHN 1

Where to Begin?

Where to begin? That is true of everything in our lives – relationships, careers, education, or any new adventure. It is also true in storytelling. Each of the Four Gospels tell the same story but with four unique perspectives. Consider, for example how each begin: Matthew with a genealogy, Mark with Jesus’s ministry, Luke with a brief preface, and John, most unique of them all, with creation. Not only that, John introduces four major themes that will dominate his story and our study.

1. **Logos** – *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* (John 1:1)

The Greek term for “Word” is *logos*. Yet in John’s Gospel, it carries greater meaning than our English “word.” In Greek thought, above the pantheon of gods was an Idea which they called the Logos. To them, it was the chief principle of reason. Even in Jewish thought, the Logos came to be thought of as divine, creative power.

John merges these two ideas (his first audience would have been both Jewish and Greek) and demonstrates that Christ in the Divine Logos who was “in the beginning.” As Logos, Jesus is Creator who becomes Redeemer (the message of the Gospel) and he is what holds all things together (Colossians 1:17).

The rest of the Gospel unfolds the drama of the Logos becoming flesh (John 1:14). His creative acts are seen by turning water into wine (John 2:1-12), calming the storm (John 6:16-21), and raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44).

2. **Life** – *“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”* (John 1:4-5)

As Logos, Jesus is Life. “In him,” John argues, “was life.” As “the life,” Jesus gives life by means of his redemptive work upon the cross. It is not surprising, then, that Jesus frequently claims that faith in him results in life (John 3:16 for example).

The narratives illustrate this. When Jesus encounters the woman at the well in chapter 4, he assures her that his words are life (John 4:14). When he feeds the 5,000, he proclaims to be the “Bread of Life” (John 6:35). Finally, when Lazarus’s sisters mourn their brother’s death, Jesus reminds them that he is the “Resurrection and the Life.” (John 11:25).

Jesus is life and as the life he conquers death and sin.

3. **Light** – *“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.”* (John 1:9-10)

As Logos, Jesus is also light. Not only did Christ in creation create life, he also created light. That imagery remains a common one even in our time. God, in Christ, enters our world of darkness with light.

Read the book slowly and this theme of spiritual darkness is demonstrated in beautiful ways. In chapter 3, Nicodemus comes to Jesus “by night” (John 3:2). As the story unfolds, Nicodemus slowly comes into the light. Near the end we find, “Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight” (John 19:39). Notice John’s emphasis on when Nicodemus first came to Jesus. He is no longer in the dark.

Likewise, the woman at the well encounters Jesus at noon when the sun was at its brightest. We discover, however, she is in spiritual darkness until she encounters Jesus. Later he heals a blind man and claims that those who see are truly blind (John 9:40-41). Finally, Jesus walks toward his disciples during a storm, at night, yet they seem him coming to him. He is light.

All of this finds its climax in the Passion where the Light of the World (John 8:12) is executed and placed in a dark tomb. But at dawn, the light broke through the darkness. Death was defeated. Sin was conquered.

4. **Lamb** – *“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29)

Throughout Scripture, redemption and creation merge. That is, when one embraces the truth of Jesus, they do not merely join another team or choose another tribe, they take on a new identity. They become new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The means of this new identity comes by the sacrificial death of Jesus. Right from “the beginning” John describes Jesus as the Logos who became the Lamb. The primary way John unfolds this motif is through Passover. In fact, the primary reason we believe Jesus’s public ministry was three years is due to John’s frequent reference to Jesus celebrating Passover.

At Passover, a lamb would be sacrificed reflecting upon the first Passover in Egypt. Yet despite Jesus frequently celebrating it, we never see Jesus instituting the Lord’s Supper which took place on the eve of his execution during Passover. The reason is simple, Jesus is the true and better Lamb of the Passover. Consider, for example, that in John’s telling, Jesus is crucified while the Passover lambs are being slaughtered (John 19:14).

So the Logos who is the Light of the world gives Life by offering himself as the Lamb of God. Sounds like good news.