



Heaven on Earth (Part 1) – Through the Word

Matt Chandler – August 19, 2018

Good morning. It's good to see you. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. We're going to be in John 1. While you're turning there, just a couple of things. Our sixth graders have joined us in here, those who are moving out of Kids Village and into middle-school ministry. They are with us today.

If you are one of our sixth graders, stand up for me so I can see you and we can celebrate that you're with us. We do not think you are the church of tomorrow. We think God has given us, as a congregation, you and Christ in you, so we're eager that you are among us this morning. Welcome to what when I was a kid was called "big church." Again, welcome in.

Another thing I want to lay before you, and hopefully we'll have some information rolling out to you in the next couple of days... There are some massive floods taking place in southern India. I don't know if you're aware of that or not, but it's making Houston last year look like something pretty small.

We have a lot of members with family members who live in that area of southern India who are unable to contact their family members. I don't know if you know this, but all of those airports are shut down. There is no way out. It is turning out to be what will be a humanitarian crisis at a very large scale. Our elders are looking at how we might step into that and help.

Just know that right now there's a real catastrophic thing occurring in southern India, and many of our members are directly affected by this. We just want you to be aware of that as you pray. Again, we'll roll out some information in the days and weeks to come about how we want to try to partner and help in this area.

To say that I've been eager about the gospel of John would probably be to undersell what I have been feeling. I've experienced my own personal little renewal looking at the life of Jesus Christ in

the gospel of John. Just to warn you, that's probably going to come out. If something happens today, that's what happens.

The gospel of John is a little bit different than the other three gospels, which are called the *Synoptic Gospels*. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are written, by and large, in the same kind of order, in the same kind of language. Sometimes the stories are chronologically exactly the same, and sometimes the wording is almost exactly the same. John comes at it from a different perspective. That's why you have the three Synoptics and you have the gospel of John.

Some of the most beautiful pictures of who Jesus Christ is are found in the gospel of John. You have these seven miracles that reveal his divinity. You have the seven "I am" statements. You have the woman at the well. I could just keep going. You have Lazarus being raised from the dead. You have all of these stories that many of us who have grown up in church have kind of digested, and it has helped us understand who Jesus is and, at times, combat the lies around who he is not.

So I'm eager to dive in with you. I know you're there in John, chapter 1, but John really helps us out by telling us what he's trying to do in his gospel. This is John 20, starting in verse 30. **"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these [this book we're about to read] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."**

John is saying, "Hey, this is what I'm trying to do. This is what I'm about." Since this is Scripture, this is what God wants to accomplish in you and me as we dive into John for however long we're going to be in there. Here's what he says: that you would believe that Jesus is the Christ. When the Bible says that Jesus is the Christ, it's laying before us that Jesus is the solution to sin and death, which leads to the next piece that he is the Son of God.

Jesus is not then a philosopher, some sort of moral teacher; instead, he is the Christ, the very Son of God. Then you have this beautiful little text here: that we may have life *in* his name. Even the way this is written, that life is found *in* his name, not by following his teachings, not by knowing the stories about him, not by having this vague general sense that, "Yeah, Jesus is my homeboy," but rather that he is the Christ, the Son of God, and in him, which is a reference ultimately to what it means to have union with Christ...

That would make a great sermon series, but you shouldn't bring that up today on the first weekend of a sermon series. Maybe one day, by the grace of God, summer series or next fall or three years from now when we finish John we can dive into union with Christ and all of the implications of what it means when you take us and put us *in* Christ so that his righteousness is our righteousness and our sin he bears and the power of Christ is made available inside of us by the Holy Spirit of God. But again, we don't have time to preach that.

This is what John is trying to accomplish. This is what God wants to show us as we dive into John: that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that you may have life in his name. With that said, let's dive into these first five verses. John, chapter 1, starting in verse 1:

"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. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

I love the way John starts this book, where he says, **"In the beginning was the Word..."** John isn't waiting around to let his readers figure out that Jesus is God. If you look back across the other gospels, you have everything from a genealogy to a virgin birth, but John, first sentence. He's coming strong, and here's what he says: "Hey, when was Jesus? He was in the beginning. Where was Jesus? He was with God. Who is Jesus? Oh yeah, he is God."

In the first sentence, John has just unloaded on all of us the thrust of his book, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that in him is life. This Jesus comes and puts on flesh. I don't know if you've ever spent a moment or two meditating on or thinking about the fact that Jesus is coeternal with the Father, has always been, will always be, and he put on flesh and dwelt among us. He became a baby.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Staring at this in the face... I know the Trinity can be daunting, and I was hesitant to say "Trinity" there because you only have two parts of the Trinity. You have God the Father and God the Son. The Spirit will show up shortly. He has always been there also. What we see here is you have the Father and the Son, and the Father is God and the Son is God.

For many, many, many people this is a difficult, abstract idea that's hard for them to grasp in all its richness and beauty, and I will certainly not be able to do it justice today. In fact, there are other religions that this kind of is a breaking point for them. That would be certainly true of Mormons. This would certainly be true of Muslims. This idea that God is triune is an extremely difficult concept for many people to digest, and yet it's one of the more beautiful realities of our God, that he is God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, one.

Let me try to help a little bit here. When it says that Jesus is the Word... If you do a little bit of study in the Old Testament how often this concept of *word* is used... The Greek word is *logos* here, which has all sorts of Greek implications, but that's not where I'm going with this. The *Word of God* is described several times in the Old Testament as one sent forth by God to accomplish the purposes of God and then returns *to God*.

Now that sounds a little bit like the Word. Preachers will oftentimes use the verse, "My words will not return void. When I speak, then they accomplish my purposes and return to me." That could very well be... In fact, many commentators would chalk that up as a messianic prophecy, not fodder for preachers to be competent.

I think this text is about Jesus and the coming of Jesus and the power of Jesus and what Jesus is going to accomplish, and preachers are like, "I can't fail." I think we've all heard some sermons that failed. I'm talking about *here*. I'm talking about *me*. There's a reason there is three years worth of our sermons that are not online. If you were here for that, you know why.

Have you ever been around somebody and you're just trying to figure out what they're thinking? Like, people who have good poker faces, and you're around them and you can't quite... Your insecurities are flaring. You're like, "Do they like me? Do they not like me? Did that bother them? Do I bother them? What is going on in their head?"

Well, if I could simplify, one of the ways the early church fathers tried to help us understand Jesus Christ being fully God and fully man and God the Father being fully God and fully God is that human words relate to their inaudible thoughts the way the human divine Jesus relates to the invisible God. The only way for you to know what's going on in my head is for me to say it. I know. Please don't email me about, "Well, what about body language?" I'll even *give* you body language for where I'm going, so thanks for setting me up to win.

How do we know what's going on in God's heart, his mind? What does he love? What does he hate? What is he bothered by? Yes and amen to the Word of God, but in *this* text he's not talking about the Bible; he's talking about the Son. He's talking about Jesus Christ. In Colossians 1:15 the apostle Paul says it like this: "**He is the image of the invisible God...**"

Do you want to know what God is like? Do you want to know what God does, how God feels, what God works at, what he delights in, what he is harsh toward? Do you want to know what that is? You'd better get your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Frederick Bruner says, "We long to know who God is and what God thinks and does. In Jesus, his most personal Word, God has 'spoken' to us in the most human way possible, giving us his innermost thoughts and heart, in deeds that are as profound as his words, and the believing human race has experienced deep help ever since."

Your knee-jerk reaction, my knee-jerk reaction, because of our humanity, is to think God is disappointed and angry and frustrated and totally regrets saving us. Almost everyone I talk to, if we can get past how well armored we are behind Christian lingo and bumper-sticker theology, has this kind of haunting sense not of God's pleasure but of God's disappointment.

Because we won't give God the benefit of the doubt in what he says about us in the Word, in the Scriptures, he gives us Jesus. It'll blow your mind when he meets the woman at the well. It should change your life. When a Pharisee sneaks in the middle of the night and asks, "How do I be born again? Where is life? We can see that you have power, but where do we go for life? I know this isn't it. Where do we go?" and you see Jesus' compassion and mercy and love.

Maybe by the grace of God in our divine imagination we could see the warmth of his eyes staring into human failure, knowing that he was going to be enough to cover it. He gives us Jesus so we'll see and believe, because it's so hard to believe. We know us. When no one else is around, there we are. But that's not all that's going on here. Yes, in the beginning was the Word, but follow this: he is the maker of all things.

Look at verse 3. "**All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.**" Again, John is not slow-playing the deity of Jesus Christ here. He is just going to harp on this over and over and over again throughout this entire gospel. Who made everything?

The Word made everything. Who's the Word? Jesus is the Word. Where is Jesus? In the beginning, next to God. Who is Jesus? He is God.

It's no small thing that John begins his gospel, "In the beginning was the Word..." because how does the Bible begin in Genesis? "In the beginning God created..." We know from the Genesis narrative that God created everything that was by speaking, by his word. Jesus is the active agent in creation. If we had time, which we don't, we'd go back to Genesis 1 and you would see, "Let there be... Let there be... Let there be..."

Well, who is the Word of God? Who is the expression of the inaudible God? Jesus, the Word, is the Creator of all things, and it states it positively and negatively. He created all things, and nothing exists that he did not speak into existence. He's not slow-playing the deity of Jesus Christ. He is not a good moral teacher. He is not a philosopher. You cannot categorize Jesus as one of many ancient philosophers. You cannot do that.

If you run across people who think Jesus is a good teacher, they're certainly not getting that from what the Bible says about Jesus, nor what *Jesus* says about Jesus. You cannot reconcile, "I think Jesus was a good moral philosopher and teacher," while simultaneously looking at the teachings of Christ where he claims to be God. You can't do this. It's not reconcilable. You must submit to Christ as not just King of the universe but as God in the flesh.

We see again this creative act of God in Jesus in Colossians 1:16. **"For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him."** One commentator I read... I love guys who have imagination. He said if you could get a microscope and you could see underneath everything in creation...

If you could see past the atoms and past the particles inside the atoms, if you could get as deep as you could, you might just, using our divine imagination, see this tiny little inscription that said, "Made by J.C." If you could get past the molecules and atoms and the dark matter, or whatever, if you could just get deep enough, you'd see this tiny little inscription, "Made by J.C." That includes you and that includes me.

Jesus created all things, according to Colossians, by and for himself. That includes you and me, which means I was created and you were created *for* Jesus, which is why John is making the

argument that you can only find life in him. Why? Because that's what you were created for. Now, if that's true (and it's true), then, man, that should help us make sense of our angst.

If I have been created by Jesus... Like, you get down into the essence of who I am, and you have a little inscription, "Made by J.C for J.C..." If you find that inscription on me, then it makes all kinds of sense why my job is never ultimately going to be satisfying to me, because I have not been made *by* my job and *for* my job. I have been made *by* Jesus *for* Jesus.

It makes sense why Lauren, as amazing as that woman is, will never be for me what I most deeply need, because I have not been made *by* Lauren *for* Lauren. I have been made *by* Jesus *for* Jesus. It makes sense why my kids, as much as I delight in them, will never ultimately be satisfying to me, because I have not been made *by* them or *for* them. I have not been made *by* sex or *for* sex, *by* money or *for* money. I have not been made *by* success or *for* success.

I have been made *by* Christ *for* Christ, and life is found there and there alone. This is what we're seeing in this text. My ancient friend Augustine says it this way: "You move us to delight in praising you..." I'm going to come back to that phrase. "...for you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." I love the first phrase. Don't miss the first phrase for the point that's being made in the second. "You move us to delight in praising you."

Here's the human experience. "I just can't wait for [fill in the blank]." Then what happens? A lot of times we actually get to step into that "I can't wait for." "I can't wait to get *this* promotion, to get *this* car, to get *this* house, to get *this* relationship, for *this*, for *that*, for *this*." We step into it, and there's this moment of praise. I'm not lying.

You get that promotion, you start a business, you graduate and get your first job, you get that first house, you get married or find a friend group you're going to do deep life with, you have a child, you finally make the kind of money you thought maybe you would eventually be able to make, and there's a moment of praise in that. There's this moment that feels like you've arrived, but it doesn't linger. It does not linger, because you were not made *by* or *for*...

What does Augustine mean here? I don't mean to exegete Augustine, but when Augustine says, "You move us to delight in praising you," he's talking about moving us out of praising these other ancillary things. It's a very different thing to say, "Thank you, God, for this job. Thank you, God, for

this house. Thank you, God, for this money. Thank you, God, for this relationship. Thank you, God, for *this*. Thank you, God, for *this*."

All of that is good and right and beautiful, but there's this thing that happens in the soul because of the Word where we finally just go, "Thank you," and we relinquish everything else. That's what you see so often in the Bible when men and women are praising Jesus in the midst of some of the most horrific, difficult circumstances imaginable.

Why can the apostles praise the name of Jesus after they had the flesh beaten off their backs and they leave the Sanhedrin covered in their own blood and swelling? They left singing and rejoicing. What is *that*? It's relinquishment. It's, "Praise you for whatever. You have me. I am yours. Come what may. You are my King."

Then Lewis, just because I'll make somebody a little bit more modern agree also. C.S. Lewis says it this way: "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." Right? You were made *by* Jesus *for* Jesus. You feel like, "My job is not satisfying." Okay, because your job wasn't meant to satisfy you. Just be free.

"Uh, stuff with my spouse." Yeah, she or he probably has similar concerns. You guys weren't made to complete one another. You were made to go on this journey with one another, growing in a love for the beauty of Jesus Christ who made you for himself. I could keep putting anything in our lives in this category. You have been made *for* him *by* him. If we could ever get that and be serious about it, I think some of the lingering angst that exists in our lives might begin to evaporate over a period of time.

Look at what comes next after this. There are some pretty crazy bold statements John has made right out of the gate. He then rolls out an invitation and a purpose. This is verse 4. **"In him was life, and the life was the light of men."** Remember what he said earlier. What's the big purpose of John? That you might know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that life is found in him. Why? Because you have been made *by* him *for* him.

Now you have this invitation to come into life. The picture of Jesus in the Bible is not a furrowed-brow, angry Jesus but a warm, forgiving, welcoming Christ. Did you know in two separate places in the Synoptic Gospels Jesus is called the *friend of sinners*? In one of those texts he's accused of being

a drunkard and a glutton because he would be with, have dinner with, hang out with sinners for hours on end. I can only imagine the beating Jesus would take in social media as he did ministry in 2018 if he were here.

We see in the book of Hebrews that we have in Jesus an empathetic High Priest. Have you ever thought about Jesus that way? Empathetic? How rare is human empathy? Yet you and I get divine empathy. To think about the darkest moment of your life, being broken and angry and weepy and there's no hope and all is lost, and to think of Jesus not as a furrowed brow... "After the cross, you're not going to trust me?"

To take that image out of our heads and replace it with what we'll see in John with Jesus full of empathy and grace, being tempted in every way that we are tempted and yet without sin, not condemning but saying, "I know; I'm here. I know; I'm here." Not with "I can't believe you." Oh, he totally believes you did that. That's what the cross is all about.

Again, Bruner, who for me has been a guide through the gospel of John. If you're listening to this podcast six years from now and you want to know the commentaries I used, don't email me because I won't remember, but Bruner's and Carson's commentaries are the two primary ones I've been using here.

Here's Bruner again. Bruner says this is the invitation: "'Come into union with the Word who made you, and you will come to Life!' 'You came *from* him; please come back *to* him.' 'You were made for him.' The result of this reunion will be more than human existence; it will be human *'Life.'*" That's the invitation happening right now.

Look at the victory that comes from this. Look at verse 5. There's something that happens here in the Greek. I'm going to point it out even though I don't like to do that a lot. I never want to rob you of confidence from just reading that book in front of you and knowing it and understanding it, but there's something really cool here I want to point out. You can see it in English. I just want to highlight it.

Look at verse 5. "**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**" Up until now in our first five verses, all of our verbs have been various forms of past or past continuing, and now, for the first time, we have a present continuing, so John is not saying the darkness *once* was beaten but that the darkness has been defeated once and for all.

In fact, if you write in your Bibles, you can circle the *S* on the end of *shines*. It's present, continuing action. You could even add the preposition *on* to the word *shine*. On top of that, because it's present continuing, you could add the phrase *still even on*, so that this might read, "The light shines on still even now in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

The light of the Word made flesh, the one who was in the beginning *with* God, the one who *is* God in the flesh...his victory over darkness, as seen most fully in his crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, is continuing to shine on. If you think about the forces aligned against Jesus Christ on the cross, it reads like the "Who's Who" of earthly and heavenly powers.

Let me go through. Christ is arrested. He's beaten. The beard is pulled out of his face. He's spit upon. He's punched. He's slapped. He's mocked. He's stripped naked. He has nails driven through his hands and feet. Keep in mind every muscle necessary, every gland required, every piece of wood, the iron required, the rope required were all created by Jesus.

You can't spit on Jesus' face without the capacity for your muscles to work up the spit in your mouth and spit it out. You want to talk about the relinquishment of Jesus Christ to the will of God the Father and his own will to purchase for himself many sons. It's Jesus allowing what he created and what he could dissolve in an instant to assault him.

What are the powers arrayed against Jesus in his passion? The power of sin. Let's think about how powerful sin is. Sin fractured the universe, every aspect of it. What we're seeing in southern India right now is a result of a fracturing of the universe caused by sin. You and I have a tendency to think about sin in regard to bad deeds.

Sin is so much more complex and woven into the fabric of our creation. It's beyond our imagination. (Maybe one day we'll do a series on just sin. You'll be excited about *that* one, huh?) What we see here is the power of sin and death is arrayed on Jesus. He is arrested. He is assaulted. He is mocked. He is belittled. There is all sorts of violence falling on Jesus. Not just physical violence. He is dehumanized. He is mocked and belittled. He is tortured and eventually killed.

It's not just sin, but it's also Satan. I know Satan kind of fell out of favor in the Enlightenment period, where now we just think it's ridiculous to believe in an actual Devil. Does he have a pointy tail and a pitchfork? I don't know what he looks like. There are certainly not a lot of descriptions other than

an angel of light, but I can tell you this: you disbelieve in him and demons to your own peril. I don't think there's a demon under *every* bush, but they're under a few.

Sometimes it's just a nail in your tire, if you read *This Present Darkness*. It's sometimes not a demon trying to make you crash your car. Sometimes you just ran over a nail, and that happens in a Genesis 3 world, but you make light of Satan and demonic powers to your own peril. The Bible is full of... Even what we read in Colossians: principalities and powers. That's not talking about governmental powers; that's talking about spiritual powers in the heavenlies.

So, you have sin and death, you have Satan and demonic forces, and then you have this union between things that don't agree on anything that agree in order to kill Jesus, the Eternal Word. You have the secular world. Who's crucifying Jesus? Rome. But who also is there? The Pharisees and Sadducees. Religion. When does the secular world and religion come together and go, "Yeah, let's do this together"? Very rarely, yet they join hands here to kill the Word.

Even the faithlessness of his cowering disciples joins in the allegiance of all of these foes to kill the Word. You're like, "Oh, that's probably overstated." Well, Judas is the one who betrayed him. Peter was the one who denied him. Where was the rest of the group in supporting him in the darkest night of human history? Okay, I'll tell you. Nobody knows, because they ran and hid not long after swearing they would never do that.

We see all of this. So what happens? The world turns dark. In the middle of the day it goes dark. Like, "can't see hand in front of your face" dark. What happens? Well, gosh, you know what happens. Sunday happens. The resurrection occurs, and the power of sin; the power of Satan; the power of the secular world; the power of dead, unorthodox, wicked religion that seeks to control, manipulate, and overpower; the weariness of disciples...

All of it conquered in the resurrection, and the light shone in the darkness, and the darkness could not overcome it. John is really serious about you and me, to this day, knowing that's an ongoing, continuous act. I love this, because if you start thinking about the sorrows you and I can endure in life in a broken world, sometimes those sorrows are on us because of just the brokenness of a Genesis 3 world.

Sometimes we are attacked, we are misunderstood, we are misrepresented, we are caricatured, but the victory of light over darkness trumps the plans of Satan, the plans of demonic creatures. It

trumps the plans of the secular world. It trumps the plans of organized religion to control and manipulate and build a kingdom unto itself instead of letting us be free and alive in Christ. It overpowers our failures as followers of Jesus.

Has anybody ever fallen asleep praying? Like, "I'm just going to dive into the Lord here. Jesus, I...I love you so much." We can be so self-condemning in that moment. Philip Yancey drew my attention as I was reading one of his books. I'll sometimes do that, where I'm just praying, and then it has been 20 minutes and I'm like, "Oh gosh. Okay, was that the third heaven? I don't think so."

Philip Yancey talked about how safe does a child have to feel to fall asleep in their father or mother's arms? I thought that was a better way of looking at it than my self-condemnation. Again, John is assuring his readers then and now that the light shines on even on the failures of his disciples, over the power of sin and death, over the power of Satan, over the power of the secular world, over the power of empty, controlling religion and into the souls of his sons and daughters.

I know we're in different places today across this room. For many of us, I'm talking about Jesus in this way, and you're like, "Oh my gosh. That's him. I know him. That is. I love this. Yes!" For some of us...I just want to be really honest...somewhere on the journey, faith took a back seat. It stopped being a priority in our lives. Maybe that happened gradually over a period of time. For others of us still, there's a moment we can name where we knew, "God cannot be good because *this* happened," and we turned our back.

Others of us just find in us an apathy. Even in one breath we would go, "Oh, that sounds so good. Oh, I would love for that to be true." Our souls just feel stuck. Just apathetic. "The pleasures of this world will be enough for now. I'm too tired to make any other move. Too much is going on. My world is broken. These things can't be true for me." That's why I'm so excited for you to watch who all Jesus redeems and rescues, loves on, and calls from death to life in the next few months and/or year.

I want to end my sermon with this quote again. "'Come into union with the Word who made you, and you will come to Life!' 'You came *from* him; please come back *to* him.' 'You were made for him.' The result of this reunion will be more than human existence; it will be human '*Life*.'" You were made *by* him and *for* him, and nothing on earth will satisfy you until you come into union with what you were created for. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for these men and women. I thank you for your grace on us. You have made us for yourself. I just ask that as we consider these things, as we gaze upon your beauty, as King David would write about in Psalm 27, as we seek you in your temple, that you would give us eyes to see, ears to hear, a heart that longs. I pray for the angst that many of us might be feeling in this room, and I pray that the word preached today would provide an answer.

For men and women who feel empty and men and women who feel like no matter what they drink they can't be satisfied and what they eat they can never get full and what relationships they're in are always hollow, there's always something wrong, or some experience of loss that has them unable to enter into this rest, I ask that your Word would provide them answers today by your Spirit's power.

For my brothers and sisters, my friends who trusted their souls to you years ago and have, for whatever reason, put their faith in the back seat and you are kind of a tagline to their life but they certainly are not pursuing you, loving you, worshiping you, chasing you, I just pray that the word preached, the word received this morning might jostle our hearts and that there might be a prayer of relinquishment that says, "I have been made *by* you and *for* you. Help me." I ask in all things that you would deepen our love for, our worship of, and our delight in Jesus, who was in the beginning, who was with God, who is God. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.