

Over the next few months we're going to focus on the Gospel of John. The sheet you have will give a bit of background information and I would urge you to have a read of it because it will help to put some of the readings in context, and give a better understanding of why John writes as he does. I have chosen John for a couple of reasons: John 20:30-31 *Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

- 1: That you may go on believing
- 2: That you may have life

The whole Bible is primarily concerned with God's revelation of himself to human beings. That revelation comes through nature, events in human history, and indirect messages heard by those chosen to receive them and passed on by them to others. There is no clear distinction made between what God says and what he does. Words are also actions, and actions are kind of words. God's words are always effective, he speaks and it is done. By his word the heavens and the earth were made. He said let there be light and there was light. His word goes out and what he intended to do is done. His word comes to the prophets and they are constrained to proclaim it.

Similarly, God deals with his servants according to his word. To tell the story of what he has done is also to relate what he has said. The Song of Deborah, For example, is both a rehearsal of the righteous acts of the Lord and also a record of his judgement on his enemies. It is significant that the same Hebrew word *dabhar* is used both for word and event in both old and new Testaments.

The Christian gospel is so bound up with Jesus of Nazareth, the climax of biblical revelation, that the message in which it is proclaimed is equated with him. It's all about Jesus.

This first section of the book acts as the prologue, with chapter 21 being the epilogue. There is a structure to the prologue:



The unique contribution of the prologue is that it reveals the Word of God not merely as an attribute of God, but as a distinct person within the godhead, dwelling with the creator before creation began, and acting as the divine agent in creation. The prologue doesn't speak of the word of God but of *the Word* who was *with God*, and *was God*. It is his life which is imparted to all living creatures. In human beings, the life infused into them by the Word is more than physical.

The divine Word is the source of our intellectual and spiritual understanding, our conscience as well as our consciousness. There is an affinity between the light which we possess and the greater Light from which it comes. This means that we are able to look outside ourselves, to contemplate and reflect upon the world, to understand the working of its laws and reflect something of its glory in art and literature. And by this light we are also able to look inward and to become conscious of the strange contradictions in our nature: our capacity for doing good and propensity for doing evil; our heavenly aspirations and earthbound desires; reaching for the stars and descent into the abyss; hope and despair; piety and godlessness. The truth is that the light with which the Word illuminates all people is a light that shines into the darkness. Human beings, made originally in the image of God, are fallen creatures and although that image of God remains, it is impaired. The world into which we are born, once seen by its creator to be 'good' is now disordered by sin.

However overwhelming the darkness may seem, the light of the divine Word shines on and is not obliterated. With a life there is always light. In fact, life is dependent on light. When we receive life through Christ, we also receive his light. His light as the light of conscience and reason that is in every human being. It is also a spiritual light which enables us to see and understand God. John 8:12 Jesus said, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*"

God never leaves himself without witness in the world. The 1<sup>st</sup> witness is creation itself – nothing that has been made has been made without him, and it all points to him. Romans 1:20 *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.* So, creation itself and all God's natural blessings give witness to God. They give some light, some understanding to everyone. But most people do not receive the full light, the word. Those who do not believe remain in spiritual darkness.

Then we read of John the Baptist whose purpose was to direct people to the word made flesh, a man that they could see. The gospel starts with this because John is primarily concerned to record that, by an act of divine condescension and infinite compassion, the Word has interrupted this disordered and murky world, and entered it in precisely the sphere where sin is most deeply entrenched – in us. He became flesh, with all its inherent weakness and frailty.

Those people who did receive Jesus: that is put their faith in him, who believed in his name, but given an incredible privilege. They were given the right to be children of God. All people are created by God, but not all people are his children. To receive the right to be a child of God, we must believe in his son Jesus. 1 John 3:1 *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God.* This is a spiritual birth which comes through faith. In order to receive an inheritance, we 1<sup>st</sup> must be children. In order to be children, we 1<sup>st</sup> must be born. In order to be born into God's family, we 1<sup>st</sup> must accept Christ as our Lord and saviour. We do not become children by our own effort or by good works. Even if a servant works in someone's house faithfully for many years, that servant will never become a son or daughter – unless they are legally adopted, in which case, they have the full rights of any other son or daughter. Ephesians 1:4-5 *Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ.*

We are children of God not by works but by spiritual birth, which Jesus talks to Nicodemus about in chapter 3.

To become flesh, or human, the Word had to enter human life at a particular moment in history, and as a member of a particular race and nation. Preparation for his coming at this time and in this manner had been made long before. God had chosen people, to whom he revealed himself more frequently and more fully than to any other people. Accordingly, when the Word eventually became incarnate among that people in fulfilment of the promises made to them it might have been expected that he would be welcomed as the one who was entering his

home. However, when he came to Israel the people, for the most part, rejected him. This, however, did not frustrate God's redeeming purpose. His truth had to be revealed. His gracious love for sinners had to be expressed, and expressed in a way that only he could express it, for he was full of grace. No one reading the story of Jesus conversation with the Samaritan woman, of the restoration of sight to the man born blind, of the feeding of the hungry crowd, of the raising of Lazarus, or the washing of the disciples feet and the rest of the passion story, could fail to notice the grace that flows from Jesus. He was also full of truth and John's gospel has the fullest record of his teaching about himself and the nature and purpose of his mission.

Over the next few months you'll hear the phrase *Missio Dei* from time to time. It reminds us that God is a sending God – that is he sends his people into the earth with his message, and that is something he has always done. It is his character. Sometimes we say that the Church of God has a mission, but *Missio Dei* suggests that the God of mission has a Church - God is at work in the world. God is at work in this area, and the best thing we can do is to work out what God is doing and join in. We have the perfect example of the missionary heart of God in this passage – the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. The Father sent the Son, in the power of the Spirit to rescue us and bring us life.

Today, we have the privilege of being children of God, having been adopted into his family through faith in Christ.

And so, we come to this table, with its elements that remind us that Jesus came into this world in human form, and that he lived and died in order that we might believe and have life. We come in faith, believing that his promises are true. This is not the exclusive table of Monkton and Prestwick North Church, or of any one Church, but of our Lord Jesus. It is his instruction, and him that we remember as we come. It is open to all who love Him. If you are not sure about your relationship with him, simply pass the bread and wine on when they come to you, but think about what they represent as you do that; Christ's sacrifice for you.

It is open to all who respond in faith to Jesus words:  
Come to me and you will never hunger;  
Come to me and you will never thirst;  
Come to me all who are weary  
And I will give you rest.

Come and share the bread of life,

Come and receive the Love of God,  
Come and meet the Lord who offers us new life.