

To Exalt Christ

To Equip, Encourage, Exhort and Edify God's Elect

The High View of Christ: His Identity – John 1:1-14

Our Wednesday evening Bible Study group has just completed a year and a half study of the gospel of John. It has been chapter by chapter, verse by verse. John's gospel has given us a high view of the eternal Christ, his identity as the Son of God and of the gospel. The 14 opening verses encapsulate John's entire gospel about Jesus, starting with his pre-incarnate state with God the Father, then detailing his incarnate earthly ministry.

John Calvin writes – *"The other three [gospels] are more copious in their narrative of the life and death of Christ, but John dwells more largely on the doctrine by which the office of Christ, together with the power of his death and resurrection, is unfolded. The doctrine is far more clearly exhibited by him. The three former exhibit his body, but John exhibits his soul."*

IOW Calvin says that John doctrinally/theologically takes his reader deeper into the person and practice of Christ and thus that of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Someone once said, *"Doctrine leads to doxology."* IOW it leads to praise. They are right. We are meant to drill down deep into the word to mine its riches. It is why the Reformers, such as John Calvin, preached expository sermons.

Calvin preached book by book, chapter by chapter, verse by verse. To show how committed he was to expository preaching, when Calvin returned to Geneva in 1541 at the invitation of the city council, the first Sunday he was back in the pulpit he took up exactly where he had left off in 1538.

Our passage this morning from John 1:1-14 is a theological and doctrinal exposition of Christ by John which takes us deep into the word, both written and incarnate and as Calvin said, “*exhibits his soul.*” John first presents Christ as –

The Word – John 1:1-5

John opens in verses 1-2 – “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.*” ‘Word’ in the Greek broadly means, “*Something said*”. But in its narrowest, most meaningful sense it means – “*the Divine Expression (i.e. Christ).*”

How much more specific can a definition get than that? Christ the Son is the *Divine Expression*, the holy, human manifestation of God the Father. In John 14:9 Jesus said – “*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.*” In Colossians 1:15 and 19 Paul wrote - “*He is the image of the invisible God...For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.*” In Hebrews 1:3 the writer says - “*The Son is the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being.*” Therefore, John uses precisely the right word to describe the ‘Word’, the Divine Expression, Jesus Christ. Jesus is God in human form.

When John writes, “*In the beginning...*” and “*He was with God in the beginning*” he uses the same words as Genesis 1:1 - “*In the beginning...*” It is the same beginning. John is speaking here of the eternal and therefore divine nature of the pre-incarnate Christ.

It is before he became flesh and made his dwelling among us. His divine nature would never leave him even when he became flesh. His divinity/humanity were essential for our salvation. Divinity in Christ, the Word, meant he was sinless, therefore able to take our sin and atone for it.

Right in the middle of those declaratory statements of John is the phrase – “*and the Word was God.*” Those four words speak to his divinity, his eternality and identity. All of those qualities fit into our salvation –

divinity to pay for our sin. Eternality for that which Christ promised, namely that whoever believes in him shall have eternal life. John 3:16. Only he who “*was God*” can grant that. My go-to chapter/verse is John 6:40, where Jesus promised – “*For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day.*” Two promises of Christ.

In verse 3 John says – “*Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*” A 2012 book by a scientist who was an anti-theist was entitled – “*A Universe From Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing.*” The author had his own atheistic theories, but John 1:3 and Genesis 1:1 answer the question – “*Why There Something Rather Than Nothing?*” It is because, “*Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*” There is something because there was/is someone.

It is called, “*ex nihilo*” meaning “*out of nothing.*” God alone in three, being self-existent and eternal, has that ability to create something out of nothing. God simply said, as Genesis 1 records, “*Let there be...*” and it was. His word was sufficient in power and purpose.

John tells us that Christ the Word was there so that “*Through him all things were made.*” Verses 4 and 5 speak of Christ that “*In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*” He speaks of him being life and light, shining in the darkness. But the darkness did not understand it as John’s gospel tells us that Christ was rejected. The cross bore that out.

Jesus would later testify as recorded by John to being the light of the world and being the resurrection and the life. At creation light came to the universe & the earth. Then in logical order came life in its various forms. Light and life go hand-in-hand.

A plant will die for lack of light. Our vitamin D level goes down in winter when we are not out in the sunlight. Light and life go hand-in-hand

with Christ as well. When exposed to the Word as the light of the world, we do not walk in darkness. Instead, we walk in his light and find life & life eternal. Next John takes his readers to the one who is the witness to the Word.

The Witness – John 1:6-9

John wrote in verses 6-7 – *“There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe”*. This is John the Baptist. When John says he was sent it means that John the Baptist did not come on his own initiative, volition, determination, mission or self-call. He came because he was called and sent by God. Luke’s gospel account is valuable in that it tells us the origin and purpose of John the Baptist.

His birth was foretold just like that of Jesus. Zechariah, his father was told that John would be great in the sight of the Lord. That he would be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth. That he would prepare the way for the Lord, all of which he did.

He came as a witness to the light which was Jesus Christ. Once Jesus came, he gave him the pre-eminence. John the Baptist broke the silence of those 400 years between the testaments. God, through the prophet Amos had foretold of a famine, not of food or water, but of hearing *“the words of the Lord.”* Amos 8:11. John was God’s witness to end that famine.

Why was he sent by God as a witness of the Word? Verse 7 - *“He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe.”* The bottom line, the purpose, the ministry of John was *“so that all men might believe.”* A constant theme running throughout John’s gospel account was the value and absolute necessity of belief in Christ.

In Romans 10:13-15 the apostle Paul brings together the message of salvation and the messenger. He wrote – *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.’”*

Paul captures beautifully the essence of who John the Baptist was as that witness to the light who was also the Word. He was that preacher, whose feet may not have been beautiful but his good news was – *“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* He brought the good news who is Jesus Christ, the Divine Expression. We are all here because we have all had our own ‘John the Baptist’ whose preaching pointed us to Christ and awakened us by the Holy Spirit’s power to our need for Christ and who kept us fed/nourished in the faith.

Verse 9 records that John was a witness to, *“The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.”* John Calvin, 1509-1564, the great Reformer, comments – *“Christ is the light, shining from itself and by itself, and enlightening the whole world by its radiance; so that no other source or cause of splendor is anywhere to be found.”*

What Calvin is witnessing to is the sufficiency, the singularity, the exclusivity that is found in Christ alone as there is no other source or cause of such splendor. One important characteristic or attribute of God and thus of Christ is his **aseity**, the fact that he is not dependent on anything or anyone.

Paul summed up that independence in Colossians 1:17 when he spoke of Christ – *“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”* This is who John the Baptist was witnessing to, namely Christ. As Calvin said so well, *“the light, shining from itself and by itself, and enlightening the whole world by its radiance.”* That is the one who John said was coming into –

The World – John 1:10-13

John the gospel writer now in verses 10-13 comes back to speaking of Christ as the one who was coming and indeed had come into the world. In these verses John gives us a snapshot of the three-year ministry of Christ and what he experienced.

In verses 10-11 John wrote – *“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”* We discovered in our study that Jesus was constantly working to make himself known as the one sent from God. No less than 38 times does Jesus speak of, *“him who sent me.”* Despite the miracles, the preaching and teaching that left people in awe, *“...his own did not receive him.”*

Our study coincided with Easter & the pertinent passages, the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus' last evening with his disciples, the crucifixion and resurrection all merged with Easter. Those passages testified that, *“his own did not receive him”*, but instead rejected him, which also meant they rejected the one who sent him.

It shows that to receive him is to believe him and the one who sent him and some did. Not all rejected him. John gloriously testifies to that fact in verses 12-13 – *“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”*

In John 3 Jesus had a visitor, named Nicodemus. He came to Jesus at night. He acknowledged Jesus as a teacher who had come from God. His proof of that was the miracles Jesus had done. Here was a man in whom God was working. This would be proved out later as he, along with Joseph of Arimathea, would reverently secure the body of Christ from the cross for a proper burial. Their faith was born out by their action.

To be born of God is to be born again. It is not a doctrine or a theology that is spoken of very much these days. But there it is in John 3:3,5,7. Jesus makes being born again a necessity, in fact a three-fold imperative. Jesus told him and through John, he tells us three times – *“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again...I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit...You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.”*

To be born of God is to be born again. Jesus cut-to-the-chase with Nicodemus and with others that he undoubtedly confronted with this same thrice repeated imperative. To be born of God is to be born again, to be given *“the right to become children of God.”*

To be born again is go through a rebirth which equates to regeneration. To be born again is to begin a new life spiritually by the intervening, renewing power of the Holy Spirit. To be born again is become a child of God. Regeneration leads to receiving Christ and believing in his name. We receive and recognize him as being that true light that has come into the world and into us and who is –

The Way – John 1:14

Verse 14 – *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* That verse brings together the grandeur, the glory and the grace of Christ.

When John says, *“The Word became flesh”* he describes the combined grandeur, majesty, dignity of his divinity and his humanity with no depletion or degradation of either. They are in him in their fullness. Therefore, he is completely able to deal with our sin & purchase our redemption, our salvation. *“The Word became flesh”* just so he could do that.

In Christ's glory we see him as the “*One and Only, who came from the Father.*” We spoke about his singularity and exclusivity. Jesus would say in John 14:6 – *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*” It is another way of saying, the “*One and Only*” which he is. There is no other. The Reformer John Calvin would say, *Christ alone, Solus Christus*. Calvary made him worthy of all titles and names including the “*One and Only*”.

In Christ's grace is his willingness and ability to deal with our sin. To cause us to be reborn into his image as he first created us in his image. Grace works through regeneration, justification and sanctification to bring us to glorification. All that is undergirded by him being the truth. This is the high view of Christ. His identity in full. Amen – **Soli Deo Gloria.**