

Invitation to Life John 1:1-18

I. Introduction

Today we begin a new series in the Gospel of John, and, studying a Gospel during this strange season is very appropriate as we'll see. The name of our series will be "Come and See." The entire Gospel of John is an invitation to all of us to "come and see" who this Jesus really is.

Come is the first word of command spoken by Jesus in John. It is then found on the lips of those who have encountered Jesus, as they invite others to meet him.

Come is also one of Jesus' favorite words, because it is the essential verb of discipleship. Jesus does at times tell us to *go*, but for the most part, Jesus invites us to *come* to him and encounter him, and in doing so, we will *see* who he really is. We *come* and then we *see*. Note that it is not "*see then come*." We cannot stand off at a safe distance, and then decide what we want to do with Jesus. That's what Caiaphas did. That's what Pilate did. They saw Jesus, but it did them no good. They never came. They never believed. We usually say, "seeing is believing." Not for John. For John, "Believing is seeing." Coming, encountering and believing takes the scales off our eyes so we will truly see Jesus, the lover of our souls. We come, and we will see (John 1:39).

And, the all-important result is what? Life! Life abundant and life eternal! When we *come* and when we believe and when we truly *see*, we will *live*. That's the ultimate invitation from Jesus - an invitation to life! As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "Jesus calls people not to a new religion; but to life" (Bonhoeffer, 467)!

And, that is why it is so pertinent to our situation today. Life is what we want. Sadly, we see a lot of death around us right now with this virus. And, as we celebrated last week, Jesus conquered death so that we can have life eternal. But, the invitation from Jesus is not just life eternal, it's life abundant right here and right now. In some ways, with this shelter in place, we feel like we are merely surviving. Jesus invites us into a life of thriving, of abundance, of meaning and hope and acceptance and joy and love and so much more that John wants to show us. So, I invite you to come and see this Jesus, and the life he invites you into in the Gospel of John.

Now John has written a unique book, the most unique of the four Gospels. One person likens John "to a pool in which a child can wade and an elephant can swim" (Morris, 7). On the one hand, it is commonly given to new believers and even inquirers to examine the foundations of Christian faith. On the other hand, as Leon Morris has said, "years of close study of this gospel does not leave one with the feeling of having mastered it, but rather with the conviction that it is still strange, restless, and unfamiliar" (Morris, 7). I can vouch for that. I've been through this Gospel a couple times and each time I feel like a child wading in a pool.

II. Background

But, before we get into our text this morning, I want to spend a little bit of time giving you some background information for the Gospel. And, by that, I mean answering the who, when and why questions.

A. Who?

First of all, who wrote John? Within the Gospel itself, the author is identified only as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Tradition within the early church identifies the author as John, son of Zebedee, a disciple of Jesus.

B. When?

When did John write his Gospel? The traditional date is usually given late in the first century, like around 80-85.

C. Why?

Thirdly, and most importantly, why did John write his Gospel? John clearly states his purpose in chapter 20. He says this, [30](#) *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these 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 has given us this great gift so that we may believe and by believing, we may have life, abundant and eternal life!

Indeed, the key word in the Gospel is *believe*, used 98 times. And this word believe is always used as a verb in John. In other words, believe in John is not just mental assent. For John, to believe implies action. As one writer says, "Faith for John is an activity which takes people right out of themselves and moves them into Christ" (Morris, 336). It's an activity of sharing in the very life of Christ. That's our invitation.

III. Introduction to the Prologue

That gives you some background. I'm going to transition to our text today, the prologue of John, chapter 1, verses 1-18. Now, if you've been with us since last year, you'll know that we studied the prologue to John for our Advent series leading up to Christmas last year. Those four sermons provided a helpful introduction to our studies in John now.

Today, I plan on going through the entire prologue in just one sermon, which is a terrible thing to do! But, I will refer you to those other four sermons if you are interested.

The prologue to John is a magnificent piece of literature. And, it is much more than simply a preface to his Gospel. The prologue is more like an overture to a great musical. It's a bit like the first song in *The Sound of Music*. That first song, *The Hills Are Alive*, introduces all the great themes for the rest of the musical. So, the prologue to John will introduce us to all the great themes of his Gospel, things like life, light, darkness, witness, truth, believe, glory, etc.

But, also, we will find that this prologue will give us a set of glasses for understanding the book. It has been said that one should read the prologue before every single scene in the story, that's how important this prologue is.

What I want to do this morning is look at 3 different invitations that John gives us in this prologue. And, all the invitations ultimately lead us to life, because they all lead us to the Word made flesh.

We'll begin by reading the first 9 verses. This is an invitation to the light.

IV. Invitation to the Light (1-9)

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 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.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. (ESV)

A. The Word & the Light

John famously begins his Gospel referring to the Word. It's an intriguing beginning. I will come back to "the Word" when John comes back to it in verse 14. But, John tells us that the Word, who we will find out later is Jesus, is God and all things are made through him. In other words, if we had a microscope powerful enough, we would see the imprint "Made by Jesus Christ" on everything, including every cell in our bodies.

B. The First Invitation to the Light

And, then we get verse four where we get the first invitation in the Gospel: Come and see the Word, attach yourselves to him and you will be in the life-giving light because he is the light of all humanity.

C. The Witness to the Light

Indeed, the word light is used seven times in these nine verses, as John, the Gospel writer, introduces John the Baptist in verse 6. The Gospel is now located in a particular time and place by bringing John the Baptist into the conversation. All four Gospels include the witness of John the Baptist, meaning you can't understand Jesus without understanding John the Baptist. We'll say more about John the Baptist next week, but here John the Baptist is introduced as the great herald of the good news of Jesus. John the Baptist was not the light; he simply pointed to Jesus, the light of all humanity.

D. The Two Qualities of Light

Light is one of those great themes in John's Gospel. And, it's a powerful metaphor, isn't it? There are two key characteristics of light that John raises that help us understand Jesus as the light, even the light of the world as he will later call himself.

1. Light Overcomes

Without light, there is darkness, and, darkness is scary! As a kid, I know I was scared of the dark. We feel very insecure when we can't see. Someone has said, "it does no good to curse the darkness, simply light a candle." Why? B/c even a solitary candle in a dark room overcomes the darkness of the room. Darkness has no chance even against the light of a solitary candle.

The candle was lit in Jesus and, verse 5, the darkness has not overcome or extinguished this light of all humanity, Jesus. That is the Easter story! Darkness threw everything at Jesus, even death, and he overcame it!

This means that Jesus, the true light, shines into all the darkness of our lives, your life, my life – all the disappointments, all the sadness, all the loss, all the pain, all the suffering, all the anxiety of a pandemic, all the turmoil of a pandemic. He shines into all that darkness, and he overcomes it all! He is the light to all mankind even today.

2. Light "truly" guides

Secondly, John tells us that Jesus is the true light, verse 9, that will guide us to true life. Without light, we are lost and in danger of tripping and stumbling over things because we can't see. But, with light, we can miss the potholes and obstacles in the path in front of us. The light illuminates the path and guides us around problem areas.

So, Jesus, the light of humanity, overcomes darkness and guides us to life, life abundant and life eternal.

E. The Bold Statement about the Light

But note the bold statement John is making here which I have alluded to already. He is saying there is no other light in our world that will bring life abundant and life eternal. There is only one true light for all humanity, Jesus. There isn't one separate light for Americans and Europeans and Asians. There isn't an incandescent light and an LED light and a fluorescent light. There is only one light for all of humanity for which humanity can find true life! Later on Jesus will say that he is *the way, the truth and the life*, no one gets to God except through him (John 14:6).

So, the invitation is to come to Jesus, the true light and you will see.

Let's move on to our next invitation. I'm going to re-read verse 9 and go through verse 13.

V. Invitation to a New Identity: A Child of God (9-13)

9 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. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (ESV)

A. Identity of being a Child of God

At the very center of the prologue is another invitation. It's the amazing invitation to a new identity, to become a child of God, an adopted brother/sister of Jesus.

"It is the highest privilege of the Gospel" (Packer, 186). When we attach ourselves to Jesus, we enter into a deeply personal relationship with the living God exactly like Jesus has. We are adopted as sons and daughters of the living God. It's incredible! In the beginning, John says, Jesus, the Word, is with God, meaning in intimate communion with the Father, in a deeply personal relationship with the Father. And, when you come and believe, you enter into the same kind of relationship, the same kind of intimacy with the living God.

B. Identity Highlighted in the Resurrection Appearance

Jesus highlights our new identity in the resurrection scene in John, chapter 20. Mary goes to the empty tomb and recognizes Jesus and calls him, "Rabboni." Jesus responds by saying, "Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and *your Father*, to my God and *your God*'" (John 20:17). That is the first time Jesus calls the disciples brothers and sisters. And, God is not just his Father, but ours as well. Yes, we can call the living God "Abba" like our brother Jesus! It's an intimate family word used by children, even babies can say "Abba."

Even if "Father" is a problematic word for you, I invite you to give Jesus a chance to tell you about the Heavenly Abba. Let Jesus define Abba for you, and you will be amazed! For this Father has boundless love and endless mercy. Isn't that Good News?

C. Identity Change Requires Only Belief

And, in verse 13, John tells us that becoming a child of God comes *only through believing!* Believing is the only requirement.

- This new identity doesn't come by birth. Just because your last name is Smith or Johnson or Reese does no good for you to enter the family of God. You must believe.
- This new identity doesn't come because of your nationality. Because you are an American or a Canadian or a Welsh does no good for you to enter the family of God. You must believe.
- And, this new identity doesn't come because of anything you do! Like Joel said last week, you can't do anything to move from perishable to imperishable. No achievement by you or anyone else will get you this new identity! You can't work your way into

the family of God. Just like there was nothing you did to become the child of your parents. You didn't do anything there, and you do nothing here. You simply come and believe and then you will see.

And, when you do, you have a new identity. You become a child of the living God. It is an invitation into an eternity of love! That's good news.

Lastly, presence, verse 14.

VI. Invitation to His Presence (14-18)

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.') *16 For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. (ESV)*

A. The Word

Now we get to talk about the Word. John began verse 1 by saying, *"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* He then comes back to the Word here in verse 14. And, *"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."* What an amazing statement! Jesus, the Word, who is God, takes on human flesh. In our great need, God sends his son to be present with us. He is Immanuel, the with-us God. Jesus invites us to come and see, to attach ourselves to him, and we will have his life-giving presence with us too.

That's the invitation, but what about this word *Word*, the Greek word being "logos"? And, even more fascinating is John will not refer back to Jesus as the "logos" again in the Gospel. So, I want to dig into these verses by asking two questions:

1. What is John doing here with the word logos?
2. Why doesn't he refer back to Jesus being the logos throughout the rest of his Gospel?

And, as we answer these two questions, we will be led back to the invitation of presence.

B. John and the Logos

So, first of all, what is John doing here with the word "logos?" Well, fundamentally, John is an Evangelist. He wants to share the Good News of Jesus with as many people as possible so that they may come and see Jesus and ultimately have life in him. And this word "logos" is a contact point with all the surrounding cultures. In the first century, *logos* is a loaded word that gives him common ground to talk with all of his neighbors about Jesus. It means a lot of things to a lot of different people groups. In fact, some commentators think we shouldn't even translate logos into English because the English word "word" doesn't even get close to capturing what logos means. Now, John isn't going to affirm everything that his neighbors mean by logos, but it is a contact point. And, he's going to start there to connect with everyone.

C. The Word to Others

1. Greek Philosophers

For example, to many Greek philosophers of the day, the logos is the rational principle of the universe. The logos is that which gives life its rationality and reasonableness.

2. Other Greeks

To many other philosophers of John's day, the logos was the integrating principle of the universe. There's an ordering to the universe, and the logos is behind it. It's a little bit like science today. All these natural laws fit together that bring order into our world. That's the logos.

3. The Jews

To the Jews of his day, the logos is the way God creates and communicates with humanity. In Genesis 1, we get, "In the beginning, God said and God said and God said. Throughout the Old Testament, we get, "Thus says the Lord." God speaks and God speaks and God speaks. So, the logos is the means by which God creates, and God communicates with humanity.

But, here's the key. No one in the 1st century was prepared for the "logos" to be personal, to be relational, to be a person. So, by using logos, John gets the attention of all these groups, and he can now take them deeper and introduce them to the person of Jesus. It's brilliant!

D. The Word Today

The question for us today is if John were writing his Gospel today in the Bay Area, what would his contact point be? What would he use to draw his neighbors in, and then bring the truth of Jesus into the conversation?

Maybe "force?" In the beginning was the force and the force was with God and the force was God. May the force be with you? No. But, that one is a helpful example because it points out the tension John has in using logos. The force can be positive and negative, and so you wouldn't affirm everything about the force, but it may give a contact point.

A better example might be "higher power." "In the beginning was the higher power and the higher power was with God and the higher power was God. And, the higher power became flesh and dwelled among us." Now, we might not affirm everything that our surrounding culture would, regarding "higher power," but it would give us a starting point.

Hopefully you can understand what John is trying to do here with logos.

E. Jesus Being the Logos

So our second question: John begins here Jesus being the logos, but he never again refers back to Jesus as the logos? Why? Well, in verse 14, the logos becomes flesh and dwells among us. Jesus, the Word, becomes flesh and is present with us. So, John doesn't need to refer back to Jesus as the Word because he is going to take the rest of the Gospel to show us what "Word-ness" means, that is to say, what authentic presence really looks like. John wants to show us the deeply personal-ness of the logos. So in John's Gospel, Jesus,

the Word, will use more words than in the other Gospels. In the other Gospels, Jesus speaks in short, pithy sayings called parables. In John, Jesus, the Word, speaks in long, drawn-out conversations, sometimes one-on-one conversations: Nicodemus, woman at the well, the blind man. Jesus converses with people in John which requires authentic presence.

And, John's point, which is really Jesus' point, is to show us how transformative presence, really is. In every encounter, people are transformed by his presence. Because it turns out, you show people you love them by your presence with them. So, in John, the logos reflects presence and love, not destructive power. This God is different. This God's presence brings transforming love, not destruction.

F. Invitation to Presence

We have talked a lot about presence over the last few weeks. Bernard named his last sermon, Presence and Absence. We especially appreciate presence in this time of sheltering-in-place. In John's time, all were invited into the bodily presence of Jesus.

Today, we are invited into the presence of Jesus through his Spirit. When we come and when we believe, we receive the gift of the Spirit as the very presence of Jesus. And this is what we were made for, to have the presence of God within us.

And he will never leave! His loving presence will abide with us forever. We are never alone. And, just like those people who were transformed through the loving presence of Jesus in the first century, we are transformed by the Spirit's loving presence today. That's the third invitation of the prologue.

VII. Conclusion

So, three invitations in this text, all as invitations to life, because they are invitations to Jesus.

1. Come and attach yourself to Jesus, the light of all humanity, and you will truly see and not live in darkness.
2. Come and attach yourself to Jesus, and you'll have a new identity, a child of God, delighting in the fatherhood of God, the you can call him Abba.
3. And, come and attach yourself to Jesus, and his presence will be with you always, to the very end of the age. You will never be alone.

Someone has said that "All the leaves of the Old Testament rustle with the rumor of hope that someday a man will come who will give us life." John says *that* man has come. His name is Jesus, for he has come to give us abundant life and eternal life (John 6:68, 10:10, 14:6).

The invitations have been sent out! And, you all are invited, regardless of where you live, what you've done, what you've not done, who you are, you are invited to come and see this Jesus! Come and encounter this one, the Word who became flesh and when you do – you will see, and you will live! That's a promise and that's the good news of the Gospel. Amen.

Benediction (adapted from 1 John 3:1 and Ex 33:13)

May you walk this week in these promises –

That the father has lavished his great love on you by calling you his child.

For that is what you are.

And, his presence will go with you.

You will not be alone.

And he will give you life in his name.

Amen.

Resources:

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (2015 Edition)

Bruner, Frederick Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*

Johnson, Darrell, *Preaching John* (Regent College Course)

Morris, Leon, *The Gospel According to John* (NICNT)

Packer, JI, *Knowing God*