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JOHN 1:1-14

John Series

[PRAYER] Father, right now we do thank you for the hope that you've given to us. We thank you for your love. Thank you for your grace, your mercy, and your compassion on us, that you've reached out to touch us. Lord, we do dedicate this offering to you and thank you for it. Bless us now as we open your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

Open your Bibles to John 1 today.

I want to tell you a story first. I want you to tell you about last Sunday's worship service. During last Sunday's worship service, as you know I like to worship with these children up here. Momo came in and he had a bagel in his hand. We were a little early, we were just talking before church started, and I said, "Hey. We're about to worship." He has a bagel and his mouth's full. I said, "Well, finish it up! We're about to worship God here." So he finishes up his bagel and worships with us.

Little Za'here is sitting next to me and we had communion last week. Of course our children weren't served at that communion. So he says to me, "Can I have some crackers and juice?" I said to him, "This is not a snack. If you want a snack you can go back to the information table. This is special. This is communion. And when you get older and you understand more about Jesus and what He's done for you, then you can have communion." He says, "Oh okay."

When we stood up to worship a few minutes later he touches me on the side and I said, "Yes?" He says, "I look like you, right?" I said, "Yeah, you look like me," but in my mind I'm imagining what do you think this little African American boy who's four years old is thinking when he looks up at me, this old white dude. What does he mean when he says, "I look like you"?

So afterwards I communicated with Monica, his foster mom, and I said this is what he said. She says, "Well this is what he does. Every morning when he gets up, he wants to look cool so he looks like all the kids. He dresses to be like his friends. But on Sunday morning he wants to look like you."

How cool! You know what that makes me want to do? It makes me want to look like Jesus. And that's why we're going to study John 1.

The book of John is one of the gospels and it's the fourth of the gospels. So open your Bibles to the fourth gospel, John, and we're going to go through there today.

Let me tell you about John first of all because John was a unique guy. He was one of the five hundred that is described in this passage in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 where it says, *and that Jesus appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.* Paul continues. *Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.*

John was one of the five hundred. John was also one of the one hundred twenty that were in the upper room waiting for the Holy Spirit to come. When the Holy Spirit came then they were able to go through to Pentecost and 3,000 people got saved. John was one of those one hundred twenty.

But he wasn't just part of the five hundred and part of the one hundred twenty. He was also part of the twelve, those special ones that Jesus called out to be His apostles or His disciples.

We read in Matthew the story of how John was called. It says in Matthew 4:18-22, *As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*

John was a part of the Twelve, those disciples that Jesus called out to have that special relationship with Him and to entrust then the kingdom of God as it would be developed through God's church over the centuries.

The beautiful thing about this though as we look forward in John's life, not only was he part of the Twelve but he was a part of this inner circle of three that were with Jesus. Often it was Peter, James, and John. At the transfiguration we have Peter, James, and John. We also have Peter, James, and John in the Garden of Gethsemane. There was some special group even among the Twelve.

But even more than that, the Bible tells us six times that John was the disciple whom Jesus loves, refers to him that way. So there is a circle of one, Jesus and John. As we understand and read the gospel of John we're going to get the perspective of Jesus' best friend, as it were, here on earth. That's the part we're going to be looking at.

Look with me at John 1 and I want you to understand what's happening. You have to understand John lived a long time. The last book he wrote was the book of Revelation. We're in the first book he wrote, the gospel of John, and he's telling the life of Christ. But even he writes that long after the other gospels had been written.

We call all the other three gospels the synoptic gospels. That's made from the Latin word *synoptic* which is *syn* which means same and *optic* which means to see. They saw together. They all saw the same way. The three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, saw it the same way. They transcribed or they wrote about the life of Jesus from the same kind of perspective, historically choosing to go through those things.

But John is different. It's a completely different kind of approach to the understanding of Jesus' life. And that's pretty significant. You see, John is writing later.

I think maybe what John is seeing is something that happens in future generations after people have been saved for a while. The first generation, they're excited about Jesus. There's a passion there because God has rescued them, Jesus was there walking among them, powerful things happen. But the second generation comes, many times, and they know about God, they know about the beliefs because they were taught all those things by their parents, but they don't often have the same passion that their parents have. And the third generation tends to think about God as an idea, as something that's kind of there but may not be as connected as well.

That's why it's so important to revitalize the passion in our lives. I'm third generation. My grandmother was a Christian, my father and mother were Christians, I'm a Christian. Each one of us must come to a place where we grab onto the passion of God and it touches us in a personal way. I would encourage you young people that you are embracing the passion of God, not just relying on your parents and their salvation.

It was John who wrote in the book of Revelation, "There was a church, and they were known because they lost their first love." Maybe that's what John is seeing now as he's looking at the Christians who are there. He wants to communicate a message to them. He wants them to understand what salvation is all about. He wants them to understand what discipleship is all about. It's powerful what he's going to help them understand. He's going to help them understand that the gospel is more than just a prayer that you pray when you're a kid. The gospel is more than just a few spiritual laws that can be written down. The gospel is more than just slogans on a t-shirt. It's something very deep inside of us and he's going to call it discipleship.

We're going to talk about that as we go through and we're going to understand more of what that looks like in practical terms. So he's going to share the story of Jesus.

Before we look at John 1 turn to John 20 because in John 20 we have the purpose of the book. John describes that purpose for us so that we can understand why he wrote the book. He says in John 20:30-31, *Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 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.*

In other words, there are two things: the who and the why. You want to believe in Jesus and you want to have life in His name. God offers us life. He's going to talk about that life when we get into John 1 in just a moment. But he also talks about it in John 10:10. Let me read this to you. He says, *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

God offers us something very special in our lives. Not just a prayer that we pray when we're young. Not just a Bible we put on our shelf. Not just a t-shirt we wear that says "Jesus loves you." What we're talking about is something different. It's discipleship. It's life. And that very life is what we're going to try to understand as we read through and understand the gospel of John.

John 21:25 says this: *Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.*

So what we want to do is we want to look about not we're going to see the birth of Jesus Christ in the gospel of John like we see in Matthew and Luke. There are some things we're not going to see because John is being very particular about what he's picking out because he wants to communicate a message to us. He wants us to understand what that message is.

He's not going to start with genealogies like Matthew and Luke do. He's going to start with creation. So if you look at John 1:1 you're going to see that he starts with the word *in the beginning*. Now those words *in the beginning* should resonate with you because those words come from some other place in the Bible. They come from the very first book of the Bible that Moses wrote. It was Genesis 1:1. *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.* So John is going to take us all the way back to creation to understand something.

Moses was the guy who came to the burning bush and when he started talking to the burning bush he said to the burning bush, "Now I understand all these things that you're telling me, but when I go to Pharaoh and Pharaoh asks me this question, 'Who told you to do all this? What is the name of your God?'" God's answer to Moses in that moment was, "You tell him I AM sent you." *I am* is used seven times in the book of John. I am the bread of life. I am the vine. I am the living water. All these different things that *I am* in the gospel of John. One of the times he's just *I am*, which is the same thing, the self-existing one that's talked about even back in Moses' writings.

In the gospel of John we're going to see seven miracles talked about. We're going to see seven people who called Jesus the Son of God. I think that when John finished writing this book he must have looked back at it and said, "Wow. This is amazing," because it's just a piece of artwork designed by the Spirit of God speaking through John so we can understand it. He wants to communicate a message that we would believe in God.

He's going to start with three reasons right in verse 1-5. So look at John 1 and let's start reading these verses, John 1:1-5.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Three reasons to believe in Jesus. The first reason you believe in Jesus is because Jesus is God. That's what he's saying right here. He's unlike any other person that's been around.

When Mark starts his gospel he starts with the story of John the Baptist. Luke begins with the birth narrative of John and Jesus. Matthew starts with the genealogy of Abraham, going back to the roots of Israel. But when John starts he takes us back to the fact that Jesus is God. That's what he wants us to understand. The baby born in Bethlehem was unique in all of humanity because He is God.

So the first reason that we should believe in Jesus is because He is God and that should give us this "Wow. He lived among us? God lived among us?" We should come to that and go, "That is amazing. That is truly amazing and that is reason to believe in Jesus.

Number two, the second reason to believe in Jesus is because He is the creator. Look at verse 3. *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

So what he does is he takes the Word (*the Word* is the reference to Jesus here) and His relationship to God as God first and now he translates that or he moves to His relationship with people on earth and with earth itself. That He is God and that He's also created all things. So He created you and me.

That's another reason to believe in Him. He is the Creator. We start thinking about what God has done and the fact that He's created us, it draws us to Him. We go, "Wow. I want to believe in Him." We're drawn to believe in Jesus. We're drawn to believe in Him because He's created us.

There's a fictitious story about some scientists who decide that we've come so far in our technology and our biology that we don't need God anymore. So they decided to send one of the scientists to tell God we don't need Him anymore. The scientist went and said, "God, we don't need you anymore because we can create life and we can create a person now and we have modern technology that can make all these things happen, so we don't have any need for you anymore."

God patiently listened and then said, "Okay. Well why don't we do a test? Let's do a man creation test."

The scientist says, "Great because we can create a man."

God said, "And we're going to do it just like we did with Adam in the beginning."

The scientist says, "Great." The scientist reached down and picked up some dirt and God says, "Uh uh. Get your own dirt."

See, God's the one who is the creator. He's the one who created you and me. Because He's created you and me we should believe in Him. That's the call. So John is starting his gospel out here that it is so important to believe in Jesus. When we understand that He is God, when we understand that He created us, we're drawn to that belief in Him.

Number three. Third reason is in verse 4-5. *In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

The concept of life is important here because we're not just talking that He gave us breath, He gives us a quality a life. He gives us what John 10:10 says, abundant life. He gives us something that's amazing.

The person who accepts Jesus Christ into their life, who believes in Jesus, recognizes that He's God, recognizes that He's created him, and recognizes that He planned life for him, He's got life, He's offered him that life. Those are great reasons to ask Jesus Christ into your life.

If you're here today and you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, there's three reasons to say, "Yes. I want Jesus in my life. I want Him to control me. I want to give Him everything." It's not just about praying a certain prayer, although we do come to God and pray. We say, "God, I recognize I'm a sinner. I need you as my Savior. I want you to come in to my life. I want you to run me. I want you to control me." That's what God does. That's salvation. That's what happens.

But John starts out his gospel here to empower us so that we will know that Jesus is God and that we might trust Him in our own lives. Powerful. First five verses he jumps right in. This is serious business. John knows it's important and he wants all seekers to understand this. He wants everybody who's interested in God in any realm to understand Jesus is God.

Now we go into verse 6 and he's going to tell us about John the Baptist. Don't be confused with the name John. It's not the disciple John here. He's going to talk about John the Baptist.

Verse 6: There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe.

The word *witness* is the Greek word is *martyreo* which is where we get our English word 'martyr.' And here's why. Every time you witness, something is at risk. Whether you risk your own life or not may be in question, but whenever we witness, something is at risk. It may be your reputation. Some people may laugh at you. Some people might think you are a fool for following Jesus. Every time you witness for Jesus you run a risk.

Will you take the risk? If you're willing to take the risk and be a witness then you're saying, "I believe in Jesus. This is not just an optional thing. This is essential. You've got to have Jesus in your life. And I want to tell you about that." Some people won't receive that. It will be difficult, as we're going to see in the following verses here. It's hard. But that's what a witness is, someone who's willing to take the risk. John was the witness who came testifying as a witness *concerning the light, so that through him all might believe.*

Verse 8: He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. We're not trying to win people to ourselves, except that in winning to ourselves we're winning them to Jesus. So we do want people to like us, but it's not so that we can be supreme, it's so that Jesus can be supreme. John was not the light. He was just a witness to the light.

Verse 9: The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. If you want to get rid of the darkness – and you just got to understand in our world today people live in darkness. In our world today people live a dead life. They need life. People do not have what they need in order to live the fulfilled life that we have been called to.

It's so fun to me to listen to the stories of God at work in your life because as I hear those stories I'm just reminded that yes, Jesus is God; yes, Jesus created you and me; yes, Jesus offers life. It's powerful.

When the light comes into your life, it just illumines everything. You don't get rid of the darkness with a baseball bat by beating the darkness up. You get rid of the darkness by turning on the light. Jesus comes into our life, He illumines life so now life is all different. It's amazing what happens when someone comes to Jesus. Isn't it? They come to Jesus and they go, "Whoa. I see life differently." That's what he's talking about here. *The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.*

Verse 10: *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.* He wasn't just easily embraced. There are some people who do not recognize Jesus as God.

Verse 11: *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him* – speaking of the religious leaders of the day. They should've known. These are the guys who in the Old Testament are told all about the Messiah coming. They should've known that the Messiah was coming, but they had in their mind a particular picture of God and they had Him in a box.

There are some people today who put God in a box and they can't understand. They can't see this Jesus who brings life into their lives. What we're doing as we witness, as we share the light with other people is we're passing on that light so other people can see it in real terms so they can see what's so important.

Notice it says in verse 11, *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.* The word *receive* is very important, as we're going to see in the next verse, verse 12, because each one of us has an opportunity to receive Him.

Verse 12: *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.* So there's this new birth, adopted into this family to become a child of God when we receive him and believe on his name.

Two different things. All three of those concepts tied together. We receive Him, we believe on His name, and we become a part of His family. This is not just a receive Him when I was six years old I went forward in some event or when I was fifteen I accepted the Lord at church. We're talking about something that becomes a path that we choose, a discipleship plan that God is working out in our lives. It's a new birth.

What does that look like in practical terms? You can be religious but not converted. You can wear a t-shirt with a Christian slogan on it but not have Jesus inside your heart. He's talking about discipleship.

Notice they not only receive Him but they believe in His name. They believe in all Jesus stands for. Wow. It's transforming.

Our lives should be different because we are Christians. Each day we're thinking about what God is doing. We're growing spiritually as I wrote about in the article. God is doing something deep inside of us. There's this vitality. That passion is coming into our lives regularly because of our relationship with God. It's not the passion that drives our faith, but it's the faith that drives our passion. When we understand what God is doing then we go, "Yes. I'm so glad that God is doing this deep work inside of my heart." It's discipleship. We follow Him. We become under His direction. We receive Him.

He's going to help us understand what this looks like in practical terms as we go forward. In chapter 2 he's going to talk about a man who wants to know, "Wait a minute. I don't understand this spiritual birth stuff," and Jesus is going to say, "You have to be born again." He's going to come to the woman at the well. We're going to see that. And she's going to learn about living water, something you're partaking of everyday. Not just one time but you have this inside of you going on all the time. It's discipleship. That's what he's going to help us understand. This daily communion with God.

We better back up and read verse 12 again and then we'll read 13. *Yet to all who did receive him, to those believed in him 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.*

There's something supernatural that takes place in your heart when you trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. If you're just relying on your history, we've got a problem. If you're relying on today, every day trusting God for the bread of life (we're going to see He's called the bread of life in the book of John), His daily sustenance is what we are. We're relying on that sustenance every day. We're calling on Him and asking Him to fill us today. We can't do anything on our own.

Verse 14: *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

So this is Jesus referred to in John 1 as *the Word*. We have 'the Word' as the person of God, the Son of God. We also have 'the word' to describe the Bible, that is, the word of God in that sense, the written word. Both of those are very interesting in that they are both 100% God and 100% man. Jesus was 100% God came to live among us and 100% man. If that's really hard for us to comprehend, the Bible's the same way – 100% God, 100% man. God uses people, but it's 100% God. When we look at it, we've got the word of God. He says Jesus is the word, He's the communication vehicle so that we can understand Him.

When Mom says to her teenage daughter, "Go in there and clean that bathroom up again," and she goes in and cleans it up, reports, "Mom, I'm done," Mom goes in there, looks at it, "Wait a minute. Come back in here. You have to understand something. I want you to know that when I say clean the bathroom *that* is not what I'm talking about. Let me explain to you what it means to clean the bathroom." She uses words to communicate something so that the person understands.

God uses the word to communicate to us who Jesus is and what Jesus wants to do for us. He is the word, the communication vehicle so that we can understand Him. Not in a foreign language,

a word that we can't understand, but in a word that we can relate to, the person and work of Jesus Christ.

As we continue on through the gospel of John we're going to be continually reminded of the power of God. We're going to see that people who come into contact with God are changed. Each one of the stories that we read throughout the gospel are going to help us see that Jesus is God, that Jesus is the one who transforms us, that we should put our trust in Him. Every day as we're doing whatever we're doing we come before God and we come humbly before Him.

You don't have to live too long on this world to see what kind of problems we have personally. We start looking at ourselves and we start saying, "I'm not as great as I think I was years ago. I am a wretched person. I need help." It's only in those moments we come before God and we say, "God, I am a sinner. I need your forgiveness for my sin. I need your power to live my life every day. I need a perspective that takes me forward. I need your truths to guide me as I'm going forward."

That's what God offers and He calls it discipleship. He invites us into a personal relationship with Him. Yes salvation, but it doesn't stop with that. That's just the entry point. After we get saved then we start living a disciple life. That's why we spend our time during the day communing with Him. That's why we spend some time during the day praying, reading His word because in the midst of that we are energized by the power of God inside of us and God gives us what we need. That's what it means to be a disciple. We are not just converts. We are disciples and that discipleship is what we're going to learn as we continue in the gospel of John.

I encourage you to read it. It will take a little bit of time, an hour or two maybe, to read the gospel of John, but as you read it you'll start to experience this passion that John wanted for those people who were seeking what God wants for every one of us. It's not just about conversion, it's about discipleship. God wants us to work in that.

When He does that, when that happens inside of us then we start shining. We start reflecting God. And we ask God, "God will you work inside of us? Would you shine through us so that other people can see more about what it means to experience this life?"

There are some people who have a hard time with this. There are some people who have a difficult time coming to Jesus. We do the best we can to share Jesus with them and realize the Holy Spirit's working in that person's life. We don't convert people. We let God convert them. The Holy Spirit works in that person's life. We want to let that happen. It just continues on and we do our work to let Jesus shine through us. When He does that then people start seeing that. It's amazing what takes place when people see the light inside of our hearts. Amen?

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I ask now that you would be working inside of us and confirm in us that we are the lanterns that hold the light of Jesus inside. Lord, that's what we want to be. So before we start communicating this light to others, would you be that in our own hearts? Give us that passion to be your disciples, to follow you in everything that we do. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.