



Sunday, May 10, 2020

Clifford Baptist Church, Amherst, Virginia
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(Transcription from the Morning Service that was Streamed Live)

Sermon: “Opening the Gospel of John”

Scripture: John 1:1-3 (King James Version)

Today we’re going to begin a new sermon series. I closed out the “G E Power Company Study”—Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians” last week. So we begin a new journey through a new book of the Bible. I’ve preached from this book many times but never preached through it. We’re going to walk step by step, verse by verse, in the Book of John for the next many, many Sundays to come. I know it will take a lot of sermons to cover this great book, and I look forward to it and am ready to begin this morning!

Turn in your Bibles to John Chapter 1. Let me give you a dream, an outlook, of what I want to see as an end result of this series. Over the years I think any of us who are Biblical students, those of us who have been in church a long time have said I’m overwhelmed when it comes to opening the Bible, reading it, and knowing where to start. I for one, and I think many members here, say to start by reading the Gospel of John. Jesus is the centerpiece of the Bible, and John is so good at explaining who Jesus is. I have suggested to numerous people over the years to begin by reading this book which clearly introduces Jesus Christ the Son of God. When this study is complete, I would love for Clifford Baptist Church to produce this sermon series in a boxed set so you can have them as church members. When you come across someone who really wants to begin understanding the Word of God and to begin studying, you could give them this set and give them a good footing as to what the Bible is all about. The key character is Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. I want this to become a resource to introduce people to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

As we get started today, I want to nail down some basic information about this gospel. Let’s have a word of prayer together: Our Father and our God, thank you for this Mother’s Day. Thank you that we meet here together in this sanctuary; people in many homes are worshipping today by streaming this service while this pandemic goes through our country and world. We thank you we’re still together bound by the Holy Spirit that we may worship You. Lord today as we open the Gospel of John, we pray You will lay Your hand on the preacher and lay Your hand on Your word. Bless us Father as we hear about Your Son who came to save us and give us life. We love You and praise You Lord and ask You to bless us as we go through every verse of this great Book of the Bible. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

The Gospel of John was written by John, the old disciple of Jesus Christ. Most of the disciples died as young men; they died martyr’s deaths. But John was given the opportunity by God to live many, many days and to be productive in his ministry and work. As we open this book today, we know it was written by that disciple—the “one who Jesus loved,”

the one who laid his head on Jesus' chest as they celebrated the Passover together. As we think about the good news of the Gospel of John we realize there are four eyewitness accounts—four biographies of Jesus in your Bible. In your New Testament you will find Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called “synoptic gospels” meaning that each one of these three accounts was written by a man—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—with a very particular slant in mind as how they wanted to portray Jesus Christ as the Son of God. But they also draw from one another. Much of the material you'll find in Matthew, Mark, and Luke is very similar; they seem to use each other as a template for study as to how to convey the life of Christ but each has its own slant. For example, Matthew is writing to his family—the Jewish audience, the Jewish people—who need to come to Christ as Savior. He is proving to them through his gospel that Jesus Christ is the Messiah who Israel has been looking for, praying for, waiting for. Matthew says “Here He is—this is our Messiah we've waited for for centuries.” Mark is the shortest of those three synoptic gospels and he's probably the first gospel writer; the first one to produce a gospel. He describes Jesus as a servant. Mark's centerpoint of his gospel is to show Jesus as the one who heals, the one to whom you go to in great need and He will bring you the healing you need. Luke's audience is Gentile which is natural because Luke is the only Gentile writer in the Bible. He also wrote Acts, but he's the only Gentile writer amongst all the sixty-six books of the Bible. Luke is writing to his family, the Gentile audience, as he introduces Jesus as the Son of Man and the Son of God. Luke is interesting because he's a physician; Paul specifies him as a physician—a healer of men. This makes Luke very detailed-oriented, and he truly centers on the healings that Jesus gives. His center audience is the Gentile people because he himself is a Gentile.

While each one of the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke has their own slant and personality through these separate writers, they're very much alike. Matthew and Luke probably used Mark as the first gospel as their rule of thumb—their template and outline of what they were going to write. I have a book in my library called “Gospel Parallels” taking Matthew, Mark, and Luke and showing how each lines up with the other.

But with the Gospel of John where we begin today, John stands alone. This is the last account, the last biography written about Jesus' life. It was probably written between 80-90 AD, some fifty years after he walked with Jesus on the shores of Galilee, fifty years as he heard Jesus preach, fifty years as he had seen the miracles come forth even the miracles of raising people from the dead—Jairus' daughter. John was there when she was raised from the dead. John was there when Jesus died on the cross. John was there when Jesus said from the cross “...take care of my mother, take her to your home...” and in that hour John did that. John was with Peter as they ran to that empty tomb and saw that Jesus was not there; He had been raised from the dead. John feels the urge of God to write this biography of Jesus some fifty years after he walked with the Christ and seen His miracles.

John shares events that are not recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. While those three gave an historical account of what Jesus did, John gives more of an interpretation, a theological background of why Jesus did what He did. John was showing us that Jesus was, indeed, God himself. This is very important; I would encourage you if you're going to hang with me during the gospel of John, get a notebook and take some notes during this series. If you do that, here's one of

the first notes to write down: John is the one and only gospel writer who tells us why he wrote his book. Look at John 20:30-31. I'll refer to these two verses over and over again as we study this gospel so make a note of them. "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book: But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." As we open this gospel, we find that John wants to bring people to Jesus as Lord and Savior. He says I could not write down everything Jesus did; he closes his book by saying if I wrote down everything Jesus did, the world couldn't contain all the books that should be written. But I'm writing down enough that you can see the life of Christ, hear His words, and witness His miracles and know He went to the cross and is risen from the grave so that you might believe in Him as your personal Savior. This book is a witnessing tool; it's why it's so exciting as we study it together. John says this is my account of Jesus Christ and as you read it I want you to know this is a man of history. This man walked on the soil of earth but beyond those facts I want you to know He is the Son of God and that He gave Himself so we could know God Himself as Savior and Lord. It assures us it's a witnessing tool—that's why I pray one day we'll box up all these sermons and give to people who need to know Jesus as Savior. This gospel is meant to bring lost people to forgiveness, salvation, and life. Its sole purpose is to lead us to Jesus as the Christ, the Savior, the Lord, the Son, the Lamb of God. He's our Savior, our Lord, our friend.

That being said as we get a little on the background of the gospel of John, go to Chapter 1. Verses 1-18 are called the prologue. It's been said that if every Bible on earth was lost, destroyed, or somehow disappeared and if we have the first eighteen verses of this gospel, then any person in the world can come to Jesus as Savior. These verses have been called the "gospel in miniature." The prologue of John teaches us from creation to the coming of Christ to His salvation of us—it's beautiful as we read these verses. They're so deep and life-changing; there is no earthly way I could preach one sermon on these eighteen verses—it cannot be done unless you want to sit for two or three hours! I don't think you want to do that, so we're going to break it down a bit by just looking at verses 1-3 today. Before we read those, let me read the entire prologue as one unit—the "gospel in miniature." Hear it as the word of God that can bring anyone to the salvation of Jesus Christ.

John 1:1-18: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same for a witness to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him and cried saying, This was he of whom I spake. He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his

fulness have all we received and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” May God add His blessing to this beautiful portion of His word. Obviously, these eighteen verses have tremendous truth but let’s back up and read just verses 1-3 again: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”

The first three words—“In the beginning.” Another book in the Bible begins that same way—Genesis, which means the “book of beginnings.” John starts his gospel the same way. These words refer back to an eternal beginning. I believe John wants to tie the name of Christ to the beginning of history in Genesis in eternity. It’s almost more than we can conceive in our human minds because our lives are based on beginnings. We’re built on the time frames of beginnings; we all have a birthday. We all have beginnings of different things that happen in our lives—the day we got married, the day we graduated, the day we built a new house or started a new job. Whatever it is, our lives are built on beginnings. We understand our lives in terms of beginnings and going forward. But God Almighty does not have a beginning. We have to be able to conceive that God has no beginning; He eternally has been and is today, the Great I Am. He will be for every tomorrow, and He will be with us and for us. There is no beginning of God and no ending of God; He is eternal in nature. Here’s John’s truth—write it down: Jesus, God’s Son, is part of the Godhead and Jesus has no true beginning. He is eternal in nature. Certainly there was a day some two thousand plus years ago, when Jesus stepped out of His eternal glory, took on flesh in Bethlehem, and came to be with us but Jesus did not have a beginning in the manger. He simply stepped out of His eternal being and took on flesh in the incarnation and was born among us to walk among us. We have to understand Jesus has always existed; He has an eternal framework. He always will exist. When God said “...let there be light...”—the first words of Genesis—Jesus was there. Notice here John mentions the eternal name of the Son of God—the Word. Word is capitalized; it’s a personal name, the name of Jesus the Christ. Jesus is the Word of God. We literally hear God through Jesus; we hear eternal words through Jesus as He speaks to us.

Do you remember back in Genesis, in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve had sinned and fallen into rebellion they ran and tried to hide from God because they were so ashamed of what they had done? In Genesis 3:8-9, Scripture says “...the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden...” Think about that; sometime we read a passage of Scripture and let it pass over our brain cells and not give it much thought but “...the voice of God” was walking in the garden. The voice was given legs and walking and called out to Adam “Where art thou?” The voice, the word Adam heard in the garden, I believe was the voice of Jesus—the spoken Word of God. Every word of Jesus, if you have a red-letter Bible today, is literally the voice of God Almighty speaking to us. Jesus stepped out of the glory of Heaven so He could speak the Word of God to us. It is recorded in those gospels—those red-letter editions. Why is that point of Scripture so very important that we need to hear it? Listen friends, that point is absolutely crucial to the Bible and our faith. Listen very carefully: Many religions and sects around the world that label themselves “Christians” often say Jesus was a great man. Jesus was a prophet of God; He represented God; He came to earth to speak a word from God. But in these three verses,

John emphasizes that Jesus was not sent here as a representative of God. Jesus was not sent here in order to speak a word from God. He was not sent here to speak as a prophet for God. Rather, Jesus came as God Himself. He stepped out of His heavenly authority, His majesty, His power, His brilliance to come to us. He was not a great prophet of God—He was God Himself coming to us. Jehovah Witnesses do not believe that; there are many other expressions of faith that do not believe God Himself stepped out of heaven. But that’s what we believe; John says the Word of God, part of the Godhead, stepped out of eternity and came to be with us. He was not just a great man who did great things. God Himself walked among us, showed us grace, showed us love, spoke to us. God Himself went to the cross and rose from the grave. The Word, the voice of God, came to be with us. We have to believe that; it’s the foundation of the Bible.

For many years, news and magazines have showed us pictures of the Queen of England. When we see her, she is royally dressed and properly escorted. Everyone is charged to practice etiquette around her—women will curtsy and men will bow as she walks by. When the Queen ventures out in the world of “common people,” she’s always protected and sheltered. Why is that? Because she’s royal; people address her as “Her Majesty.” Most of the time she leads in complete separation from the people of England. But John says here the royal of all royals, the creator of the universe, the master who controls the paths of the stars and planets, the King of all Kings, the Lord of all Lords, stepped out of heaven and came to live among us. He did not live in the separation of a castle; He did not dress in the robes of royalty. He didn’t set Himself apart from us but rather He came to live with us. One translation says He came and pitched His tent among us—to be one of us and live like us.

It’s amazing when we think about the life of Christ. God Himself, born in the humblest of hospitals, wearing the clothes of a lowly servant (as we think of nearing His resurrection He only had one set of clothes). He had very few possessions; He had no home, certainly no body guard. He had no money to speak of. What the Gospel of John and all the gospels teach us is that God Himself came to be with us and among us. God Himself got His hands dirty as He healed us. He was just as real in the healing as those nurses and doctors are in this pandemic in New York City; Jesus is a healer. His feet got filthy as He traveled from town to town preaching the good news of a loving God. He came to be with us and traveled among us. He groaned; He got tired and thirsty. He came to us to give us the good news of Jesus Christ. Beyond our human logic, the very word, the voice of God was silenced for three days. On the cross when Jesus the Son of God said “It is finished,” His voice was silent until after His resurrection when He approached one of the people who loved Him and said “Mary.” Even though His voice was silent those three days, He spoke the loudest “I love you.” The Savior who gave Himself on the cross allowing His blood to be shed that we might be forgiven. God Himself rising from the grave so that we might have eternal life.

Friends, I hope you can see my excitement as we stand on the brink of an amazing Bible study. I want you to remember the reason John wrote the gospel—that you may believe. That’s why we’ll gather here Sunday after Sunday after Sunday so you’ll believe more deeply and our walk with Him will get closer. This is much more than believing a story; this is so much more than being a “fairy tale” people want to memorize; it’s not even kin to a fairy tale! This is believing in and surrendering to the Son of God who is so real, so strong, that He would give Himself to us. That He would step out of

glory so we would come to Him as Savior. We know that Jesus, the Son of God, God Himself, the Voice stepped out of glory and surrendered all in order to come to us. Here's what we do for Him—we believe and surrender everything to Him. We give our hearts, lives, souls, futures, families, possessions—everything belongs to Him. He came and gave everything to us, even to a cross and empty tomb. For those who believe, we are called to give our everything back to Him. We sell out; we leave everything at His feet. Do you and I believe that? Do we want to give of ourselves that intensely? If you truly mean it, “Yes, Lord, I give you everything and everything I'll ever be”—if you truly mean it, it will bring you to worship Him. There is no way you can sell out to Him and not worship Him. I believe it, and I want to sell out to Him in every way in my life. I'm not there yet; I'm working toward that goal. I want to walk that walk day by day. I want to tell you that you can't sleep late, read the paper, linger over breakfast, watch some random TV show and say I've sold out to Jesus; it cannot happen. You can't withhold your talent in ministry—if God has given you a talent. You can't give Him a little piece of your tithe and say I've sold out to Jesus; you have to give Him everything He deserves and asks. Truly, He will use our giving to bring Jesus to the world. True belief is total sell-out; period! There's no such thing as partial sell-out; there's no such thing as a “partial Christian”—one who lives in the church on Sunday and in the world the rest of the week. It's all or nothing! Jesus gave His all for us and that's what He asks of us. It's entirely right for Him to ask all of us; surrendering to Him.

Today, brothers and sisters, and that includes me as a believer, will we fall at the feet of Jesus and say “Lord you are my Savior, you are my God. I believe you stepped out of eternity to save me, to find the one wandering sheep—you left ninety-nine in heaven and found the one wandering—me. Because I proclaim You as my Savior, I'm selling out to you in worship, service, possessions, my family—everything I have belongs to You. In everything I do, I want it to be Yours.” When we come to the altar of the church (your heart) today, will you say “Lord Jesus, I confirm to You I will sell out to You; everything I have belongs to You.” I pray, believers, we'll do that. I believe the Lord has allowed this COVID-19 pandemic to come so we can settle down, be quiet, and rethink who we are. I think these days have been good for us; when we haven't been able to carry on as normal and realize how important the church is and how much we miss worship. Maybe the Lord has called us back to rethink: “Have you really surrendered? What do you want to give to My Son?” Maybe today's a new day for you and me as we sell out to this risen Savior. If you don't know this King of Kings and have never met this Lord or Lords, you can come to Him today and say “Lord I believe You are God Himself. You went to a cross for me personally, to save me, a sinner. I come and ask You to be my Savior. I place my faith and life in You and give you everything I have.” I pray you'll do that today. Wherever you are right now, bow your head and if you can, get on your knees, and say “Lord, I accept you as Savior.” I pray many were saved in the first three words of John Chapter 1. He is our Lord, our God, our Savior and He loves us so much.

Let's Pray: Father, thank you for these moments. I so look forward to these days we'll spend together walking through the Gospel of John. Bless us we pray, and bless that one who needs Jesus as Savior today. Bless him or her that they'll put their hearts in Your hands and their lives in Your care. In Jesus' name. Amen.