

Mirror, Mirror

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 December 2023

Preacher: Tim Thompson

- [0 : 00] How are we all doing? All right. That was great. Sounds like we're doing wonderful.
- Well, for those of you who don't know me or have forgotten in the last week, my name is Tim. I am going to be here preaching this morning, and I will apologize for that in advance.
- But as the new year is about to begin, I am not too complicated of a man. I often like simple things, or at least wished I liked more simple things. And so when I was asked to preach today, I really only had two passages in mind since it is New Year's Eve, and we're about to begin the new year.
- So I had two passages in mind immediately about beginnings, and I'm sure you can guess what they are. Before I say them, Genesis 1-1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and also John 1-1.
- In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Beginnings, that's kind of an easy and obvious connection. And in the end, I landed in John, and I think there will be some really good takeaways for us as we begin the new year.
- [1 : 16] I hope you can find them as encouraging and as beneficial as I did. Since this isn't the middle of a series, we're coming to John, the Gospel of John, cold.
- I'll give a little bit of a recap, or is it a pre-cap, since this is, I don't know. Anyway, let's warm up to John here, and I'll give you a little bit about John, the Gospel of John.
- It was written by the Apostle John, who was a part of Jesus' apostolic inner circle. He might have been considered the core team if that was a thing at that point.
- But the inner circle, he has been referred to as the disciple that Jesus loved. And when John's name is mentioned in our text today, it's actually referring to John the Baptist, though I think I should clear that up as we start.
- It's not talking about the Apostle John. The four Gospels show different sides of Jesus. Matthew shows his kingship, Mark his servanthood, Luke his manhood, and the Gospel of John is his godhood.
- [2 : 28] The theme of the Gospel of John is that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Son of God. And I don't want to minimize that. It is the main point and the focus of this book and also of this passage.
- We see that from the start of the book, that it's John's focus. I want that to be one of the takeaways from today. It's the foundation for what I'm trying to say. And I don't want anything else I say to distract or detract from that very large point.
- It's because of this we need to focus our attention on Jesus in the new year. And with that, I'll have Emily come up and read our text. It'll be John 1, 1 through verse 13.
- In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

[3 : 40] There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Thank you. So, George Lucas knows how to tell a story.

He has done some of the most famous stories of my lifetime, and has done so for several generations. She's so good at telling stories, Disney recently, several years ago I guess, bought the rights to his studio.

[4 : 40] Some of the stories that fall under his involvement would be Star Wars and Indiana Jones. So, if you think back to how those franchises started, they started, all of them, their first episode started, or the first movie started in the middle of the story.

In Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indy is exploring a dark tunnel with a crew of people that start to turn on him, and eventually they either all turn on him or die, except for his escape pilot that has a large snake in Indiana Jones' seat, which is just as good as turning on him in my book.

If you think back to how the Star Wars franchise started, Star Wars, A New Hope was the first episode, or the first movie that came out. R2D2 and C-3PO are running from the evil empire taking over their ship.

It's mid-blaster fight. These robot droids, who are not introduced to us, just mid-chaos, we see them and their shipmates running and fighting. Even the first movie that came out started with episode number four, A New Hope, mid-story.

These epic tales all start in the middle of the story, leaving us confused and wondering what is going on, who is good, and who is evil. This is a common storytelling tactic starting in the middle of the action.

[5 : 58] I'm sure there's a term for it. I'm sure I learned it, but I don't remember what it is. It's an effective tactic. It creates confusion and keeps you off kilter and on edge, keeps you involved, invested in the story.

Let's look at our passage and see how John starts off his story. John 1.1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. We can see John's focus starts on Jesus.

His eyes are on God, and I think that's noteworthy. There are many places he could have started his story, but his focus is on Jesus. John starts at the earliest part of the story you could possibly start, at the beginning.

This clears up everything from the start. He doesn't want any question about the deity of Jesus. He doesn't want any question about the main part of the story or who is going to be involved in the story.

It's not how George Lucas would do it, but the Apostle John doesn't want any confusion. He is up front from the very beginning. John shows all of his cards from the beginning.

[6 : 56] John would not be a good poker player. He tells you he has the ace. To add to the argument that John wants to be up front, Jesus is referred to seven times in the first five verses, either using the pronoun he, him, or with the word.

This is clearly the main point of the topic, the main point of this section. John wants our attention on Jesus and his role in creation at the beginning and his connection with God here.

So as I'm reading this text, my first question is, why did John refer to Jesus as word in this text? Why doesn't John refer to Jesus by name? I think that's a good question.

John, if John wants to be clear about Jesus, why doesn't he say Jesus' name? I'll try to answer that, but first, does anyone remember a short season of time when it was mildly trendy to say word after somebody would say something?

For example, you might say, it's cold outside. Somebody would reply with word. Does anybody else remember that? I remember that. So I googled, what does it mean when someone says word?

[8 : 04] And WikiHow replied, word is a casual response to acknowledge what someone is saying. It's another way to say cool or okay. Word and word up can be used to show agreement with the speaker, confirming that you approve of their statement.

I'm not taking WikiHow as answers for gospel truth, but I think it's an interesting connection. Don't let that convince us, though. Let's keep exploring.

As we think about the purpose of words, what comes to mind? Kids, why do we use words? Yes.

Anything else? What are we trying to communicate? Why don't we use hand signals? Yes. Good. Yes. We use words to communicate thoughts, emotions, ideas, desires.

We also use words to communicate who we are. Isn't that the purpose that Jesus came to earth for? He came to communicate who God is.

[9 : 08] He came to reveal God's mind, display God's perfection, and express to us God's love. He is the full expression of God's love, manifested in human form.

When you think about words in this way, and what Jesus did when he was with us, is there really a better word to use than word? This would be a good time to reply if you were mildly trendy with word.

Anyone? Word. Thank you. Thank you. As we begin a new year, let's reorient our focus to Christ. He was there before the beginning.

He was here as the embodiment of what God wants to communicate to us about who he is. He is worthy of our focus as the new year begins. Let's reevaluate our mental priorities.

What do we spend our time thinking about? Are we thinking about the next thing we're about to purchase? Are we worried about meeting the deadline at work or at school? Do we spend our idle time thinking about the next project that we want to work on, that we need to work on, the projects we have still working on?

[10 : 19] Do we focus on the things that we have learned in Philippians 4, 8? Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable.

If there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Is there focus on our mental priorities? Things like, have I put enough in my 401k? Are we going to have a family vacation this year?

Can we buy that extra thing that we probably don't need? Or can we upgrade or update the other thing that probably doesn't need it? Or are we worried about taking care of the last and the lost and the least?

Is there focus on our visual habits and our listening habits in the next year? Are we paying attention to the media we're consuming? Are we scrolling our newsfeed as much as we are scrolling our Bibles? Do we tell our children of God's faithfulness as often as we are reading books for pleasure?

What are we watching and listening to? For John, he starts writing about beginnings. It's all about, when he starts writing about beginnings, it's all about Jesus. And I think we can take a note from his book.

[11 : 22] Here's an example that might be helpful. Have any of you tried to start your GPS while you're in a parked car in a parking lot? Your map isn't facing the right direction.

It jumps around, unsure which way you are. It's not correctly oriented until you start moving. When we aren't like John, whose focus is strictly on Jesus, we're like a GPS in a parked car, not oriented very well and not knowing which direction we're headed.

John gets right to the point of his story. He gets our attention focused right where he wants it, and that is where it should be as we begin the new year. Let's focus on the one who was there from the beginning at the beginning, the one who was with God and the one who is God.

As a little bonus, before we head to our next section, I want to look at the last verse of this paragraph here in verse 5. This isn't a part of any main points.

This won't be on the test. It's a bonus point you get for free. I found it when reading the commentary and I thought it was really good. Verse 5 says, The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

[12 : 27] How encouraging this is for us. As a Christ-centered exposition on John said, the darkness has not overcome it. The light is still shining in the darkness. It is in the current tense.

It is still shining in the darkness. The darkness could not overcome. The darkness plotted, schemed, ran out of ideas, and still the light is shining for all to see. I hope you guys can find that as encouraging as I did.

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

Unfortunately, we all know what I look like. Why? Because we have seen what I look like. There's lights in here shining on us. You have looked at me with your eyes. Your brain has taken that information, processed it, and you know what I look like for better or for worse.

Kids, could you describe to me what your dad looks like, what your parents look like? You look like. Yes. Yes, because you have seen me. Yes. Could you describe to me what a spring sunny day looks like?

[13 : 36] Bright out. Yes. Yep. You might use it feels warm. Sure, sure. What does the sun look like? Bright out.

Yep. Bright. Good answers. That's a little less easy to do some of those things. It's hard to look at the sun. We see in verse 7 that John the Baptist is sent from God to bear witness about the light.

Why does a light in the darkness need a witness? If you've ever seen a flashlight on a dark night, it's easy to see what that looks like. Why does light shining in the darkness need someone to witness about it, someone to describe it?

John is bearing witness to a blind people, people who are unable to see the light. Their eyes are closed and their hearts are hard. Verses 9 through 11 says, the true light which gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

He was in the world, the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own and his own people did not receive him. Well, there's some metaphoric language in our passage that we're looking at today.

[14 : 41] Exodus 33 and 34, chapter 33 and 34, we learn that there's also a real life physical nature to this life, to this light. When Moses asks to see God, God grants Moses his request.

God hides Moses in the cleft of a rock, covers Moses with his hands while the glory of God passes, and allows Moses to see his back. After Moses comes down from Mount Sinai, we read in chapter 34, starting in verse 29, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he had two tablets of the testimony in his hand.

As he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.

After having a personal interaction with God like this, Moses' physical appearance was changed. Moses was physically reflecting, remitting light. You could also point to the transfiguration in Matthew chapter 17, verses 1 and 2.

And after six days, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

[15 : 58] There's clearly some form of physical light that radiates from this light of men. The next passage I picked up a couple weeks ago while Mike was preaching, and it was really fun to be able to connect what I was working on and with what he was going to be talking about too.

In Luke chapter 2, verses 8 and 9, this passage will probably sound familiar because we just covered it a couple weeks ago. It says, And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night.

And the angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. There is clearly a physical nature to this light, but these are things that contribute to John using the word light.

But also, John is talking about something more than photons emitting physical light. What does John say in verse 4? In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

That light shines into the, this light shines into the darkness, exposing the darkness. In the darkness, we either choose to step into the light and into life where we can be shrink backers who cower further away from the light.

[17 : 07] Ephesians 4, chapter 4, verses 17 and 18, Now this I say and testify to the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, futile in their minds.

They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of hearts. Moving along in the book of John, it says, starting in verse 6, there was a man sent from God whose name was John.

He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him. He was not the light but came to bear witness about the light. We are similarly called to witness like John the Baptist.

Thinking of the Great Commission in Matthew, chapter 28, starting in verse 6, Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

And when they saw him, they worshipped him but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to them. Go therefore and make disciples to all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe that I have commanded you.

[18 : 18] And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. Also in Matthew, chapter 5, verses 14 through 16, You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand and it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. We are also called to be a witness to this light.

If our focus isn't on the light, how can we reflect it correctly? I'm thinking like a mirror. If a mirror isn't correctly focused on its subject, it doesn't correctly show what it's supposed to.

The world did not know him. His people did not receive him. John was sent into the world to be a witness to the light, a witness to Jesus. John the Baptist was not the light but was able to act like a mirror and reflect the light.

Mirrors have an object and a subject. They focus on the subject and reflect to the object. Have you ever used a mirror to reflect a bright light on an unsuspecting person's eyes? Thinking in a classroom, sun is coming in, you use your watch and get the teacher in the eyes or maybe your phone or reflective service or maybe two brothers in the back seat trying to annoy each other.

[19 : 34] Let's be that. Let's be the obnoxious siblings in the back seat, you know, reflecting that light to others. John was able, I get the teacher to laugh.

John was able to show people the light. He was a tool God called into action to show a dark world and a blind people who the light of the world was.

We also get to be a witness and get to reflect this light into a dark world. If we have been called to make disciples of all people as we begin this year, are we focused on reflecting Jesus into the dark places?

We are called to make disciples and how can we if our focus is elsewhere? If our attention is off of Christ, what are we witnessing about? I know I tend to be a really good witness for my football team.

It doesn't take long for me to casually mention something about whatever big game we have coming up this weekend. I could talk at great length about Brock Purdy or Christian McCaffrey being the league MVP this year.

[20 : 34] Look at me in a sermon I'm already talking about my team. How quickly I am to bring up more important things. But how quickly am I to bring up more important things like a loving Savior who offers life, love, peace, and forgiveness?

Maybe you like talking about politics. I've had a former co-worker even refer to politics as his sport. He would post online about it regularly but which is more important?

The ever-changing climate of politics or the eternal one that has stepped into space and time? meaning he was there before it was created and he was the one doing the creating.

We like talking about our favorite TV shows and movies. These things that offer just a few hours of distraction. We witness about our favorite show as talking about them with friends for hours.

Does anyone remember the show Lost? Before we were streaming it I remember vividly getting together after each episode with friends and talking about the latest cliffhanger and then even the end of the season for so long.

[21 : 40] We would talk for hours. We can talk about our kids for hours on end with other people. We discuss what they're learning, what they need to learn, which activities they're in. We talk about what they need from us, what we still need to teach them.

I'm not condemning these things or these actions but when we allow them to completely consume us we lose sight of what is most important. We are like a GPS in a parked car not sure which way we are supposed to go.

It is because he existed before the beginning that we should be focusing on him. It's because of who that means he is that he is deserving of our focus in the new year.

As John the Baptist said Jesus ranks before me because he existed before me. Think of a bride on a wedding day. As she enters everyone stands up and as she walks on the aisle everyone turns to face her.

all eyes on her the entire time. This is what we should be doing. It is because we are called to bear witness that we need to focus on him.

[22 : 44] If we are mirrors reflecting the light into a dark world then we need to focus our attention on Jesus. If our focus isn't on the one who existed before creation then what are we really reflecting?

It is because of those reasons we need to look to him in all we do. Let's start this year like John with our attention firmly on Jesus who is the perfect revelation of God's mind a perfect display of God's love and perfectly God himself.

So as we begin a new calendar year let's look back to a long time ago but not a galaxy far far away. Let's focus on someone who has written a better story than even Hollywood could ever have hoped to write.

Let's focus on the one that is the very definition and embodiment of word. The very definition and embodiment of light. Let's focus and reflect Jesus this year.