

“The Deity of Christ”
John 1:1-3
(Preached at Trinity, January 27, 2016)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Tonight, we begin the Book of John. As one of the four Gospels it is distinct and stands apart. We refer to the other three Gospels as synoptics from the Latin term synopticus which comes from the Greek word σύνοψις which means “to see all things together.” The synoptics contain many of the same stories often in the same sequence.
2. John's Gospel, on the other hand, is distinct.
 - A. While the Synoptics put a high emphasis upon the humanity of Christ as He conducted His ministry, John's Gospel puts a high emphasis upon His deity. For example, Matthew and Luke include genealogies giving the human lineage of Jesus, while John looks back to eternity, “In the beginning was the Word. . .”
 - B. John's Gospel gives us a wealth of material not contained in the synoptics. We have the wedding feast at Cana, the dialogue with Nicodemus, the encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, the raising of Lazarus from the grave. It reveals Jesus as the Good Shepherd in **Chapter 10** and we find the high priestly prayer in **Chapter 17**.
 - C. On the other hand, the Gospel of John contains no parables. It contains allegories like the Good Shepherd, and the Vine but no parables. There are no examples of Jesus casting out demons. The transfiguration is missing. The institution of the Lord's Supper is missing.
 - D. Since I've been your senior pastor I've preached through Matthew and Mark. This will be our first journey through John. It is a Gospel, rich in content. I'm anticipating it will take us several years to complete our journey.
3. There is little dispute that the author of this Gospel is the Apostle John – brother of James, partner with Andrew and Simon in a fishing business. His father was Zebedee.
 - A. John was a passionate man that William Hendricksen describes as having a fiery nature. In the list of the 12 Apostles James and John are called the “Sons of Thunder.”
 - B. God's grace upon him brought about a profound change. He is later referred to simply as the beloved disciple. As Jesus hung upon the cross He entrusted His mother to his care.
4. The grand theme of the Gospel of John is Jesus as the Messiah who has come to save His people from their sins and by believing in Him we might have eternal life.

John 3:16 NAU - "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

John 20:30-31 NAU - "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

John is endeavoring to set the truth about Jesus before you so that you might believe.

5. The Gospel is divided up into five sections:
Chapter 1:1-18 – The prologue
Chapter 1:19-12:50 – The public ministry of Jesus
Chapters 13-19 – The passion week
Chapter 20 – The resurrection
Chapter 21 – The epilogue
6. **Read Verses 1-3**
 In these opening verses of this Gospel all eyes are upon Christ. John tells us several truths for us to believe about Christ.
- He is eternal – “In the beginning was the Word”
 - He is a person distinct from the Father – “The Word was with God”
 - He is God – “the Word was God”
 - He is Creator – “All things came into being through Him”
 - He is the source of all physical and spiritual life – “In Him was life”
7. The Gospel of John will fill our minds and hearts more and more with the knowledge of Christ. If you want to have a greater relationship with God you have to understand more and more about Christ.
 A.W. Pink wrote: “If the believer would enter into a better, deeper, fuller knowledge of God, he must prayerfully study the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures!”
8. Understanding the first chapter of John’s Gospel is essential for understanding the rest of the book. If we comprehend these verses correctly it will open up for us the riches of what’s to come.
9. John begins his Gospel with the words, *“In the beginning was the Word”*
 To our ears, this is an unusual beginning. Because of our indoctrination into Christianity we know this is referring to Christ but why did John choose to refer to Jesus as the Word? There are two important reasons.
- A. First, John was aware of his Gentile readers. He often mentions Jewish customs and then describes them presuming that some may not be familiar with them. He understood he was writing against the backdrop of Greek thought. To the Greek philosophers the *logos* was an impersonal principle of reason and order in the universe.
John presents the Logos as the eternal Son of God that became man. Instead of an impersonal force all things find order and being in Him.
 Hundreds of years before the birth of Christ there was a Greek philosopher named Heraclitus who wrestled with the question of how there could be order in a universe in which everything seemed to be changing. Heraclitus was the philosopher who said, “You can’t step into the same river twice.” He meant that the water of the river is always moving. So when you step into the river the second time it is no longer the same river. It has changed. To Heraclitus all life was like that. Nothing was stable. All things were changing. But if that is so, he asked, how is it that all things remain the same? Why is the experience of one generation the same as that of people who have gone before? Heraclitus concluded that the *Word* of God (he called it the *logos*) stood behind everything we see and governed it. God’s *logos* was the ordering principle of the world.¹

¹ Boice, J. M. (1988). *Ephesians: an expositional commentary* (p. 251). Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library.

- B. Second, Jesus is the fullness of the Divine revelation to man – the Living Word. The Jews understood clearly the concept of “the Word of the LORD.” It is found over 250 times in the OT. It expresses the Divine revelation of God. Jesus is the fullness of the revelation of God. He is the incarnate Word
John 1:18 NAU - "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."
Hebrews 1:1-2 NAU - "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world."
10. John said of this living Word that He “was” at the beginning. *“In the beginning was the Word”* John writes with an echo of Genesis 1
Genesis 1:1 NAU - "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."
11. John is making an important point here. That there was a beginning and Jesus was already in existence. It speaks of the eternity of Christ. John is declaring at the very beginning of his Gospel Jesus is God. John wants us to know at the very beginning that Jesus is God.
 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."
- I. All things had a beginning – John writes, “In the beginning”
- A. The phrase “in the beginning” points to a starting point, a beginning
1. Before this there was nothing
 2. There was a time when there was nothing but God. Everything that exists finds its being in God.
 We find this described here in **John 1**
John 1:1-3 NAU - " 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 came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."
 3. Everything we have ever seen, heard, tasted, or touched had a beginning. Everything around us is finite. But Jesus is altogether infinite. Everything around us had a beginning. Jesus is eternal.
 We began, Jesus “was”
 4. John uses the imperfect tense of the verb “to be.” It describes continuous action in the past. Jesus was continuously in existence before time began. When time began Jesus was already present.
- B. The Bible teaches an existence before the birth of the mountains – a realm in which only God existed
1. Jesus existed in eternity as the second person of the Godhead
 Stephen Charnock writes of the eternity of God –
 "He was before the world, yet he neither began nor ends; he is not a temporary, but an eternal God; it takes in both parts of eternity, what was before the creation of the world, and what is after; though the eternity of God be one permanent state, without succession, yet the spirit of God, suiting himself to the weakness of our conception, divides into two parts; one past before the foundation of the world, another to come after the destruction of the world; as he did exist before all ages, and as he will exist after all ages."

- a. According to Charnock God's eternity is without succession
 - b. Charles Hodge agrees – "With Him there is no distinction between the present, past, and future; but all things are equally and always present to Him. With Him duration is the eternal now."
 - c. Herman Bavinck disagrees – "We should not conceive of God's eternity as an eternally fixed, countless moment of time."
 - d. The reality is we cannot conceive of infinite eternity. We cannot conceive of God's infinite mind where everything is forever present. God has never acquired new knowledge.
2. All of our thoughts are confined temporally. Time is a measure of creaturely existence and we will always exist within the realm of time – a succession of events. For us creation began in a moment and time began. Before this there was only God.
- C. Although Jesus in His deity has no beginning His humanity had a beginning
1. In His humanity He was conceived and was born – John describes it: **John 1:14** - "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us"
 2. There was a time when the incarnate Christ did not exist and yet His birth did not bring about a change in the eternal Son of God. He is immutable.
 3. Now Jesus as man will always exist.
- II. John establishes at the beginning of this Gospel the deity of Christ and this will be an important theme in this Gospel – *"and the Word was God"*
- A. John records that Jesus affirmed His deity continually
1. He was not ashamed to refer to Himself as the great "I am"
John 8:58 KJV - "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." - ἐγώ εἰμι
And this continually infuriated the Jews:
John 8:59 NAU - "Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him"
 2. Jesus spoke of His equality with God
John 10:30-31 NAU - "I and the Father are one." ³¹ The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him."
John 14:7 NAU - "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."
 3. John records Thomas' reaction to the risen Christ
John 20:27-28 NAU - "Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." ²⁸ Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"
- B. Of course the deity of Christ is affirmed throughout the NT
Paul continually drove home the deity of Christ
1. In **Philippians 2:6** Paul proclaims the absolute equality of Christ with God - "although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,"
 2. In **Colossians 2:9** Paul declares that Jesus possesses the fullness of the Divine nature - "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,"

3. Paul wrote in **Romans 2:9** that Jesus was God, blessed forever - "from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. "
- C. This is John's point here at the beginning of his Gospel – Jesus has all of the attributes of God.
1. He is eternal – “In the beginning was the Word”
 2. But John will also show that Jesus is one with the Godhead – individual in person, yet one with God.
John 1:1 NAU - "the Word was with God, and the Word was God"
 3. John will stress throughout this Gospel that Jesus bears all of the marks of the Divine nature:
 - a. He is omnipotent – He changed the water into wine at the wedding at Cana and many other miracles.
 - b. He is omniscient –
John 2:25 - "He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man."
John 4:29 NAU - "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I *have* done; this is not the Christ, is it?"
 - c. He is the giver of life –
John 5:21 NAU - "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes."

Conclusion:

1. What difference does it make that Jesus is God? Why is John laboring so hard to make this point?
 - A. Our proper understanding of Christ is essential for salvation
 1. This is often a matter of debate. How much do you have to know about Christ to be saved? Obviously you don't have to be a theologian. But a misunderstanding of the person and nature of Christ will affect how you come to Him.
 2. If you deny the deity of Christ you cannot know Him.
John teaches that the issue of salvation hangs upon this doctrine
John 8:23-24 NAU - "And He was saying to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.
²⁴ "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."
ἐγώ εἰμι
 3. Without the deity of Christ there can be no atonement. Without the atonement there can be no salvation.
 - B. Our proper understanding of Christ is essential for His proper worship
 1. If our view of Christ is contrary to the revealed truth of Scripture then we are serving another God – a form of idolatry
 2. If you do not see Jesus Christ as God you cannot worship Him properly as God. God is a jealous God and will share His worship with none
The Bible declares that Jesus Christ has been exalted above all