

John's Own Testimony about Christ

John 1:1-18

The Gospel of John Sermon Series

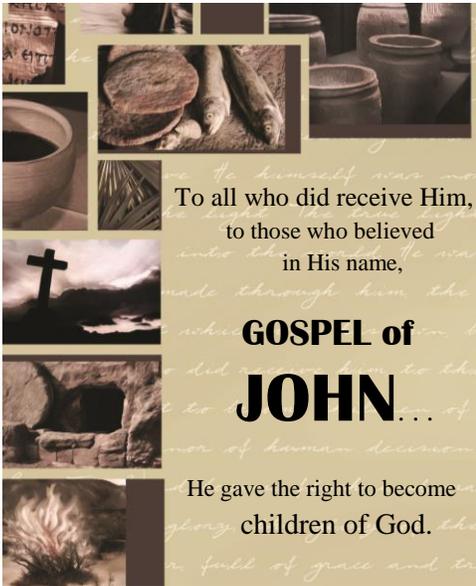
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

February 9, 2014

TEXT: John 1:1-18

This morning we continue in our series on the Gospel of John. Over several weeks, we will be looking together at a set of testimonies designed to persuade us at the core of our being that



Jesus is the promised Messiah, the saving Son of God, and that with belief in Him we will have life in His name. This morning, we look at John's own testimony, John the Evangelist, the writer of this Gospel. I want to begin this morning with looking at the nature of the testimony we have in that this Gospel comes from John. We'll spend a few minutes on that, and then we will look at John's own testimony as he begins the Gospel.

Very early in the second century, we have testimony that this Gospel is written by John the Evangelist, the disciple of the Lord. Irenaeus, a second century writer, says about John:

"John, the disciple of the Lord, who leaned on His breast, also published the Gospel while living at Ephesus in Asia Minor."

This very early writer, Irenaeus, who tells us that the Gospel of John was written by John, the very same person that we read about in John 13, says:

"When I was still a boy, I was in Polycarp's company. [Polycarp was an early Christian leader in this part of the world.] I have a clearer recollection of events at that time than of recent happenings. What we learn in childhood develops along with the mind and becomes a part of it – so that I can describe the place where the blessed Polycarp sat and talked, his goings out and comings in, the character of his life, his personal appearance, his addresses to crowded congregations.

"I remember how he spoke of his conversation with John and with the others who had

seen the Lord, how he repeated their words from memory; and how the things that he had heard them say about the Lord, His miracles and His teachings, things that he had heard direct from the eye-witnesses of the Word of Life were proclaimed in complete harmony with the Scripture. I listened eagerly at that time, learning them by heart.”

What a great example this is to us of the importance of Christian Education, for us to be involved with our children, laying down truth early so they grow up with not knowing anything different.

You may wonder, “Why is it even a question as to the author of this Gospel?” It's a great question, because when we turn to the Gospel of John, one great peculiarity about this book is that John never mentions himself by name in the Gospel of John. He uses various expressions, seeming to deliberately conceal his identity. In John 1:35-37, he tells:

*“The next day John [the Baptist] was there again with **two of his disciples**. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God!’ When **the two disciples** heard him say this, they followed Jesus.”*

In John 1:40, John continues by saying:

*“Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one **of the two** who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus.”*

He does not tell us the name of the person with Andrew, just leaving it as “the other disciple.” Several times in the Gospel of John we encounter this mysterious “other disciple.” There was “another person there,” but he never mentions his name. In John 18:15, he says:

*“Simon Peter and **another disciple** were following Jesus.”*

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Peter and John, the sons of Zebedee are frequently mentioned together, and yet in the Gospel of John, we hear of Simon Peter and “this other disciple.” Do you tell your life story referring to yourself as just another person who happened to be there? Yet, that's what John the Evangelist does over and over. In John 19:35, we read this about an eyewitness to the crucifixion, a man who saw the soldier pierce the side of Jesus, burst the pericardial sac, and who saw that blood and water flowed out:

*“**The man who saw it** has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.”*

Again, John never mentions his name.

Who is John? What kind of a man is he? There is another unique expression in the Gospel of John that occurs several times. It's an expression that he uses to describe himself. This

anonymous man, refusing to mention his name, is finally pressed forward into the light of day. When you say, "John, who are you; what kind of a person are you?" he says to describe himself in John 13:23:

*"One of them, **the disciple whom Jesus loved**, was reclining next to Him."*

In John 19:26-27, we read again of **the disciple whom Jesus loved**:

*"When Jesus saw His mother there, and **the disciple whom He loved** standing nearby, He said to His mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home."*

On the morning of the resurrection of Jesus, we see the same phrase in John 20:2-4:

*"So [Mary Magdalene] came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, **the one Jesus loved**, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put Him!' So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first."*

There are two ways of understanding that phrase, **the disciple whom Jesus loved**. The first way is to imagine that John is saying, "I'm the one that Jesus really liked. I can't really speak a lot about the others, but I'm really the one." You know that doesn't fit the profile of someone who is actually trying to minimize his identity and role, does it? Another way of understanding this phrase is to recognize that John would say of himself, "I am a person whom Jesus loved." Love in the Gospel of John is a powerful and deep theme. Love is mentioned 117 times in John's writings. Love is the great expression of God to the world that we see in John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Jesus says to the disciples in John 14:15:

"If you love Me, you will obey what I command."

In John 15:9, Jesus says:

"As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you."

He goes on to say in John 15:12:

"My command is this: 'Love each other as I have loved you.'"

Then Jesus defines the love of God in a very concrete way. In John 15:13, Jesus says:

"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

John heard these words. They pressed upon his heart and mind, and when he was asked to speak of himself, to describe himself, what does he say? He says of himself, "I am just a man for

whom Jesus gave His life.” It's a very similar expression to what Paul says in Galatians 2:20 where he speaks of:

“ . . . the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

I want to make a few significant applications of this observation for us this morning.

- *Make much of Jesus in our lives.*
Follow John's example by making much of Jesus in our lives.

- *Talk less about ourselves and more about Christ.*

When people are around us, when they hear our story, they should be left with the impression that Jesus Christ is great and wonderful and reliable and trustworthy, rather than be left with the impression that we are really special. Christ is Someone special; Christ is the One to be remembered.

- *Tell your story, your personal narrative, your testimony, in a way that people remember Him.*

When you tell the story of your life to people, tell it in a way that makes Jesus Christ memorable in the ears of others.

I remember when a group of us went to North Africa. We were there to share Christ, but you couldn't have a Bible open. You couldn't hand out literature openly. The best resource that we had was our own testimony that we had prepared in advance and practiced giving to others. Prepare to tell your story in five to seven minutes in a way that gives Jesus Christ the glory and the honor. I want to challenge you, from this example of John, to listen to yourself this week, and ask yourself: “Who am I talking about the most?” Am I talking about myself, my family, my kids, or am I really talking about Christ? If someone were to listen to everything I'm talking about this week, would they be given the impression at the end of that conversation that Jesus Christ is great? That's the pattern John sets for us.

Last week, I had lunch with someone I wanted to get to know better. We had a great time, and without either of us saying, “You know, we really should follow John's example and most of our conversation should be about Jesus Christ,” it just happened. The lunch went long, and the conversation went back and forth. This new friend said, “You know, I could boast on God all afternoon. Are you pressed for time?” I thought, “I'm not. I love to hear what Christ has done.” So, as we speak, we need to model this example: Make much of Christ in our lives; make much of Him in our conversation; talk of Him along the way; and make less of ourselves. It will be John who will give us the memorable line next week that “He must increase, and I must decrease.”

Though he hides himself, though he does not name himself throughout the narrative of this Gospel, John does offer his testimony to us. He offers to us in this prologue, these opening 18 verses, a moving and complete picture of the work of Christ, the glory of the Son of God. This prologue is a rich feast in the Bible. I mentioned last Sunday that I'm reading the Gospel of John along with John Chrysostom, the fourth century Christian leader. John Chrysostom preached a series of 88 messages on the Gospel of John. I was really humbled by the fact that John Chrysostom took 15 sermons on this passage, on these 18 verses. O the richness of the Word of God before us! I want us to look this morning at these 18 verses as a summary of what John wants to say. He captures our attention like an overture to a great work that he will unpack throughout the Gospel narrative. In a sense, when we get to the end of John, the prologue will make all the more sense. There are four movements inside this testimony, and they all speak of the glory and worth of Christ. Let's follow these moves together and apply it along the way.

Movement 1: The Word and Creation. Divine Son with the Father.

The first movement in John 1 is that John would tell us by his own testimony of the eternal splendor of Jesus Christ. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we meet Jesus in the context of His birth and His preaching right away. None of those Gospel writers tell us of Christ's eternal glory before His coming. John fills in this gap. John tells us of the eternal splendor of the Son, that He is there at the absolute beginning of the world. Our memory verse for this week is John 1:1:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

John tells us that Jesus Christ is there at the absolute beginning of all things. Nothing that you and I experience in this life, or in all of life, is outside the scope of His sovereignty. He is there in the beginning, and the way that John begins his story calls to our mind the Book of Genesis, the opening sentence of the Scriptures. John tells us that Christ was with the Father, and that He was God, in eternal fellowship with God at the absolute beginning of all things. John tells us in John 1:2-3 that:

"He [the Word] was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made."

The Word was the Agent of creation itself, and through Christ all things were made. Without Him nothing was made that has been made. He is the eternal Son, the Agent of creation, in eternal fellowship with God the Father. All existence, all creation, flows from His will, His purpose, and His design. In John 1:4-5, John tells us that the eternal splendor of the Son of God was that:

"In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it."

You can hear the echoes of Genesis 1 throughout this opening sentence: In the beginning, God speaking, light and life flowing from the Son of God, with the Father, divine nature, essence, one with the Father. John would tell us that when you come to Jesus Christ, He is the eternal, glorious Son. Oh, what powerful hands we place ourselves in when we turn to Jesus Christ!

Movement 2: The Testimony of John the Baptist.

John tells us next, in the second movement, that the eternal Son is witnessed to by John the Baptist, and this will be our focus next Sunday. The other Gospel writers tell us that John the Baptist has a preparatory role. He gets God's people ready for the arrival of the King Himself. John the Evangelist says that John was sent by God; he was a witness to testify to the Light. He was not the Light, but he was pointing others to Him. John's preparatory mission in the world prepares us for the advent of Christ Himself.

Movement 3: The Different Reactions to the Word in the World.

John tells us, thirdly, that when Jesus comes into the world, there are widely divergent reactions to Christ. The world doesn't really know what to make of Jesus, the eternal, resplendent Son. Some, however, do respond positively. There is a huge negative and positive in this section, widely divergent reactions. John 1:10 says of Jesus:

“He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him.”

Can you imagine walking past your father and not knowing him? Can you imagine walking past a dear and treasured friend and missing him in the crowd? The world, though it was made through Him, failed to see Him and recognize Him.

King Alfred, an English King, reigned during a period when England was attacked by the Danes. The Danes came and they slaughtered the English troops. King Alfred fled the battlefield to wait for another day. He hid his identity for his own protection. He took refuge at the cottage home of a shepherd named Ulfric who was loyal to King Alfred. King Alfred told him his true identity, and Ulfric protected the king. Ulfric's wife was somewhat careless with her words, frequent to gossip, and so Ulfric made the decision to not tell his wife who their guest was. So Ulfric was hosting King of England disguised as a country worker, and Ulfric's wife had little patience for this guest who didn't really seem to be pulling his weight around the cottage. She scolded him, and she harassed him. One morning, she thought, “I need to be specific with this man,” and she gave detailed instructions to watch the pan as the morning hotcakes were being baked. She told this country worker, “Stare that pan until the cakes are ready.” Well, the king watched the pan, and as he was watching the flames, his mind drifted to battle strategies, new alliances, gathering the troops together, and winning the day again for England. When he turned back

and looked at the pan, the cakes were charred black. Ulfric's wife came round the corner and saw the cakes burned, and she struck the king. When she struck the king, Ulfric could take it no longer, and he gazed at his wife and he said, "My dear, my dear, do you not recognize the face of your king?" She dropped the pan. Christ came, the true King, and the world missed Him. John would tell us in John 1:11:

"He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him."

He came His very own people, but His own did not receive Him. Can you imagine? John 1:11 is one of the saddest verses in the New Testament. The Son came, and they did not receive Him. The door was closed. Yet John tells us in John 1:12-13:

"Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His 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."

To all who did receive Him, to everyone who opened the door of their lives to this incarnate Son, to all who received Him and believed in His name, then He, as the real King of the world, gave them the right and authority to become children of God, children born of God. This image, that all who receive Christ are born again, is precious to John and is unique to John's Gospel. It is a topic we will come to in two weeks, new life in Him. You can come from any background and be seated at the King's table with Christ. There is a sanctity of new life. There are no human privileges made at the King's table. Jesus is the great respecter of persons, and to all who receive Him, He gives the right to be children of God.

John Chrysostom pastored in a society with huge social strata in place and firm boundaries between wealthy and poor. He proclaimed in this city a word timely for our own. He said:

"As many as received Him, He gave the right to become children of God, whether bond or free, whether Greeks or barbarians or Scythians, whether unlearned or learned, female or male, young children or old men, in honor or dishonor, rich or poor, rulers or private persons, Jesus Christ deems them all worthy and stamps them with one signet seal, that of the King."

It doesn't matter what your background is. It doesn't matter if you're privileged to know Christ at a young age, or if you experienced the sorrow of not knowing Him, and you came to Him later. Whatever the shape of your discipleship, Christ will give to you that same impress of the King, child of the King, all welcome at His table. The only requirement is that you believe in His name. The only prerequisite for coming to Jesus is sin. If you have no sin, then you have no need of a Redeemer. But if you do have sin, small or large, come to Him and He gives forgiveness and new life.

Movement 4: John's Own Solemn Testimony.

John tells us a fourth movement, and it is his own solemn testimony at the end of this prologue beginning in John 1:14. John tells us on solemn oath concerning this eternal, glorious Son, this Word:

"The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

This eternal, glorious Son, this Word who was one with the Father became flesh a human being, and He made His dwelling, literally *tabernacle*, among us, and we have seen His glory. Do you see what just happened in this statement? John switched to the first person. It's so subtle. He was talking about the glory of the Son, the witness of John the Baptist, the implication of new life for all who believe, and all of a sudden he says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among **us**, and **we** have seen His glory." He steps forward into this overture as an eyewitness just as he says in his letter, 1 John 1:1-3:

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us."

If you have seen the glory of this eternal Son, then you cannot keep such information to yourself. It must be shared, and it is shared in the most natural and generous way. John says in John 1:14:

"We have seen His glory, . . ."

Oh, what glory it is!

"the glory of the One and Only. . ."

The word that John uses here in Greek means *one of a kind*, a genus of one, the One and Only beloved Son with the Father. "We saw Him; we heard His voice," John would tell us. Next he would tell us that this glory was:

"full of grace and truth."

Grace and truth. These are important words, precious words. Often these words are preached as though they are in conflict with each other, as though you have grace, but you also have truth; you have mercy, but you also have truth. I was stunned to see where these words actually occur in the Scripture. This pairing of the words *grace and truth* actually occurs dozens of times in the Greek translation of the Bible, dozens of times translating the expression of God's *steadfast love and faithfulness*.

In Exodus 34:6 we see:

“And He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.’”

In the Bible that John read, that last phrase is “grace and truth.”

In Psalm 86:15, we read:

“But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.”

In Psalm 89:14, it’s written:

“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before You.”

We see in Proverbs 3:3:

“Let love and faithfulness never leave you.”

In Proverbs 20:28, it says:

“Love and faithfulness keep a king safe; through love his throne is made secure.”

Grace and truth. John would tell us that the Son of God, this eternal glorious Son, came to us in person. He dwelt among us. John says, “We saw with our own eyes who He truly is, and that He is filled with steadfast love and faithfulness, expressed from the Father.” In John 1:16 John says:

“From the fullness of His grace, we have all received grace upon grace.”

We keep receiving from Him.

John pays Jesus two more staggering compliments. At the end of these verses, in John 1:17, he says:

“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth come through Jesus Christ, a great compliment. The steadfast love, the faithfulness of God the Father, flow to us in the world through Jesus Christ, and He is the mediator of the New Covenant with God's people, to all who believe.

The final compliment he pays to this glorious Son is in John 1:18 when he says:

“No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known.”

No one has seen God; no one has ever gazed upon God face to face. Our minds flood back to Exodus 33:22-23 when Moses prayed to see the glory of God, and God replied:

"When My glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove My hand and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen."

No one could gaze upon the Father's face and live. But, John tells us that though no one has seen God face to face, the One and Only at the Father's side has stepped forward in history; He has stepped forward in this world to make the invisible, glorious God visible in our eyes. If you want to know God, then John would solemnly testify that you must look to Jesus Christ. If you want to know the Father, then you will see the Father in the face of Christ. The glorious, immortal, invisible God has become visible in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Himself, in John 14:8, when Philip asks to see the Father, answers in John 14:9:

"Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father."

Jesus Christ, the eternal, glorious Son, witnessed to by John the Baptist, rejected and received in the world, is none other than the Revealer of God. You cannot pass by indifferent to Jesus Christ this morning. Jesus Christ is the one person of human history that we must know and gaze upon, for when we gaze upon Him, then God becomes known to us. John the Evangelist testifies to us this morning his own testimony, that he has seen Him with his own eyes; that he would testify to us of His real nature and glory and splendor; and he will promise to each one this morning that if you believe in Him, if you place your life in His powerful, glorious hands, then He will cause you to be born anew and give you a seat at the King's table and claim you as His own. These are our ongoing prayers: for conversion, and for new life that flows in our midst.

Our service began this morning with the hymn, *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*:

*"Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise."*

Yet, through John's testimony, the Word of God has come, and in Jesus Christ, this immortal, invisible God has become seen, and known, visible. So, we're going to sing the song, *Behold Our God*, and the arc of this morning moves from invisible to visible. I want to call on you, if you have not placed your trust in Jesus Christ, do so this morning, and let us pray with you. If you have already placed your trust in Him, then beseech Him to make this new life swell up within you, set you free, and let you eat from the King's table.

Let us pray. Precious Lord Jesus, we pray this morning that You would pull back the veil, that You would let no one in this sanctuary leave not having recognized You. We thank You, Lord Jesus, for the example of John to make less of himself and more of Jesus, and we pray that this week You would enable us to do the same, that we would never tire of speaking the wonders of what Christ has done for me. We thank you, Jesus, that You have made God known to us. We thank You, that we are Yours and that You are ours. We pray that as we draw to You, that Your immeasurable power would be at work in our lives and our families. We give You the glory.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.