

Our Bible Journey Begins with John
Gospel of John Sermon Series
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
September 6, 2020

TEXT: John 1:1-18



We begin a new sermon series at Kenwood together with *Bible Journey*. Our journey this fall will begin with the Gospel of John. *Bible journey* was developed as an innovative discipleship curriculum by my good friend Dr. Tim Laniak who teaches at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. *Bible Journey* is a digital resource and is going to be an online companion for us this fall. *Bible Journey* offers a rare combination of in-depth Bible study together with immersive content like virtual visits to biblical locations, on-site interviews with scholars, and interviews with Christians around the world who have been impacted by God's Word in their lives. We're going to use this online resource together with the text of Scripture as we journey together. One of the most impacting things in my life as a believer has been the privilege of traveling to the places where biblical events happened. It has rooted my faith in history that these things really took place. The Bible is not just about ideas, but it is about persons and a personal God who has come in person to this world. Together with *Bible Journey*, we will be able to visit these sites without going to the airport, with no security checks. We will be able to look onsite. We will be able to look at objects and artifacts, but together with the journeys to biblical lands, the other journeys that have played a significant role in my own Christian growth have been the opportunity to visit more than thirty-five countries to see the body of Christ, whether that's in the Amazon jungle, on a train in Czechoslovakia, or meeting believers in Christ in Asia or different parts of Europe or Africa. To see the global church, people who have seen the glory of

Jesus Christ and have placed their trust in Him is galvanizing. It is strengthening to know that you're part of something much, much larger than your own individual piety or devotion. You're part of the kingdom of God, the body of Christ. More than 170,000 people join this family every day. Jesus is at work in the world, and we want to see it, discover it. But we want to grow strong in our conviction that the Bible is real, took place in real time, through a Person. We want to meet some of our family members. People have been touched and impacted by the Word. *Bible Journey* will be our companion along the way, and I know that some of you during this COVID period have more time on your hands than you've had before. Some of you call me and say: "Pastor David, I just don't know what to do with all my discretionary time." Others of you said: "You know, my life now is staring at a computer screen. The last thing I want to do is look at a screen anymore." *Bible Journey* is a digital companion that you can use at your own pace. You can use it with the time that you have. If you have more time, there is depth to explore. The resources inside Bible Journey have been curated over hundreds of hours, and I don't think we'll exhaust it. If you have limited time, you can go at your own pace. It's there digitally when you access it, and you can create your account.

Bible Journey is structured around three headings. First, we look *in the text*. Christianity is a text-based faith. We don't know the events of Scripture without the text of Scripture describing it. The God we meet in the Bible is the God who has come to us in Jesus Christ, but we must read the words, we must get into the text. Christianity is not rooted in someone else's testimony. It is rooted in the reliability of Scripture and its transmission over time. There will be a set of content in each lesson in *Bible Journey* that will help us get *in the text*, to look at the theme, the narrative, and the structures. How does the Bible come to us and equip us to be better readers? When we read the text, get in the text, we will also have questions that are prompted for us by the text – ideas that are new, foreign words, places that are unfamiliar, concepts that are different from the cultural currency that we use today, and yet *Bible Journey* will allow us to go *behind the text*. My friend Tim has lived in the Middle East. He's traveled extensively there, and he is a gifted scholar and teacher, and the teaching inside *Bible Journey*, the behind the text, some of it is filmed on-site, on-location. The videos are short and can illuminate the text for us and help us go behind it to see where the ideas of Scripture are coming from as they meet us in the text. *Bible Journey* is not just about a Bible study. It's not just knowing the background behind the text.

I think my favorite feature about *Bible Journey* is the third part called *in front of the text*. I'm a scholar at heart. I have three master's degrees and a PhD. I get hooked on studying the Bible. Those who know me well, if you drop me out of the airplane anywhere in the world, I will probably want to study the Bible. But the real calling of God in my life is not primarily as a scholar; it's as a pastor. I love to see what happens to people when they meet the Word of God. As excited as I get about grammar, as excited as I get about original languages, my greatest joy

is seeing the transformation of people when they actually start reading the Bible and it comes alive to them and they trust in Jesus Christ and begin to live for Him. That is exciting! *Bible Journey* allows us to meet hundreds of people who are living for Christ today around the world in this set of interviews in front of the text.

We are going to begin our journey in the middle of the story in the Gospel of John. This month, we will look at a mini-series on John, and then we will start in the beginning later this fall. In John 1:1-18, we encounter an immense and glorious text. When we go into the text, we noticed right away that there is a pattern of repetition, keywords repeated over and over. John 1:1 focuses our attention on the Word:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

The power of repetition draws our attention and holds our attention on the Word. We go to the absolute beginning of all things, and we find the Word, we find the Word was with God and that the Word was God. The Word was in the beginning, and the Word is not only God, but the Word is the One through whom all things were made. Everything you see, including you, was made through the Word of God. God's first act in Genesis is to speak the creation of the world by His Word. All things were made through the Word and without Him was not anything made that was made. The Word is uncreated. He is not part of this creation. He is its Creator. Our friends who live on either side of our parking lot at Kenwood need the truth in John 1:1-3. The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Christ was the first of God's creation, that there was a time when He was not, that He is less than divine. Yet, this teaching cannot be reconciled with the clear teaching in the text. In the text, the Word was God. The Word creates all things, and nothing is made without Him. The Word is not part of the creation. He is the Creator of the creation, and we read in John 1:4-5:

“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.”

The darkness has not overpowered it, and we get our first signal in the Gospel of John that there is a conflict in the world. There is darkness in this world, and yet the Word, in Whom is life and light, shines, piercing this darkness, and the darkness is not powerful enough to put out.

John 1 then brings us down firmly planted in history and takes us to a messenger, a person. Remember, the Bible is not just a set of ideas or concepts, but it is about a personal God who comes in person to this world. John tells us of a man whose name was John. He came as a witness to point, to bear witness about the light. He himself was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light – the true Light, giving light to everyone – coming into the world. He was coming. It's the great journey behind the Bible's own journey – the journey of the Word to the world. The Word comes to the world. He was in the world, the world was made through

Him, and yet the world did not know Him. They didn't recognize Him. He came to His own and His own did not receive Him. One of the saddest verses in the New Testament, the Creator comes, but creation does not recognize or receive Him. But to all who do receive Him, He gives them the right to become children of God, born not of blood or the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God. And then we reach the initial climax of our text. The repetition takes us to this point in John 1:14, concerning the Word we've been describing:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:14 is one of the most important sentences in the Bible. This sentence has five truths packed within it, so densely. If we open the fountain slowly, it will wash over us like living water.

Number one: The Word becomes flesh. The Logos, one God, comes into this world and takes on human flesh – willingly, joyfully, sacrificially, humbly, comes and takes on flesh, real humanity, God in the flesh, walking around this world. When you see Jesus Christ, you're looking at the face of God. The Word takes on a real humanity, fully God and fully man.

Number two: The Word dwells among us. The word that John uses here is the same word used to describe the tabernacle. He doesn't say the Word just happened to live with us. He says the Word tabernacled among us, so that what we have in the word *incarnation*, His taking on a flesh, is nothing less than the dwelling of Almighty, eternal God, with His people. The glorious God who was veiled in the sanctuary now is seen in the Person of Jesus Christ, His Son, and John tells us:

Number three: We have seen His glory. It wasn't a mirage. It wasn't a made-up story. John says we saw it with our own eyes. I remember in third grade at Greenwood Elementary School, it was an exciting day. The teacher told us that there was this remarkable event in the sky. There was to be a full eclipse of the sun. I didn't even know what that meant, but she said next that in light of the full eclipse of the sun, we were to make crafts. That got my attention. Not only were we going to make crafts, but we were going to go out to the playground instead of an extra hour of math. I thought: “This is just awesome. A little less math, a little more craft and playground!” So, we did it, and we built these cardboard viewing boxes with a piece of aluminum foil on back. We're getting ready to go out, and the teacher explained: “When you get out in the field, point your box towards the sun, but make sure (and these are instructions for third graders), make sure, kids, that you look at the aluminum foil and don't stare directly at the sun. If you stare directly at the sun during an eclipse, (and I was on the edge of my seat. I was thinking maybe I'll just get a glimpse) then you'll be blind.” I thought: “How will I explain that to my parents?” The field trip just turned sour. So I thought: “Okay, it's aluminum foil.” It

was breathtaking; it was riveting to see that full eclipse. It was real. It was immense. I saw it and I remembered it. I remember it up until this present day. John said he saw a glory much more powerful than the full eclipse of the sun. He saw the glory of the incarnate Son of God. He said he saw the glory and it was real.

Number four: His glory was as of the only begotten, the one-of-a-kind, absolutely unique, of the Father. His glory was totally unique in its splendor. John uses a term here that we all need in our active vocabulary. It's the term *monogeneis* in Greek. We use the word genus for a species, a type. That is a word we often use, but *monogeneis* is a genus of one. It's the category of being where there's only one representative. There is only one example, a totally new category. It's the glory of the one and only, absolutely unique, Son of God with the Father forever, the Word. And John says: "We saw His glory, His unique Person, and when we look up closely at His power and His radiance and His authority, and His brilliance, and His luminosity, and when we pressed up closer, what impressed us most of all was His character."

Number five: He was full of grace and truth. It's not what you'd expect. When you consider the glory and power and authority of God, the great news of the Bible is that when you get up close to this personal God, you find a God who is full of grace and truth, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. This word pair, grace and truth, is often used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, to describe the character of God. It's who He reveals Himself to be to Moses on Mount Sinai in Exodus 34:6:

"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.'"

This is the God that we meet in the text. This is the God that we discover behind the text flowing through, radiating the glory of His Person. It's the truth of who Christ is that causes John to cry out to those who hear him in John 1:15:

"(John bore witness about him, and cried out, 'This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me.'")"

He is before John because He existed before him. Jesus Christ existed before His incarnation as the divine, eternal Son. He is the covenant mediator. The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ, and the climax of this passage comes to us in John 1:18:

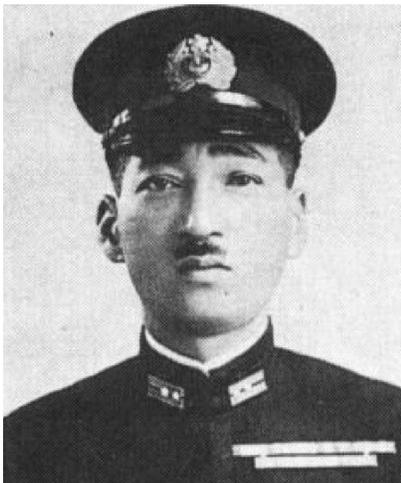
"No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known."

No one has ever seen God, God of glory, veiled in the sanctuary, the only God, the one and only. There it is again, the absolutely unique, the *monogeneis* God, the One at the Father's side, He has made known. We long to know God. It's in us. Even the atheist longs to know God. We are in a moment in cultural history where we're searching for answers. It's hard to know which

information is reliable and can be trusted, and it's frustrating, isn't it? I get so frustrated sometimes when I'm searching for a solution to what I think should be a fairly obvious question and I find opposing answers readily, and then I'm just in a muddle. Where do you go for reliable information that can be trusted, not only about small things, but about massively important things? Where can I go to get reliable information about who God is and how I might know Him? The place where we go to see God, to meet God, to know God, is in the text of Scripture. We go behind the text to follow its terms, its categories, and to be brought into sharper focus to the God that we meet there – what He is like, His character, and what He requires of us.

John is so different from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Matthew, Mark, and Luke build up their story of who Jesus is slowly until they have the disclosure that Jesus is the Messiah about three quarters of the way through the Gospel. John is sometimes called the preacher's gospel. Preachers can't wait that long. John gives us in the first 18 verses a towering portrait of who Jesus is in an unqualified statement of His divinity.

Not only do we look *in the text*, *behind the text*, but the most moving part often for me about *Bible Journey* is *in front of the text*. What happens to people who pick up the text and read like Augustine, long ago in North Africa, when he heard children singing: "Pick up and read," and he began to read the Bible and trust in Jesus Christ. *Bible Journey* is filled with interviews and personal stories of where the text goes once it's released into the world and into the minds and hearts of people in countries, governments. One of the stories I learned this week with *Bible Journey* I want to share with you. It is a story really about two men. The man on the right's



name is Jacob DeShazer. He was born in West Stayton, Oregon in 1912. He grew up on a farm. He'd always wanted to be a pilot but did not qualify. He joined the United States Army Air Corps in 1940, at age 27. The man on the left side is Mitsuo Fuchida. He was born in Katsuragi, Nara Prefecture in Japan in December 1902. He

entered the Imperial Japanese Navy at Hiroshima in 1921. Mitsuo had an interest in flying. He graduated as a midshipman in 1924 and was promoted to ensign in 1925. In December 1930, he was promoted to lieutenant. He developed a special interest in horizontal bombing and was made an instructor in this technique in 1936. He gained combat experience in the Second Sino-Japanese War and was assigned to the aircraft carrier Kaga in 1929. In 1936, he was accepted into the Naval Staff College, and he joined the aircraft carrier Akagi in 1939 as commander of

the air crew. In October 1941, he was selected to lead the surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. On Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, with a Japanese force under his command, 423 aircraft prepared to attack United States Pacific Fleet. At 6 AM, 183 guide bombers and torpedo bombers took off from carriers 250 miles north of Oahu and headed towards Pearl Harbor. At 7:53 in the morning, Fuchida sent the code words back to Japan: "Tora, Tora, Tora." They had achieved a total surprise. The US Pacific Fleet was decimated. Fuchida returned to the aircraft carrier after circling above Pearl Harbor from watching the second wave. He returned to the aircraft carrier in triumph.

Jacob DeShazer, heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor while he was peeling potatoes in the kitchen. He shouted out: "Japan will have to pay for this!" Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, DeShazer, along with other members of his bomber group, volunteered to join a special unit that was formed to attack Japan. Twenty four crews were selected and received three weeks of intensive training at Eglin Field in Florida beginning in March 1942. They undertook practice carrier deck takeoffs, extensive flying exercises, low-level and night flying, low altitude bombing, and water navigation. Then, they were told the mission that they would take was to fly B-25-Mitchell bombers over Japan in what became known as the Doolittle Raid. DeShazer was the bombardier of B-25 #16, nicknamed the "Bat (Out of Hell)," and the Doolittle Raid was forced to take off early as the task force was discovered. They flew over Nagoya, Japan and successfully bombed the city, but when they flew over China, they ran out of fuel and had to parachute down. DeShazer was injured in his fall into a cemetery along with the rest of his crew, and he was captured the next day by the Japanese. DeShazer was sent to Tokyo with the survivors of his crew, and he was held in a prisoner of war camp for over forty months. Thirty-four of the months he spent in solitary confinement. Three of his crew members were executed by a firing squad before his eyes, and another member died of slow starvation. In solitary confinement DeShazer said: "My hatred for my enemy nearly drove me crazy." All he could think of doing was killing every Japanese person he could find. He wrote: "My thoughts turn toward what my mother had once talked about, that Christianity had the power to change the human heart from hatred into love, and I began to be gripped by a strange longing to read the Bible to see if I could find the secret. So, I asked my captors to get a Bible for me."

In May 1944, one of the Japanese guards brought this DeShazer a Bible and told him he could have it for only three weeks, and so he began to read. He began to read and read and read, and chapter after chapter of the Bible began to work into his heart. DeShazer was gripped by his reading of the prophets in the Old Testament. Six times he read through their writings that focus on the divine Redeemer who was to come, one who would come born in human flesh. He went to the New Testament and found there those prophecies fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He continued through the Gospels and the book of Acts. He came to the letter of Romans, and he read Romans 10:9: "*If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and*

believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." On June 8, 1944, DeShazer, inside Japanese prisoner of war camp, confessed Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior and received forgiveness and salvation in His name. Through reading God's Word, he was freed not only from his sin, but the hatred that he felt toward the Japanese dissolved. He stayed in prison for another year, and yet he wrote: "My heart rejoiced in my new spiritual life, and even though my body was suffering terribly from the physical beatings and the lack of food, I discovered that God had given me spiritual eyes. When I looked at my enemy officers and the guards who starved me and beat me and beat companions so cruelly, I found that my bitter hatred for them had changed to love and compassion." He wrote about what happened to him in a little pamphlet called: "I Was a Prisoner of Japan," and described his conversion.

Mitsuo Fuchida continued to serve in the Japanese Imperial Navy. He led assaults on Australia. He was in the battle of Midway at the critical moment in the battle when the entire Pacific theater of the war changed in five minutes when the Japanese Air Force was fully loaded and fully fueled and US bombers hit the aircraft carrier right at that moment. The explosion threw Fuchida from the command deck and he landed with such force that it broke both of his ankles. He went back to Japan and served on the command staff until the end of the war. At the end of the war, he was depressed, he was angry, he was bound up with unforgiveness. After the war, the United States, under the Marshall Plan, went to help rebuild Japan. (My grandfather was there as part of that.) It wasn't only rebuilding the buildings in the streets, but the Pocket Testament League was also invited to Japan. It was in an interview with David Collins, who was the CEO of the Pocket Testament League, that I discovered the story this week in *Bible Journey*. The Pocket Testament League was invited to come to Japan, and they distributed 11 million copies of the Bible. Truck loads of the Bible were brought. People came and filled auditoriums to receive a copy of the Bible. At the end of the war, Mitsuo Fuchida was given one of these Pocket Testament League Bibles. As he read the Bible, he was moved by its content. He came through a train station one day, and as he passed through the train station, a person who was distributing Bible literature gave a tract to Fuchida. It was a tract of DeShazer's testimony: "I Was a Prisoner in Japan." Fuchida read through the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and when he got to Luke 23, he saw Jesus on the cross and heard Jesus' cry from the cross: "Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing." Fuchida said: "That's me. I didn't know what I was doing. My heart is gripped with anger and unforgiveness, and Jesus Christ is praying for **me!**" And so on September of 1949, the man who led the attack on Pearl Harbor prayed to receive Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, because God's Word is powerful. Fuchida, the leader of the attack on Pearl Harbor, and DeShazer, who had participated in the Doolittle Raid, had both become Christians, and then they met each other and began to travel around and speak to vast crowds of people about faith in Jesus Christ. The leader of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor came to the States and gave his Christian testimony at Air Force bases. He wrote: "I can only barely describe the thrill of leading my first person to faith in Christ in America.

DeShazer, who had bombed in Nagoya City, moved to Japan and planted a church in Nagoya City. The converted American spent the rest of his life in Japan. The converted Japanese spent most of the rest of his life in the United States. These two former enemies came to faith in Jesus Christ. In 1970, the year in which I was born, Fuchida wrote down his testimony and published it under the title:



“From Pearl Harbor to Calvary.” He said these words: “Jesus Christ is the only One powerful enough to change my life. He is the only One powerful enough to inspire it with His thoughts. He is the only answer to shape DeShazer’s tormented life. He is the only answer for people today.” Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only, full grace and truth.” “To all who received Him, He gave them the right to become children of God.” This, dear friends, is going to be an exciting journey. This is week one, lesson one. There are 200 lessons. This journey begins for us this week. What I want you to do today is very simple. I want to challenge to go to [Bible Journey.com](http://BibleJourney.com) right now and create your own account and you will have total access to the Gospel of John. Get familiar with *Bible Journey* to explore the contents. There's a journal together with it. Download it to your computer or even print it and fill it out along the way. There is online support on *Bible Journey*. I want to invite you to join me on *Bible Journey* because God's Word is compelling. This unique discipleship resource will be your companion as we journey through God's Word together, in the text, behind the text, and in front of the text, so that we might be equipped as people who know God's Word clearly and can communicate it, and can look with eager expectation for the transformation not only in our own lives, not only in our church life, but in our city, in our culture, and in our world. Look what God did with just two young men who started reading the Word of God. Let's pray.

Oh, God, You are great. Your saving plan for us is glorious and beautiful. You sent Your beloved Son into the world. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We praise You, Lord. We thank You for coming. We thank You for allowing us to see Your glory, the glory of the One and only Son of grace and truth. Lord Jesus, we come to You in humility and ask that as we begin our journey this fall together, that You would allow the Word of God to pierce our hearts and minds, that You would change us from the inside out. We pray that in our coming close to You and finding grace and forgiveness, steadfast love and faithfulness, You might change us, Lord, that You would conquer our rebellion, that You would allow us to see Your love and that You

have purchased our lives. Make us Yours forever, Lord. You are worthy to be praised, and so we want to praise You now together,

In Jesus' Name, Amen.