

Sermon: I Said It

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Scriptures: John 1:1-2, 6

Introduction

Marshall McLuhan wrote, "The greatest obstacle to communication is the illusion that it has been achieved."

Isn't the goal of communication clarity? When we speak, we want our message received. When we write, we want our thoughts to be grasped. And when someone is speaking to us, we want them to speak in a language that we can comprehend. It is frustrating when people speak in a coded language or have insider information, and we don't understand. In communication, we want to understand and to be understood.

The apostle John was no different.

I. An introduction to the Gospel of John

John differs from the other three Gospels, known as the synoptic Gospels. Matthew wrote with his fellow Jews in mind and emphasized that Jesus of Nazareth had fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. He was the King of Kings. Mark wrote for a Gentile audience, the busy Romans, presenting Jesus as the suffering Servant, ministering to needy people. Luke wrote his Gospel for the Greeks and introduced Jesus as the sympathetic Son of man, emphasizing Jesus' humanity. John, the beloved disciple, writes to both Jews and Gentiles, presenting Jesus as the Son of God, emphasizing his divinity.

Whereas the first three Gospels major on describing events in the life of Jesus, John emphasized the meaning of those events. John's Gospel is not so much biographical as it is a theological argument for the deity of Jesus. John uses every event, every statement, every miracle, and every title to show us that Jesus is God. He makes the audacious claim by stating the purpose for his writing: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31 NIV). John wants us to believe Jesus is God. He writes with a clear evangelistic purpose.

To accomplish this purpose, John meticulously records seven "I am" statements that Jesus made that can only be attributed to God himself. "I am the bread of life" (6:35, 41, 48, 51); "I am the light of the world" (8:12, 9:5); "I am the door for the sheep" (10:7, 9); "I am the good shepherd" (10:11, 14); "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25); "I am the way, the truth, the life" (14:6), and "I am the true vine" (15:1, 5). The "I am" recalls God's revelation of his name, "I AM," to Moses (Ex. 3:14). Please note that Jesus did not say he gave bread, but that he is bread. That would be true for the other statements as well. These are clear statements and claims to his deity.

Furthermore, John records seven miracles or signs pointing to Jesus' divine nature. They are: changing water into wine (2:1-11), healing a man's son (4:46-54), healing a lame man (5:1-9), multiplying bread and fish (6:1-14), walking on water (6:15-21), healing a blind man (9:1-7), and raising Lazarus from the dead (11:38-44). Jesus possessed power over nature, something only God could do. By the way, this Gospel is sometimes referred to as The Book of the Seven Signs because of these seven miracles.

The greatest sign that Jesus was divine is his resurrection from the tomb. John provides stirring eyewitness account. He was one of the disciples to see the empty tomb. He records several post-resurrections appearances by Jesus.

John wants to be unmistakably clear that Jesus is the divine Son of God in whom we should believe. He offers convincing and compelling proofs that Jesus should be our God.

It is not the end of the story but the beginning, our attention is focused in this message.

II. An overview of the prologue in the Gospel of John

As John begins his introduction of Jesus, the first eighteen verses are called "The Prologue." The Prologue is one of the most complex theological statements in the Bible. Both Augustine and Chrysostom are reported to have said, "It is beyond the power of man to speak as John does in his prologue." John Calvin wrote of the prologue, "Rather should we be satisfied with this heavenly oracle, knowing that it says much more than our minds can take in."

The Prologue is far more than an introduction to the Gospel. It is really a dramatic summary, a revelation, of all that will take place throughout the earthly ministry of Jesus. The Prologue serves like a table of contents. John uses several key words that he refers to time and time again throughout his Gospel as he introduces Jesus as the Son of God. There are seven pairs of words: Word and God; Created and Made; Light and Life; Received and Recognized; Believe and Become; Born and God; Grace and Truth. Each pair of words will be examined in this series of sermons.

III. The Word: God communicating with humankind

We begin by looking at the first pair of words: Word and God. John begins his account by writing, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning" (John 1:1-2 NIV). John Calvin called these verses the "Speech of God." One commentary called this verse the "most compact and pulsating theological statement in all of Scripture."

Notice that John follows effective communication technique.

A. First, get their attention

It has been said that the first ninety seconds is the most important time of a speech and the first 25 words are the most crucial. A speaker may have thirty minutes to hold the audience's attention, but he has only a minute and a half to get their attention.

Any good speaker needs a good opening line. John has a great one. He grabs his audience immediately with three well known words-"In the beginning." Interestingly, Genesis 1:1 begins with the same three words, "In the beginning." John was not content to begin his Gospel story as Mark did with the testimony of John the Baptist. Nor was it enough to go back with Luke to the birth narratives of John the Baptist and Jesus. John did not even go back with Matthew in his genealogy to Abraham and the beginning of the nation of Israel. John started at the very beginning as Genesis 1:1 does, "In the beginning," when there was just God.

In Christian theology you cannot go back further than God. The Gospel of John begins a new Genesis which depicts the redemptive work of Christ. "In the beginning" suggests not only the start of the gospel story but the creation of the world as well. In saying, "in the beginning," John describes Jesus as "existing from the beginning" and "the ultimate source of all things." This fact is examined in greater detail in the next sermon.

B. Next, use language that all can understand

John introduces Jesus as the Word, with a capital "W" in the next phrase: "Was the Word." Just so we are clear, the Word refers to Jesus Christ. John wrote in verse 14, "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 NIV). We will examine thoroughly this all important statement in the last sermon in this series.

John calls Jesus the Word because he had come to see the words of Jesus as the truth of God and the person of Jesus as the truth of God in such a unified way that Jesus himself-in his coming, and working, and teaching, and dying and rising-was the final and decisive Message of God. Or to put it more simply: What God had to say to us was not only or mainly what Jesus said, but who Jesus was and what he did.

The Greek word for the Word is Logos. To the Jews, Logos had roots in the Old Testament, communicating the power of God. It embodied the creative energy of God. In Genesis 1 in the Creation story we read nine times, "God said." He spoke the word and there was light, and sky, and ground, and vegetation, and the sun, and animals, and man. With his word he created. The Psalmist reiterated the creative power of the Word: "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth" (Psalm 33:6 NIV). To the Greeks, Logos was more of a philosophical principle than a power. The word embodied thought, wisdom, reason, and rationality. As far back as 560 BC, Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, had said that the only permanent and lasting reality in the flux of constant change was the Logos, the Reason of God, which controlled and guided this stream of change. To the Christian, Logos was greater than divine power, and more than rational principle; it was redemptive proclamation. Jesus was the way to God. As Jesus would say, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to Father except through me" (John 14:6 NIV). Jesus was the message.

John goes beyond the familiar concept of Logos that his Jewish and Gentile readers would have had and presents Jesus Christ as a personal being, fully divine, yet fully human. Also, Christ was not simply a personification of God's revelation as the Jews thought; he was not as a mere mediating principle like the Greeks perceived, but was indeed God's perfect revelation of himself in the flesh, so much so that John would record Jesus' own words to Philip: "Jesus answered, 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?' Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work" (John 14:9-10 NIV emphasis mine).

This was John's flash of genius. In one word he communicates with three different groups of people, the Jew, the Greek, and the Christian, the audience of his Gospel.

C. Now, state the main point

He continues: "And the Word was with God." The literal translation could be "the Word was towards God." The whole existence of the Word is orientated toward the Father and is in eternal, active communion with him. The Word is in the presence of God, face to face with him.

Notice in the creation story: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" (Gen. 1:26 NIV emphasis mine). In fact, the most common name for God in Hebrew is Elohim, a plural form.

Here's John's main point: Jesus is God.

D. Then, reaffirm the main point

The phrase "And the Word was God" is the climatic statement in John's speaking of the Word and God. All that can be said about God can be said about the Word. John is saying more than "the Word was divine." He is saying that the Word was the embodiment of the divine, the personification of Deity, the incarnation of God.

John reaffirms the main point: Jesus is God.

Yet the Word and the Father are not identical. Grammatically, John does not include the definite article before the word God. If he had done this he would have said that the Word was identical with God. John is saying that the Word was of the very essence, the very character, of God, while not being identical with God. John is not saying that there is something divine about Jesus. He is affirming that Jesus is God.

E. Finally, restate what you have said

John does this by stating: "He was with God in the beginning." The Word was with God, the Word was God. And, he was there in the beginning. It's the word he I want you to pay special attention to. John is saying that the Word is not an "it" or an abstraction or a theory. The Word is not just a power, or philosophical principle, the Word is a person. God has come to us personally. His name is Jesus. Jesus is not aloof or indifferent. As you read John, he will underscore the personal nature of God over and over again. The context of the message was Christ himself. The man was the message.

Jesus is God's Word to us. When God decided to give his final message to mankind, he didn't just send it in a book, which came later! Instead, he sent himself and became that Word to us.

IV. What are the implications of the Word is God?

What does all this theology mean to us? What are the practical values learned in an introduction of Jesus as the Word? There are many implications, but let me offer a few.

A. God has spoken

He is not mute but articulate. God has always had a word for he is the Word. The Almighty is not speechless. God has spoken in his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is God revealing himself to us in a language we can understand. If you want to know what God sounds like, listen to the Word, Jesus. If you want to know what God wants you to do, read the Word, the words of Jesus. If you are looking for a sign from heaven, the Word is the road map for you to follow. If you want to know of how to get to heaven follow the one who came from heaven, Jesus.

B. Jesus is the heart and mind of God

What do we know about words? From the heart the mouth speaks. Much of our words reveal to others our hearts and minds. It reveals what we are thinking. So Jesus is God's Word that reveals the heart and mind of God to us. Jesus said, "These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me" (John 14:24 NIV). The Word spoke words. If you want to get to know God, get to know Jesus. If you are hungry for God, read the words of Jesus.

C. Jesus is the complete word

A word is composed of letters and Jesus Christ said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8 NIV). Alpha was the first letter in the Greek alphabet; Omega was the last. Jesus said that he was the "A" to "Z." Jesus is the embodiment of all we need. If you are looking for answers, they are found in the Word, Jesus. If you are looking for meaning you will find them in the Word, Jesus. If you are looking for directions follow the Word, Jesus.

There's a warning, however.

D. Jesus' words are difficult to follow

John 6 is one of the most moving chapters in Scripture. It moves people from high to low, for being with Jesus to deserting Jesus. In this chapter we witness Jesus feeding the five thousand, walking on the water, and proclaiming that he is the bread of life. The crowd around Jesus had grown quite large. And why not? Jesus fed them, displayed great miracles, and uttered powerful teaching. But then he challenged them: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you" (John 6:53 NIV). It was Jesus' way of saying, "You have to take all of me, not just the feeding and the miracles. You have to cross the line of faith, accept my words, and follow them completely."

Do you think all the people in attendance that day signed up? Well, you read John's report. "On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?'" (John 6:60 NIV). Hard, meaning not difficult to understand, but hard, difficult to follow. So what did they do? Again, John tells us, "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (John 6:66 NIV).

Jesus' words are difficult to follow. Why?

Because the Word forces people to pick a side. He challenges people to make a stand. With Jesus there was no middle of the road, no gray area, so fence-straddling. With Jesus it is all or nothing, life or death, with him or against him, stay or leave, follow him or withdraw from him.

C. S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* wrote, "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn't be a great moral teacher. He'd be either a lunatic-on a level with a man who says he's a poached egg-or else he'd be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse But don't let us come up with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He hasn't left that open to us. He didn't intend to."

While there is a warning, there is also a benefit.

E. Jesus has the words of life

Jesus said to his hearers, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63 NIV emphasis mine). Please don't misunderstand, Jesus, The Word, embodies information. But that is not his main purpose or his main message. Jesus, The Word, brings life.

The crowd leaves after Jesus made his startling requirement. He is alone with the Twelve. Jesus turns to them, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" (John 6:67 NIV).

Peter replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69 NIV, emphasis mine).

Many things Peter did not understand; he was just as bewildered and puzzled as anyone else was by the miracles and teachings of Jesus. But he knew that the One standing before him, the Word, had the words of life, and, that he was God. It was a beautiful confession of a faith. Peter would follow Jesus anywhere and, if needed, he would willingly die for Jesus, which he ultimately did.

In Jesus Christ we have the words of life and find the answers to the deepest needs of modern man. If you are looking for the answer to life's questions; if you are looking for the hope of the world; if you are looking for the One who lifts every burden; if you are looking for the giver of eternal life; his name is Jesus Christ.

F. Jesus is the last word

One last thing, as in a lot of conversations-especially heated and controversial ones, we know that the one who utters the last word usually wins. Here's the final learning: Jesus is the last word. When I was a teenager an expression was popular: "God said it. I believe it. That settles it." That statement is only two-thirds true. The truth is: God said it, that settles it, whether I believe it or not. Jesus will have the last word.

What will be his last word for you? Will it be: "Welcome home my good and faithful servant; I have a room prepared especially for you"? Or will it be: "Depart from me, I never knew you"?

Jesus is God communicating to us in a language we can understand. He has spoken the words of life. Do you understand that he is God? Will you believe in him and follow him?