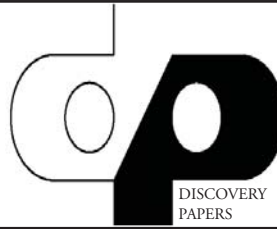




## THE OTHER



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John 1:1-5

1st Message

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Something is out there. We are not alone. This is not all there is.

I don't mean that in a scary way. I'm not introducing a horror movie. I'm just suggesting that there is something else besides us in the universe. Probably even something vastly different than us. Something a lot of people might call God. Some might call it an energy. Some might have other names for it.

I'm calling it "the other." There is something else out there.

Most people believe this—the vast majority of people, in fact. A recent poll showed that atheism and agnosticism is on the rise in America and put it at 6% of the population. That means 94% of people in America believe that something is out there (<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>). There is "the other."

Woody Allen is quoted as saying, "I believe there is something out there watching us. Unfortunately, it's the government." But his is a rare opinion.

When you ask people if they believe in something, almost all of them will say yes. They may not call it God. They may not practice a particular religion. They may have serious questions about its nature. But most people, when it really comes down to it, think that there is something out there. There is "the other."

This morning we are kicking off a new series as a church. Last year we embarked on a really different kind of project called *EPIC*. We preached an overview of the entire Bible in nine months. It was a great experience of being united under a common topic, connecting together across different parts of the church, and seeing the incredible story of God's work in the world on a high level as it's revealed in the Bible.

As we talked about where to go next, we realized that we wanted to slow down and study the Bible in smaller sections and we wanted to focus a little more on application. We've seen this incredible story of God's action in the world. Now what does it mean for us? How does it get driven home?

So we gradually came to the conclusion that focusing

on Jesus is the best way to ask ourselves how to live out these grand truths that we discovered in the *EPIC* series. Many of us were drawn to the gospel of John because it is such a unique portrayal of Jesus. And so we decided to embark on another journey over the course of a school year, but one that will cover one book instead of the entire Bible. So we'll be studying the Gospel of John over the next ten months.

Personally, I'm really excited to study this book as a church. It's probably one of my favorite books in the Bible—definitely my favorite gospel. John is an incredible author. His writing is like one of those jawbreakers that you suck on. Willy Wonka's Everlasting Gobstopper. It has layers and layers of meaning. Just as you think you've gotten beneath the surface to discover something new, you realize there is something more that you don't quite grasp.

There is one theme that is everywhere throughout this book. Life. John uses the Greek word for life way more than any other biblical author. He is concerned about life—what it is, what counterfeits are out there, how to get it, and what makes it hard to get. In fact, John tells us at the end of his book that his main purpose in writing is so that people can have life.

In John 20:30-31, John says, "these [signs] are written so 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 describes exactly what he's doing.

His purpose in writing is that people may have life. The way he goes about helping people to have life is to show them signs that point to life. People often identify seven signs that John refers to in his book, but in reality, the whole book is full of signs. Some of those are miraculous signs, like the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Some of them are more common, like the words that Jesus speaks about himself and to his followers. Everything in this book is some kind of a sign.

And all of those signs point people to life through faith in Jesus Christ.

In showing us these signs, John is an incredibly visual author. He uses all sorts of images to carry his message. So in an effort to organize our journey through the gospel of John, we've selected nine images that John uses throughout

his gospel as our guides through this book. Word. Birth. Water. Bread. Light. Tears. Vine. Rise. And Breakfast. We've grouped the various sections of the book together according to the symbols.

Our goal is to let these images help us to have some sense of where we are in the Gospel of John. But they aren't like the eras that we used to divide out the grand story of the *Epic*. They don't carry a story in the same way. They aren't chronological. These images are all throughout the gospel. They show up in one place, fade into the background, and then show up again.

It's as if you're looking at a picture with lots of images and some of them come into focus for a moment. We're choosing one to bring into focus at different points to capture our attention, but that won't be the only place it shows up and it won't show up all the time during that section. Then it'll show up again in a different section.

Each of the images reminds us of life. Each of them shows us how John is pointing faith in Jesus as the only way toward the kind of full life that God intends for us.

So this morning we start at the beginning. And when I say the beginning, I mean the beginning. That's where John starts his gospel. But in particular, he starts off with the idea that I began to talk about. He begins the story of Jesus, not by using Jesus' name, but by referring to this sense that people have that something is out there. In our Bibles, it is translated as "the Word." That's the image that we'll be drawing into focus for the next two weeks.

Our passage for today covers the first five verses. John 1:1-5. This is what is often called the prologue of John. It's his introduction to the book. This book is written to people that don't think they want to hear about Jesus. It's written to people who have some kind of belief, but don't know exactly how to articulate it.

The prologue starts off with this idea of "the other." The idea that something is out there. John begins with an idea that everyone knew of and then gradually develops it. He refines it. And eventually, he names "the other." But not this week. We'll get there next week.

As John develops this idea, he starts off in the way distant past. The pre-past. Before the before. And then he moves closer. He moves to the past. To the creation of life. To the beginning of what we know. Then he brings these ideas to today. He says something about what is going on now.

Throughout all of this we'll see this theme of life. That this "other"—the one that John is introducing us to—is somehow deeply connected with life. And that gives us hope that perhaps we could have access to a different kind

of life than we have known in the past.

## In the Beginning

So let's look at where John starts. As I said, John starts at the beginning. But this beginning is even before our beginning. It is the pre-past.

John 1:1-2:

**<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
<sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God.**

You can't read these words without being reminded of the beginning of the entire Bible because he starts by using the same words as the first words in Genesis. He does that intentionally—to alert us to the fact that he's saying something about the nature of the universe itself.

He starts with the same words as Genesis, but then he changes them. Genesis 1:1 opens with "In the beginning, God." But John starts with "In the beginning was the Word." We know that God was at the beginning. That's one of the famous lines of the Bible. But John changes things up. He talks about "the Word" being at the beginning.

But what is he talking about? What is "the Word?"

This is where John is trying to connect with the idea of "the other." To understand what he's doing, we need to have some background on the language that he's using. The Greek word being used here is "Logos." It's a fairly common Greek word—it comes from the root word "to speak." Most English Bibles translate this term using the English "word." And that's a good translation.

The problem is that the Greek word "Logos," while it literally means "word," meant so much more to John's readers than we can even really understand. Several centuries before the Gospel of John was written, Greek philosophers starting using the word "Logos." Heraclitus, in the 5th century B.C., started using this word to refer to a principle of order and knowledge that governed all of reality. The Stoics used it to refer to "the common law of nature, immanent in the universe and maintaining its unity, the divine fire, the soul of the universe." Philo, a Jewish philosopher used it to refer to "the agent of creation."

It meant a lot to Greeks, but it also meant a lot to Jews. Their entire faith was based on the self-revelation of God through his Scriptures. The concept of "the Word of the LORD" pervades the Old Testament. God revealed

himself through words. Creation happened through a spoken word. The prophets gave voice to the word of the LORD. The word of God is the means by which God acts in the world.

So Logos meant something deep to Greek philosophers. It also meant something deep to Jews. Here's how I understand it. The Logos is that thing that's out there that you know exists but you just can't explain. It's "the other."

In studying this, I learned that most Chinese Bibles translate Logos using the Chinese word "Tao." "Tao" is a fascinating word. Like Logos it has deep roots in philosophy. It's also a very plain word that is used commonly to refer to a number of different things. The word literally means "way," "path," or "principle." But many religious and philosophical traditions use this word to describe what I'm calling the other.

One philosophical definition of this word is "the basic, eternal principle of the universe that transcends reality and is the source of being, non-being, and change" (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Tao>).

This is a great summary of how people used the Greek word "Logos." Honestly, I'm a bit jealous of Chinese Bibles. Tao is a great word in Chinese that captures a lot of what Logos meant to a Greek reader. We just don't have a word in our language that means all these things.

Do you see what John did brilliantly? Do you see what the early translators of the Bible into Chinese did brilliantly? They started with an idea that was already prevalent in their culture and they connected that idea with Jesus. They started with what people already believed in, but then redefined it for them to refer to Jesus.

The obvious question then is what do people in our culture already believe in? Do they believe in something like Logos or Tao?

Eckhart Tolle has written *The Power of Now*—which Amazon lists as one of the most popular self-help books. He writes this about stillness, "the only thing in this world that has no form. But then, it is not really a thing and it is not of this world" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eckhart\\_Tolle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eckhart_Tolle)).

Oprah Winfrey talks about what she believes saying, "It isn't until you come to a spiritual understanding of who you are—not necessarily a religious feeling, but deep down, the spirit within—that you can begin to take control" (<http://oprah.about.com/od/oprahquotes/a/esteemquotes.htm>).

The actor Jack Black says "I don't have any real

spirituality in my life—I'm kind of an atheist—but when music can take me to the highest heights, it's almost like a spiritual feeling. It fills that void for me" (<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/spirituality.html>).

C.S. Lewis talks about how before he became a Christian, he had a sense that he called the "Northernness." It comes from pagan Norse mythology and he describes being engulfed by "a vision of huge, clear spaces hanging above the Atlantic in the endless twilight of Northern summer, remoteness, severity" (C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, p.68-69).

Don't you think that most of the people you know could resonate with this? Don't you think that most of them have some sense of "the other." Whether they call it "stillness" like Tolle or "the spirit within" like Oprah or "Northernness" like Lewis or "music" for Jack Black, most people have some awareness that there is something more. This isn't all there is.

At the heart of it, that's what Logos referred to. It was a term that a bunch of different people used to refer to the "something more" that everyone on some level acknowledges as being there.

So John starts with this idea from his culture and he develops it. The first thing he says is that it was in the beginning, before anything else. So far everyone would agree with him.

Then he says it was with God. That phrase literally reads, "the Logos was toward God." It was with God, but not in the same way that my phone is with me today. It was with God in the way that my wife is with me today. The Logos was with God in a personal way. Then John goes a step further. He says that this Logos wasn't just with God. This Logos was God.

It's incredible how much John has said in such few words. He has tapped into some rich idea of something beyond this world that almost everyone had a sense of. He has suggested that this idea was personal and that it was in some kind of relationship with God—in particular the God of Israel. Then he has gone one step further to say that this idea, this Logos was God himself. All in a few words.

Eventually, John will give this Logos a name, but not yet. That will come.

## Created Through Him

John begins way, way back in the distant past before there was anything. That's where he starts. He begins by talking about the basic existence of the Logos. But in

the next two verses, he moves a bit closer. He moves to creation.

John 1:3-4:

**<sup>3</sup>All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and the life was the light of men.**

John has established that the Logos was there in the beginning. Now he says that the Logos wasn't just there, he did something. The Logos participated in creation. In fact, he didn't just participate—he was essential to the whole process.

The way John describes it is captured in verse 3, “All things were made through him.” The word translated as “made” literally means “came to be.” It's actually used repeatedly throughout this whole section. John is very interested in how things “came to be.” And in what things “came to be.” Here it is used to describe how everything came to be. It all happened through the work of the Logos. Nothing came to be—or began to exist—apart from his involvement in it.

But what John says about the Logos is that he caused everything to “come to be.” The Logos didn't just wave a trick magical wand. He actually made things exist that used to not exist. That is something that no one has ever figured out how to replicate.

For all of its accomplishments and contributions to society, science can't replicate and it can't figure out how it happened in the first place. Science can't adequately explain existence. One of the founding axioms of science is the principle of cause and effect. Science assumes that everything has a cause. Anything that happens does so because of some cause. Through experimentation and the scientific method, we are able to determine that cause. We see the effect and we find the cause.

But the problem happens when you keep following the chain backward. If everything has a cause, then as you follow those causes, you get further and further back in time. But that's theoretically impossible because it would mean that ultimately there is no cause for everything which would violate the very foundation of science. So there must exist something outside that caused everything. This is the first cause, or the “uncaused cause.” Something, or someone, which itself had no cause, had to set everything into motion.

If you ask most people on the street whether they believe in God, this is the argument they will usually fall back on. They will say something like, “Well, I just can't believe that

all of this is an accident.” That's street language for saying that there must be an uncaused cause.

John says that this is the Logos. He is the uncaused cause.

Then he says something more. “In him was life.” John says that life itself originated with the Logos. He didn't just create rocks and dirt and water. He gave birth to life itself.

Scientists don't have many theories to explain how something came from nothing. But they do have theories to explain how life came from non-life. Many believe that the first life was born out of what is called a primordial soup: a mix of nonorganic material and chemicals on the earth. An experiment in 1953 suggested that lightning could have caused compounds to combine into life. Another theory suggests that deep sea vents might have created the conditions for life through vast amounts of heat and hydrogen. Others believe that vast quantities of ice might have served as a protective environment for very slow reactions to occur and result in life. Still others suggest that life arrived from another planet on an asteroid. But that only leaves the question: how did life originate on that planet.

Two years ago a bunch of these scientists gathered together in Arizona for a conference to discuss the origins of life. A lot of theories were shared and debated. But at the end of the day, one of the conclusions reached is that we just can't know. They quoted Nobel-Prize winning physicist Richard Feynman who said, “What I cannot create, I cannot understand.”

Isn't that a fascinating quote? “What I cannot create, I cannot understand.” Ultimately, we can't understand how life began because we can't create it. As hard as we have tried, we simply cannot create life from nothing.

John tells us why. Because life is in Jesus. Jesus is the source of life. Think about what that means. That thing that makes me different from this pulpit and my dog different from my car comes from Jesus. In Jesus was life. It all came from him. Everything that has life owes that life to Jesus. That's what John is saying here. It's an incredible thing to say.

This is what we're going to discover as we study the gospel of John. Not just that believing in Jesus gets you to heaven. Jesus isn't just the source of eternal life. Jesus is the source of life period.

I think if you ask the average person what they want, they'll have a bunch of different answers. But if you combined all those answers and put them together and started to find something similar about them, you'd see a pattern. This person wants a better job that pays more. That

person wants a girlfriend. Another person wants their kids to obey them. Another wants their parents to give them more freedom. Someone else wants healing from sickness. Another person wants a new car.

All of those things have to do with life. What we want is life. We have different definitions of what might bring us life. Some want money, some want relationships, some want power, some want prestige. But all of us, at our core want life. We are desperate and frantic and crazy about finding life.

In the first few words of this gospel, John makes a crazy claim. All life comes from Jesus. Jesus is the source of life.

That means that if you want to experience life—and I've said that's exactly what you want—then you need to get it from Jesus. This is a message that resonates in our world. Everyone wants life—Christians, Atheists, Buddhists, Muslims, and everyone in between. The answer is the Logos. In him was life.

Notice that the answer isn't Christianity. The answer is Jesus. The Gospel of John isn't about how to be a Christian. It's about Jesus. How to know Jesus. How to find life through faith in him. Christianity is the system that we've come up with to get there. It's just the name we give to that collection of people who are trying to do this. But it's also become more than that. Depending on where you are, Christianity can be associated with a certain political viewpoint, certain behaviors, certain language, ways of dressing and having fun, and where you live. But all of that is secondary. What's primary is Jesus—the source of life.

## The Light Shines

John begins by discussing this something that is out there in the universe—the Word, the Tao, the Logos, the soul of the universe. He says it was there in the beginning. Then he gives it personality and says that it was with God. Then he gives it an identity and says that it actually was God. Then he says that he was responsible for everything that came into existence. Then he says that he is the source of all life from the bacteria that makes me sick to the dog that licks my hand to the child that grows up in my house.

Then he brings it home.

John started in the way distant past. Then he moved to the past: to creation. Now in verse 5, John jumps forward. In verse 5, he brings all of this into our experience.

John 1:5:

**<sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the**

**darkness has not overcome it.**

In the first four verses of this book, John has used exclusively past tense verbs. In the beginning was the Word. In him was life. The life was the light of man. But now John says the light shines in the darkness. All of a sudden he switches to the present tense. The emphasis of the verb tense is really something like “the light is shining in the darkness.” This is happening here. This is happening now.

That brings everything we've been talking about to a whole new level. It's one thing to talk about the soul of the universe. Even to give it personality and a name and to call it responsible for creation and even life itself. But now John is saying, “it's here now.” The Logos is shining here and now.

It's like if you're sitting around your kitchen table talking about politics. One of you is criticizing President Obama for some policy decision. Maybe you use some choice language to describe him. Someone else defends him. You're having a heated debate about the merits of our nation's president. Then you hear a knock at the door. And he walks into your dining room and sits down next to you. Now he's not a president out there making decisions that you agree with or disagree with. He's a person at your table. That's very different.

That's what John does by bringing the Logos into the present tense. The Word is not just something in the past. The Word is now.

But the Word isn't just now. The Word is shining and something is trying to stop it.

Now we've got a story. Talking about a pre-existent Logos is theology. Speculating on the origin of life is philosophy. But now we have light versus darkness. Now we have conflict. Conflict is interesting. Conflict gives us a story. The Word is the light, but the light isn't all there is. There is also darkness.

Just like most people acknowledge some force out there, almost everyone acknowledges that our world has problems. Deep problems. Most would even say there is darkness. You can find darkness on a national scale and find countries oppressing its citizens. You can find darkness on a regional level and find people in our area trapped in the sex trade or living in poverty. You can find darkness in our families where rage, bitterness, and anger can take root, last for decades and tear people apart. And you can find darkness on a personal level. There is darkness inside my heart: selfishness, greed, lust, and anger.

So John tells us that this Logos has something to do with

the darkness in our world. In fact, he says that it is opposed to the darkness. John says that there is a fight coming. But in the same breath, he gives us a little prediction of how things are going to turn out. He lets us know that this is a story worth listening to because it is a story where the hero wins out in the end. The darkness may try to overpower. The darkness may try to overtake. But the darkness will not win. The light will prevail.

So now, what started out as a cosmic discussion that any philosopher might enjoy having has all of a sudden very practical implications. We don't just live in a world where things happen randomly. History isn't just unfolding neutrally. We live in the midst of a conflict. On one side is this Logos who is the light and the life of man. On the other side is the darkness that pervades our world.

Life is not the only thing out there. There is death as well. Jesus is the light, but there is darkness. Life comes from Jesus, but death is powerful as well. And so at the end of these verses, we find out that the Logos isn't just philosophy. It's current events. It's happening now.

There is darkness and there is light. The question that we must ask is "whose side are we on?" There are no bystanders in this. There is no standing on the sidelines watching how it will unfold. There are no fair-weather fans. There is only light and darkness.

Honestly, I think a lot of us need to be challenged by this. A lot of us believe in Jesus. We follow him. We volunteer in church and go to Bible study and pray before we go to bed. But sometimes it's easy to forget that the life of Jesus is a story of conflict. It is a battle between light and darkness and it is happening today. The light shines today because the darkness surrounds us today.

This battle happens as we face temptations to give in to our selfish desires. This battle happens as our children grow up and face more and more confusion about what life is all about, about the source of happiness, and about the nature of sexuality. This battle happens as the people around us wrestle with alcoholism and infidelity and bankruptcy and depression. This battle happens as our world struggles with a changing international landscape amidst deep questions of who is going to come out on top. This battle happens as people seize opportunities to oppress children and women and each other. This battle happens as our neighbors and coworkers try to figure out how to make sense of life.

We believe in Jesus as our friend. We believe in Jesus as our Savior. We believe in Jesus as our Lord. But Jesus

is more than all that. He is what was before anything else was. He is the light that shines in the darkness. He is the source of existence. He is the source of life. He is engaged in a conflict with death and darkness. And he is the one that will eventually emerge as the victor.

Most people have a vague sense that something is out there. Jesus is that something and he is bigger than we can even imagine.

## Conclusion

So John begins his story of Jesus. The other gospel authors start their stories very differently. They begin with the birth of a man. Over time, their stories make it clear that Jesus is a different kind of man. Gradually, you become aware just how different Jesus is.

Not John. He starts off with the cosmic, profound truth about the Logos who is literally the all-in-all. He was before. He related to God. He is God himself. He was responsible for everything being created. He is the source of life. And finally, he is here now, ready for a conflict and poised to win.

If you're like me, after hearing this, you want to know more. You want to know more about this person. You want to know about light. You want to experience life. That's the journey that begins today. Let's follow these signs. Let's find life for ourselves and let's be a part of God offering life to the world.