



THE LAST WORD ... ON GOD

Over Advent this year we're going to be looking at the beginning of Jesus' story – though not according to Matthew or Luke, but John. And it involves a message ...

John 1:1-18

Well, it's the first Sunday in Advent, and time for a festive brag: Kellie's Christmas present is sorted (from me, anyway – I can't account for anyone else)!

But so what? Why do all this? Because we're married to this person? "Dear _ I felt obliged to give you this present as we happened to say 'I will' so many years ago, and we haven't changed our minds yet." Or because we're related to that person? "Dear _ I felt obliged to give you this present as we happen to share the same genetic material, and we're still talking." Please, no! So why do we do this? Generally, we send cards and give presents and make an effort as a way of sending a message:

"I love you."

John begins his 'Jesus story' by talking about a message, too – the Word, or *logos* in Greek. Only this message or Word isn't a thing, it's a person. It's Jesus!

Now this idea isn't unique to John. By the time John wrote this gospel, Jewish scribes had translated the Hebrew scriptures into Aramaic – in what are called

the Targums. And in the Targums, God is given a nickname: 'the Word' or *Memra*. Why does this matter? Because everything those Jewish scribes said about the *Memra* John says about Jesus – beginning with the fact that Jesus is God Himself.

Look at the clues in John 1:1:

1) He's Always Been There. Here's a question for you: when did Jesus' story begin? Ask that of a lot of people, and they'll say "Bethlehem." Push it a bit further and they might say "Mary." But in reality, Jesus' story goes back much further.

How far? As far as it's possible to go.

John's Gospel begins where the Bible itself begins – *en arche* or 'in the beginning', as in the beginning of time and space. Why does this matter? Because of what it says about Jesus. The most accurate way of translating the Greek here is "In the beginning the Word already was," or "the Word continued to be." The point being, Jesus was already there when the universe began, which means Jesus must be outside of time – He must be eternal.

That's why, later on in John's Gospel, Jesus says, "Before Abraham was, I am" or "I am He," which is an expression that God uses of Himself in Isaiah chs 41-51 (6 times, in fact). I.e. He was there in the beginning, and He'll be there at the end –

And He's there with you, too.

2) He's Always Been With God. "And the Word was with God ..."

When John says "with God" or *pros ton theon* in Greek, it could also be translated 'towards God', 'facing God' – in this case, like a mirror image. I.e. although they're distinct, everything God is, the Word is. Paul too picks up on this idea when he says, "He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the heir of all creation" (Colossians 1:15).

Christian philosophers over time have come up with various arguments for God's existence:

- **Cosmological** (a beginning demands a beginner)
- **Teleological** (a design demands a designer)
- **Ontological** (an idea demands an ideal)
- **Ethical** (an aspiration demands an inspiration)

But the greatest evidence is Christological: it's Jesus Himself. It's like God has left a great big thumbprint on the pages of history – and Jesus is it.

However, Jesus also tells us something about what God is like. I.e. He's a God of love and compassion and mercy and grace and truth and humility and justice. One of the questions kids often ask is, "What does God look like?" John's answer would be, "He looks like Jesus." And that's important because what we believe about God can often affect how we behave –

So we need to get it right.

3) He's Always Been God. "And the Word was God." Notice it doesn't tell us how (God's ways are way beyond ours, as it says in Isaiah 55), just that He is.

Now let me explain something: you'll get some people claim that when it says, "God" it should actually read 'a god' (with a lower case 'g'), the point being that Jesus is some kind of lesser god, but not the God of Gods. The problem with this, apart from the fact that there is no 'a' or indefinite article in Greek, is that, in the Bible, there's no such thing as a 'lesser god' either – there's the one true God, and that's it. As it says in the *Sh'ma*, the Jewish declaration of faith (Deuteronomy 6:4):

*Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one.
And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, and with all your strength.*

Yes, as far as John is concerned, Jesus is God. And that means He's either a false god ...

Or the one true one!

Making God Known

So, this 'Word' was already there at the beginning of the universe, and this 'Word' is a perfect reflection of all that God is – because this 'Word' is God Himself.

Which is why, at the very end of the prologue, John says this (vs18):

*"No-one has ever seen God at any time;
but the one and only Son (or in some texts, 'God'),
who is at the Father's side, has made Him known."*

There is a profound mystery here – a paradox. No-one can 'see' God in terms of fully comprehending Him, as made clear on numerous occasions in the scriptures. But there is an aspect, a dimension of God's being, that we can see, that we can know – and that's Jesus. And get this: the words "who is at the Father's side" should really be translated, "who is in the bosom of the Father ..." I.e. in the very heart, the core, the centre, of the Father, is that carpenter from Nazareth. Which means that everything the Son says and does, the Father says and does. As Jesus Himself put it, "I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me." "I and the Father are one."

So why does John refer to Jesus as 'the Word'? In a nutshell, because Jesus is God's way of saying, "I love you." Except ... the message is not some string of letters on a page. The message is *God*.

Which leaves us with something of a challenge: if this is what God has said to us – what do we say in return? Are we ready to say we love Him too?

With our lips? With our lives?