

☒ LIFE OF JESUS

February 14, 2021 | *The Word Became Flesh*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Read John 1:1–18

Pray that God would give you insight to understand this enormously important but difficult to comprehend passage.

THIS WEEK

☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Jesus came into the world on a redemptive mission.

☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Since we are followers of Jesus, understanding His mission helps us understand our mission.

☒ MEDITATE

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. (John 1:4–5)

GETTING STARTED

+ *Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to connect this passage's main point to your own life.*

🗣️: *What three things would you tell someone about yourself if you wanted them to know you?*

Q: *How would you, in your own words, encapsulate the mission of Jesus Christ?*

We often define ourselves by what we do. Architects are known by the buildings they design. Truckers are known for adapting to a life on the road. Soldiers know their lives have been forever altered by the military way of life. This is not always a healthy mindset; nevertheless, we often find our identity in our labor.

In many ways, the same thing can be said about Jesus Christ. You can know a lot of basic facts about Jesus, such as the place of His birth, the area of the world in which He lived, His nationality, and His cause of death (we will discover each of these things as we move through this series), but if you fail to understand His mission, you have failed to understand Him. John, one of Jesus's closest companions on this earth, recognized this to be the case. Thus, when he set out to write his Gospel, he began by explaining the basics of Jesus's mission on earth.

Q: *Why is it essential for us to define Jesus by what He came to do?*

Q: *How are you defined by Jesus's mission?*

APPLICATION POINT – It is essential for us to define Jesus by His mission. It is equally essential for us to be defined by Jesus's mission. There are many ways we can define ourselves, but as Christians, none of them exceeds who we are because of what Christ has done for us. Christians can be doctors, soldiers, truck drivers, mothers, or anything else, but we are Christians first. We can fill all these roles during the week, but we cannot leave our Christian identity behind. This week make a list of the various roles that define you. Do any of them define you more than your relationship with Christ? If so, write down some steps you need to take to bring this area of your life back into balance with your relationship with Jesus.

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+ John begins his Gospel by referencing Jesus's divinity and then announcing His mission.

1. CHRIST HAS BEEN SINCE ETERNITY PAST.
2. THE TASK OF JESUS'S MISSION: SHINING LIGHT
3. THE GOAL OF JESUS'S MISSION: MAKING US CHILDREN OF GOD
4. THE MEANS OF JESUS'S MISSION: GRACE AND TRUTH

GOING DEEPER

+This section will investigate John 1:1–18 in more detail to understand how John described Jesus's mission.

1. CHRIST HAS BEEN SINCE ETERNITY PAST.

🗺️ JOHN 1:1–3

🗨️: *Why does John call Jesus the “Word”?*

🗨️: *How many ways does John reference Jesus's deity in these verses?*

John begins his Gospel by describing the divinity of Jesus Christ. This is part of the doctrine of the Trinity, one of the most distinguishing beliefs of the Christian faith. Christians believe that there is one God and that He has existed eternally in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is inherently mysterious. Human language struggles to explain it, and the human mind struggles to understand it. But this essential Christian doctrine is John's choice to begin his Gospel.

🗨️: *What does God's Trinitarian existence tell us about His nature?*

🗨️: *How does Jesus's divinity make Him the perfect Savior?*

APPLICATION POINT – Since God has existed eternally in three persons, there has been an eternal relationship

between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We serve a relational God! God's ability to relate does not stop within the Godhead but extends to us. This is made most evident in the incarnation (appearance in human form) of Jesus Christ. Many psychiatrists have noted a pandemic of loneliness sweeping across our modern world despite people being more connected with other individuals than ever before. Christians are not immune to feelings of loneliness, but we know we have a relationship with a relational God. This week consider some ways in which you can strengthen your relationship with God. How can you invite Him into your life more? Some ways to start could include prayer and fellowship with other believers.

🔗: *How is it that God made the world and that all things were made through Jesus?*

🔗: *How does Christ's role as Creator relate to the Christian claim that He is king?*

After describing Jesus's deity, John quickly moves on to Jesus's role within creation. Genesis 1 reveals that God created all things through His speech. John, consistent with the intent of Genesis 1, injects a Trinitarian perspective into the creation of the world by identifying Jesus with the word spoken by the Father. Thus, God the Father created all things through God the Word.

We should not let familiarity obscure how remarkable John's claim is. He is attributing the creation of the universe to a man with whom he walked, ate, and lived. Such a claim was revolutionary and had obvious implications for the importance of Jesus Christ for everyone who has lived.

🔗: *How does Christ as Creator solidify His reign over your life?*

🔗: *Christ not only created humanity, but the earth and the rest of the cosmos as well. What implications does this have for our relationship to the world we live in?*

APPLICATION POINT – Just as we are not the extent of Jesus's creation, we are not the extent of His redemption. Part of Jesus's mission is to redeem the very cosmos He made (Romans 8:20–21). As followers of Christ, we are entrusted with proclaiming and spreading Jesus's mission, and this responsibility includes being caretakers of the world He made and is redeeming. There are obviously climate extremists whose views cannot be reconciled to

the gospel and Jesus's mission in this world, and Christians should avoid this extremism. But we cannot abandon our role as caretakers of what our Savior created and redeemed. What simple actions can you and your Christian community take to care for creation?

2. THE TASK OF JESUS'S MISSION: SHINING LIGHT

☐ JOHN 1:4-9

Q: *What does John mean by light in these verses?*

Q: *What does John mean by darkness?*

In these verses, John introduces a metaphor describing what Jesus's mission on earth entails. Jesus's life gives light to men. What John means by this metaphor is the question interpreters of Scripture must wrestle to answer. Light enables us to perform the most basic functions needed to live on earth. Apart from light, we would endlessly stumble about in darkness. Applied to our spiritual lives, this metaphor shows that apart from the light Jesus provides, we cannot even accomplish the most basic tasks needed to please God.

An interesting detail about light and darkness is that although they are contrasts, they are not complete contrasts. They are not complete counterparts. Darkness is the absence of light. You cannot have both light and darkness. Light always overcomes darkness. John draws on this dynamic within his metaphor. The darkness does not overcome the light. Every dark place is transformed where Jesus shines His light.

Q: *How has Jesus given light to your life?*

Q: *What is the eternal state of those who live apart from the light of Christ?*

APPLICATION – The light Jesus shines upon our lives is the forgiveness of our sins and the restoration of our relationship with God. But as is the case with real light, it extends far beyond its source. The gospel changes not only our relationship with God but every aspect of our lives, including our marriages, our other family relationships, our

attitudes at work, our financial habits, even our eating habits. Are you allowing the light of Jesus to infiltrate every area of your life? If you are a Christian, choose one aspect noted above and make a list of ways in which the gospel is making a difference in that area of your life and the ways in which the gospel should be making a difference but is not. If you are a non-believer, list the ways the gospel would change your relationship with God.

Q: *What is the role of John the Baptist in this passage?*

Q: *Why does John the apostle emphasize that John the Baptist was not the light himself?*

John the Baptist is an important figure in all four Gospels. His appearance here, however, in this heightened reflection about Jesus, may strike us as odd. John was an important transitional character in the Bible. Jesus called him a prophet (Matthew 11:9), linking him to the Old Testament prophets, but he was also the first person to call attention to Jesus at the start of His earthly ministry. Thus, John the Baptist spans the Old Testament and the New Testament. His role was to be a witness concerning the Light. In this way, he is an important link to us as followers of Christ. Our role, like John's, is to be witnesses for the Light. Thus, John also links us to the prophetic ministry of the Old Testament.

Q: *Some people wondered if John was the Messiah. They confused the messenger with the message. Are there ways you have failed to recognize Jesus as the true Messiah?*

Q: *How is your witness for Jesus Christ going?*

APPLICATION POINT – John was so consumed with his witness about Jesus that some people mistook him for Jesus. Unfortunately, modern believers are seldom so enthusiastic about their testimony concerning who Christ is and what He has done. Today is our time, like John and the prophets before him, we are to be witnesses for the light of Christ. Where are you neglecting your role as a witness to the Light? In your family? At your workplace? On social media? List a few potential ways you can tell others about what Christ has done for you.

3. THE GOAL OF THE MISSION: TRANSFORMING US INTO CHILDREN OF GOD

■ JOHN 1:10-13

Q: *What does it mean to receive Jesus?*

Q: *What does it mean to be a child of God?*

For a time, Jesus was an immensely popular figure among His own people and even among some of the Romans stationed in His region. By the time of His execution, however, the masses had turned their backs on Him. Thus, John noted, the world did not know Jesus, and even His own people rejected Him. It can be difficult for modern Christians to appreciate the significance of Jesus being rejected by His own people. We tend to think of His mission from a wider frame of reference, and there is a legitimate reason for this. But the Gospel writers all emphasize Jesus's mission among the Jewish people, His people. Jesus Himself states, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). Their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah is a major component of the Bible's story of our salvation. It was the rejection of Jesus among His own people that led to widespread mission among the Gentiles.

Those who embrace Jesus and His mission are reborn into God's family. This is the goal of Jesus's mission. Jesus's mission on the earth was not to build an earthly kingdom. It did not revolve around a financial portfolio or political aspirations. It cannot be best described with some vague notion such as making this world a better place. Jesus's mission is to build a family. His mission transforms us from children of the world into children of God. John described this transformation as a new birth, a metaphor he incorporates again. John does not go into great detail concerning how we are transformed into children of God at this point, but what he does say is significant. We are transformed into children of God by receiving Jesus Christ, not by any great deeds on our part. It is Jesus who has accomplished all that is needed for our salvation. We only need to receive Him and what He has done. Also, our salvation is based upon God's will, not the decree of any king or the decision of any man—including us.

Q: *Why is it dangerous to find our worth in the opinion of others?*

Q: *How do you try to earn admission into God's family apart from what Christ has done?*

APPLICATION POINT – Christians must remember that Christ, our Savior, was ultimately rejected by His own people and the rest of the world. We must be wary of finding our worth in what others think of us instead of who we are as children of God. What matters most is not how many friends we have on social media, how many “likes” our posts receive, or how popular we are among our peers. What matters most is that God considers us part of His family. Are you seeking your worth from the opinion of others? Many Christians, once they begin asking this question, are surprised to see how often they pander to the praise of others. This mindset has been deeply ingrained in us to the point that it controls the clothes we wear, the food we eat, the décor of our homes, and even the type of activities we do with our families. And social media has exacerbated the problem. We can now live for the “likes” of others even when they are nowhere around us! This week consider ways you are seeking your worth from the opinion of others and how you can prioritize what Christ thinks of you. For one day, try to run each of your decisions through the grid of “will this decision show how I value Christ above all things or show that I allow the opinion of others to shape every decision I make?” I suspect that many of us will not need to go more than an hour before realizing how this grid will radically alter our lives.

4. THE MEANS OF THE MISSION: GRACE AND TRUTH

■ JOHN 1:14–18

Q: *How does the grace and truth of the Son become known within humanity?*

Q: *Why does John contrast grace and truth with the law of Moses?*

The means of Jesus’s mission is grace and truth. John mentions this couplet twice in the closing verses of this passage. On their own, these two concepts seem rather vague here. He does not delve into our need for grace and truth or what these do. He does, however, contrast this couplet with the law of Moses, which highlights the significance John is getting at. The law of Moses showed Israel how to live with God in their midst. The problem was that the Israelites, like the rest of us, were utterly incapable of keeping God’s law perfectly. To behold the glory of God, we will need grace. That grace comes to us in the life, death, and resurrection of the Son, Jesus Christ. The truth John refers to concerns the very nature of God. For Moses and the Israelites, God was always shrouded in mystery. He dwelt among the people in the desert, but His presence was confined to the inner chamber of the tabernacle, the holy of holies. Moses saw God’s glory, but only the most remote parts of it (Exodus 33:20–23). In Jesus, however, the true glory of God was made available for everyone to see. Thanks to the witness of the four Gospels, this truth about God revealed in Jesus Christ has been preserved for us as well. This is essentially what this series on the life

of Jesus is all about—seeing the glory of God as revealed to us in the life of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Q: *How does grace, as opposed to law, free us to seek God's glory?*

Q: *Most religions, even the ones that claim divine revelation from their god as Christianity does, still believe in a god that is shrouded in mystery. How does the incarnation, the taking on of humanity by the Son of God, alleviate this concern for followers of Jesus?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jesus shows us the truth about who God is and what He is like. We should not overlook the enormous implications of this claim! Devout Muslims go through their entire lives uncertain whether their god will judge them favorably, but Christians know God has sent His Son to make salvation available to all who will receive Him. Many animists are uncertain whether their god(s) values honesty above swindling, but Christians know God is just and expects us to promote justice in the world. Religions based on the idea of reincarnation are never quite sure how the scale of their lives is tipping, but Christians know Jesus has acted decisively on our behalf. These are just a few examples of the ways in which Jesus has made God known to us. But are you taking full advantage of knowing God through Jesus? This week ask yourself what you will need to do to make the most of this study on the life of Jesus Christ. When can you devote time to reading through the lessons and answering some of the questions? How can you prioritize the times you gather with others in your church to discuss these lessons? How can you hold yourself accountable to the application points you will encounter? Make the answers to these questions known at least within your family. Husbands and wives, when you know your spouse is studying a lesson, step in to take care of the needs of your children to provide some uninterrupted time for study. It is possible that being committed to meeting with your group(s) will require you to alter your children's extra-curricular activities. It will be almost impossible to keep up with your lessons if you take three months off from group meetings for baseball season. These are hard decisions, but this may be what will be required if you are going to make the most of knowing God through Jesus Christ this year.

NEXT STEPS

John 1:1–18 describes Jesus's mission in terms of the task, the goal, and the means. How can you join Jesus on His mission to shine light into a dark world? Christians should yearn to know more about our Savior, what He did while He was on this earth, and what He told His closest followers. But one thing that must become apparent from the very beginning of this study is that we cannot be content with merely learning more about Him. We must go

alongside Him in His mission to make God known within our world. The best way you can do this is through the ministries of your church. At the outset of this study, commit to joining Christ in His mission by taking part in your church's ministries to a world that is in need of the light of Jesus.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

Lord Jesus, all things were made through you, and you give them radiant light. Lead me in shining light into the world you have made.

God, help me to grow in my love and longing for you. Help me to prioritize my relationship with you above what others think about me.

Jesus, shine your light into every area of my life. There is no part of my life that does not need your radiance. Help me see where you can make the greatest impact on my daily routine, in how I face unexpected challenges, and in how I spend my leisure time.