

ViralStJames Bible Study #21: 2021 – New Year – New Beginnings

The Background – New Year – New Beginnings

John 1:1-18

All the best stories have a context. John's Gospel focuses on the acts, or 'signs', in the life of Jesus that demonstrated that he was God's chosen one (the Messiah) and how life in all its fullness can only be found in him. However, John realises that to show the bigger picture (and perhaps to confound those who were saying that Jesus was only a man) he has to set Jesus in his true context – not simply as someone whose coming was foretold by the prophets, but as the one who was with God right in the beginning and active in creation. It is no coincidence that the opening words of his Gospel echo those of Genesis – 'In the beginning God created' becomes 'In the beginning was the Word'.

The Passage – John 1:1-18

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

John 1:6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

John 1:10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

The Questions

1) Why do you think John begins his Gospel by taking us back to creation?

- To make sure that the hearers/readers of his Gospel were left in no doubt that John's story was not just a biography of a man, but a story of God becoming man;
- One of his themes in this 'prologue' is 'light' shining in the darkness, and being embodied in Jesus and his actions – light in the darkness was the first act of creation in Genesis.

ViralStJames Bible Study #21: 2021 – New Year – New Beginnings

2) John says that ‘In him (Jesus) was life and that life was the light of men’ (v4). What do you think John meant?

- *Light illuminates, it shows us the way to go*
- *John was saying – look at Jesus – his actions demonstrate how we should live*
- *Listening to him; following his actions ‘(Come and see’ 1:39) – feeding the hungry; serving others;*

3) Who or what is ‘the darkness’?

- *The forces that oppose the good news of life*
- *Wilful Ignorance/selfishness?*
- *Note that the darkness can neither understand nor overcome the light – the tense is an ongoing one. The darkness may be there, but cannot ever extinguish the light*

4) What role does John the Baptist play?

- *John the Baptist is the witness to the light, to Jesus (vv 7-8)*
- *But not just to see him, but to tell others what the arrival of Jesus means ‘so that through him all men might believe’ (v7)*
- *The arrival of Jesus means that people can see who God is (v18)*
- *Points out that Jesus goes beyond the law given by Moses (which simply identified what was wrong/right) – Jesus brings life – ‘blessings’, ‘grace and truth’ (vv 16-17) and his defeat of the powers of darkness enables him to fill us with his Spirit, which transforms us*

5) Who does Jesus come to?

- *He came to his own people (v11) – ie born a Jew (but then rejected by them)*
- *To all who received him (v12) – (ie believe in his claims) - the good news of life is available to all, not just Jews – this is good news for the whole of John’s world – Greeks and Romans as well as Jews.*

6) Who are the children of God?

- *Those who believe in him (v12)*
- *People whose actions, way of life, are characterised by love*
- *People who are ‘in Christ’ (John 17:26; Colossians 1:27) – indwelt by His Spirit*

7) What do you think is the role of the children of God?

- *Are we the ones to whom John Baptist has handed the baton? Our role to testify, to help people to understand how life in all its fullness can be lived?*

8) Are we more than simply ‘testifiers’ – are we (as Spirit filled Christians) now the light ourselves – how can we make the light known to those in darkness?

9) Is there anything here that encourages you at the beginning of the year? What do you think is the good news in this passage?

- *The darkness can never overcome the light?*