

## **What Is In A Word** **John 1:1-18**

{adapted from a sermon by Pr. Erik Rottmann - Grace Lutheran Church - Versailles, MO}

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the beginning was the Word. This simple sentence begins John's Gospel. Although most who can read ancient Greek will agree that St. John's Gospel is some of the easiest Greek to read, it also contains some of the most profound doctrinal statements in all of Scripture. In these words, John connects the Babe of Bethlehem with the God who has no beginning and who created all that exists. This Jesus, the Christ of God, is Himself God.

But what is in a Word? What can words do? How easily do words flow from the mouths of men? Words can heal and words can harm.

Jesus says in Matthew chapter 12, "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). And when Jesus uses these words in Matthew chapter 12, He speaks condemning Law. Specifically, Jesus speaks condemnation to the Pharisees, because their words revealed their hatred for Him.

In this same phrase, Jesus also speaks condemnation to us, because He goes on to say, "Men will have to give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36-37).

"Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). The tongues of men display who men are within. It is not so much that men do not display who they are by words spoken publicly, in polite company and within the confines of self-control. Rather, you and I display who we are by those words that are spoken out of earshot, when we think that no one is listening.

Yes, it is those under-the-breath mutterings, spoken not only by Scribes and Pharisees, but also by baptized children of God, those mutterings only prove the Scriptures right. Yes, Scripture declares, "with the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing" (James 3:9-10).

"Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). For all of it is condemnation of our hearts and our mouths, today's Gospel shows that this statement speaks also life and health and peace. For just as men's words reveal men's hearts, so also do God's Words reveal God's heart: Out of the overflow of God's heart, God's Mouth speaks His Word, "and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

"By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made; their starry host by the breath of His mouth. He spoke and [the earth] came to be" (Psalm 33:6, 9). The love of the LORD your God is so great that it overflows into a creative act. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit cannot be happy living

in isolation because these three Persons are the one True God and God is love. Love overflows His heart and out of the overflow of His heart His mouth speaks.

And this Word of God, the Word of which today's Gospel speaks, this Word fully embodies all that God is. "The Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Through this Word all things were made, and "without Him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3). "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us" (John 1:14).

Light shines in darkness, even though the darkness cannot and will not comprehend the Light (John 1:5). God comes to His own, even though His own received Him not (John 1:10).

Consider the history. Moses led a nation of maybe a million or more; twelve men straggled along after Jesus. Israel sang, "Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7), but King Jesus refused both to live and to die by the sword (Matthew 26:52). Elijah called down fire from heaven, which consumed his water-drenched sacrifices and allowed him to capture and destroy 450 men who were devoted to false gods.

On the other hand, look at Jesus. Where were His victories? Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:45). And as for his detractors, they all stood by and said, "He saved others, but He cannot save Himself" (Matthew 27:42). Jesus is pale and mushy.

But this "pale and mushy" Jesus is pale and mushy only because His divinity is hidden beneath the skin of His humanity. He appears weak as compared to the great heroes of old because His task is not to provide physical deliverance or geographical conquest.

All those who came before, Moses, David, Elijah are all the lesser and He the greater. They may have represented God in their actions and their courage and their might, but here in Jesus we see no mere representation: we see God "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). And out of the overflow of God's gracious heart God speaks to us and gives to us and causes to dwell among us the physical shape of His eternal, creative and life-giving Word.

St. John does not say, "God created the Word" or "the Word came into being." He says that the Word of God is God Himself, the Word was already in existence prior to the beginning.

This is the deepest mystery of the Christian faith, that God would become man. In Christ, God is associating Himself in an intimate way with a creation that was doubled over in its hatred for Him. It is indeed mysterious, that God would not remain silent, but that He would speak His Word into the deadness and darkness of His creation, and by His Word re-create both life and light for us. What a mystery, that this Word of God would dwell among us and make us His own kin, so that we might "become the children of God" (John 1:12).

"Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34), and the Word which God speaks "became flesh" (John 1:14), that is, He became a complete human being, like us in every way except for sin.

Dear friends, the uncontainable Son of God comes into my frame and contains himself in my

shape, both in body and in soul. He breathes my air; He feels my pain; He walks my path. He does not become an angel, but a man, to turn back for all men the fate that all men deserve.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3, 14).

The grace of God is that the Word still comes among us and lightens our dark world. The mouth speaks God's Words of forgiveness, and sins are removed. That which you and I have spoken of others is forgiven. In the Word, the Light shines in the darkness and brings forth life.

The Word is spoken and people eat the very flesh of God and drink the very blood of Christ. Darkness is expelled and light shines illuminating a meal of eternal consequences.

Again, in our time, Jesus appears pale and mushy, hidden as He is in the simple Word. Yet that simple Word gives God's grace and truth. How did the text read?

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3, 14).

These are the simplest words in all of the Scriptures, and the human heart cannot fully grasp or understand all that these words say, let alone express them. But that which we can apprehend, by the miracle of faith, will surely shine in our dark places, illuminating not only our minds but our hearts as well. "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). May God grant that, when we speak of the contents of these newly created and overflowing hearts, we speak none other than the Word that He Himself has spoken to us.

Oh what a blessed Christmas, that the Word was made flesh for us, wrapped in clothes, and laid in a manger. That this Word still speaks to us today. Amen.