



THE WORD & THE TRUTH

JOHN 1

How do you begin to describe a man who changed the entire course of history?

What if he lived before history even began?

What if we could know him?

His name is Jesus. He is the very Son of God. He was with God in the beginning. He made all things. He tells us what is true and beautiful about God. His life is the very light of humankind, showing us how to live in a dark world.

God sent a man named John to tell the world about Jesus. John explained, "Jesus will bring light to the world, but his brothers and sisters will choose to stay in the darkness. However, all who do see him for who he truly is will become children of God."

Children of God!? Did you hear that? Not only can you know about God's Son, but you can become as close as a son or daughter!

But Jesus was not a high and mighty king who lived in some unreachable space. No, Jesus came and lived with people like you and me! Jesus was the very presence of God, yet he was also a human. He came to live with us so we would see God in all his beauty and glory.

One day, John was teaching about Jesus when some people known as priests approached him. Priests were the spiritual leaders of the Jews. They taught people about God, but they hadn't come to understand that Jesus was God's Son.

Doubting John's authority, the priests questioned, "Who do you think you are? Are you Elijah the prophet?"

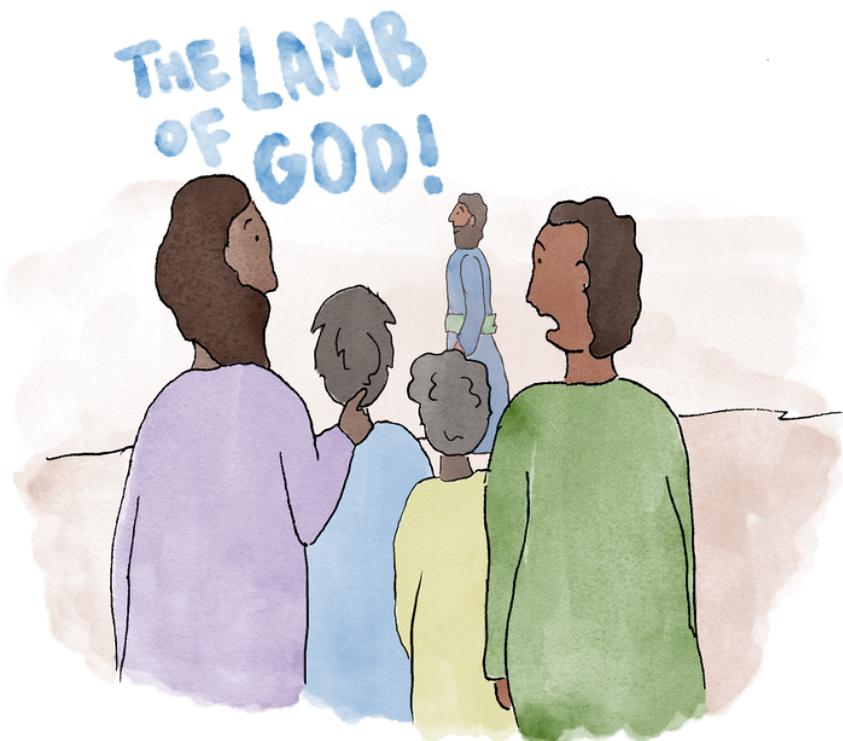
John answered, "I am not Elijah, and I am not the Christ (another name for the Savior they had been waiting for). I am just a man, a voice crying out, telling people to make their hearts ready for the Savior to come."

These priests, however, had other motives. Their questions were not nearly as innocent as they seemed. You see, the Pharisees had sent the priests to question John. Pharisees were a group of Jews who thought they were big and important. Pharisees thought God would love them if they just kept all the rules. But of course, that is silly. Because of sin, we will never be able to follow all the rules. The whole Bible tells us that we need a rescuer, but the Pharisees were offended by the idea that they couldn't save themselves!

So the priests continued to press John for an answer. "If you are not the Christ or Elijah, why are you baptizing people?"

John answered, "I baptize with water, but among you is standing someone so great that I am not even worthy to untie his sandals!" John knew that Jesus was more than a man and worthy of great honor.

The very next day, John saw Jesus coming from far off. John recognized him immediately and called out, "Everyone look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world! He is who I told you would come! I baptize with water, but this man baptizes with the Holy Spirit. I even saw the Spirit rest over him. That is how I know that he is indeed the Son of God!"



The next day, as John was with two of his disciples, Jesus walked by again. John said one more time, "Look, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples immediately began to follow behind Jesus.

Suddenly, Jesus turned to the men and asked, "Who are you looking for?"

The disciples replied, "Rabbi (which means teacher), where are you staying?"

Jesus answered, "Come with me."

The two disciples stayed with Jesus that night. The next day one of the two disciples, named Andrew, hurried to tell his brother, Simon, that he had found the Messiah (another word for Christ). The one they had waited for was finally here! Together, they rushed back to begin the adventure of a lifetime by following Jesus!

When Jesus first met Simon, he said, "Your name will now be Cephas (which means Peter)." Renaming someone may seem a bit strange to us today. But in Jesus's time, this was a source of pride! Simon's new name meant "rock."

Perhaps God was making Peter strong!

The next day, Jesus went to Galilee to call more disciples to join him. Seeing a man named Philip, Jesus said, "Follow me."

Philip then found his friend Nathanael and said to him, "We have found the person Moses and all the Scriptures promised!"

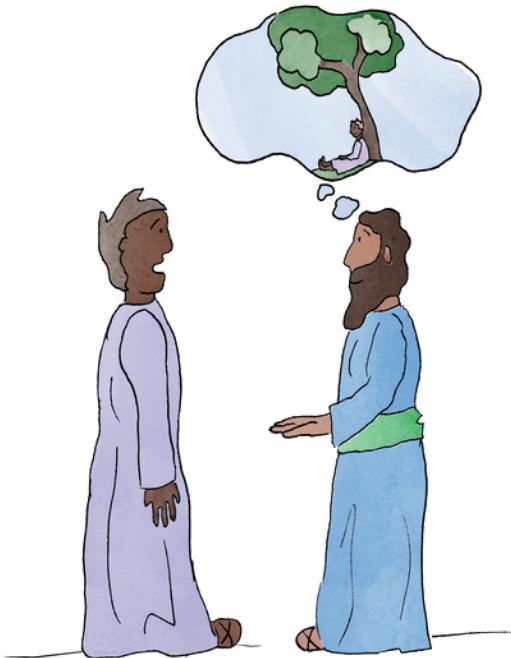
But Nathanael was not quite sure about Philip's news. After all, Jesus was from Nazareth - a small, poor, and unimportant town. How could the Savior of the world come from such a place?

Jesus saw Nathanael as he walked with Philip and said, "Nathanael, come here!"

"Do we know each other?" Nathanael replied, knowing the two of them had never met.

Jesus did know him. He knew him well. Jesus said, "Before Philip called you, you were under a fig tree. I saw you."

How could Jesus have known this? Nathanael was stunned. "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" he proclaimed.



Jesus loved Nathanael's simple trust. Jesus looked at Nathanael, saying, "You will see greater things than this. Heaven will open, and God's angels will come down to the Son of Man and then back up to God."

Of course, Jesus was talking about the story of Jacob and his ladder from Genesis. Jesus is the only way to come to God. A ladder will never get you any closer! God has to come to us. Now, in his Son Jesus, he had!

Ever since the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve turned their backs on their Creator, we have been apart from God. Some people try to earn God's love by doing lots of good things. But we can never do enough good to make God love us! Some people try to ignore God. But, just like Nathanael, he sees everyone! Others are just plain confused about what to make of God. Jesus loves people like that too! The book of John is for you and me and all types of people who need to know that Jesus is God.

MIRACLES & MERCHANTS

JOHN 2

Two days after meeting Nathanael, Jesus traveled to a wedding in a town called Cana. As soon as Jesus arrived, it was clear that something was wrong.

Mary, Jesus's mother, anxiously ran to him and asked, "Son, can you do anything? We have run out of wine for the party!"

Now, you should know that while many of us are too young to drink wine today, it was very common for people of all ages back in Jesus's time.

You should also know that there was more going on here than meets the eye. This story is about something far greater than just having a drink. You see, the Old Testament spoke about wine as a sign of joy. It was a way of talking about God being with his people.

During the hundreds of years Israel waited for Jesus to come, they had grown spiritually thirsty. Jesus wanted his friends to see that, while they were dry now, a life-giving, soul-quenching, heart-softening time had come!

Jesus found several stone jars and asked the servants to fill each one to the top with water. Altogether, it was about 150 gallons. More than two bathtubs filled to the brim!

The master of the feast drew the first cup from the jars as the crowd looked on with nervous anticipation. Could the water have somehow turned to wine?

With great surprise, the master proclaimed, "This is some of the best wine I have ever tasted!"



It was a miracle! Who could do something so marvelous except the Son of God? The kingdom of Jesus was coming. It would refresh, renew, and redeem everything it touched.

The disciples were elated. With joy in their hearts, they traveled with Jesus to Jerusalem for Passover - a celebration the Jews held every year to remember how God saved them from slavery in Egypt many, many years before.

Jewish men and women came from all over to Jerusalem for Passover. Every year, people brought animals to sacrifice as a part of the festivities. Often, people would travel from far-off distances, making this quite a chore!

Some merchants in Jerusalem decided to take advantage of this problem by selling animals. They set up shop selling oxen, sheep, and pigeons right outside the temple. The holiest of days was becoming little more than a way for people to make money!

Jesus commanded, "Take these things away from my Father's house! Destroy this temple, and I will raise it back up in three days." He drove the merchants away with a whip and flipped over their tables.



Jesus's anger was unlike anything the disciples had seen before. He was angry, make no mistake! But, he was like a father who saves his child from danger by any means necessary. Jesus loved his children and wanted to win their hearts back from evil.

Bewildered, the Jews replied, "Jesus, don't be silly, it took us 46 years to build the temple. Now you want us to destroy it? What are you talking about?"

Jesus, though, was not talking about the building. He was referring to his own body. Not very long after that day, Jesus would die for the sins of the whole world, including the merchants whose tables he'd just overturned. Most people thought Jesus's death would destroy him. But only three days later, he would be raised from the dead.

As his disciples thought about their day at the temple, they began to understand, all the more, that their teacher was someone special. And of course, he was.

The one God had promised all along was here.

NEW LIFE

JOHN 3

As word spread about Jesus, the Pharisees grew more and more disgusted. But Nicodemus, a Pharisee, saw something different. Nicodemus just had to meet Jesus! Secretly, under cover of night so nobody would see him, Nicodemus went to see Jesus.

"Rabbi," Nicodemus whispered so only Jesus could hear, "I know you are a teacher from God. Nobody else could do the amazing signs and wonders you have done unless God is with him."

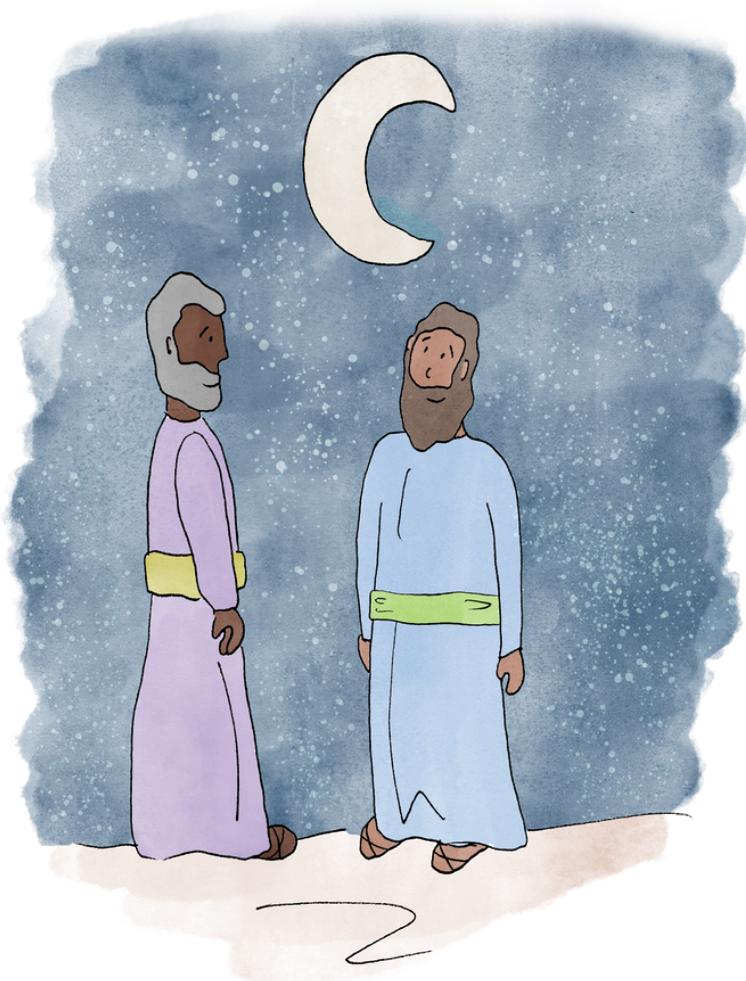
Jesus replied, "My signs and wonders point to an even greater miracle."

"What is it?" Nicodemus asked.

Jesus answered, "The kingdom of God is coming. But you will not see it unless you become new. It must be as if you were born all over again." Perplexed, Nicodemus asked, "How can you go back into your mother and be born again?"

"No, no," Jesus explained. "You must be born again of the Spirit. Your body will look the same, but your heart will be brand new. You will have a new reason for living. Only then can you see the kingdom of God."

Jesus looked more intently at Nicodemus, speaking some of the most beautiful words in the Bible. "God loved the world so much that He gave his one and only Son. Whoever believes this will not spiritually die but will have eternal life. God did not send me to point out how wrong everyone is, but rather to save God's friends. Because all people are sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, everyone already deserves death for their sins. I came to shine light into the darkness, show you your wickedness, and point you to the life you can have in God."



After his time with Nicodemus, Jesus and his disciples went to the Judean countryside. The water there was plentiful, making it a delightful place for Jesus to baptize new believers. Not too far from where Jesus was, another man named John was baptizing people. Remember him? Some of John's disciples approached him, saying, "The man you told us about is here baptizing. Look, everyone is going to Jesus instead of you. Aren't you jealous?"

John replied, "I am not the Christ, but I came to tell you that he was coming. My joy is complete because he is now here. He must increase, and I must decrease. He wants to tell us about God and give us the Holy Spirit. God has given all things to Jesus, and he is here to give those things to us."



Have you ever looked forward to a big birthday present that you wanted for a long, long, long time? You may have even waited for so long that you thought you would never get it. But then, you did!

That must have been what John's disciples felt at this very moment. Their moms and dads, grandparents, great-grandparents, and even their great-great-great-grandparents waited for Jesus to come. Now, he was here!

John finished talking to his followers with encouragement and a warning. "Whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life. Though your body will die one day, your soul will be with God in heaven. But those who do not believe will have a life of eternal punishment, for they will get what their sins deserve."