

The Word Becomes Flesh

John 1:1-18

Karl Udy – 3/12/17

Sermon Summary

Since humankind began reasoning, the question of origins has occupied the minds of many.

Long ago, Chinese thinkers defined the 5 basics of life as wood, fire, water, earth, and metal, and early Western thinkers described the 4 essentials as earth, air, fire, and water.

Not quite so long ago, but certainly ages before contact with the Europeans, Maori had an elaborate tale of origins. It began with a void, a nothingness. Sky Father – Ranginui, and Sky Mother – Papatuanuku, gave birth to 45 lesser gods or *atua* – the best known being Tane.

Even today, the quest for origins continues, now led by science. CERN, the European Centre for Nuclear Research, has built an enormous “boy’s toy” – a speedway track that accelerates nuclear particles to astonishing speeds in the hope that some of them may collide with others to produce a theoretical particle called Higgs-Boson, or, as some call it, the god-particle.

Chinese Tao Te Ching writings go back to the 4th century BC. Their *Tao* (or the Way) is the manifestation of life and has parallels to John 1:1’s description of the divine animating principle as the Word (*Logos*).

Today’s scientific “big-bang” theory of origins could also echo John 1:1: “In the beginning was the big bang”.

We human beings have seen that the universe has an order and pondered how that sustaining power came to be so. The *Logos* John describes is not just a word but the Word, like the *Tao*, the “something” that creates and holds the universe in fine balance.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God In him was life (*bios*), and that life (*zoe*) was the light of men” (John 1:1, 4).

Bios is the Greek word that covers everything that happens to a human (biology). *Zoe* is the Greek word for that which makes something come alive.

When Jesus touched a leper, he was not affected by the disease of the leper’s *bios*. Instead, the leper was healed by Jesus’ *zoe*. The Jews thought that touching a dead body made a person unclean, but Jesus’ own unique life-force, his *zoe*, could bring the dead body to life.

What is this light that makes a Christian see God?

“In him was life, and that life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

John 1:14 states that “the Word became flesh and lived among us”. This is not an angel who descended to Earth; this is the Creator God who has come amongst us! What an incredible thought; what an incredible moment, and, more importantly for each of us, what a realization that this life-force is unleashed within us.

We naturally ask ourselves, why was it necessary that God become a man?

The answer is in John 1:18 – to make God personally known to us. All the intellectual and philosophical musings could never produce the knowledge of God that His incarnation in human form provided.

This was the reason 2000 years ago, and it is the reason today. All the ways we humans use to search for meaning in this world lead to a blind alley – into a maze with no exit. We go deeper and deeper searching for the ultimate “god-particle”, but the revelation only comes when we receive the one and only true light, Jesus (“the true light that gives light”, v.9).

Einstein, a declared agnostic, admitted he felt drawn to a *zoe* that he longed to see beyond the *bios*: “It was a knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, of the manifestations of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty, which are only accessible to our reason in their most elementary forms – it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute the truly religious attitude, and in this alone, I am a deeply religious man.” (*The World as I See it*, 1934).

What hope for anyone if such a brilliant mind as Einstein could not discover the ultimate meaning of life by abstract thought or scientific application?

Unless we understand that Christ is the true life, we will never find meaning.

The light of the new-born Christ child would defeat the darkness of sin and death by his own death and resurrection. For us now, a life without Christ is a slow killing of our soul. We are, in effect, living a dying process, a *bios* with no true *zoe*.

John 1:4-5, with the analogy of light and darkness, challenges us to recognize the true light of life that will take us from darkness into the light of eternal life.

We have no excuse. God has made himself known: “No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:18). And as Jesus declared, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

Will you come to the light?

Discussion Questions

Read John 1:1-18.

1. Karl Udy emphasized that the *Logos*, the Word, is the “divine animating principle” about which many religions have theorised, but which Christianity has uniquely defined in Jesus. Paraphrase John 1:1-3 to clarify the role of the Word within the Godhead.
2. How does it clarify Jesus’ relationship to time and to space (matter)? Does Genesis 1:1-5 help or confuse your thinking (don’t get hung up here though!).
3. Read John 1:4. In this sentence, the first “life” is *bios*, and the second is *zoe*. What is the power that *zoe* represents?
4. How did Jesus’ *zoe* become a light for humanity? Cite examples from the Bible and in your own life.
5. Read John 1:5. How is Jesus the light of God? How is he a light for humanity?
6. What relationship of the light and the darkness is expressed in 1:5?
7. Read John 1:6-13. How does this passage elaborate on the relationships expressed between Jesus as the light and various human beings? (Take your time exploring this section; see how many different relationships are indicated).
8. Read John 1:14. How does it express Christianity’s most radical truth?
9. How did Jesus reveal God’s glory, grace, and truth?
10. Read John 1:14-18. How is Christianity’s description of God’s relationship with humanity different from that of other religions?
11. How did Jesus bring a new dimension to our understanding of God that differed from its Jewish origins as revealed through Moses?
12. John 1:18 elaborates on John 1:5 and 1:14. Read also John 14:6. If these verses are true, what should you do?
13. Has the light overcome the darkness in your life? If so, explain that change. If not, how can you help yourself in this process?
14. Are you exercising your full rights as a child of God (v.12)? What do you think those are?