

## **SERMON**

**JOHN 1:1-18**

**THE ALMIGHTY I AM: BEFORE THE BEGINNING**

**SUNDAY, 12 APRIL 2026, 10 A.M.**

**FIRST PRES GRAND JUNCTION**

### **Opening Prayer**

This week: we are starting a new sermon series on the “I AM” statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John. As we all know, we have just finished a good and fruitful journey through a series on Jesus as our “gentle and lowly” savior, which was rooted in the following text from Matthew 11:

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*“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

That series was rooted in that text, and it was guided by Dane Ortlund’s book, “Gentle and Lowly”. Even though we are finished

with that series, may we never forget what we have learned in that series: Jesus *is* gentle and lowly, and Jesus wants us to truly trust in his mercy, in his grace, and in his abiding love for each one of us. May God help us never to lose sight of *any* of this.

Along with being our gentle and lowly savior, Jesus is *also* our risen and exalted Lord. More than any other part of the New/Second Testament, the Gospel of John emphasizes this point. In fact, I think we can say,

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*The Gospel of John is scripture's clearest testimony to the divinity of  
Jesus Christ*

Not the *only* testimony—but the clearest. Back when I was a student at Whitworth University in Spokane WA, my professor and mentor Jim Edwards was fond of saying,

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*“What is whispered about Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) is shouted from the rooftops in the Gospel of John” –  
Jim Edwards*

More than any other Gospel, John is upfront and unapologetic about his belief that **Jesus is God**.

And if we’re going to understand that claim—if we’re going to take it and all of the I AM statements seriously—there is only one place to begin: at the very beginning of John’s Gospel, in these first 18 verses that are often called “the prologue” of the Gospel.

Matthew’s Gospel starts with a genealogy. Mark’s Gospel jumps right into the action with John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus. Luke’s Gospel starts with a salutation to someone named “Theophilus” and the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah. John’s Gospel starts with this Prologue.

The Synoptics are meant to be read as narratives – from start to finish. I think it is different with the Gospel of John. I am convinced that we are meant to read this whole Gospel with the Prologue in mind. In this sense, we can say that

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*John's Prologue is the thesis statement of this Gospel*

Even *more* strongly: every major theme of John's Gospel is grounded in the Prologue.

Please raise your hands: who here has ever been to the performance of an opera or a symphony?

What is often played at the *start* of a symphony? The overture, which offers smaller samples of larger pieces of music.

Another question, and please raise your hands: who here has ever seen "The Sound of Music" (Tom and I have different opinions on that movie)?

**Slide** (please insert picture of the Sound of Music)

During university, I worked at a video store – when people would come in and ask me for the scariest movie in the store, I would have them “The Sound of Music”.

At the start of that movie, while the credits are rolling, we can hear snippets of songs like “The sound of music”, “My favorite things”, “Climb every mountain”, and so on.

Another question: how many of us are now humming bars in our head from that musical? I’m so sorry.

The prologue of John’s Gospel is functioning exactly like the overture to a symphony or the opening of that earworm musical—it is giving us a real flavor and a true sense of what is to come.

Every time we read part of John’s Gospel—such as the wedding at Cana in chapter two, or the raising of Lazarus in chapter eleven—we should read it *with* the Prologue.

I hope we are clear on this: the Prologue is much more than just the beginning of John’s Gospel. It sets the stage and guides *everything*

that follows. And if we *miss* what John's Gospel is saying here, *then we will misunderstand everything that follows.*

So: before we hear anything that Jesus says—before we see anything he does—in this Prologue, John's Gospel wants us to know *who Jesus is*. And this takes us back—not just to the start of Jesus' life, but to before the beginning itself. Listen again to how the Prologue starts.

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*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

When John begins his Gospel this way, he is not choosing his words casually. He is taking us all the way back to the opening words of Genesis: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” That is where creation begins—where time begins, where everything we know comes into being. But John is not simply echoing Genesis; he is doing something even more profound—he is deepening what

the Bible already says. Genesis tells us what happened *in* the beginning. John tells us *who* was already there.

Before anything was created—before there was light or darkness, before there was sky or sea, before there was even such a thing as time itself—John tells us that “the Word” (his first descriptor for Jesus) already was. John does not say, “In the beginning, the Word came into being.” He does not say, “In the beginning, the Word was created.” He says, “In the beginning *was* the Word.” The Word already existed. The Word did not begin—it was *before the beginning*.

And then John presses even further. He tells us that the Word was *with* God, and the Word *was* God. Those two statements sit side by side, and we are not allowed to soften either one of them. The Word was with God—meaning there is relationship, distinction, communion.

Which means that when we begin to speak about Jesus, we are not encountering a moral teacher, or a wise rabbi, or even a powerful miracle worker. We are starting with the One who was there before the beginning—the One through whom all things came into being—

the One who shares fully in the being of God. Before anything began, He was, and *all things* were made through Jesus the Word.

In the next part of the prologue (verses 3-5), John's Gospel highlights three central themes about Jesus the Word: life; light; and darkness. First, John tells us, "in him (the Word) was life".

In the Second Testament, there are two main words for life:

Bios – refers to biological life. Bios life *is* a gift from God. Every single one of us here has full experience of Bios life. Bios life has a beginning; it changes; and it eventually ends.

Zoe – the quality of life enjoyed by God. Some translations of the bible call this "eternal life", but I think it is better to say "the quality of life enjoyed by God, which never ends."

So: Zoe life—that John's Gospel is talking about—is not about heartbeats, or about the physical breath that is in our lungs. Instead, Zoe life is about: Being fully alive to God; Being fully awake to reality; whole, not fragmented; rooted and plugged into what will *not* disappoint.

When John speaks about life here in the Prologue, he is not talking about life in the sense of how long we live. He is not talking about duration, or years, or the length of our days. The kind of life John is describing—the life that is found in Christ—is not dependent on having a long biological life. It is something deeper. It is what we might call *qualitative* rather than *quantitative*. A person can live for many years and still feel empty, restless, or disconnected. And someone else can have far fewer years, and yet live with a depth, a clarity, and a rootedness that is unmistakably real. That is the kind of life John is pointing to here. The life that is in Christ is not measured in length—it is measured in fullness.

**Slide** – picture of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

We can see something of this kind of Zoe life in the witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a German pastor and theologian during the rise of Nazi Germany, a man of deep intellect and even deeper faith. At a time when much of the church in Germany was either silent or complicit in the acts of a morally bankrupt government, Bonhoeffer spoke out. He helped lead what came to be known as the Confessing Church, resisting the attempt to bring the church under Nazi control. He trained pastors in secret,

he preached Christ when it was dangerous to do so, and eventually he became involved in efforts to resist Hitler himself. For this, he was arrested and imprisoned. And even in prison, his writings and letters reflect a remarkable clarity, courage, and trust in God.

Bonhoeffer did not live a long life—he was executed by the Nazis at the age of thirty-nine, just weeks before the end of the war. And yet, it would be very difficult to say that his life was somehow lacking or incomplete. There was a depth to his life, a clarity, a rootedness in Christ that is unmistakable. Even in the face of imprisonment and death, he did not lose that center. That is the kind of life John is pointing to here. Not a life measured by years, but a life marked by fullness—a life grounded so deeply in Christ that even the darkest circumstances cannot extinguish it. Bonhoeffer's life was not long, but it was real. And that is the difference John wants us to see.

And this is where John brings these ideas together in a way that we cannot miss. He tells us that the life that is in Christ is the light of all people. It cannot be contained. It does not stay buried inside a person. The life that is in Christ begins to shine through those who belong to him.

When someone is truly rooted in Christ—when their life is grounded in him, shaped by him, sustained by him—it does something. It brings clarity into confusion. It brings steadiness into chaos. It brings truth into places where there has been distortion or uncertainty.

And this is not limited to a few well-known figures or extraordinary lives. This is true, in quieter ways, in so-called ordinary lives as well (for the record, I have never met an ordinary Christian—ever).

Wherever someone is rooted in Christ—whether they are known or unknown, seen by many or only by a few—the light of Christ can shine through them into the darkness around them. In acts of faithfulness, in words of truth, in quiet endurance, in steady love—the light is borne into places that would otherwise remain dark. Not because of who we are, but because of the life we share in Christ.

And what is so striking about John's Gospel is that it does not pretend the darkness isn't there. It does not offer a naïve or sentimental vision of the world. It names the darkness—real darkness: confusion, resistance, suffering, rejection, even violence. John is not telling us that the light shines in a world that is already bright. He is telling us that the light shines in the darkness.

This is what we saw in Dietrich Bonhoeffer. And the same is true, in different ways, wherever this kind of life is found. The life that is in Christ does not remain hidden—it shines. And John tells us that this light shines in the darkness—and the darkness did not overcome it.

And yet, as we hear all of this, we might begin to feel the weight of it. This life, this light—something we are called to bear into the darkness of the world around us. But John does not leave us with that responsibility on our own. He does not tell us to go out and generate this life, produce this light, or sustain it by our own strength. Instead, he tells us something even more astonishing.

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*And the Word became flesh and lived among us.*

The One who was before the beginning—does not stay removed from the world he has made. He comes near. He takes on flesh. He enters into our world—not as an idea, not as a distant force, but as a human being, fully present among us. As Eugene Peterson so

memorably puts it, “the Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood.”

Which means we are not left to bear this light alone. The light has come to us. In him, we see who God truly is—not distant or abstract, but near, present, and full of grace and truth.

And this is only the beginning (in the words of Maria Von Trapp, “A very good place to start”).

In the weeks ahead, we are going to hear this same Jesus—the One who was there before the beginning, the One who became flesh and lived among us—begin to speak. And when he speaks, he tells us who he is. Repeatedly, he uses those simple but profound words: “I AM”—the Name of God in the First Testament. Jesus says:

“I AM the bread of life.”

“I AM the light of the world.”

“I AM the good shepherd.”

And in each of these statements, we are given a deeper glimpse of the One who is our life and our light in the darkness. Not an abstract idea. Not a distant figure. But our risen and exalted Lord—present with us, speaking to us—and revealing himself to us.

So, over the next several weeks, we are not just going to study these words—we are going to listen. We are going to listen to the One who was before the beginning, the One who came near, the One who still speaks.

And as we do, we will begin to see more clearly who he is, and what it truly means to be alive. **Let's Pray.**