

# Encounters with Jesus

## Week 1: Jesus Is the Word (Logos)

John 1:1-5

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- January 14, 2024

Good morning, Grace! Let me give you people at home a chance to change the volume so you can hear me over the roar of your fire. You know what, if you came today we're not even going to have an offering today—how about that? Hard to get here. Thanks for coming and thanks for watching.

Before we get started with our learning time (we start a new series today), I want to let you know that 2024 will be a historic year here at Grace Covenant Church—historic in that, for decades, we've been desiring, and for years, we've been working on refining and updating our bylaws and our doctrinal statement. They were written in Old English. And it's time that we update it to something we can understand. So, we're working on finalizing that. On April 21 we're going to vote on the acceptance of our new bylaws and doctrinal statement. But you must be a member to have the privilege to vote on that.

So, we're wanting you all to consider becoming members of Grace. And not just to affirm that vote, but rather, because we're going to make membership a priority this year, because it's the right thing to do. You should be a member of a church somewhere. So, why not here? It's a statement of mutual commitment that we're making towards one another. We're going through the journey and helping guide each other to become like Christ in all of life. We are being discipled and we are making disciples. That requires a commitment to the local church.

Now the good news is that we are going to make membership as accessible as possible. We'll have a membership class each month in the spring. And what we want to do is help you know if you're a member or not. So, if you want to become a member, we have these cards out on a table in the lobby. Just fill it out. It's simple—three blanks—name, phone number, and e-mail so we can contact you. And we'll contact you about the opportunities we have for you to go to our membership class and where to plug in. On the card, if you're not sure—*I don't know, I've*

*been here for a long time, I went through some of it but didn't finish it, I don't know*—fill out the card. We'll get back to you and tell you your status and how you can be a part.

This is a great year to be part of a great church, and not just to attend, but to invest in the body of Christ that you call home. So, would you consider membership very seriously? It's the right thing to do.

### ***Carpe Diem – Seize the Day***

Let's look at a passage today. We're going to start a new series. And I saw an interesting video this week that had great advice. A young man is asking an older man, "What advice would you give to you—the twenty-year-old you? What would you tell him?" And he takes out a tape measure like this [*pulls out tape measure*] and he says, "Okay, look. Now listen to me. Imagine this tape is the years of your life. And this is how many years you're going to live. And did you know life expectancy is actually going down for two to three years in a row now in the United States? The life expectancy of a female is age 79 and the life expectancy of a male is now age 73." So, you take that tape measure and you do the numbers (ooh, sixty---we'll use metric) and you go to seventy-three, and all this—I don't know if that's going to happen. So, we'll just cut that off. And then you look at your age ... I'm 63 ... that is the first part of your life and you're never getting those years back. You cut that off. And then he holds that up and he says, "What you have left is what you have left. That's all you have." And then he says, "You need to seize that, every one of those, as a gift from God, that this is the day that the Lord has made. You need to live each and every day like it's a life amongst itself."

Make the most of what you have left. Live a life of power and purpose. (Now it's me adding something to that.) Live a life of power and purpose, that God would grieve and weep with each of us if we find ourselves in the last years or even the last moments of our lives coming to the full realization that we lived somebody else's purpose, or our own. Or that the life that we lived was enslaved by shame or fear or pride, and all the while there was power accessible by the Holy Spirit himself, and by other believers in Christ helping us change.

The point of the illustration was "carpe diem"—seize the day. Again, we're starting a new series today, and it's called *Encounters with Jesus*. And in the series, what we're going to look at is men and women who are wasting their lives, the only lives they have. And it's all the years they have left, and they've been living a purposeless life, or someone else's purpose, and

powerlessly. And then ... and then ... and then ... they encounter Jesus. And if they accept His forgiveness and His honor and His power that He's going to give them, it's a fork in the road for their whole life. They will live a life of victory. If they reject it, they throw away what's left—what little is left.

## Incarnation

So, how can we be sure to live a life with purpose and with power? How do we have access to living a life without regret, to make the most of what's left? Believe it or not, it's in a word. The answer to those questions is in a word. The word is “incarnation.” It means when God became flesh and dwelt among us. It is the radical doctrine of the Christian faith that is called the lynchpin of human history. And it is the lynchpin of every single person: that God became man. If you can just imagine the power and the invasion of the Creator becoming incarnate and how that would bring purpose and power to our lives ...

Let me give you a way of looking at the depth of it. It's a hard thing to grasp. C. S. Lewis wrote an essay called “The Seeing Eye.” And he asks the question “How can we relate to God at all?” And he says that we relate to God the way Hamlet would relate to Shakespeare. And how could Hamlet possibly relate to Shakespeare? He's not on the stage with him. And so, Lewis says that the only way Hamlet could understand Shakespeare is if Shakespeare wrote himself into the storyline.

Now it's interesting, years after that essay was published, one of C. S. Lewis's friends, Dorothy Sayers, who was an author famous for writing a series of novels and short stories around a detective, Sir Peter Wimsey, demonstrates this idea. About halfway through the book series, he finds himself introduced to a love interest, and her name is Harriet Vane. And they enjoy each other for the rest of the series.

The experts on the writing of Dorothy Sayers—and one of her books is *The Meaning of the Maker*—say that Dorothy Sayers, because she created the universe of Wimsey and created his character, saw him and got in touch with his loneliness, and she loved him. And scholars say that Harriet was Dorothy Sayers; that Dorothy Sayers wrote herself into the novel because she saw the loneliness and the love she had for the main character. So, how can Sir Wimsey possibly relate to Dorothy Sayers? He met her. That's how.

And that's exactly what is happening in the doctrine of the incarnation: that God creates the universe and He watches each and every one of us ruin our lives and what He's created. He loves us and sees our suffering and our life without purpose and power, and so He writes Himself into the script so that He can bring us those things and we can live our lives.

### **John 1:1-3, 14**

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.**

**<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

This passage is the pinnacle of human thought. We're going to look at just a few verses. It's called the pinnacle of human thought. Look at chapter 1, verse 1 of John. He says, "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."

We'll skip to verse 14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Just think about it for a moment—the Creator of all things is visible and invisible. All things around, beyond space and beyond time, He clothes Himself in our skin and enters the story. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us so that we might see or behold His glory.

### ***Logos***

If we look carefully at the first sentence alone—I want you to see how in a word it gives us insight to the question of how we can live a life without regret, how we can live a life with purpose and with power. Look at that first sentence: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Clearly, John wants us to look at and enjoy the word "word." In Greek the word is *logos*. It has many facets. It is pregnant with meaning. We're going to look at three today to show us who Jesus is in this single sentence.

Logos means that it is the very definition of the purpose of life; absolute, authoritative truth; and power. Logos is about meaning and purpose, it's about truth, it's about power.

## 1. Purpose

Let's look first at purpose. We get the word "logic" from *logos*. It means "reason." Not reason like logical reason as much as bigger philosophical questions. In those days the Greek formal philosophers were talking about what the meaning and purpose of life is, what are we here for, what are we designed for. We must be made for a particular thing. Why should we wake up in the morning at all?

You have to understand your purpose to enjoy the potential of why you exist, to make the most out of what you have left. If you saw me grab a laptop and try to drive a nail with it, you would hopefully say, "Hey, stop, don't do that. First of all, you're going to destroy that laptop. Second of all, you're not going to drive the nail. Nobody wins—the nail wins, I guess." And you'd say, "Don't you know the purpose of the laptop?" And maybe all the while the hammer is looking at you with great contempt. The point of all that is to show that if we don't understand the meaning or the purpose of a sophisticated electronic device that's rather fragile, we'll misuse it and it won't live up to its potential. All the while, the hammer is not being used for its good use and purpose.

That's how it works with the human experience as well. If we don't know why we're created, we can't understand the purpose of our life, and we're just going to waste what's left.

In the context of this passage, John wrote "In the beginning was the Word," *logos*, the philosophy of the time then—and it's very similar to the worldview of today, both formally and informally. In other words, there were formal philosophers of the time, and the culture itself was very similar to today—overwhelming in many respects. They kind of had a view that there was no *logos*; there's no real meaning. Why get up in the morning. Why be a good citizen? Why contribute to the culture? Why be nice to your neighbors? What are you supposed to be living for? And they concluded there was no *logos*.

And so, there were two schools of thought that deviated from that conclusion, a lot like today. One of them was known as epicurean thought, and its proponents said, *Look, there's no meaning or purpose, so you might as well be comfortable. I mean, just live for pleasure.* A more

civilized version would say, *Just make choices so that you're comfortable and you're safe. If there's ever a decision to be made, make sure you're comfortable, make sure you're safe.*

Epicureans didn't invent it. It's been going around for thousands and thousands of years. Honestly, it's written in the Old Testament and the New Testament and in today's newspaper and in journals where it says, *Look, if there's no logos, here's the pledge of allegiance to this phrase: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.*

So, one school of thought was this epicurean idea of just living for the pleasures of life. Another expression of "there's no *logos*, there's no purpose, there's no meaning," was stoicism, or a stoic view. Have you seen the resurrection of stoicism? It's everywhere all the time now. And atheistic stoicism says, *Look, I get it, there's no meaning in life, but you should be moral. You should be nice to other people. And you should be generous because you shouldn't get attached to things because nothing's going to last for very long.*

In Plato's Republic it's called "the noble lie." We know it's not true, but it's at least a noble expression of a lie.

So today we have no meaning, no reason, no purpose. And if you can imagine then as it is today, John starts his biography of the life of Jesus like a cannon fire going off. The first sentence: "In the beginning there is a *Logos*, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." So, John's introducing Jesus here as the meaning and the purpose of life. And listen, he's not just saying that Jesus is bringing meaning and purpose; he's saying that He is meaning and purpose. The person of Jesus *is* the meaning and purpose. Because Jesus wrote Himself into the script of our experience, He became one of us. He brings us that. And now our purpose is to know Him and to love Him and to serve Him. And if we find ourselves living our entire existence around that meaning and purpose, then our hearts are filled with joy and our minds are filled with wonder, because that's the way we're made. That's the whole point.

And so, an obvious application for even this simple first meaning of the word *logos* is: Is that where Jesus is in your life? Is He an absolute lighthouse? He's your north star. He's the reference point in all you do. Or are you choosing your own personal reference? Are you living your life today for His glory and His preferences, or your glory, your preferences? Don't waste your life. There's not much left. Seize that day.

When you look at the various encounters with Jesus, purposeful encounters with Jesus, you can see that He changes people's lives. He has an encounter with Peter, and Peter has lived

his life to be a fisherman. It's his family trade. And Jesus enters and says, *I have a different purpose for you. Come and follow me.* And Peter left his nets ... on the day of the largest catch in his entire life. He's given a meaning, and it's to serve and to know and enjoy Jesus.

He does the same with a tax collector called Matthew. He leaves his tables and his calculators and follows Jesus. They're making the most of what's left of life. This is all you have, so this is all you have.

## 2. Authoritative Truth

There's another expression, or nuance of the word *logos*. It's not just "meaning," but it's also "truth." And when I say that, it says "... and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." It's not just that Jesus comes and brings us truth and teaches truth; He does. But again, John is saying "In the beginning was the Word ..."—He is the truth. Jesus is the truth. Jesus will literally say, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me." He is the *logos*.

So, Jesus gives us a purpose in life, and then He gives us the truth, the means of getting there, guardrails, have you. So, it's not just morals and ethics, by the way. When we talk about absolute truth here, we're talking about values. And that's sometimes a nuanced difference from ethics themselves. It's like what has value in eternity. There's a great metaphor of "Every decision has a price tag," and most of our price tags have been arranged by Satan. And Jesus comes in and says, "I am the *logos*, I am the truth." *I am going to make sure the right values are attached to the right things. Those in my image have infinite value.*

And we say absolute truth because He became man. He has authority. He has authoritative truth. And we say "authority" because that word comes from the word "author." He wrote Himself into our script. He's the author. He knows. Why wouldn't He?

Look at this way. This is funny. You probably have an experience like this. In high school or college you might have taken an English literature class and you had to write a paper on what you believe this particular author's meaning of his story was. What was the purpose of this author's story? What is the meaning behind this? And then people hand in their papers, and you have this generous avalanche of people's opinions. "Well, this is what it means to me." And somebody says, "Well, this is what it means to me." And it's hard to say anybody's wrong because that's what it means to them.

There was a great movie—well, it wasn't a great movie—it's a great story. But anyway, it was a comedy with Rodney Dangerfield. He's an old guy who's a comedian. And he was in a movie where he played a fifty-year-old uneducated millionaire. And he decides to go back to school. That's the name of the movie—*Back to School*. He goes to college, and he's not used to college. It turns out that studying and making good grades is harder than making money. And he's taking this English literature class and he's being asked to write an essay on the writings of Kurt Vonnegut. Well, Rodney Dangerfield didn't get rich writing papers; he got rich hiring people to do stuff. So, he hires Kurt Vonnegut to write an essay on the writings of Kurt Vonnegut. He comes by his house and says, "Yeah, I need you to write an essay." And so, while everybody is sharing in class what they thought the meaning of a particular story by Kurt Vonnegut was, Kurt Vonnegut comes in and says, "No, this is what I meant." It's authoritative, because he's the author. That's where we get the word.

So, the point is that Jesus needs to be the bellwether absolute truth about everything that we live for. He decides what is right and real and true in our lives. When we talk about the phrase "Jesus is Lord," it means we go through and look at what He says and we attach those price tags to life situations. Those are His values, those are His ethics, so those are absolute. If we choose to go through life, as happens for many inside the Church and outside the Church, like a buffet line where we say, "Nah. Yeah, I like that one. It works for me. I don't like that one. It's inconvenient. Ooh, I really don't like that value, because I'm lonely."

So, in 2024, when we talk about "Jesus is Lord," we want to make the most of what is left in our life. We want to live a life without regret. "Jesus is Lord" means that He's given us a meaning and purpose and He's given us the means of getting there with absolute and authoritative truth.

### 3. Authoritative Power

*Logos* means meaning and purpose. It means values and absolute truth. And the last meaning that I would like to emphasize here is that it means "power." And again, not that Jesus just *brings* power; He *is* the power. "In the beginning was the Word ..." In the beginning, Jesus was powerful. Power, authority, and how does He do that? Because He's the author. And since He made everything, He can change everything. He doesn't have to submit. People have



problems with the miracles in the Bible. He doesn't have to submit to the laws of physics if He's the author of physics. If He wants to walk on water, He can do that.

Look again at how He has power over creation because He's the author of it—verse 3 and 14 again. “Through Him all things were made; without Him, nothing has been made that has been made. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory as of the only begotten Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John's hearkening back to the creation story itself and using some of the vocabulary it was using. And he's talking about how God created everything, visible and invisible. The God who is infinite creates all the finite things and enters that world. And when Jewish readers were reading this—not the Greeks, but the Jews—they're thinking, *Wait a minute. We beheld His glory, we saw all of His glory.* They know that every time the Creator enters creation, creation can't handle it. His glory is overwhelming to the finite. So, whether it's Mount Sinai or earthquakes and what appears to be volcanic eruption and blaring, deafening sounds, that's the nature of the Creator coming to the creation.

There's a story in Exodus 33 where Moses is just begging to see the glory of God. He says, “Lord, show me Your glory.” And so, God starts the instructions and ends the instructions with this: “No one can see my face and live.” And so, He says, *Here's what we can do. We'll put you in the cleft of these two giant boulders. I'll walk by you, but I'll shield your eyes from me. And then after I pass, then you can see me leaving.* And the last thing He says is, “My face cannot be seen.” That's the glory of God. We can't handle it.

And so, Moses says, “Show me Your glory.” And John says, “We saw His glory.” Moses hears, “No one can see the face of God and live.” And John says, “We saw His glory, full of grace and full of truth.”

And how is that able to happen? In a word—incarnation—the glory of the only begotten son from the Father. He wrote Himself into the story. He saw our loneliness and He loves us, so He says, *I've got to get in there somehow and fix it. And I'm going to need to get in that storyline in a way that doesn't just rattle the earth into nonexistence.*

And so, you can see in the storyline of Jesus when you see the encounters with Jesus that are power-oriented. There's a story where He's out on the Sea of Galilee and a sudden squall, a storm, takes over, and he has grown fishermen screaming in panic for their lives while He sleeps. They wake Him up and Jesus just says, “Sit, stay,” to the storm. And the winds stop immediately

and the waves stop immediately. And the men in the boat say, “Even the winds and the waves obey Him.” Well, yeah---because He made it. He doesn’t submit to it. He just goes along when He wants to. He’s the author.

A friend of His dies and he’s three days dead in a cave and Jesus says, “Lazarus, come here.” That’s power. If you don’t know the story, Lazarus gets up from his death—hears him in his death—and walks out. Even the dead can hear Him, because He has power over death. And the point is that Jesus has the power to heal us. We do not have to be enslaved by fear and pride and panic, shame. We can be set free from that.

We’re our own worst enemies. I love a lot of songs from the singer/songwriter Paula Cole. And she’s very self-aware. She writes this song about her own trials in life, and the song is called “Me.” And in the song called “Me” she tells the world that she’s the problem. Here’s the chorus:

And it’s me who is my enemy  
Me who beats me up  
Me who makes the monsters  
Me who strips my confidence  
And it’s me who’s too weak  
And it’s me who’s too shy to ask for the thing I love

She understands that to be healed, she has to be healed from herself. And this song, this chorus, is the cry of every encounter with every single person who comes into the presence of Jesus the Christ--in real time back then and now.

And in the beginning was Jesus; in the beginning was *Logos*. And He comes in and He brings peace. Because He brings meaning. He gives us a reason to live. He’s the reason to live. He gives us boundaries and values so that we live for eternal things, not temporal things. And then He gives us the power to change the things that we’ve been enslaved by and defined by for, sometimes, decades.

If you look at the life of Apostle Paul, he has this encounter with Jesus. He’s literally blown off a horse. And when he experiences the fullness of what Christ offers in forgiveness and honor and purpose, he changes his whole life and lives for a new purpose. He changes his values. He changes the boundaries and the way he’s living.

And what I love the most about Paul’s radical conversion is the power that Christ has over Paul’s pride. He’s absolutely transformed. Later in his ministry towards the end of his life

he's talking about how he's been beaten and nearly stoned to death and nearly beaten to death several times. He's been flogged, he's almost starved, eaten by dogs. And he says, "I consider these slight momentary afflictions." And the reason they're slight, momentary afflictions is because Paul has changed his purpose in life and Paul and changed his values. Now these are momentary afflictions. And Paul's soul, his pride—he's set free from the bondage of his self-righteousness.

One of the last things he writes is that he's the chief among sinners. Now he gets it. He is his own enemy. He is the one who makes the monsters. And Paul is set free from that because of the power that comes into logos. What does he do with the rest of his life? Whatever is left—that's whatever is left. And what does Paul do? He makes the most of that.

## Summary

So, the appeal today in 2024—it's going to be a great year at Grace—I hope it's going to be a great year for you—is for Jesus to be Lord in your life. That means He's king. That means He gives you meaning and purpose. He gives you boundaries to live by and values, and He gives you the power to be able to change. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Just look, by the way—just stop and pause. Look at all that Jehovah did to come near to us; that He writes Himself into the script, into the storyline. And He adds a chapter, not just on death, but on crucifixion. If I'm writing myself into a story, I'm not going to include pain. It includes persecution and even the crucifixion. And all of that so we can have intimacy with Him.

So, whatever is between you and the *Logos*, King Jesus ... whatever it is ... something you need to start to do or something you need to stop doing ... do whatever you have to do. Be able to just leave the room. Just leave it here, right here. Be able to leave the room and be able to say, "I will go anywhere at any time to do anything with anyone. Because You are the meaning of life. And You'll guide and direct me, and You'll give me the power to do that." And then you'll be able to make the very most of what little ribbon you have left.

By the way, when I cut this originally [*holds up tape measure*], it's really about this long. I just made it longer because it makes a better visual. It's actually this long. Carpe diem. Seize the day. Make the most. Do whatever you have to do with what's left.

You know what? Here's what I want us to do. I was thinking this week—we bought one of these for everyone. If you want, you can go by the visitors' center. There's a table on each side. There's a basket, and you can pick one of these up. Do your own math. The average life expectancy of a woman is age 79. The average for a man is now 73. You could add your own thing. I had to cut some numbers off because of my family's medical history. And then what you have left is what you have left. So, make the very most of that. Be grateful to God. This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be thankful.

What are you going to do with what you have left?

Let's study the encounters with Jesus together and see if we might find somebody who we can connect with and see how their lives were changed when they came in the presence of the *Logos*, and see if we can't be transformed by that fork in the road as well.

But today it's decision time. What are you going to do with what's left?

*[Prayer]*

*Lord Jesus, we are grateful for this day. This is the day the Lord has made. And Lord, I'd ask that Your Spirit would convict us if we are living a life with our own purpose or a misguided purpose that we've adopted from the culture in a meaningless world. I'd ask that You would convict us if we are living life outside the values that You clearly and authoritatively declared to be true.*

*And then, Lord, I feel like this church—I'm not sure we're tapping in on the fullness of the power that You have available to us—not just collectively as a church, but as individuals. Some of us have convinced ourselves that we're being defined by some sort of fear or shame or addiction or whatever—that it's not true. And I'd ask that Your Spirit would teach us, maybe in this series, that You have given us the power of the resurrection to be overcomers and to be set free.*

*Lord, I'd ask that this would be the beginning of a new life: a life without regrets, a life of victory, a life with eternity in mind; that we might give that to You, and You'd enjoy it. In Jesus' name. Amen.*