

Christmas Day—A
John 1:1-5
Give Him Your Attention

What I'd like to talk to you about in this Christmas season is how could you possibly give a gift, a birthday gift to the birthday boy, which is something he does not already have? What could you give the wealthy, all-powerful God who made and still owns the universe? How could you give him something he doesn't have already? And I'll tell you one thing that he does not have and that's your attention. He doesn't have it until you give it. Today, I'd like to dig into God's Word with you to see how important and valuable this is and what a sweet gift it is that you can give God something he does not have: To pay attention to him. To listen to what he has to say to you. Not only to bless you but so that you can find out how you can serve him.

The one thing that Jesus does not own by virtue of his creation of all things is the hearts of the people he has made. For in order to gain from you what he most wants—your love—he has to let you be free to have the ability not to love him. A terrifying thought! A frightening thought because he allows you to commit spiritual suicide. He doesn't want it, he grieves over it, but you have that frightful ability to commit spiritual suicide and ignore him and blow him off. But something that you need to give him and only you can give him is your heart and today I would like to talk to you about gift number one. I invite you to put it on your list and that is to call Jesus by one of his most beautiful names. Call him the "Word" and give him a gift he does not have but desires. Give him the gift of your attention and we can start right now. Let's go to the gospel of John. Let's read together some of the most matchless words in all of Scripture.

John's gospel was almost certainly written long after the other three. Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a fairly similar point of view. There is a word for that, I'm going to give you for free today, it's called "synoptic." If you ever read or stumble on that word, it's a pretty college-type word. But you may run into that and I want you to know what it is. It means the three evangelists—Matthew, Mark and Luke—saw things pretty much the same way. They have the same basic arc or trajectory of telling this story of Jesus' life. They tell the birth narratives, they tell of his parables; a lot of action stories. In fact, the gospel of Mark is all action. It's always "*and then,*" "*and immediately,*" "*and then,*" and "*straightaway*" and "*right away.*" It's almost like you have to run to keep up with Mark because it's a book of action.

John knew that all this information was available to his readers and so his gospel is markedly different. The fourth gospel has a much different point of view. He doesn't tell anything about the birth narratives, for instance, because he doesn't have to. The beginning of his book, those first eighteen incredible verses, are called the prologue and they are a poetic essay on the significance and miracle of the person and work of Jesus Christ, who he is and what he did. But it's done in poetic form using little bitty words and this is another trademark of John's writing—small, tiny, little words with great, big, deep meanings. And John records teachings of Jesus that none of the others of Matthew, Mark or Luke, do. He really has an ear for the long discourses of Jesus.

Another feature of John's gospel are the "*I Am*" statements; the great metaphors of Jesus' ministry — the vine, the Good Shepherd, the way, the truth, and the life, the light of the world —and his gospel begins with perhaps the most important of all of the metaphors for Jesus Christ and you need to know about it if you don't already. We're going to just savor the first couple of phrases from the prologue of John's gospel in this Christmas season.

"*In the beginning,*" meaning of the world, the beginning of the universe, "*was the Word.*" And your editor does you a favor by capitalizing the "W" so that you don't think of it as just a spoken word, but you think of it as a person; it's now a proper name for somebody and I think you know who that is. "*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God,*" so now the word is distinguished from God and yet, "*the Word was God*" (1). And here is a poetic and beautiful way of expressing the Trinity; that Jesus is fully God and yet distinct from God his Father, which is a total contradiction. "*The Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning,*" (1-2) from the very beginning of all existence. "*Through him everything*

was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made. In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (3-5).

You know what words are, right? Words are like thumb drives. They are capsules or packets of information that get from my brain into your brain and they’re usually routed through me, through my muscles, through my tongue, my teeth, my mouth is flapping, my tongue is flapping, a little wet muscle weighing a few ounces, and the clicks and movement of my teeth and the framing of my palette create disturbances in the force, in the air between us. And then your ears pick it up so that the ideas that started here get into your head. Words are the medium for communication of ideas, great and small, trivial and of immense significance.

So when the Bible says that Jesus is not just a word of God but the word of God, what we’re talking about is he’s a walking flash drive; loaded with information to get from God to you and he communicates things you need to know that you could not figure out by yourself. From creation, you can figure out there is a God. In fact, everybody who has the slightest bit of honesty knows that creation didn’t just happen. Even atheists say that things were designed; they use the word designed. It slips out of their mouths; they can’t help it because everybody knows there has to be some kind of design behind a world this incredible and complex. You can figure out that there is a desire and that he’s almighty and that he’s above—this is something far beyond any human’s capability—but that’s pretty much where it stops. The only other thing you know is you might be in some trouble because your conscience is telling you and making you squirm and sweat for all the times you know you have done something wrong. Where does right and wrong, any notion of right and wrong, come from? How can we even have those concepts? Because we didn’t make it up; it’s embedded in our consciousness but that’s where it stops. Somebody big designed this world. I’m in somebody else’s world and I’m nervous about my accountability and I don’t know what to do about it. So people make up hundreds and hundreds of different ways to feel good about themselves and be reconciled with this great power out there. It is only when the Word, capital “W,” is revealed that we can know for sure that this God likes us. That there is a rescue plan set in motion from the beginning of time and that Jesus is a walking Christmas card loaded with information, as much information as a thumb drive and more to share the love, the passionate love, that his Father has for you and for me, lost as we are. And to share the information that in person, he came to redo everything to make it possible for us to be reaccepted as God’s children.

Without the word of God made human flesh—the word was made flesh in Bethlehem—without the person of Jesus Christ, we would neither know nor benefit from this love from God. But by being God himself, Jesus brings the presence of God to the very surface of this planet. And the word—just this tiny, fragmentary, little thing; this beautiful little poetic phrase—tells you three things about who Jesus is.

He is with God, he is God, and he was with God from the beginning; he’s eternal going back to all eternity. This is a big deal. Big deal number one is Jesus, the word, is God. And I got to tell you why that is so important—because it means that everything he did on this earth could be directed to have a benefit to you because God and man were working at the same time. When he obeyed a commandment, his divinity, his divine nature, spread it out big enough to cover you and you’re allowed to claim his report card as your own. When he took a blow from the whip and his back was cut open, it was the blood of God coming out, which means it can now be distributed and be connected with you so that the punishment that purchases us peace was laid upon him. It means that by his stripes, you can be healed because he wasn’t just an unfortunate victim of an injustice, which would be contained in just him. Like, too bad for that poor guy; another miscarriage of justice. But his being divine, the Word being God himself, means that everything he did was universal enough and powerful enough to spread out and cover the world at his time and to spread forward and backward in time, retroactively to bring healing to the suffering sinners in the past—go figure—and to pardon people already dead in their transgressions so that retroactively they may stand before God forgiven and pour it forwards and pay it forward. Only the blood of God could do that. When the blood from that crown of thorns dripped down his human face, it was the blood of God and thus sufficient to pay for every last one of your and my sins. And that divinity and universality of his work is what makes it so critical for you to know about this and believe it. Notice I didn’t say “understand it,” I just said to believe it and embrace it. The Word is God and the Word was with God, with his Father.

Number two; this is a big deal also—if you read John’s gospel in quantity, if you read, say chapters at a time, a number of themes will bubble to the surface. You’ll notice that Jesus talked about certain things over and over and one of them is how he and his Father were tight. Everything the Father laid out in his wonderful and awesome plan of salvation is something Jesus busted a gut to fulfill. And he made himself small, like a servant, and submitted to his Father as part of his humiliation; his humbling work. And every time he was criticized by the Pharisees, he would say to them: “Don’t you realize that I and my Father are one? That everything the Father does, I do? That we’re together like this? My mission on earth is to carry out his mission and I will fulfill it all.” Even as he was about to be arrested in the agony of the Garden of Gethsemane, he humbled himself under his Father’s will and he was with God at the best of times and at the worst of times, as well, and submitted to the Father’s will: “No, my Son, you must suffer and die so that my full anger and wrath may be carried out but it can be put on you.” And the greatest switcheroo in the history of the world took place and he was wounded for us and we were healed through him.

The third one is eternity. He was already there from all eternity and has experienced and witnessed all of human history. He sees it all and of course, is eternal in the other direction, as well. This is who the Word is. With God, his Father, and from all eternity.

Now, what did he do?

“*Through him everything was made*” (3). You know in the Apostles’ Creed we say: “I believe in God the Father Almighty” and with one sentence, what do we attribute to the work of God the Father? We say he is the “maker of heaven and earth.” That’s true, totally true, but don’t leave Jesus out. “*Without him not one thing was made that has been made.*” His fingerprints are all over the world, as well. His breath spoke. The Word gave the word to assist in the creation of the physical universe and the Holy Spirit was there, too. Genesis 1:2 says the Spirit of the Lord hovered over the gigantic mud ball, the chaotic mess, of just the elements and the raw materials that were the first things that God made. Creation was a committee job, wasn’t it? On day six when God was going to do his last and greatest work of all, when he was about to create humanity, what did he say? In Genesis 1:26 he said: “*Let us make man in our image.*” That’s a big deal! Father, Son and Spirit were involved in the intellectual activity and in the execution, the engineering and construction activity, and in the supervision and inspection of the final product and looked at it all and said: “It is good.” And the Son was involved in the creation of the human race and the creation of you, as well.

Second, “*In him was life*” (4). Jesus said once in a different metaphor: “I’m the vine and you’re the branches. Cut off from me, you have only the illusion of life. Cut off from me and you’re dying like a cut flower. Cut off from me, you may look alive but really, you’re dying. But connected to me is how you have the juice of life flowing through you. Connected to me, you’re alive. Connected to me, you can bear fruit.” Never forget that the word of God made flesh is your source of life. He’s why you’re alive. He’s why you can enjoy your life now without guilt. He’s your source of energy, spiritual energy, to be better than you are, to do the transformation of your character. He’s your energy source to love the unlovable, to be generous when you want to be selfish, to be kind when you’d rather think about yourself, to plan ahead and defer gratification when you’d rather pig out right now. To think about somebody else instead of thinking about me, me, me. In Christ is your life. That’s what makes you fully alive. “*Whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*” This is your hope while you’re dying. This is a message you can give to dying people that they don’t have to be afraid because whoever lives and believes in him, in whom is life, will never die.

“*And the life was the light of mankind. The light is shining in the darkness*” (4-5) and darkness does not want light. Satan moves with the speed of dark. You’ve heard of the speed of light; he moves with the speed of dark. And our world is a dark, dark place, isn’t it? Jesus said to his disciples: “*The love of most is going to grow cold.*” The longer the age of warfare goes on, the more and more selfish and dark people are going to get. And man, we’re living it, we’re living it. Just think of the urban riots that tear up our nation, the insanity of people who want—allegedly—to do something to redress an injustice in our legal system and in our security system of policing but instead they burn down neighborhoods. What darkness! I have this hypothesis; I think I know why people set fires like that and smash windows and loot: Because they can. I’m not insulting your intelligence. I’m serious, I’m dead serious about this. Why do people do that? Because they are predators looking for an excuse in a large group of people where there’s emotions and anger as they think: “Now’s our

time to destroy.” What is that but the darkness of Satan; his ugly dark breath is all over times like that and that darkness is in us, too. For although I tell you over and over again to rejoice that you are saints of God and that your holiness shines as brightly as Christ himself, that is your legal status before God right now. But the fact is, simultaneously, we are still sinners and some of that darkness still lives in our hearts. And only the light of Christ and his word can beat the darkness back. And even as you maybe have heard, all the darkness in the world cannot snuff out one small candle. And I’ll tell you what—all the darkness of hell cannot snuff out even one of the words of Christ as the word of God comes to us through these words of God. “*And the darkness has not overcome it*” (5). It is imperative that we pay attention to the Word.

This is what I invite you to put on your list of things that you could give the one who’s got everything because something that the Lord Jesus does not have the way we’re born is your attention. And sad to say, the darkness does not want the light and that darkness within us does not want the light of Christ, either. This Santa-mas season, make it Christmas for yourself and the people around you by choosing to give the Word your attention. The small “w” word and the big “W” Word. Only you could choose to do that for the Lord has spoken and acted, but only you can let it into your life. He can’t—well, he can, I suppose—but he will not force it on you. He will not shout Scripture at you. He invites you to open your ears and heart and listen. You’re doing it right now so you are off to a great start right now. You alone have the authority in your life to crack your Bible. You alone, when you are eating with people in your home—do some of you still do that? You can let the word from the Word move around your table. You can choose to read your Bible. Does that sound obvious and dumb? If you could never find a better time than right now to give the Word your attention—are you comfortable with your current level of Bible literacy? Yes? No? Hmm, I wonder.

Do you really pay attention to the word? Have you read all of Jesus’ words, for instance? I wonder if you have. I hope you have but I bet some of you haven’t. Have you read through the gospels for instance? Have all of Jesus’ words to you actually landed in your brain yet? Have you heard his voice through the great prophets of the Old Testament? He speaks to you in that way as well. You knew that, right? Have you listened to his words come to you through the epistles, the letters of Paul and the others who explain to you the meaning of what happened in the gospels? Do you think like: “Well, maybe I kind of get it for myself.” Have you paid enough attention to the word that you can summarize Jesus’ work for somebody else who’s struggling and stumbling and banging his shins and stubbing his or her toes in darkness, in the darkness of their life? Can you explain it? Have you ever brought somebody else to faith in the Lord Jesus? Were you ever God’s it? Have you ever brought somebody else to faith in the Lord Jesus? Were you ever God’s vehicle for that? Pay attention to the Word, the Santa-mas, and make it Christmas in your heart and in your life for it is through the word that faith is created inside you. It’s through the word your faith is nourished. When you are taking a beating and a licking, when you are half intrigued by Satan’s lies and temptations, when you’re exhausted and tired, pay attention to the Word and let his ultimate message of his love for you, the word made flesh came to live among us and we have seen his glory; the glory of the one and only of the Father, full of grace and truth and his grace and truth will delight and strengthen your life, as well.

Let’s come before our Lord today and let’s give him our worship and praise and let’s come before him with a prayer, as well.

Father, we thank you today for what you have decided to do for us. The plan that you worked out was beautiful and it worked. Lord, only through your word can we realize how magnificent is your rescue plan and how miserable would be the fix we’re in without it.

Lord Jesus, thank you for coming all this way down to this earth to lift us up all that way to be a child of heaven. Holy Spirit, thank you for giving us the ability to believe it; now inspire us this Christmas season to give our Savior the gift of our attention so that your words of guidance and comfort will reach our hearts. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.