

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

January 18, 2026

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Trustworthy

Bull's Eye

(John 1:1-18)

Introduction: Orienting to John's Gospel...

I am a creature of habit. And, yes, Kathy will validate this.

While I tolerate variety in food, I could eat a few meals rotated every few days for a very long time. I always plant a garden, twice a year. I've driven the same Ranger truck for twenty-two years. I've been at Northwest...for a long time.

You get the idea. I like familiar things.

For one more example, I like John's Gospel and (full disclosure) I've preached John before.

In fact, the very first series of messages I ever gave here at Northwest (when we were meeting at a YMCA on Wurzbach Road) was from John.

That was in 1982. Then, twenty-two years later, I preached John, again. (2004) And, creature of habit that I am, here we go, again. Twenty-two years later, turning to John's Gospel. (My overly optimistic "future preaching planner" tells me that I'll be preaching through John in 2048.)

I have long loved John's Gospel, and I've come to love it more as the years have passed. So, I'm very eager to move through John with you, again.

But the way we'll walk through John this time will be different.

A church could spend years going through John, and we'll spend months. This won't be a series in which we explore every narrative and go deep into every passage.

You could call what I'm going to be doing "cherry-picking," but it's not really that.

What we're going to do is thoughtfully zero in on select passages in John that zero in on the trustworthiness of Jesus.

Our "win" in this series of studies will be to see the trustworthiness of Jesus.

The Winter Olympics in Italy are coming up in February, so there will be all kinds of ways to measure a "win" in those Games.

- Downhill skiers will aim for speed.
- Snowboarders will shoot for technical expertise.
- Ski jumpers will aim for length.

But in our favorite Winter Olympic sport - curling - the players' aim (Are players called "curlers"?) is to push the "stone" into the middle of the bull's-eye (the "button" of the "house").

In our study of John, we're not slaloming or jumping, we aren't looking to go fast or far. We're curling.

We're aiming at the bulls-eye of seeing Jesus for who He is, so that seeing that He is worthy of our trust, we do, in fact, believe in Him.

At the end of each Sunday morning, if we can say that we have seen one more reason to trust Jesus, John would be fist-pumping and shouting, "Yes!" That would be the win.

Here at the beginning, just a couple of thoughts about the uniqueness of John as compared to the Gospels written by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We call those three the "synoptic" Gospels.

John's Gospel

JOHN VS. MATTHEW, MARK, AND LUKE

Each of those three records emphasize different aspects of Jesus' life and ministry.

But they do so from a very similar perspective. (syn+optic = through one eye).¹ They are writing to the church to explain Jesus' life and ministry so that new followers of Jesus will know His story.

John wrote outside of that synoptic box. He arranged his material differently. He included things the others didn't. He left out things the others put in.²

In John, you won't find the Sermon on the Mount, the record of the Transfiguration, or one single parable.

But you will find a wedding story, Lazarus' resurrection, and the Upper Room Discourse, and other narratives the other Gospels don't include.

All of the episodes in Jesus' life that John included and all of Jesus' talks that John recorded found their way into John's final draft because they aligned with his purpose for writing. That purpose was as clear as clear can be.

JOHN'S PURPOSE

Every author has a purpose for writing their book.

Why did John write His Gospel? John answers that question. He told us exactly why he wrote. We find his "purpose statement near the end of the book.

¹ Matthew traces Jesus' claim to be the Jewish King / Messiah. Mark sees Him as a Servant / King. Luke, the lone Gentile writer, focuses on the universality of Jesus' message and ministry.

² Many Bible scholars have rejected Johannine authorship, but on purely subjective grounds. The witness of church tradition, internal style (similarities to 1,2, and 3

[[John 20:30] So then, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; [31] but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name.

Isn't that simple? John's unapologetic purpose was to write an introduction to Jesus for those who have not yet believed.

He chose the material he did to persuade his readers that Jesus is trustworthy so that they would believe in Jesus.

Seeing Jesus to be as trustworthy as He really is, is exactly why we are going to work our way through John's Gospel together.

John will equip us with truth that assures us of His utter trustworthiness AND with confidence to share a trustworthy Jesus with family and friends.

There is a powerful scene located a little more than halfway through the book, where John tells us about some non-Jews (Greeks) who came to Jerusalem at Passover season in search of Jesus.

These Greeks approached the Apostle Philip, with a simple request. ***[[John 12:21]... "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."***

And that's our request, our "quest," today. It is in the spirit of wanting to "***see Jesus,***" we turn now to John's Gospel.³

THE PROLOGUE

We refer to the eighteen verses we're looking at this morning as John's "Prologue."

John, and Revelation; and John's reference to himself in this book as ("***the disciple whom Jesus loved***") make it easy to say that the Apostle John wrote this book.

³ There is great difference of opinion as to when John wrote his Gospel. Estimates range from the mid 40's of the 1st century, to the early decades of the 2nd century. We can rule out the latest and earliest dates as untenable. I think John wrote shortly before AD 70, not long before Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

It is a very famous section of Scripture and is remarkable for how concisely, how skillfully, John weaves themes together to give us a crucial understanding of who Jesus is.

John introduces us to an entity he refers to as ***“the Word.”***⁴ We hear the word ***“word”*** and think, *“Huh. A word.”* No big deal.

But for John’s mostly Jewish first-century audience, the word ***“Word”*** would have been a very big deal.

And what would John’s first readers have thought as they read John’s opening, ***“In the beginning was the Word”***?

Well, two ideas would have been swirling around in their minds.

First, they would have thought *“creative energy.”* How was the world created? By the WORD of God.

We read in Genesis 1 that God spoke *“words”* into the darkness at the very beginning and said, ***“Let there be light”*** - and there was light. He spoke *“words”* six times and the universe and all it contains appeared.

So, when John says, ***“In the beginning was the Word”*** we should think of the creative energy of God.

Second, John’s first readers, when coming to the word ***“Word”*** would have thought, ***“a revelation of God.”***

One of the most often repeated phrases in the writings of the prophets is, ***“The word of the Lord’ came to [this or that prophet].”***

⁴ We may be tempted to substitute ***“Jesus”*** for ***“Word”*** in the Prologue. But John put ***“Word”*** in the place of Jesus’ Name for a reason. There is nothing to link Jesus with the Word until we get further into the passage. We would do well to try to let John develop his theme without mentally “skipping ahead,” and substituting ***“Jesus”*** for ***“Word.”***

⁵ John was steeped in the Old Testament much more than in Greek culture. Many read this passage and see in John’s comments about the ***“Word”*** reference to the Greek religious idea of the *logos*, which was the secret of wisdom among the

Then, when ***“the word of the Lord”*** arrived, God would reveal His message to the prophet.

When we hear ***“the Word”*** this morning, we are to think of God’s revelation. God is going to reveal something about Himself through this ***“Word.”***

With that as background, here are John’s opening comments.

An Intro to “the Word” (1:1-5)

The Word and God (1:1-2)

[1] In the beginning was the Word⁵, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.⁶ [2] He was in the beginning with God.

John starts off by taking us back to the beginning of all that there is and says, ***“The Word”*** was already there.

The ***“Word”*** did not begin to exist at the beginning. At the earliest moment that you can imagine, ***“the Word”*** had already existed forever.

And then, back ***“in the beginning”*** the Word sustained a relationship to God. ***“...and the Word was with God.”***

So, if there is a relationship between ***“the Word”*** and God, it follows that there must be a separation between ***“the Word”*** and God.

I can only have a relationship with someone separate from me. ***“The Word”*** and God existed together from the beginning.

Greek mystery religions. John, though, would have had an entirely different idea in mind when he made mention of the ***“Word.”***

⁶ Some translate verse one *“and the Word was ‘a’ God”* since there is no definite article before the word ***“God.”*** Colwell’s Rule (a standard rule of Greek grammar) refutes that translation. The rule states that in Greek, definite nouns (like “God”) which precede the verb regularly lack the article and should be translated as if they have one. The correct translation of this phrase is, ***“And the Word was God.”***

And then - and this is the part that may produce a migraine - **"The Word was God."** There is equality between **"the Word"** and God.

John says here that **"the Word"** - whatever or whoever it may be - is not godly, not god-like, not a god. God. The Almighty.⁷

And John continues.

The Word and Creation (1:3-5)

The Word is the Creator (v. 3)

[3] All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being.

So, **"the Word"** was with God before creation AND when it came time to create, **"the Word"** was the active Agent that brought it all about. There has never been anything created without the Word's active involvement.⁸

And there is more for us to learn about the Word.

The Word is the Sustainer and Illuminator (v. 4a)

[4] In Him was life... - and THAT is a mouthful.

I am alive. You are alive. And there are living things - plant, animal, and human - all around us.

But all the life we see all around us is dependent life. Plants depend on carbon dioxide, light, and water to live. You and I are dependent on food, water, and air to live.

Not so the Word. The Word has independent life.

"The Word" is the source from which all creation draws life. **"The Word"** depends on nothing for its' life. Take everything else away and **"the Word"** lives on.

And the life force within **"the Word"** serves humanity as a lighthouse, directing us to its - No to **His** - life.

The Word shines in the darkness (vv. 4b- 5)

[4]...and the life was the Light of mankind. [5] And the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not grasp it.

My version of the Bible translates verse five, **"...and the darkness did not grasp it** (i.e. - **"the Word's"** light)."

While an acceptable translation, I much prefer rendering John's words, **"the darkness did not overcome it."**⁹

It is the nature of light to dispel darkness. Light, by definition, is more powerful than darkness. Turn on a light in any dark room and the darkness flees.

And the Light that **"the Word"** shines is powerful enough to overwhelm the darkness of human sin, misery, and pain.

Human darkness is never so dark that **"the Word's"** Light won't break through.

This is John's introduction to **"the Word."** He's told us that while **"the Word"** is personal, it is also an eternal, creative, cosmic life force.

We keep reading as John brings us back from the cosmic to the flesh and blood world of daily life.

⁷ **"The Word"** could be viewed as some impersonal force at this point, except for the use of the pronoun in verse two, **"HE was in the beginning with God."** The Word is a Person.

⁸ When we turn to Genesis 1, we will see that in addition to God's Spirit moving across the surface of the waters (v. 2) and God Almighty speaking (v. 3), the Word was there, too, actively participating in the creation event. (John 1:3)

⁹ The Greek word that my translation (NASB) renders **"grasp"** is *katalambanw*, is a military term that speaks of conquest. (It can refer to the mental grasp of a subject.) See Eugene Peterson's rendering in The Message (and that of the English Standard Version), **"The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn't put it out."**

Prequel to the Word's Grand Entrance: John the Baptist (1:6-8)

[6] A man came, one sent from God, and his name was John.¹⁰ [7] He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. [8] He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.

This John is not the author, the Apostle John. Here, John the apostle was writing about John the Baptist.

That John was the wild man who wore animal skins and ate locusts and honey. That John was one of the most curious and compelling characters in the Bible.

That John burst onto the scene at the Jordan River calling people to baptism and to repentance. He lived out in deserted areas.

That John was all authenticity, boldness. He was unself-conscious, and zealous for God.

All of that was true, and John was truly a man sent from God. But that John was not the star of the show. He was the prequel.

He came to be a witness of the Light that ***“the Word”*** shines into the darkness.

As it is in 2025, so in the first century Jewish world, witnesses were brought to trial to give testimony.

John the Baptist staked his future, his reputation, and his life on the testimony he gave about the Light of ***“the Word.”***

We know John the Baptist as an historical figure who lived in first century Israel. And John gave testimony to the divine, creative, transcendent Word.

But that transcendent, creative ***“Word”*** was also rooted in space / time history, as John (the apostle) now makes clear.

Christmas in January: The Word Incarnate (1: 9-14)

The Rejection of the Word's Light (1:10-11)

[9] This was the true Light that, coming into the world, enlightens every person.

There was a time before the Light was present in the world. But then, the Light came into the world ***“He”*** had created. And He, the Light, was the Enlightener.

Only through Him are men, women, and children enlightened to “the Word” (to God!) by His million candlepower beam.

And the light which is the shining of ***“the Word”*** was a Person, just as real and historical a person as John the Baptist.

[10] He was in the world, and the world came into being through Him, and yet the world did not know Him. [11] He came to His own, and His own people did not accept Him.

“The Word” that shines the light is transcendent, eternal, creative...AND imminent, personal, and near.

When the creative, eternal ***“Word”*** came to earth to shine, He did not come as an alien. He came as a Man.

And, when ***“the Word”*** came to His people, He did not come as a foreigner. As God, He came home to the people of God, to the Jews.

By this time, we can't resist the temptation to draw a straight line between ***“the Word”*** “the Light” - and Jesus.

¹⁰ Remember the miraculous circumstances of John's birth. He was born to the barren Elizabeth and was announced by the angel to Zacharias, at the temple. John was truly a man sent from God.

Jesus came home to the Jews, who should have welcomed Him with open arms - but they didn't.

From start to finish, manger to cross, Jesus' own people gave Him only contempt. He got the same treatment from the Romans.

His entire life was one painful experience after another of rejection.¹¹

He didn't force Himself on anyone, not even His own people. And He was rejected by most as untrustworthy.

But there were those who saw in Jesus a Man worthy of their trust. For them, there was a gift.

The Reception of the Word's Light (1:12-13)

[12] But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name,¹² [13] who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God.

Throughout our time looking into John's Gospel, we will be returning to this most basic of all biblical themes over and over again.

John will tell us repeatedly and Jesus will tell us repeatedly that there is no good thing we can do to become God's children. All we are asked to do, all we can do, is believe in Jesus.

God values faith. Faith is the response He wants from us.

And people who believe in Jesus (that is, who ***"receive Him"***) become God's child. God makes it so.

¹¹ In His earliest days, the Jewish leaders didn't make the effort to travel the seven miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to see Jesus, even though the rumor mill had it that the Messiah had been born. (Matthew 2) In His mature ministry, the Jews were continually holding Him at arm's length and rejecting His teaching. Finally, their rejection culminated in having Him put to death on the cross.

So far, we've traced the Word's story from eternity past to creation to a birth at Bethlehem when the Light first shined to Calvary where the Light was rejected.

But the end of the story of ***"the Word"*** is not the tragedy of rejection. It is the glorious story of grace.

The Word Became Flesh (1:14)

[14] And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only Son¹³ from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Of all the momentous sentences we read in the Bible, this has to rank in the top ten - or five, or three. ***"The Word"*** - eternal, Creator, God - became flesh. Myth become reality.

Here, John writes the most concise version of the Christmas story and the clearest statement of the Incarnation we'll ever hear.

This is the heart of Christianity: ***"The Word"*** took on flesh in the Person of Jesus.

During the three years John spent as Jesus' apostle, He watched ***"the Word"*** at work.

He saw ***"the Word"*** walking the streets of Nazareth and the roads of Judea. He watched ***"the Word's"*** healing hands. He heard ***"the Word's"*** life-giving messages.

When we think of beholding God's glory, we may mostly think of visions, miracles, and spectacular shows of power.

But in all human history the glory of God was most clearly seen when Jesus ***"dwelt among us."***

¹² In the ancient world. The name stood for the person. Believing in the Name of Jesus is believing in the Person of Jesus.

¹³ I much prefer the translation ***"only begotten."*** The term ***"begotten"*** emphasizes the unique relationship that the Word / Son has with the Father. He alone proceeded from the Father.

This was the vision John the Baptist had of Jesus.

John's Testimony (1:15)

[15] John testified about Him, and called out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who is coming after me has proved to be my superior, because He existed before me.'"

We know from the Gospel of Luke that John the Baptist was six months older than Jesus. But here John says that Jesus ("**the Word**") existed before him. And John was right.

So, how long before John had Jesus existed? Well, "**In the beginning was the Word...**" So, Jesus was exactly an eternity older than John.

John the Baptist insisted that "**the Word**" was greater than he was. And our author, John the Apostle, has fired an arrow straight into the bulls-eye of grace.

This morning, our goal has not been to go higher, faster, or farther than anyone has ever gone. We're not experimenting with new ideas.

We're curling. We're pushing a stone toward the bull's-eye. And at the center of the story of Jesus we find grace.

The Bull's Eye Of Grace (1:16-18)

Grace Upon Grace (1:16)

[16] For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.

There are untold numbers of tragedies unfolding all around us - internationally and personally, within our nation and in our city.

Tragedy is a constant in our very broken world.

And when tragedy strikes home, any of us may be tempted to wonder, "*What did I do to deserve this?*"

I understand. Those who suffer may have done nothing to deserve this or that particular tragedy. Tragedy can seem random.

So, John says here that God has lavished us who have believed in Jesus with "**grace upon grace**," wave upon unending wave of grace.

And, as we just asked about tragedies, so now we ask about grace, "*What did we do to deserve any of this?*"

We think we'll stump God when we ask, "*Why do the innocent suffer?*" The harder question for any of us to answer is, "*Why do sinners receive grace?*"

It's because with the coming of Jesus, there came a tidal wave of grace.

Moses vs Jesus (1:17)

[17] For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

The essential character of the Jewish system, in terms of their day to day experience, was Law.

The Jews were to be obedient to a rigid set of rules and regulations.

They were told how to make their sacrifices, how to pay their tithes, how to dig their latrines, how to punish crimes. Law ordered most every aspect of their lives.

But it wasn't as if there was no grace in the Old Testament. There certainly was.

We see grace in the sacrificial system. And many times, God dealt with the nation of Israel in grace.

He showed grace to foreign nations, like when He did not destroy Nineveh when they turned from their sin.

And grace was given to people who deserved judgment - like King David, who received grace when he could have been put to death for murder and adultery.

But, in Jesus, God has poured out grace on us in unparalleled measure. And here is the story of everyone who believes in Jesus.

On Day #1 of your life in Jesus, you believed that a trustworthy Jesus would give you eternal life and make you a child of God. Jesus did exactly that on the day you believed in Him for those promises.

Then, on Day #2 of your life in Jesus, you sinned. But because on Day #1 you were forgiven, you were forgiven still, you were a child of God still, you possessed eternal life still.

The one who believes in Jesus receives grace upon grace. Every day.

The wonder of grace never fades because we can never get over what God, in Jesus, has done for us.

- By His death on the cross, He removed the penalty of sin. Jesus was ***[John 1:29] the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world.***
- By His resurrection, He offers people like us who are spiritually dead eternal life when we believe.

Grace. By definition, grace is what we get that we don't deserve, shouldn't expect, don't have a claim to, and are not entitled to.

Conclusion:

Bull's eye.

Today, we have not skied faster, jumped higher, or skated fancier than anyone ever has. Today, we have curled our stone straight onto "the button of the house."

And there at the bulls-eye, we have seen what is at the core of who God is.

John wrote, ***[1:18] No one has seen God at any time; God the only Son, who is in the arms of the Father, He has explained¹⁴ Him.***

We have found that at the core of the nature of God, we find grace, because grace is at the core of Jesus, ***"the Word become flesh."***

¹⁴ The Greek word we translate "***explained***" is the word from which we get our English word "***exegesis***." Jesus has "exegeted" God the Father.