

#1971—October 4, 2009—“Hall of Presidents”—14

[Gauger:] *Moody Presents* the Hall of Presidents.

[Easley:] God, in His great kindness, reached down in a way I'll never understand from eternity past, and He chose you before the foundation of time. You don't seek Him out and decide, “Oh, I think of all the options, Jesus is the best one.”

[Gauger:] With a legacy look at the men who shaped the school that Moody founded, this is *Moody Presents*, the Hall of Presidents, and I'm Jon Gauger, welcoming you to this very historic series of broadcasts. It was March 1, 2005, when a tall, Texas-raised pastor stepped across the stage of Torrey-Gray Auditorium to become the eighth president of the Moody Bible Institute: Dr. Michael J. Easley. He'd gone to Dallas Theological Seminary, earned his master's in theology there, and earned a doctorate of ministry there in 2003. But before coming to Moody Bible Institute as president, Dr. Easley served in the pastorate for nearly twenty-four years. Starting as a youth pastor, he interned at Trinity Fellowship in Dallas, Texas. He then became senior pastor at Grand Prairie Bible Church in Texas. Then he packed it all up and headed East to Springfield, Virginia, just outside of Washington, DC, where he served for eleven and one-half years at Immanuel Bible Church. When coming to the Moody Bible Institute in 2005, one of Dr. Easley's responsibilities was *PROCLAIM!* He had lots of ideas, lots of new energy for the broadcast. I think one of the things that described his ministry both as president and as speaker on *PROCLAIM!* was an unswerving commitment to the reliability of Scripture. Dr. Easley believed that a sermon ought to be about the Bible, not pop theology or current events. You know, it was my privilege for nearly three years to sit across the table from Dr. Easley as we taped the *PROCLAIM!* broadcast, which ultimately became *In Context*. But you know, it always amazed me—he would sit down and always quiz me about what had happened that day, what was on the headlines of the newspapers, what he had just seen at a Web site. Dr. Easley was a voracious reader, and whatever it was that was unfolding in the world, he had already read five different articles from five different perspectives. He is just a tremendous reader and a great student of the culture. But as president of the Moody Bible Institute, Dr. Michael J. Easley had a commitment to not just observing culture, but shaping it ... through the students of Moody Bible Institute. So in his weekly chapel messages, he took on broad themes, speaking very carefully, biblically, into the lives of the student body. One of his more memorable series centered around the gospel of John. Today's message, drawn from John's gospel, the first chapter, is titled *In the Beginning*. From president's chapel 2008, join me now as we walk down the Hall of Presidents for a message by Dr. Michael J. Easley.

[Easley:] John is the disciple whom Jesus loved. He is one of the sons of a fisherman named Zebedee. He is the disciple who put his head on Jesus' chest. He had a special relationship with his Lord. He wrote a gospel account that at once is simple enough for a child to grasp and at the same time will grasp a scholar for his lifetime. The gospel of John is the latest gospel. It was written some time after the church in Ephesus was planted by the apostle Paul, probably in A.D. 85 or 95 or thereabouts. You have to ask the question if you're even a casual Bible student, why another gospel? Matthew, Mark, and Luke—isn't that enough? We call them the Synoptics. But John is different. John is not a synoptic gospel. It is different. It stands apart, and we wonder, why did he write another letter telling about Jesus Christ?

The simple, naïve response from me is that God wanted another record. It's a different record in a number of ways. Do you recall being in college or perhaps high school and a teacher gave you an assignment in literature—to read a poem, a short story, a novel—and as part of your essay or your test you had to write down, what? What was the author's thesis, or purpose

statement? For some reason I had one of these literature teachers who just loved to take apart your answer if it wasn't exactly the purpose statement they wanted. Did you have any teachers like that? I mean, my grade hung in the balance. If I could come close enough to the purpose statement of the book as I saw it to get a grade ... She always would mark it in red and say, "This isn't the purpose of the book." I went through life going, "I'll never understand the purpose of any book."

Well, the gospel of John tells us the purpose of the book. John 20:31 is the clearest verse in all the Bible, in any of the books of the Bible that tell you why it was written. In fact, why don't you read it with me? John 20:31: "But these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

Now, for years I read that verse like many of you have and thought, *Oh, the purpose of the gospel of John is to record all these things so we'll believe in Jesus.* But that's not what the purpose statement says. You have to read the verse before, which says, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written." What's the antecedent? The signs that Jesus performed. John is recording seven key signs that Jesus performed with the explicit purpose, the deliberate purpose, so that they will be a witness, a testimony, on-trial on-the-stand swearing that these events happened so that—the purpose clause—you will believe. Not just the whole life and times of Jesus, although we can readily see it that way, but technically John is saying, I have recorded these seven things that He did in the eye of the disciple so that, with the purpose that, you will believe. So John is one of the clearest books of the Bible on telling us why he recorded the book. Now, these signs we're going to look at as we continue this series of John, but this morning I want us to get a larger view of the gospel, and then we'll start unpacking it in the weeks ahead. Now, there are many other purposes why John recorded the gospel, and we will look at those, but the theological center is that so people would believe. He recorded these signs to prove that Jesus is who He said He is.

Let's look at six unique components of the gospel of John as we begin laying a foundation for future study. First of all, the gospel is often described as a theological gospel. What we typically think of then is somehow this is more theological than the Synoptics: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Why did people say that? Why would you perhaps feel that way? Well, one of the things is that John, although he has narrative portions, does not have some narrative portions. For example, he does not have a birth or an incarnation narrative. What he does is he says, "In the beginning was the Word." Skip the story; give me the truth. "In the beginning was the Word." He doesn't talk about incarnation; he says, "The Word became flesh." So people study that and go, "Wow! That's heavy! That's theological." Well, all Scripture is theology. What John is doing is he's taking some choice doctrines and putting them in very simple forms for us to understand.

Secondly, the vocabulary of the book of John is limited. Now, I don't like the word *limited*, but I can't come up with a better word. What I mean by that is, he only uses about 600 vocab words to write the whole book! When I was a student in seminary ... Some of you have taken Greek as a language. What you typically do is you memorize a lot of verbs. You memorize a lot of nouns, a lot of vocabulary. You learn some grammar. You learn some rules. You take a lot of pop tests every class period. Then after your second, third, or fourth semester they put a copy of the Greek New Testament in front of you and open it to John 1:1. You read, "*En arche en logos.*" I know the word *logos*; that's *Word*. "*Kai logos.*" There's *logos* again. "*En pros theos.*" That's *God*. And "*Theos en logos.*" Man, that's *God* and the *Word*. I can read Greek! That's the last time you ever feel that way. That's why professors do that—to goad you on to keep studying.

In some respects it's a very simple book to read, because it doesn't take a lot of vocabulary to understand John's news. Now, what do we say about someone who is brilliant? If they are brilliant and they dazzle us with their speech and use incredible vocabulary and concepts that we're kind of glazed over, we say, "Wow, they're really smart." But when a brilliant communicator can put the cookies on the bottom shelf, where the masses can grab it, we say, "Wow, I can understand that." So brilliance is kind of a relative thing, is it not?

By the way, if you hold a New International Version, that Bible was written for a seventh-grade-educated grammarian. If you hold a New American Standard, they are assuming you understand twelfth-grade grammar. If you have a King James—twelfth-grade grammar. Because that's where the American audience reads—seventh-grade level. The gospel of John in a sense we might say is seventh-grade grammar, but it in no way demeans or reduces the profundity of the passage. It's simple, but it's not elementary.

Thirdly, the gospel of John is unique because it does not include some things: a genealogy, a birth narrative, a baptism account, a temptation account. No casting out of demons. Not one parable in the gospel of John. No transfiguration. No institution of the Lord's Supper. No agony at Gethsemane, and no ascension. People worry about why John didn't include these. Good students comb through it and come up with some conclusions of why John doesn't include these.

Fourth, a unique component is the way John talks about substitutionary atonement. Substitutionary atonement in Pauline language is very specific. Christ died for you, on your behalf, in your place, instead of you. You can't read Romans or Galatians without seeing the doctrine of substitutionary atonement in fifty iterations. It's impossible. It's like Paul's favorite thing to exalt. You were atoned because of what He did on the cross for you, not what you can ever do for Him. Importantly, rightly so, he teaches about this. John never uses that type of language. What John does is remarkable. John paints an Old Testament theological word picture. John the Baptist says, "Behold, the Lamb of God who"—what? "Takes away the sin of the world!" Substitutionary atonement. He doesn't unpack it like Paul.

In another case Jesus tells Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life." What was the serpent in the wilderness? They had to believe. The sting of the viper would go away by faith, looking at this. What does it mean to lift Jesus up? To crucify Him. Jesus says, "When I'm lifted up, if you believe upon Me you'll have eternal life." So he doesn't unpack it the same way Paul does; he unpacks it in beautiful Old Testament theological word pictures.

Fifth, another prominent motif is that of eternal life. Perhaps no other writer discusses what it means to have eternal life better than John. It's in the prologue. "In Him was life," verse 4, "and the life was the Light of men." John says, Do you want to know about living forever and all that that embodies? You need to understand who Jesus Christ is. Nine times John will use "eternal life" and explain it in a manifold sense so the reader, the hearer of the story centuries later will understand what it means to have eternal life in Jesus. It's not just living forever; it's what it means to have eternal life with God.

Sixth, and perhaps the greatest theological contribution of the gospel of John, is his analysis of the simple word *belief*, or *to believe*. There is no greater writer than John in understanding the nature and the essence of belief. Again he gives us a manifold look at the word, a few of them. It's equated to following God, to drinking. Belief is an action followed by some type of command. Belief is heeding. Belief is hearing. Belief is worship. Belief is obedience, and belief is

commitment in John's language. So John's trying to explain to us belief, unlike maybe the way some of us have accepted belief as a point-in-time thing. If you're here today and you've trusted Christ as your Lord and Savior, you've put your faith in Him, you've believed in Him for this gift called eternal life ... We typically talk about that as point-in-time, right? There was a point in time when you did that. John, however, uses the words every single time, ninety-eight times in his gospel, as a verb, never a noun. The New International Version renders it a noun a few times, but it's never a noun in the Greek language. I think the deliberate reason John does this ... Yes, there's a point in time when we believe, but there's a living, an ongoing, activity of faith, to have a life of faith in Jesus Christ. To believe in Him means more than "Yeah, I believe in Jesus." It means more than an intellectual assent, we often say. It means more than putting a cognitive place ... "Yeah, I believe in Him." It's an active, vital relationship.

[Gauger:] For anyone just joining us, you're listening to a message from Dr. Michael Easley, eighth president of the Moody Bible Institute. His sermon from John 1 is part of the Hall of Presidents message collection available at our Web site, moodypresents.mbn.org: eighteen messages on nine CDs. In addition to your listening library, I think you'll really treasure the Hall of Presidents. Complete information at moodypresents.mbn.org. Now, Michael Easley with the conclusion to his message In the Beginning.

[Easley:] You will all know that an illustration at best stands on three legs, right? There is no illustration to make a scriptural point that is four-legged. It's going to wobble. Let me give you some wobbly help. If I believe I should go to college, then I'm going to have to do what? Call some colleges. Get some catalogs. File an application. Send some money. Fill out some forms. Go visit a campus. Right? If I want to get married, if I believe I should be married, I'm going to have to date a person or court a person. I'm going to have to get to know a person, maybe get to know their family. Then I'll have to kind of reel that person in with flowers and bribery. You know? Then I'll have to say, "Will you marry me?" If I believe that I should invest money, I'm going to have to study a little bit. I'm going to have to read. I'm going to have to talk to a broker, perhaps, or someone who is good at investing. I'm going to have to do a little research. Then what am I going to ultimately have to do? Write a check to somebody and submit it! Right? I can think about college, marriage, investing, or anything else on my sofa, and it's just a daydream. Until I get up off the sofa and start doing something toward that belief, I don't believe at all, do I? I'm just thinking about it.

Remember—three-legged at best. John is trying to help us understand that there is a belief in Christ, but there is a *belief*—*what* it means to look more like Jesus Christ than myself as I live out this life of faith. To believe in Jesus in the gospel of John is to have life in His name.

So what's the gospel of John about? It's a message of grace to the heart of man. It's the good news of Jesus Christ to hopeless people who are desperate for hope. Do you know any hopeless people? What a book to begin to learn.

Let's look at the prologue. Technically it's verses 1–18. We will only cover verse 1 this morning. Years ago I introduced the book of Genesis, and I preached Genesis 1:1, that sermon. We had a visiting missionary there, and they wrote me a letter back. They calculated how many verses there were in Genesis and how long it would take me to preach the whole book one verse at a time. Fear not—we will not do that.

John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." It's reminiscent deliberately to Genesis 1:1, "in the beginning." If there is any room for missing it, John says, let me give you the words *life*, *light*, *darkness*, and *beginning* so you don't miss it. So

any casual reader of the gospel of John in antiquity would say, "This sure sounds like the first book we call Genesis, verse 1. 'In the beginning God created.'" He does this deliberately and brilliantly. God creates the cosmos with the Word of God.

As Semitic thought often does—Genesis, Exodus, Judges, even here—they will give you the overarching principle and then unpack the particulars. That's what John does. Verse 1 is the propositional truth, the Word of God, and then he unpacks what that means in the particulars. If you study Genesis, Exodus, or Judges, the first chapter is an outline of the whole book in every case. The same is true in the gospel of John. The prologue is an outline of everything he's going to demonstrate as he gives the particulars of the book. A masterfully written verse, a masterfully written first eighteen verses to unpack the entire literary analysis so that you will understand what he wants us to know from reading his account of Jesus Christ's life.

The creation language sparks interest in the reader. Verse 1: "In the beginning was the Word." What he is saying here is two things: History began at a point in time, and the root of the universe began at a point in time, but Jesus, the Word, was always there. The *logos* was always there. He always existed. In other words, never was there a time when the Word was not. Never has there been anything ever created that was not dependent upon Him.

So what's this *Word*? The word is *logos*. Three times in verse 1: the *logos* is with Him; the *logos* is Him. In the beginning was the *logos*. What is this *logos* thing mean? If you pulled out a Greek dictionary off the shelf, this is what you would read: a statement, a matter, or a record; a message, a concept, or an idea; a mandate, an order, or a decree; a moral, a precept; a message by a prophet; a doctrine, a speech, a narration. Now, I could go on for about four minutes. The first person to use the word *logos* was a Greek philosopher named Heraclitus. Heraclitus lived six hundred years before Jesus Christ came on the scene. Heraclitus used the word to describe that everything is in chaos, but *logos* is the divine thing that gives order to chaos. So if you read the Greek classics, you will read in extent about the *logos*. The *logos* is this thing out there that gives order and meaning to that which is total chaos and disorder. What an interesting word John would pull on to talk about God. That which is out there, which is total chaos, something has to bring it into order, and John says it's the *logos*.

So the scholars debate. Is he writing to a Gentile, Greek audience or to a Jewish, Semitic audience? The Jew wouldn't know the word *logos*; they'd know the word *dabar*. *Dabar* is "the word." "The word came to a prophet," the "word of God," *dabar*. They would translate it in Greek *logos* sometimes. So the Jew would say, "No, the beginning of all would be wisdom, *chokmah*. Wisdom is how you fear God." So they debate to this day, "Who is he writing to?" The Jew would read it and say, "What's he using that term for?"

The Gentile would say, "*Logos*? Hmm. He's going to define this for me finally. 'In the beginning was the Word ...'" I think John has his vocabulary feet in two worlds deliberately to compel whatever reader of that day to say, "He's going to tell me what the Word is?" In the beginning was the *logos*? The *logos* was with God, and the *logos* was God? So the Greek would be compelled because they loved wisdom; they loved philosophy; they loved to debate. So John writes a strophe that would pull them in to a book unlike any other strophe perhaps written.

Well, the Word was not only in the beginning. In verse 1b, "the Word was with God." The little preposition used, *with* in your English text, has been written more than you would ever care to even know about. What does it mean, "the Word was *with* God"? I think it means that He is face to face. It's not the normal Greek word for *with*. It's the word *pros*, which seems to be "up against the side." "The Word was with God." There was an intimacy with God. There was a face

to face with God. The *logos* to the Greek—this thing that puts order to chaos—was with God. So the Greeks would say, “Wow, this *logos* is something.” The Jew would say, “The Word was back with Yahweh? How is this *logos* with Yahweh?” It would compel them into ... It’s the closest possible connection.

In addition, John tips his hand to a Trinity, to a godhead. There are some distinctions going on here. “The Word was with God.” Somehow there is something else happening here.

By the third strophe, “The Word was God,” he has identified that this is not a thing; this is a person. The essence and character of God are seen in the Word.

Now, all of us who know the Bible even a little bit know he’s talking about Jesus Christ, right? But you know, you’ve got to read clear down to verse 17 before he ever says “Jesus Christ.” Isn’t it interesting that right away he didn’t say “And the Word was Jesus”? He’s pulling his reader along saying, “What is this Word?” All things came into being through Him. Apart from Him nothing came into being. What is this Word? Who is this Word? Of course, it would not take them long at all to conclude that he is arguing that Jesus Christ is the Word of God.

He’s God in every way, but He’s not God. He’s the essence of God, but He’s not Him. He’s distinct because He’s with Him, and yet He is God, and He’s always been existing—a full-orbed perspective of who this Jesus is. John says it’s the Word of God. He was in the beginning, was with God, and He is God. Will you pray with me?

“Father, thanks for this wonderful book, simple, complex. We will unpack it for years. Stimulate each one of us here to fall in love with the Word, Jesus, more and more each day. Let our lives look different because of it. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

[Gauger:] You know, as you listen to this message from Dr. Michael Easley, you get a strong sense of his passion to help students understand not just a surface glimpse of Scripture, but what the original text meant, the intent of the Holy Spirit inspiring these authors. In the Beginning, the title of today’s message from John 1, is part of our collection of Hall of Presidents messages available right now at our Web site, moodypresents.mbn.org. That’s moodypresents.mbn.org. I strongly encourage you to check out that Hall of Presidents message series. Just click on the button when you go to moodypresents.mbn.org. I’m Jon Gauger, saying thanks for listening and inviting you back next week when we hear another message from Dr. Michael Easley right here on *Moody Presents*, the Hall of Presidents.