

O Lord God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God might be thoroughly equipped unto every good work. Send forth your spirit this morning, O Lord. Grant us light. Grant us insight and wisdom into your glory, particularly the glory of your Son. and grant us insight into our own hearts, O God, in the darkness therein, that you would draw us, those of us who know you and those of us who know you not, draw us, Lord, to Jesus, the only name under heaven, given amongst men, by which we can or must be saved. We offer these prayers in Jesus' name. Amen. Please take your seats, and if you would, turn with me in your copy of the word of God to John's Gospel, chapter one, I can't imagine when was the last time you all heard a sermon on John's gospel, chapter one. It must have been at least 14 or 15 days. When I heard Dr. Thomas preach on John 1 for his Christmas Eve sermon, my heart initially sank as I thought to myself, well, I can't use that quote, and I can't use that quote, and no, I can't use that quote either. But then I thought to myself, you know, in God's providence, Could there be a better passage for Dr. Thomas and I to pass the baton? He's been my mentor, my father in the Lord for so many years. I owe him an enormous debt. I came to the Reformed faith under his preaching back in Stranmillis. 30 years ago now, and it's a great honor and privilege to be here and to read the scriptures. And we begin this morning a new series on John chapter one, and this is indeed the word of God, and if you would please take heed how you hear. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. You were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. The grass withers and the flower falls off, but this is the word of the Lord, and it endures forever. Well, back in the day when ships were tall and tails were taller, the British Navy was docked somewhere in the Pacific. It would be Port

Talbot in Australia at the end of the 18th century, beginning of the 19th century. And the sailors were enjoying some shore leave. And as is often the case with sailors, they were returning home at the end of a long night in the bar, a little worse for wear. And two of them were staggering arm and arm down the street. And they got entirely lost. And they were struggling to find their way back to the dock. And so they look, and here's coming a rather distinguished, older gentlemen striding purposefully down the main street. They didn't recognize him. It was the admiral of the fleet. And they kind of staggered up to him, arm in arm. And one of the sailors says, sir, would you happen to know where we are? And the admiral, who's completely aghast, looks at them and says, gentlemen, do you know who I am? And the one sailor looked at his friend and said, this isn't going very well. We don't know where we are. He doesn't know who he is. I wonder this morning, do you know who you are? I mean really know who you are. Because we live in an age in which there is tremendous confusion on that very subject. Men and women and boys and girls all across this land and all across this world have no idea how to define their identity. And you know that because they're defining their identity in all the wrong places and on all the wrong things. Men and women define their identity by looking at themselves and their achievements, the job they have, the things they do, their accomplishments. They look sometimes in the mirror at their appearance. Are they svelte and tight and in shape? Are they pretty? Are they handsome? Where do they live? Their zip code? What kind of car do they drive? What clothes do they wear? And these things can give us a deceptive sense of our identity, can't they? Sometimes people look out at their political affiliation or their sexual orientation. Or increasingly in our age, we're finding men and women defining themselves by their sense of gender identity, which is increasingly fluid. But all of those things in their own way, although they're part of who we are, of course, but all of those things, none of those things are a strong enough foundation to really define us. And if you don't, when you're thinking about your identity, if you don't begin with God, you'll never really find yourself along the way. It's a bit like a movie. You ever walk into a movie late? I hate walking into a movie late. And you come in, you've no idea what's going on, where did it begin, who the characters are, and if you come in at the wrong time, you might be struggling all the way through the movie to make any sense of it whatsoever. And life is like that. And John, this morning in our text, is helping you understand who you are by beginning by helping you understand who God is. And to do that, you gotta go back beyond the beginning of all things to the God who is

our creator. That's the most fundamental thing about you this morning. You're made by God. You were made for God. and you are made to be like God in time and for eternity. And if you don't begin there, you'll never really understand who and what you're supposed to be. Now as John this morning walks us through this text, he gives you five concepts, five words, to help you understand God. And the first is eternity, eternity. Look at the first verse. In the beginning was the word. In the beginning was the word. Now, John is writing to a diverse audience. Gentiles are part of the audience, to be sure, but I think he's writing, first and foremost, an evangelistic tract to Jews, the Jewish nation. These are Jews who are still reeling from AD 70. You remember what happened in AD 70. The Romans came in and sacked Jerusalem and razed the temple to the ground. And the Jews, therefore, are lost, right? Because the temple was the place where men and women could meet and see, or at least feel, the tabernacling presence of God. But the temple's gone. And where do you meet God? Where do you find the tabernacling presence of God with no temple? And the Jews are feeling as if they've got both feet firmly planted in midair, and they're lost. And John writes to tell them, it'll be next week's sermon, God willing, but he writes to tell them, if you want to meet the tabernacling presence of God, you look no further than the Lord Jesus Christ. The word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. The word became flesh and literally tabernacled amongst us. That's where you meet the tabernacling presence of God, not in a building, but in a person, the person of God's son. These words, in the beginning was the word, it's kind of incredible, isn't it? Because you might think, why isn't he just clear and say, in the beginning was the son, or in the beginning was Jesus? Because writing to Jews He's connecting and reminding them, not just at the beginning of all things, but of the beginning of scripture. The Jews knew exactly what John is saying. They can't help but hear the echo of Genesis 1. In the beginning, God created heavens and the earth. And John here takes the word God out and he puts Jesus in, in the closest approximation to God. He's connecting your thinking about God to Jesus. In the beginning, God, in the beginning, was the word. Because what is a word, boys and girls? Words reveal us, right? When I speak, when you speak, we reveal our thoughts. our plans, our purposes, we reveal our character. When John calls Jesus the word of God, he's saying that Christ is the revelation of God, his mind, his heart, his being, his plan, his purposes. If you want to know God, look to Jesus. Later, Christ himself will say, he that has seen me has seen the Father. He's connecting Jesus

to God, he's also connecting Jesus in the closest possible way to God's activity and creation. How did God make the world? He spoke the world into existence. He spoke, it was done. He commanded and it stood fast. And John here is saying that the voice that shattered the silence and the darkness of the first day wasn't the Father's voice. And it wasn't the Spirit's voice. It was the Son's voice. He spoke the universe into existence. He's also connecting Jesus, not just to God and creation, but he's connecting Jesus to the Bible because the whole Old Testament is based upon the principle that God reveals himself by speaking. In the beginning was the word eternity. Now what's the beginning here? What was beginning? The beginning of, of all beginnings, the beginning of creation of space and of time and of matter. If you think about it, those are the three dimensions, the three prerequisites for creation. If I were to make matter this morning, but there was no time, well when would I put it? And if I made matter but no space, where would I put it? You have to have space and time and matter together at once, or you can't have any of them. In the beginning, when clocks started, Ticking and space started expanding and stuff started happening. Jesus was there. The word was. He had open-ended existence. Eternity. That's the first word. The second word, John says, is equality. In the beginning was the word and the word was with God. We'll come back to that in a second. And the word was God. Now, the Greek is even more emphatic. The order of the Greek words is this, in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and God was the word. There's no room for the malarkey of the Arians and the Jehovah Witnesses who want to put, and God was, and the word was a God. No, John couldn't be more clear. God was the word. It's an amazing statement. Equality. All that God is, the Word is. All of the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him. That's John's point. If it can be said of God, not only can it be said of Jesus, it must be said of Jesus. all of his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. Fill him and flood him. He's not just a little piece of God, he's all of God. He's the radiance of the Father's glory and the express image of his nature. For Christmas this year, my daughter bought me a pair of lululemon khakis. Amazing. I'll never go back now, I think. They're just incredible. But when she went on, I don't know, Lululemon's website and paid for them with her credit card, and she put in, I don't know, the 14 or 15 numbers of the credit card. If she got all those numbers right, but one of them was off by one digit, Lululemon wouldn't say, well, you did a good job. We can't let you buy the khakis, but you can buy a pair of, you

know, gym shorts. Now, if you get one of the numbers wrong, you might as well have got all of the numbers wrong. You can't even buy a pair of tighty-whities. When it comes to God, Jesus isn't just the likeness of God. He is the perfect radiance of his Father's glory and the exact representation of his nature. Equality. Paul in Philippians 2 describes Christ as the morphos of God, the form of God. And if you're a medical student here this morning, you know that morphos sounds like morphology, because it's where the word comes from. And morphology is the study of the shape of things and the size of things, right? And so the morphos of a thing is the exact size and shape a thing must have to be that thing, so a square. Boys and girls, what's a square? What must a square be? To be a square, you've got to have four equal sides joined together by four right angles, exactly. And if you don't have that, you're not a square. You might be a rhomboid, or you might be a rectangle, but you're not a square. You've got to have four equal sides and four right angles. That's the morphos of a square. And Paul says Jesus is the morphos of God. All of the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him. Eternity, equality. The third thing, the third word, is community, community. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. Now, the word with, if you think about it, sounds a bit like side by side, shoulder to shoulder, as if Jesus is the Father's right-hand son, and of course he is, right? But the word is much more intimate than that. The actual word is pros, which means towards. In the beginning was the word, and the word was towards God, facing him. What is ultimate reality? It's a community, a father looking at his son, and the son looking at his father, and the Holy Spirit of the father and the son looking at the father and the son, and them looking back at him, and just, lost in love and wonder at the glory of one another and the oneness of the Godhead. As Gregory of Nazianzus says, and Calvin said, this saying vastly delights me. I cannot think of the one without thinking of the three, and I can't think of the three without thinking immediately of the one. And it's beautiful. Children, do you ever wonder what God was doing before the foundation of the world? Do you ever think maybe he was a wee bit bored? with no creation to oversee and rule and govern. God wasn't bored. He was looking at his son and thinking, isn't he lovely? And the son was looking at his father and thinking, there's no one else like him, he's amazing. On my birthday, Catherine's making me my favorite birthday dinner, which is cinnamon rolls, homemade, mm. And, Once a year, great, but beautiful. And I'm sitting on the couch in the living room, and I'm snuggling with Eliza, my nine-year-old. She's in my arms, and I'm in her arms, under a blanket. She's looking at me, and I'm looking at her, and none of us say anything. Just one of

those daddy-daughter moments. I'm just looking at her, and she's looking at me, and we're just, it's wonderful. And the reason you and I enjoy things like that is because God is like that. Do you ever wonder, boys and girls, why all of the best pleasures in life are best enjoyed with other people? You're watching a movie, a funny movie, or a scary movie, and you're by yourself. And immediately you think, oh, I wish my friends were here. Because when you're watching a funny movie with people and they're laughing, their laughter intensifies yours. And when you're watching a scary movie and you're kind of biting your teeth and hiding behind a blanket, their kind of adrenaline rush intensifies yours. If you're doing a hike by yourself and you see a wonderful view, you think, oh, I wish my son, my wife, my husband could see this. If you went to Disneyland by yourself, nobody there, just you by yourself, an empty park, well, it'd be wonderful. There'd be no lines, wouldn't there? But very quickly, you'd think, oh, it's lonely. I wish there were other people with me to enjoy this along with me, my friends, family. And you're that way because God is that way. So how do you know that Allah is not real? Allah was by himself from all eternity. And by definition, if Allah was God, he was happy by himself from all eternity, with no one to love and no one to receive love from, and he would be happy. But you know that's not true because you're not that way. We're made in God's image. We long for community. And that longing finds its ultimate reflection in the heart of God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. And the reason God made the universe was not because he was bored. was because he wanted to share the glory of that fellowship with men and women and boys and girls like you and me. Eternity, equality, community. Fourth word, creativity, creativity. Verse three, and I'm gonna quote the New American Standard, because it just captures the genius of John's language, all things, listen to me now, all things came into being through him. And without him, nothing, nothing, nothing came into being that has come into being. In other words, Jesus had no beginning. because everything that had a beginning owes its beginning from Him. He is the beginning of everything that ever had a beginning. Every blade of grass that shoots up in the spring, every bird that sings, every sparkling star in the skies, every sun Every daughter, every father, every mother, every husband, every wife, whoever has lived, whoever shall live, owes their beginning from Him. And so do you see, if you don't begin with Jesus, you're going to get life wrong on a colossal level. Because if all of life came from Him, then surely all of life has to be about Him. Are you beginning with God and his son in the way you think about this new year? In him was life, and the life was the light of men. Where did life come from? That's been a question that has perplexed scientists for thousands of years. Let me simplify it for you. You're sensible people. You've only got three options.

Option number one, life came from nothing. And when I say nothing, I mean nothing, nothing. No space, no time, no matter, just nothing. Well, that doesn't make any sense whatsoever because nothing comes out of nothing. Okay, your next option is life came from something. Let's call it dust, or even dust plus water, which equals mud, okay? And lots of people in our world with PhDs, and as Dr. Ross said a few weeks ago or months ago, there is no idea so preposterous in all the world that has not been propounded somewhere by someone with a PhD. But there are people in this world who actually believe that at 9.35 on Tuesday morning, long time ago, that something like mud exploded and produced everything, and then it was a big mess. But initially then, all that mess organized itself into self-replicating pieces of information called DNA, and after that came the dinosaurs. It makes perfect sense. Here's the problem, though. Have you ever seen life come from non-life? No. It takes life to produce life. All the way back, Every bacteria, every virus, every fungus, every bird, every bee, every man, every boy, every girl came from life. But how did that go back? Because if you go back, follow that chain all the way back to the beginning, where did the first man come from? The first bacteria, the first fungus. John says it came from the one who was originally alive. Doesn't come from nothing. It doesn't come from something. It comes from someone, do you see? Someone who has life in himself and of himself and therefore can create life by himself. That's where the word came from. And you all know that. In him was life and the life was the light of man. The very fact there's life points every man, woman, boy and girl back to God. Now, if you're an unbeliever here this morning, if you don't yet share our faith, we're glad for you to be here. I used to be one myself. But deep down in your heart of hearts, you know this world didn't just come from a mindless, purposeless explosion. And one day you will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ, the judge of all the earth, and you will acknowledge that the very fact there's life in this world pointed you back to the one who had life in himself. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. People sometimes ask me, give me evidence for God. And I say, are you serious? Like, evidence for God, right? Okay. Well, I suppose I would start with the fact I have in my head two squidgy, biological 600 megapixel cameras. We call them eyes. 600 megapixels is like 13 times the clarity of an iPhone 15 camera. They see the world at 60 frames per second and can differentiate a million shades of colour. A million shades of red, a million shades of grey, a million shades of blue and orange and yellow and everything else. A million shades. And they're connected to your brain by two living wires that can transfer data at 10 million bits per second. And they run on leafy greens and carrots. And you want evidence for God?

Are you serious? Look around you, man. Look around you, woman. There's evidence for God bursting everywhere. The problem isn't the evidence. The problem is if you're demanding evidence, there's something wrong with you. And it used to be wrong with me as well, in our hearts, that we do not like to acknowledge God as God. that from the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes are clearly seen being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that the world is without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God. into an image made like corruptible man and birds and four-footed things. Eternity. Equality. Community. Creativity. The fifth word is mercy. Mercy. And to understand that, you have to understand yourself. What's wrong with this world? Why October the 6th? Why Hamas and their barbarism? Why are Putin and Xi and the little chap in North Korea rattling their zebras? Why the violence in our inner cities? Why is the divorce rate tearing families apart all across this land, rich and poor, every social strata? Why do you, why do I find it so hard to do what we know is right even when we want what is wrong? What's wrong with us? Alexander Tchnitskin, the famous Russian dissident, was asked that question to explain the Bolshevik revolution and the slaughter of the czar's family and the hundreds of millions of people who died through the darkness of communism. And do you know what he says to explain why all this has happened? He said, men have forgotten God. That is why all this has happened. John puts it, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. And the word overcome is a beautiful word in the Greek. It's a double meaning. It means overcome, but it can also mean understand. And some of your versions have it that way. The darkness has not understood it. And some of your versions have the darkness has not overcome it. And John means both. Because the reason men and women don't understand the light is because they're fighting against it. They want to overcome it even though they cannot. Or as John will say later, this is the condemnation that the men loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. And where do we see mercy? We see mercy in the fact that God, rather than wiping us all off the face of the planet, sent his son, his only son, his beloved light into the world of darkness. Even though he knew what we would do with him when we got our hands on him. We would butcher him on a Roman gibbet in the darkness outside Jerusalem on a rubbish heap between two thieves, as if their chief and lord that mankind would show their estimation of God. This is what we will do with his son. And culture can't fix that. The Romans did that. And religion

can't fix that. The Jews did that. He came to his own, his own people. But his own people did not receive him. He sent his son anyway. He sent John, a messenger. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him. All, I love that word, all. It's as big as the world, as long as history, that God sent messengers before he sent his son. that all men, which means you and you and you and all of you, that you would believe in him. Are you believing in him? You don't have a right to go to hell this morning because God has sent a savior for all of you. By deed and by grant, he has given him for all, that all might believe in him. Which means if you don't believe in him, you have nothing but yourself to blame, because God has given a savior and he's for you. And more than that, he's willing to work in your hearts to enable you to believe. He says, and we'll end here, but to all who received him, who believe in his name, who entrust themselves to him, he will give the right to become children of God, who are born, not of blood, not through bloodlines. Boys and girls, it's a great blessing to be a covenant child, but it will not save you. You must put your trust in Jesus. Salvation does not come through the bloodline. It doesn't come through the will of the flesh, unconverted human nature. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. Easier to climb to heaven on a rope of sand than to decide to believe in Jesus by yourself. Not of blood, nor the will of flesh, nor of the will of man. No man has the capacity to choose faith because he won't. And it's because he won't that he can't. And it's because he can't that he won't. He's trapped. In a cage, he's locked from the inside. But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, who are born not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God. It's like those defibrillator paddles. When someone has a heart attack and they fall on the ground, and one of the doctors puts the paddles on them, what does the doctor do? Does the doctor say, I'm waiting. What are you waiting for? Him to make the first move. Come on, man, give me a twitch. Give me a twitch and I'll press the buttons. The nurse would say, but he's dead. He's like, he's not gonna twitch. Press the buttons. He presses the buttons and then the man twitches. When God comes to a dead soul who hates him, the first thing that happens is not the twitch of faith or the twitch of repentance. The first thing that happens is God presses the gospel buttons of regenerating power. And the soul then twitches, which is faith and repentance. If you're here this morning and you feel that happening to you, you feel the spirit tugging at you and saying, don't you realize you're in the darkness and you

need someone to save you? I have just the savior for you. Believe in him. And maybe you feel God's energy pulling, tugging, working. Yield yourself to that. Give yourself to Jesus and receive him as you receive him. the most amazing thing in all the world, a child of the devil becomes a son of God. Because the God I'm preaching to you is a God of eternity and equality in his being and community and creativity, but he's also a God of astounding mercy who will send his son to hell upon the cross. that he might send blaggards like you and me to heaven through his grace. Trust him. Let's pray together. Father in heaven, we thank you for Jesus. We thank you for his beauty, his glory, his mercy. We pray, Father, that you will do in this congregation To all of us, we all need to be drawn afresh to Jesus at the start of this new year. And especially any here, Lord, who don't yet believe in you, maybe a covenant child who's convinced but not converted, send your resurrection power according to your abundant mercy into their hearts that they might be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. In his name we pray, amen.