

The Prologue II

John 1.1-2, 14, NRSV

Paul Bailey

Today I want to return to the prologue and spend some time reflecting on how we interact and respond to the Word. John tells us “In the **beginning** was the **Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God.” He then goes on to say, ¹⁴ “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a **father’s** only **son**, full of **grace** and **truth**.”

John says in the beginning or in the first instance, or to change the emphasis slightly, of first importance and of utmost priority. There is no doubt in my mind that when John uses the phrase **In the beginning** (*en archēi*) that John is wanting to convey the double meaning of “in the first place” and of “utmost priority” John says, in the first place and of utmost priority was the Word.

John says in the beginning or ἐν ἀρχῇ, in the first instance, the prime mover or active cause is the Logos (the word) and the was with God (pros) or the Logos existed in active intimate, face to face relationship with God, then John tells us that the Logos who was in the beginning with God was in fact God. Logos is God’s drive to express and reveal himself in a way that will result in salvation and transformation (please understand that salvation is a verbal suitcase that needs to be unpacked; salvation is multi-dimensional and conveys ideas of redemption, rescue, healing, wholeness, empowerment, safety, preservation, etc.). Logos is the inner longing and reality of God’s desire to fully express and disclosure himself to humanity; it is through this Logos-drive that God creates. Through the Word (or Logos) God reaches out of himself in order to reveal, unveil, express or disclose himself to a created ‘other’; so creation itself is an outreach of God’s self-disclosure; in that through the act of creation God is expressing and revealing himself as the Creator.

When you read the Greek Logos it is important that you understand that John is thinking primarily in Hebrew and that he is selecting Greek concepts in order to explain Hebrew realities. To the Greek mind Logos means to gather, order, to speak, reckon or think, it is a Word that results in reason. Whereas to the Hebrew mind (that is, in John’s thinking) Dabar is a drive forward, it is speech or Word that results in deed or action. The John the Logos is not just passive reason or rationality but the concepts of order, reason and thought overlap and flow into John’s idea of the Word as being the dynamic, active drive forward towards self-manifestation and action.

I think there are Logos people and Dabar people. Logos people are people who get lost in the rationalisation and reasoning aspects of the faith, their primary concern is to demonstrate understanding and knowledge and to work their faith into a coherent and logical world view. For a Logos person it is important that (a) progresses to (b) which in turn processes to (c) which then processes in sequence all the way from (d) to (z). Logos people find the logical sequence and progression of thought to be both beautiful and absolutely necessary. Logos people see the faith and the word about the faith as a building with a firm foundation, with bricks that lay on top of each other in safe, logical sequence and progression ending with the roof and capstone.

Dabar people are different. Dabar people have a bias towards action. They are not overly concerned with the beauty of logic but with the power and impact of the Word. For a Dabar

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person the Word is not simply a thought or reason it is an action. The idea is that God's Word and his actions are inseparable, that when God speaks, his speech is dynamic action. Dabar people believe that:

“God's speaking is never idle chatter, it is speaking with a purpose and it has power to effect that purpose. God's word has the power and the authority to make what it says happen... God's word is never just a set of truths or ideas it is always an event, which on the one hand it brings us into personal contact with the one who speaks and on the other hand works its will on the persons and situations to which it is addressed. By it God creates and re-creates, judges and forgives... [God's word] is a life changing and history making event that provokes a crisis, a decision, a parting of ways where ever it is spoken...”

Dabar people are not content with simple understanding and knowledge, logic and reasoning, after hearing the Word they are compelled to ask “so what?” What do I do in response to the Word? The idea here is that when God speaks, there is purpose and intent behind his speaking and that his speech is only completed when we actively respond to God's original purpose and intent. This strain of thought is found throughout the scriptures.

Listen God speaking about his Word in Isaiah 55:

“¹⁰ For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” Isaiah 55.10-11, NRSV

Listen to James,

“Welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.²² But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.²³ For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror;²⁴ for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like.²⁵ But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.” James 1.21-26, NRSV

The idea in both passages is that our interaction with God's Word is not complete until we have translated the raw Logos into actions and deeds that are in complete agreement with God's original purpose and intention.

God's Word is not inspiration for reflection but are in-Spirit-ation for action: God speaking is God-breathing in order to produce life and action. Christian doctrine is not bricks in a static, stand-still edifice but are springs that help his to leap from faith to faith and soar from glory to glory. Pastor and author Rob Bell deals with a similar concept in his book *Velvet Elvis*; Bell notes that:

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“When we jump, we begin to see the need for springs. The springs help us make sense of these deeper realities that drive how we live every day. The springs aren’t God. The springs aren’t Jesus. The springs are statements and beliefs *about* our faith that help give words to the depth that we are experiencing in our jumping.”¹

Part of the idea that I want to convey here is that the Hebrew concept of the Word requires action (or jumping). We cannot merely hear words about the Word and not respond. When God speaks we must jump, that is we must move according to or in harmony with God’s speaking.

John says, “In the **beginning** was the **Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God.” He then goes on to say, “¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a **father’s** only **son**, full of **grace** and **truth**.” In the beginning, or in the first instance and of utmost importance and first priority is God’s word. But as we see that Word is not abstract logic and reasoning. “...The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a **father’s** only **son**, full of **grace** and **truth**.”

Later in his first letter to the churches over which he exercised apostolic leadership John writes,

“We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ² this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us” 1 John 1.1-2, NRSV

This is what we must do in 2010. We must make the Word of God tangible, touchable, audible and visible. We must act in ways that allows the Word of life and love to become flesh. We must graduate from being Logos people who reflect on the meaning of the Word to being Dabar people who translate the Word into dynamic action which is in total accordance with God original intent when he first spoke the Word into existence. We cannot simply hear about Jesus. We must actively seek to become Jesus in our world. This is the aim and focus of God’s speaking. God’s speaks in order that Sons will be born: John says “¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.” Faith is when we translate God’s word into our actions.

James says:

“¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷ So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” James 2.14-17, NRSV

¹ Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, p.22, Zondervan 2005

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The purpose of the living Word is that we might have eternal life; but that life must be lived, not just reflected upon and discussed, sang about, written about or thought about: we must actually live the life spoken into existence by the Word. We must become light, life, bread, water, branches of the vine, resurrection and life, that way and the truth by the way we live in response to God's original speaking. I challenge you to make this year 365 days of action, 52 weeks of action, 12 months of action. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi: "We must become the change we want to see." It is when we make a concrete commitment to en-flesh the Word of the good news that we will truly understand the words,

"In the **beginning** was the **Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God." ¹⁴ "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a **father's** only **son**, full of **grace** and **truth**."

Let's pray.