

42. Forty two. That is the answer that the supercomputer *Deep Thought* gives to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe and Everything in Douglas Adams's *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*. But, in true Adams fashion, the answer is meaningless because the ones who posed the question of *Deep Thought*, actually had no idea what the ultimate question was. Was it war/peace, love/hate, childhood/maturity, life/death or just a really nice piece of perfectly cooked bacon and a fine cup of tea? Here in the beginning of John's Gospel we have an answer, right of the bat, The Word. In the Word there is the answer to everything, but as is the case with 42, we might struggle somewhat with the question.

It's hard to over-state how important the Word is to the thinking of the Greek world, which has become, with shockingly little transformation, the thinking of the world we know. It's why Aristotle and Plato are beyond household names in the world of modern philosophy. The Greek word for word is Logos, from which get logic and all the various scientific disciplines that end in ology. The Logos, is an inescapable reality in how we think and indeed in our identity as creatures. The use of Words, repeatable language patterns, that can be spoken and written down, is one of the most recognizable traits of our species.

The Gospel of John says it is also the foundation of all that is, and all that ever will be, it has been since the beginning, since before there was light, since before there was land and sea. It was there in that primal and unknowable chaos, where the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the deep, the formless void, my favorite Hebrew words, "tovu wabohu." The Word is what was spoken when the light was made, and when order was brought to the chaos. This Word thing, this Logos, is a part of everything and without it there is nothing. That's a pretty radical statement to make. Nothing would be without the Word. It's not optional, it's not a matter of faith, it is the ground of being and the foundation of reality as we know it.

The Word was, and is, and ever shall be. But the Word comes into the world at a certain place and time, it is heralded and proclaimed by a certain man named John. John is not the Word itself, he is just preparing the way, but at the same time, he is connected to the Word by blood and light. When the Word comes, he recognizes it and proclaims its arrival.

We can't really know anything about God, except what the Word show us, but in the Word, God is fully present and knowable. This was the case back in the old days when the words of the Law were written in stone and upon the hearts of the faithful, but now grace and truth have come to perfect what the old words of the law had only begun to point out. The Law taught us that God was involved with us and had certain standards that were built into the design of things. Righteousness, Justice, Compassion, these things were built into how the world, indeed how the universe operates, they are pillars of the creation. They are like gravity, they exist and we see how they can effect things.

If all of those things exist though, and they are that important, there is a shadow to them, the darkness. If God does something, there is also the possibility of nothing. If Christ is present, so is Antichrist. If the Word comes, there is something out there that seeks to silence it. The chaos, tovu wabohu, does not simply tuck its tail and slink away. We all live in a place where the light is, and where the darkness is as well, and we have a choice to make, which way will we walk. There is a reason we are put here in these shadowlands where the Word constantly has to speak order and push back against the chaos.

It is an "ontological" reality, there is the logos again. Ontology is the study of the nature of being, why is a thing a thing and how is it a thing in the particular way that it is a thing. Yes, it is pretty much one of those ologies that philosophers and theologians get pretty excited about and most other people sort of

glaze over when they hear the word ontological. The prologue to John's Gospel presents us with perhaps the most purely ontological statement in all of Scripture other than the very thing that God told Moses from the burning bush. When Moses asked God's name, God said, "I AM." John says the Word, and the "I" are one and the same. I've told you before that the Hebrew name of God, which was not supposed to be pronounced is derived from the most basic verb in any language, "to be." That's some serious fun with ontology right there, God is the one who is. The Word is "is."

Now, maybe, just maybe, as much as I love John's prologue, as much as it makes my theological heart pump, as much as I think it reveals the ultimate and ineffable nature of God, the Word, the Incarnation and the very ground of being, it's not really very relatable. Beautiful? Yes. Profound? Yes. Something that you can or would love with all that you are? Hmm.

So it's a good thing that this is just the prologue, it's just the Once upon a time in a galaxy far, far away. It's just to tell you that you are about to see something miraculous. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Yes, you heard that right, flesh, you know what Yoda dismissed as "crude matter." All that stuff that God called out of nothing and now burns in the hearts of stars and now pumps through our veins and fires through our neurons, it's the Word, but even more specifically the Word became a person, who had a location and a family and spoke a certain language and had a certain face and a certain voice.

So with all this stuff about the Logos said, and with all these ontological fireworks spent, John proceeds to introduce Jesus, who is the Christ. And at last, we start to get a look at the question. Jesus is, in fact, a question for us, can we live according to the Word, can we love truly and fully as God loves? Can we face up to the challenge and can we continue this work of incarnation, becoming something that will stand against the nothing? If the Word, that was in the beginning with God, and was God, is the answer to life, the universe and everything, then Jesus is the way we can actually ask the question in a form that will allow that answer to have meaning. He is the way our human existence fits into that big picture. He is the way that we can realize that in fact we are part of the plan, and we are born, "not of blood or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God."

So if Christ is the 42, the answer to everything, Jesus then is the question. Jesus is connected to our humanity and to Logos. Jesus is connected to heaven and earth, he is the question that chaos could not ask, because he is everything.