

Season 4, Episode 12: Surprised by Jesus: Reflecting on Chapters 1-5 with Dane Ortlund

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Sarah: This podcast is sponsored by 10offthose.com. 10offthose.com handpick the best Christian books that point to Jesus and sell them at discounted prices. Well, we've come to the end of our season in John's Gospel. It's been such a joy, it's been so rich. And so this what you're hearing now is our kind of review and reflection episode that we seek to tie up some of the themes that we've been discovering and enjoying in John's Gospel. And to do that, we've invited Dane Ortlund onto the podcast. Dane is releasing a book called *Surprised by Jesus*, tracking through the four different gospels and seeking to present Jesus freshly wonderfully joyfully to us. And it is such a joy to welcome him onto our show to think about John's Gospel through the eyes of his book and through his reflections on Jesus in the first five chapters. The episode is a little longer than usual because we've got a guest on, but also we've got a wonderful generous discount code from ten of those for you to go and pick up *Surprised by Jesus* for yourselves. Cup of Tea 30 is what you need to type in at the checkout at 10offthose to pick up your own copy of *Surprise by Jesus*. Well, here's our conversation with Dane as we chat through and reflect on the first five chapters of John's Gospel. Hope you enjoy it.

Felicity: Hello and welcome to Two Sisters in the cup of Tea. My name is Felicity and I'm here in the States and as ever, I have my sister with me, Sarah. She's in the UK. And today we have with us Dane Ortlund, who is actually just down the road from me in Illinois as well. Welcome, Dane. Thank you so much for being with us.

Dane: It's great to talk with you today, Felicity and Sarah thank you.

Felicity: Fantastic. We have actually invited Dane on because he's just about to release a new book called *Surprised by Jesus*, which, as we've been in John's Gospel, it seems very fitting to be talking with someone who's been delving into all four gospels, actually. But we're going to focus on John's Gospel. Dane, just tell us a little bit about yourself. How do you spend your time? What are you doing with yourself at the moment?

Dane: Yeah, well, as you say, I'm just down the road from here in Chicago and Felicity and I'm serving as a pastor in NAprilville Presbyterian Church for the last year and a half. But my family and I have been a part of the church for 15 years. My wife and I have five kids, ages 15 down to six, four boys and a girl. And so I love my life. I can't believe I get to get up and live a day in my life where there are plenty of challenges and adversities and so on, but I am so very thankful for what God has given me.

Felicity: What a claim to make about your life that's amazing. I love that. I love that.

Sarah: Do you ever like drinking a cup of tea as part of the good life?

Dane: I have been known to drink a cup of tea, Sarah. You are for sure more of a tea connoisseur, both of you, than I am. I am more of a coffee guy. But I will tell you, when COVID came through our family over the holidays, I went into tea, and I haven't yet left it. So I've been like a cup of Earl Gray, something like that. I'm not a biscuit guy here in the States, but, yeah.

Felicity: We'll forgive you for that. It's okay. Yeah, absolutely. You're welcome. Any hot drink, snack or no snack. That's good. We're so thankful for the way in which you've been serving the wider church as well as you've been writing books, and I have written several books, and most recently we've got *Gentlemen Lowly and Deeper*, which I know both Sarah and I have really enjoyed both of those books. So thank you so much. Let's dig in to this most recent book that is coming out on the 1 April *So Surprised by Jesus*. It's been a joy for us to kind of get a little preview of that and to read it ahead of time. Can you just talk us through why you wrote it and who you had in mind when you were writing it?

Dane: I'm grateful for the privilege of publishing with those and with my friends there. It's a book, really, on what we see of Jesus in the four Gospels particularly. I mean, we share a conviction about all of Scripture being a witness to Christ in some way. But here's what I'm

burning with you, too. I myself want, and I want to help others to tear down in our own minds the deeply held, intuitively held, false Jesuses that we tend to assume is there a domesticated Christ. And so that's really the common thread to my heart, my writing, my ministry. That's what I want to help people. I want to unleash. I want to ddomesticate. We're the ones who lower our vision on Christ, and we find ourselves going through life, and we're bored with Him. We are yawning over Him, but the problem is us, not Him. So I just wanted in this book to say, okay, what particularly does Matthew and then Mark and then Luke and then John, how do they uniquely each of those four portraits of Christ help us to do that and to see Christ for who he really is in three dimensional, full living color and all of his glory. So that was the heart behind the.

Sarah: Project, and you've done that so well. It's beautiful in the way that it does just take those distinctive from the four bustles. I think it's very tempting to just think, oh, there's just four accounts of Jesus life, but they're all pretty much the same, and there's no kind of distinctive, but they really are so distinctive from each other. And I think as we've been dwelling on John's Gospel the last few weeks, we've been astounded at the richness that we've kind of been discovering afresh about Jesus and how different it is to the times where we felt into other Gospels by ourselves. We really appreciated that in your writing. So thank you. As we said, we've just kind of finished dwelling on John chapters one to five in this podcast season. So we were wondering really what particularly surprised you about Jesus in the opening chapters of John.

Dane: It is so rich, isn't it? I mean, don't you feel like you could spend I don't know how many podcast episodes you guys are taking on this? I feel like sermon wise, I could take a month per verse, starting at John one one. It is so incredibly rich. It's like a child can follow with it at one level, but also we're never going to fund the total depths of it. The first thing that comes to mind, Sarah, when you ask that question, is the way in which, in the Prologue, John one one to 18 is John setting up the whole Gospel. He says the Word in verse 14, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, tabernacles among us, that which the temple and the tabernacle is just a portable temple. So the same thing both where God lived, the tabernacle and then the temple, it's like RV and then house. What they were preparing for was what Christ came to fulfill. The tabernacle and temple are made sense of in Christ, namely, that's where the sacred and profane connect. That's where God and humanity can once again have what they had in Eden. The fellowship is restored there in Christ. And that is so astonishing because what we have in the Old Testament is places where we're told the Word and the flesh are way far away from one another. You can't bring these two to mingle. For example, in Israel, chapter 40, verse six, a voice says crying, what shall I cry? All flesh, flesh. All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. So people were just here today, gone tomorrow were transient or human beings. The grass weather is the flower phase. When the breath of the Lord blows on it, truly the people are grass. Verse eight of Isaiah 40, the grass, whether it's the flower phase, but the Word, the Word of our God stands forever. And John comes along and Isaiah said, flesh is just poof. It hits here and then it's gone. But the word stands forever. And John comes along and says, oh, hang on. That Word that is eternal and unchanging and standing forever became transient, little blown away by the wind in a sense. Flesh, these two things. And then the whole Gospel unfolds accordingly, as Christ, more explicitly than in any of the other Gospels, claims to be gone before Abraham was I am and so on. And yet the earthiness and rootedness that he lived in actual human life, incarnation is what we're talking about in flesh. What we celebrate at Christmas. John is so gloriously clear and deep about this.

Felicity: I love that. I love that. I think that's all right. The Earthiness and the richestness of it, which then actually you've got the glory of God being revealed. I think we've really noticed that there, haven't we, as we've been walking through these verses? So you have these mega labels, these names that Christ they just dropped in, aren't they? Like Nathaniel, even? He kind of reels off three in the space of, like, five verses when he talks about the Son of man and the King. This is it. The Messiah. And then what you have is just seeing Jesus as man, as flesh, fulfill these incredible statements that are made about Him. I think that's so helpful to see that kind of joining together.

Dane: I love that. And it's not that he splits the difference, like, deity on one end of the spectrum, humanity on the other end, and he's right in the middle. He's on both ends at the

same time. He is truly God. Truly man, fully God, fully man at the same time. That's wonders.

Sarah: Yeah, I think for me, I think probably surprised is the word, as I've been dwelling on his interactions then with the different people in these first five chapters. And it's just the beauty of how he responds and how he interacts in his mercy towards all the different needs and their different hearts and responses going on. I think just that humanness and yet that kind of divine nature of being able to respond with such grace and such mercy, I think it's been something that's really stuck out for me the whole way through.

Felicity: I enjoyed at the end of chapter one, you get the ascending and descending on the Son of God. You get that, then you're able to just unpack that. I feel like when Sarah and I were doing this 20 minutes episode, as you say, you can spend a month on five verses. Can you just help us with that end of chapter one? Like, why is that so surprising and brilliant?

Dane: Yeah. You'll see verse 51 of John one, truly I say to you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God us sending and descending on the Son of man. Of course, that's picking up the language of Genesis 28, where Jacob lies down and he uses a stone for his pillow. It's that episode. And he has a dream and he sees the angels of God ascending and descending on a ladder. And Jesus gives the exact same picture, except that instead of ladder, it's me, the Son of man. And what our Lord is saying there is, you want to see heaven open? Do you want heaven to open up and come down and flood into your miserable, messy little sinful fall and finite feudal existence. You can, but it happens none as you get on a ladder and start climbing up one rung after another, though we are deeply hardwired to think that's how we do it. But rather he himself came all the way down to us. We don't go up to him. He came down to us. That's unlike every other religion, but that's what the Gospel is and that's a beautiful little picture of it there at the end of John One. You're right, Felicity.

Sarah: So how do we take all this joy and all these surprises? How do we keep this fresh in our minds and our hearts? I think that's one of our big questions really, as we come to the end of this season. There's been so much to dwell on and there's been so much that we've enjoyed. But how do we keep this fresh view of Jesus and not, as I said at the beginning, just kind of put him back in that box or kind of diminish him, like domesticate him? What does it look like, do you think?

Dane: I wish I knew. I mean, I'm trying to figure that's the battle of the Christian life, isn't it? To figure out how do we actually John Seven I know you're a John One to five now, but in John Seven come to me and you'll have fountains of living water flowing out of you. That's really another way of putting I think the question, Sarah, that you just ask and one answer to the question is we can't we can't manufacture that. It's not like if I just dig deep enough inside of me, then out it comes and I can stay fresh before God. On the one hand, it's something given to us, not something we engineer on the one hand. On the other hand, it's really just the very predictable and unsurprising answers that we have known from living our Christian lives. Reading the Bible in the morning, praying. In other words, God sees us. We speak to Him inhale exhale. It's being part of a local church and not going when you feel like it, but hooking up to the oxygen of the Gospel with your gathered body every week and availing yourself of the Sacraments. And Word is just the very ordinary, outwardly unimpressive means of grace as we walk with God as embodied fallen people and trusting Him as we do that that he will keep it fresher. And here's one thing that we should just add wouldn't out to this YouTube. God will bring into our lives whatever pain and anguish is needed to force us to keep it fresh. And that's kind of a daunting thought and I wouldn't want to communicate that in the wrong way, in such a way that just go through your life wondering where is God going to smite you? Or something. But he loves us too much to let us remain the shallow twaddling people that we would otherwise be without pain. So he forces us to maintain fresh communion with Him through the difficulties.

Felicity: Yeah, that's so helpful. And to have that thought before not while you're in, while you're not in the suffering, in the anguish, but that comes that's life. And to understand that before we get there, or retrospectively even. Yes, I think that's so true. And I think that is I love the way that you're speaking. There's this kind of desire of the Lord. He wants us to keep Jesus fresh. He wants us to have this right, kind of fresh driving view of Jesus. And so actually, he's providing the means of grace for that to happen, and how easily we try and

look for the silver bullet. Don't we just need to do this one thing and that's it. I'm going to have this be of Jesus all the time. But the way you're speaking, I think it's so helpful to see the normal means of grace that actually we do have to hand.

Sarah: I think it would stop short. And we have chapter six where Jesus goes on to say, I'm the bread of life, whoever comes to me whenever hunger will never thirst. And that is the number. But isn't it in terms of actually nourishment involves the everyday nature of coming to the bread of life.

Felicity: It kind of links into what you were saying about the interaction, Sarah, and the everyday nature of the way that Jesus is walking amongst everyday people and the way he is interacting with them, then actually giving them the bread of life, the water of life. We kind of see the evidence of that, don't we, having faith that that's going to be the case.

Dane: So true. So true. And you've both been alluding to the conversations that Christ has with other people in John one to five. I've been struck at the way in chapter three, he's talking to Nicodemus at night. Leading into chapter four. Talking to the woman at the six hour the brightness of day, photonegative polar opposites. A man, a woman, a Jew, a Samaritan. Someone who has a religious PhD. So to speak. Someone who is probably coming out to the well at that time of day because she is not one of the outcasts of society and so on. And yet the woman, if anything, is more attuned to grace than Nicodemus, who should have gotten it. This is a guy who knows the scripture, but it's just like in the very beginning of John's Gospel, in him was life. The life was light of men. The light shines in the darkness. The woman is there in light. Nicodemus came in darkness, but she got it in a way he didn't. And so throughout John one to five, not only are we being told explicitly gospel truth, the truth of grace, but we're being told it implicitly just through the way the narrative flows.

Sarah: Yeah, it's so helpful having those insights, isn't it? I think we've begun to take some of those out. But you just said that so clearly it's brilliant. But something I've been really struck with is how much I've been going back to the prologue time and time again and seeing it kind of flood out of the rest of the narrative. And I think that's this is the first time I've really seen that. I kind of wanted to go back again and again and see that happen. And actually, in your book, you really hopefully show us how the prodigal does unpack John Gospel for us and all those themes that kind of then can seep out of the now after as we go on, tell us a bit more about the prologue and how it can help us keep reading John's Gospel. For people who wanted to go on past chapter five and keep digging into the riches of this Gospel, how can the prologue continue to help?

Dane: Oh, wow. Well, we're all going to die one day, not having plumbed all the answer to that question because it is so rich. But here's one thought that comes to mind. Sir. People will say today, I would believe in your God, you Christians, if I could just see Him, if you could show them to me. Where is he? I don't see him. I see Russia invading Ukraine. I see a lot of misery and hellishness in my own life. I see loved ones dying of this and of that. Show me this god. You say, he's so good and merciful and the respectful and gentle way to feel that kind of objection is God did just that. That's really the point of John's gospel. He was way up high, came way down low. And what we have throughout John's Gospel is these astonishing statements. Like you just said, christ being the bread of life and then he multiplies the bread, he s the he's the light of the world and heal someone a blindness. I mean, it's very ornately put together, these gorgeous statements of his eternal existence before Abraham was I am. And yet the one saying that is not Zeus. Like, he's not like a marvel superhero. He's a very ordinary looking Jewish man of the first century, probably with rough hands from the carpentry that he did. And Isaiah 53 said there was nothing particularly nice about the way he would appear physically. He wouldn't have been on the cover of any magazine. He was an ordinary man. Eyes a certain color, blood type, a certain blood type, all the limitations, except for saying all the limitations of human personhood. And yet before Abraham was, I was, I am Yahweh way back then, I am one in the divine identity. That truth that we've been reflecting on together today of the Incarnation is always there in John's Gospel. At times it comes up above the surface and you see it there, but it's never totally gone. It's either latent, implicitly or explicit, and it's really illuminating for the whole Gospel.

Felicity: So with that, as you're saying, if we're thinking that our listeners might go on and keep going, so we've only got chapter five, is that a question they can be asking as they go through the next chapter? So how do we see the Incarnate Jesus? How would you phrase that in a way that helps us access that? So rather than just spotting it, what do you do with that?

Dane: Wow, that's a great question. And if we can't answer a question like that, who cares? I mean, the whole point is, how can we actually meaningfully take steps forward here, all of us, wherever we're at in our development and knowledge of the Scripture, take steps forward? Well, here would be one idea. In John's Gospel, we have far more clearly than Matthew, Mark, Luke, all three persons of the Trinity spoken about and reflected on, especially in John 14 to 17. But throughout the whole Gospel and many scholarly tomes have sought to work this out. But here would be one way to go about it. What if we read John's Gospel and we said, what is the ministry of the Father to me today? What is the ministry of the Son to me today? What is the ministry of the Spirit to me today? Distinctly and uniquely. That's why John Owen wrote communion with God. How do we uniquely and distinctly have fellowship with each of the persons of the Trinity? And the very last verse of Second Corinthians says, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. That's one way. That's the scaffolding to understand the Trinity in God, grace from the Son, love from the Father, and then the communion to follow up with the Holy Spirit. You see that in John happening. So that would be one way. And I would just encourage our listeners, read the Scripture. And we've already said John six, the bread of life. Read the Scripture, not ultimately to aggregate more intellectual or theological data in your mind. It's not less than that we should do that. We all want to be growing in that way. But read the Scripture actually to feed like a loaf of bread, like a cup of water, refreshment oxygen, breathing it in, and then as you go through the Scripture, turning what you read into prayer. So we were talking about John 151 a minute ago. You will see heaven open, and the angels have got us sending and descending on the Son of Him Father in heaven. Thank you so much that on this Tuesday or Friday or whatever in circumstance blank that I am negotiating where I am totally fried, stuck and discouraged. Thank you so much that you have sent your Son to come down and to be with me in this. Not once I get over it or not once I get on a ladder and climb my way up. But in this difficult circumstance, take a text like John 151 or wherever you are in John's Gospel and pray. If I take it, take it. It's a vertical text. It's God's word to you. Lay it on its side and plow it into your circumstances with your heart. And it's hard for me to get real specific because every one of us is walking through different circumstances, but that's what we are meant to do with the scripture and John's gospel is ready made for us to treat it in that way.

Felicity: I love that picture. I love that picture turning it on its side and plowing it into our hearts. We talk a lot when we're in our podcast episodes about how we drive it to the heart. So how do we take it from just being the word on the page?

Dane: I love that.

Felicity: Driving it to our hearts. And we're always looking for ways to kind of make that happen because sometimes it's just easier not to, isn't it? It feels easier not to. So anything that we can do to I love that image. I'm going to remember and prayerify the scripture. I think you're right, John's gospel is ready made. Just even just the way he writes. It's kind of profound, as you say, in so many ways on that level.

Dane: Amen.

Felicity: Sorry, Sarah.

Sarah: No, yeah, I was just saying. Anything else? Really? Keep talking.

Dane: Oh, I just love what you two are doing. I mean, taking listeners through the gospel of John in the 21st century with all the chaos all around us, I mean, what could be greater than to spend our lives and to spend this year befriending the gospel of John? It's deep solace and comfort if we will receive it. And so I just want to say, way to go YouTube.

Felicity: Can you just have us? I think that when I read your books or even when I hear you talk about it, I think it's brilliant to be in conversation with you because I think we're hearing that you are someone who is living and breathing and kind of having this in the grounded into the roots of your life. It's always helpful, I think, to hear someone like you talk about

what that actually looks like in reality. Can you take something from John's gospel and just play it out for us? As you say, we pray it, we plow it into our lives. What's the kind of the next spreading the roots of spreading? What does that look like, if you see what I mean?

Dane: Oh, wow. Well, I'm fresh on my mind is a passage in John 16 where we are corrected. I am corrected. My associate pastor and I run a little preaching lab and we have some younger guys in the church and they preach the sermon at the we call them like twelve to 15 minutes sermons. And then we encourage and critique, try to focus on encouragement. But I haven't critiqued. We just did it this morning. We were in John 16, the last couple of paragraphs of John 16, verses 25 to 33. Would you believe that in John 16, Jesus corrects the way we reflexively think of God the Father, by saying, the Father himself loves you. So here we are going through life and we tend to think, okay, I know Jesus pacified the wrath of God and I believe that. I know he vindicated the justice and righteousness of God. I believe that we do, yes, for sure. But it's not that. Jesus is warmer in his heart and the Father and the Spirit are trying to catch up to him and they're a little bit more, you know, cool and calculating. Rather, the Son, Father and Spirit together are totally in sync with one another in love. And Jesus knews, we tend to think, well, the Father, many of the listeners here grew up with awful dads and they did many things right, but the dads, they basically were unoffeasible. And we easily project that onto the Father in heaven. And here is Jesus saying, don't you dare go through your life thinking that your heavenly Father is like your earthly Father. In that way. Some of us, I had a great earthly dad, so some of us are great earthly dads. Okay? None of them were perfect, but your heavenly Father himself loves you. You know what? You can stake an entire lifetime of joy on John 16:27, the Father himself loves you. And so that's one little place in John's Gospel that I've just been enjoying.

Felicity: Today, I love that.

Sarah: Dave, would you pray for us as we can to close off our episode? We love you to pray for us and our listeners.

Dane: Our Father in heaven. Felicity and Sarah and I joined our hearts to pray over those who are listening and we're joining our listeners. And whatever the stressor is, whatever the adversity, what is that point in their life where they feel stuck, where they feel most shame and regret, where they feel like, there's something here in my life that's unredeemable, it's just dark and beyond hope. And we pray that you would reach in by your spirit with the goodness of Jesus and the hope of the gospel and heaven coming and rinse that place clean and give them the certain knowledge that actually Romans eight is going to happen. And that is one day going to get flipped inside out. Turned inside out. God's good. You're going to press rewind on that and that will be part of their final resplendence radiance and glory. So comfort, console as the listeners are working their way through John's gospel, give them eyes to see the glory of Christ for them at their worst, not just when they're at their best, as we pray in Christ's name, amen.

Felicity: Amen.

Sarah: Thank you so much. It's been such a joy to have. You on and it's been such a great end to our seasoning, John, to just kind of have your insights and to be talking about your book. We're so excited about its launch and its release. So everyone listening, do go and pick up a copy Surprised by Jesus from ten of those. And that is the end of season four for us. Is this season four? This is season four.

Felicity: Five. Season four.

Sarah: Yes, we're on season four.

Dane: Okay.

Sarah: This is the end of season four, but season five will be coming. Stay tuned. We will be backing your earbuds in the next few weeks and thank you so much for listening. If you've enjoyed it, please do give us a review. We really appreciate every review that helps others to find out about digging into different parts of scripture with us. But until then, we're going to say goodbye to Dane. Thank you very much.

Felicity: Thank you.

Dane: Thank you. What a joy talking with you. God bless.

Felicity: Alright, see you soon.

Sarah: Take care. Bye bye bye. Thanks for listening to this episode. It's been sponsored by [Tenovos.com](https://tenovos.com). Check them out for great discounted resources that point to Jesus.