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Bridgeway Church  
Gospel of John #4  
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### Sermon Summary (4)

#### The Fullness of Christ Overflowing to You and to Me! John 1:14-18

When you hear the word “glory”, what comes first to mind? Perhaps it is the pomp and festivities surrounding a royal wedding, such as that between Prince Harry and Megan Markle last year. Or maybe the first thing that comes to mind is the Presidential Inauguration here in the U.S. Or does “glory” evoke images of a world-class athlete standing on the podium at the Olympic Games as he/she receives a gold medal for having set a world record?

In all these instances there is something about “glory” that conjures up images of glamour and power and praise. To possess “glory” is to command the attention and adoration of others, perhaps also their envy. In other words, when we today use the word “glory” we think of some quality or level of achievement that sets someone above everyone else.

But is that what John has in mind when he uses the word here in v. 14? What did John and Peter and Andrew and Matthew and Mary Magdalene see when they saw Christ’s “glory”?

#### *The Glory of God in the Person and Work of Jesus*

When John testifies that he himself “saw” the glory of the Word who became flesh, he means he beheld it with his physical eyes. This “seeing” does not refer to seeing in a vision or a dream or trance. He isn’t describing some inner, mystical “insight” but a literal, physical seeing with his own eyes, the same sort of “seeing” that you and I are experiencing right now as we look at each other.

But how did the *shekinah* glory of God manifest itself in the person of Jesus?

First, if you had been alive in the first century and looked at Jesus, you wouldn’t have seen anything out of the ordinary. He wasn’t 7 ft. tall and he didn’t dress in designer clothes. He didn’t buzz or vibrate. He wouldn’t have worn a golden crown or had a halo hovering above his head. His face would not have shined with a luminous glow. He would have looked like every other average Jewish man who lived in that day.

Second, there are several texts in John’s gospel that tell us how the glory of Jesus was revealed in the miracles he performed. For example, we read in John 2:11, following his turning of the water into wine, that this was the first of his signs in which he “manifested his glory” (see also 11:4, 40). Others think John was referring to the transfiguration. But the transfiguration is nowhere mentioned in John’s gospel (see Matt. 17:2; 2 Peter 1:16-18).

I think John had two things particularly in mind when he spoke here of Christ’s “glory” and how he and the others saw it.

The first expression of his glory was in his humble, lowly service of others; his compassion for the hurting and his love for the needy. When the lepers came to him, disfigured and ostracized because of their disease, he healed them. When he encountered the demonized, he set them free. When he saw that people were untaught and misled and ignorant, he taught them. On multiple occasions when the crowds had nothing to eat, he fed them. When others turned their faces from social outcasts, he dined with them. When no self-respecting Jewish man would be caught dead conversing with a sexually immoral Samaritan woman, Jesus engaged her and gave her hope.

On one particular occasion Jesus accepted the invitation of a religious leader to join him in his home for dinner. A prostitute somehow was able to sneak in (I say “sneak” in because I assure you that this religious leader would never have extended her an invitation!). As everyone else looked upon her with self-righteous revulsion and disdain, she knelt down before Jesus and “began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment” that she had brought with her (Luke 7:38). When the Pharisee reacted

with disgust, Jesus spoke to the woman and said: “Your sins are forgiven. . . . Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7:48-49). Such was the glory of Jesus!

In all the many ways that we consider undignified and lacking decorum, the glory of God in Christ Jesus was displayed. He was not the sort who would have posed for photographers on the red carpet. To find Jesus you would have to look in the back alley where he sought out the homeless and the hungry.

Later in John 13, we find Jesus in the upper room with his disciples. There we are told that Jesus was reflecting on the fact that he had come from the splendor of heaven and was about to return there; he was thinking specifically about the remarkable truth that “the Father had given all things into his hands” (John 13:3). If that isn’t a description of “glory” I don’t know what is. It was precisely at that very moment that Jesus, in effect, said to his disciples, “O.K., fellas, are you ready? I’m going to reveal my glory now. I know you’ve been waiting for this moment for a long time. Here it goes.”

What you don’t read in this passage is that the disciples quickly shielded their eyes from what they thought was going to be a blinding flash of light. They didn’t throw up their hands to hide their faces in self-defense. None of them grabbed hold of something stable lest they be knocked off their feet.” Why? Because Jesus stood up, took off his robe, girded himself with a towel, took a wash basin, knelt down on the ground in front of them, and proceeded to wash their feet! Such was the revelation of the “glory” of Jesus Christ!

But I said there were two specific ways in which his glory was revealed. The first, as we’ve just seen, was in his lowly, humble service for others. The second display of his glory was the cross and his cruel and painful death upon it.

As you already know, the cross in the first century was far more than an instrument of capital punishment. It was symbolic of shame and humiliation. In the minds of people who lived at that time, death on a cross was the utter, absolute, unequivocal, nauseating antithesis of glory. But for Jesus, it was the consummate manifestation of it. Crucifixion was reserved for slaves and criminals and outcasts. A Roman citizen might be executed for a capital offense, but never by crucifixion.

Yet Jesus himself, in referring to his impending death on a cross, declared: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (John 12:23). Later, in his prayer to the Father, Jesus said: “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you” (John 17:1).

When the people in the first century heard Jesus speak of the display of his glory, they thought he meant that the Roman oppressors would soon be destroyed and all the kingdoms of the earth would grovel at the feet of Jesus. But when Jesus spoke of his impending glory, he meant: “I will be crucified!” Most in that day defined glory as military and political triumph. Jesus defined it in terms of lowly service and a willingness to endure public shame and excruciating torture to save those who deserved only damnation. In what way, then, is the glory of Jesus most vividly seen? In what way is the glory of the Word who became flesh put on display? John the Baptist said it clearly: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

Oh, but make no mistake! Christ will be seen in the blinding splendor of his glory! When the Word became flesh and was born in humble circumstances, the radiant, transcendent blaze of his greatness and power were obscured by human flesh. But the apostle Paul reminds us that it will not always be so. When Jesus returns to this earth at the end of the age, he will be

“revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed” (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

You may say, “That’s all well and good, Sam. And yes, we look forward to the day when Christ returns in the clouds to consummate his kingdom in glory. But we live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not the 1<sup>st</sup>. We didn’t have the privilege that John did, or Matthew, or Peter, to see Jesus as you’ve described him. So how are we supposed to ‘see’ his glory?”

We see it by faith! And no, that is not a secondary, deficient, less powerful way of beholding his glory. Listen to what Peter said: “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

Your love for Jesus and your faith in Jesus and your joy in Jesus are just as real and powerful and life-changing as they were for people like Peter and John and Mark who actually laid physical eyes on Jesus. You and I “see” him in the infallible revelation of the Scriptures, in the beauty and majesty of nature, in prayer, during times of sweet and intimate fellowship with one another, in times of celebration and praise, in the elements of the Lord’s Supper, in baptism, and through the enlightening and life-changing power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us.

In fact, I behold the glory of the Son of God every time I watch a man or woman humble themselves to serve in our Café or give of their time and energy in volunteering to teach and encourage our kids. I see his glory every time I watch one of you lay hands on another and pray for their healing.

And do you know what happens when you and I behold the glory of Jesus in these many ways? Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians. And remember as you read this text that he wrote it long after Jesus had ascended into heaven, long after the time that he and others could see Jesus with their physical eyes:

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18).

When we see or behold by faith the glory of Jesus we are gradually changed and transformed into that very glory. The Holy Spirit uses these moments of beholding to shape us in such a way that we look more and more like Jesus every day. We become like that which we behold. Beholding is a way of becoming.

John isn’t nearly finished in his portrayal of who Jesus is. Thus far in this first chapter he has told us that the Son of God is eternally pre-existent, that he shares fellowship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, that he is himself God, that he is the creator of all things, that he is the only source of both life and light, that he is also fully human, and that he is the consummate embodiment of God’s dwelling among men. He now will declare that as the eternal Son of the eternal Father he is “full of grace and truth” (v. 14b).

### *Full of Grace*

It’s important to remember that the Bible speaks of God’s “grace” in two ways. There is, first, what we might call “*common*” grace, common because it is universal; everyone is the recipient of this expression of God’s kindness. This is the grace that accounts for why hell-deserving sinners receive food, air, clothing, good weather, and are blessed with natural talents, athletic ability, intellectual and artistic skills. This is the grace that restrains sin: it prevents people from being worse than they already are, but it doesn’t save anyone.

The second expression of God’s grace is properly called “special” or “saving” grace. This is God’s free and unmerited favor by which he actually delivers us from a well-deserved condemnation. This grace is not universal. Not everyone is the object or recipient of saving grace. If you wonder what you have to do to qualify for this grace, you simply have to confess that you are profoundly and in every way *unqualified* for it. There is nothing of which you are less deserving! The only way to disqualify yourself from receiving God’s saving grace in Christ Jesus is to think you qualify for it.

We must also remember that this grace does not come merely to the undeserving, but to the ill-deserving. It isn’t so much that we don’t deserve grace as it is that we *do* deserve hell. We aren’t merely helpless apart from Christ: we are hostile to him and thus hopeless. We fail to fully understand what grace entails because instead of comparing ourselves with the infinite and perfect righteousness of God, from which we have fallen immeasurably short, we compare ourselves with one another. It’s as if we all stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon and argue about who can jump farther. “I can jump 8 feet!” “Yeah, well I can jump 10 feet, and with a running start I can probably reach 15 feet.” But regardless of how far we can jump in comparison with each other, at the close of the day we all end up in the same place: splattered, dead, at the bottom of that Canyon!

We erroneously think that grace means God grades on the curve. We admit that everyone has failed the test of righteousness, but that God will make up for it by adding to everyone's score an extra 30 or 40 points! No! When it comes to attaining to the righteous standards of an infinitely righteous God, we all fall infinitely short.

So let's be clear about what grace is. Grace is not God treating you less than you deserve. Grace is not God treating you better than you deserve. Grace is when God treats you without the slightest regard for desert whatsoever. Grace is when God treats you simply and solely according to the infinite goodness and sovereign mercy in his heart. Neither human merit nor demerit factor in at all.

Here's a short test to determine if you really understand God's grace in Jesus Christ.

If when you sin you run away from God rather than to God, you have failed to fully embrace the grace of God.

If when you sin your instinctive response is one of fear of judgment rather than gratitude for forgiveness, you have failed to fully embrace and understand the grace of God.

If when you sin your immediate reaction is to hide from God rather than openly confess how you've failed, you don't understand grace.

If when you contemplate your own value as a human being you rehearse in your mind personal accomplishments rather than the person of Christ, you have failed to fully embrace the grace of God.

If you typically say to yourself: "I obey, therefore I'm accepted," rather than "I'm accepted, therefore I obey," you have failed to grasp the reality of divine grace.

If you are motivated by shame and insecurity rather than joy and confidence, you have failed to understand the grace of God.

If your confidence is in baptism, the Lord's Supper, church attendance, faithful giving, or any other religious activity, rather than who Jesus is and what he has done for you, you have failed to understand the grace of God.

If, when you look at other Christians, you resent them for their spiritual growth, you have failed to fully embrace the grace of God.

If, when you grow and increase in conformity to Christ, you pat yourself on the back and silently congratulate yourself for doing what other Christians have not, you have failed to fully embrace the grace of God.

If, when you fall short of personal goals, you envision God scowling at you rather than smiling, you have failed to fully embrace the grace of God.

If you think that God doesn't love and cherish you because you are overweight or underpaid or outperformed or inadequate, you have failed to fully embrace the grace of God.

If you think that God loves you because you *aren't* overweight, or because you *are* highly paid, or because you seem more than adequate for every responsibility, you have failed to fully embrace the grace of God.

And finally, if when you contemplate the free forgiveness of sins you are tempted to use that as an excuse to sin all the more, you know little of the grace of God.

John's point here in v. 14 is that this glorious thing called grace was in Jesus Christ, fully and freely! To find and experience and enjoy the grace of God, you must look in faith to Jesus and only Jesus.

*Full of Truth*

Let's be clear right from the start. God isn't whatever you want him to be. He is who he is whether you like it or not. Jesus Christ embodies and speaks truth whether or not you think he does. Simply because you don't like some of the things Jesus said or did does not mean they aren't true.

Truth is not what works or what feels good or what the majority of people in a public opinion poll say it is. Truth is not what fits the need of the moment. Truth is not what feeds your self-esteem or makes you feel good about yourself. Truth is what God has revealed in his Son, Jesus Christ, and what he has stated infallibly in the written Word of God, the Scriptures. The truth about God and humanity, about heaven and hell, about right and wrong, about what is righteous or unrighteous when it comes to human sexual conduct never changes. You may not like it, but your feelings one way or the other have no effect on whether or not something is true or false, right or wrong.

There is no greater tragedy in our day than the relativizing of truth. Truth is no longer absolute or transcendent or eternal or trans-cultural. Truth is whatever you want it to be, whatever makes you feel good, whatever gives you a sense of well-being and value and purpose in life. If you don't like the truth of the Bible, no big deal. Make up your own truth. Create your own theology. Establish your own sexual ethics. Construct your own doctrines that match your passions and desires and loves and likes.

Well, no. John says, as do all other biblical authors, that truth is who Jesus Christ is and what he has said and what he has done and what he has declared is yet to be. ***Truth is not dependent on whether or not you believe it to be truth.*** The truth about God and what he is like doesn't change just because we live in a world of computers or because we've succeeded in sending a man to the moon. The truth about what is right and wrong doesn't change merely because we've invented the birth control pill or uncovered the mystery of the genetic code. You can choose to be offended or have your feelings hurt to hear that two plus two equals four, but that doesn't change the sum of the equation to five!

Truth is fully found in Jesus! So too is grace. That's an odd mix, to say the least. You probably know someone who always tells the truth, but they are mean and inflexible and judgmental. You also probably know some who are loving and kind and compassionate, but they fudge and compromise when it comes to truth because they don't want you to be offended; they don't want to hurt your feelings. But in Jesus we see grace and truth fully in abundance and neither of them is sacrificed on the altar of the other. They are in perfect harmony.

And the good news of the gospel, as John says in vv. 16-17, is that when we are born again and come to faith in Jesus Christ we receive "grace upon grace," as if one wave of grace is followed by yet another and another and another, similar to the waves that crash incessantly on the shore. At every moment of every day, especially when we sin, the grace that is fully found in Jesus is showered down upon us yet again.

What, then, are we to make of the contrast in v. 17 between Moses and Jesus? What does John mean when he says that "the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"? One thing he does *not* mean is that there is no "law" in the new covenant. Paul speaks of the "law of Christ" in 1 Corinthians 9:21, and everywhere throughout the NT we hear of "commandments" that we are to obey.

So what does John mean? In one sense, it may be a statement of comparison. That is, in comparison with the magnitude of grace and truth found in Jesus and the new covenant, it would appear that there is nothing but law that came to the people of Israel in the old covenant. But I don't think that's what John had in mind.

I think the primary difference between Moses and Jesus, between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, is that in the old there were laws to obey but no guaranteed provision of power to fulfill them. The Law of Moses came to the people of Israel and said: "Do this! Don't do that!" And there's nothing wrong with that. But the commandments or laws themselves could do nothing to enable the people to obey them.

Not so in the New Covenant. Now, with the coming of Christ Jesus and the permanent indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, God fulfills what God requires. That is to say, with every command or law comes the promise of sufficient power to obey. We see this in the way God spoke through Ezekiel's prophecy of the New Covenant:

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will

remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

We see this same truth in Paul’s words in Philippians 2:

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling [there is the “law” or the commandment], for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure [there is the enabling grace of the Spirit]” (Phil. 2:12-13).

One more example will suffice. We read this in Hebrews 13:

“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Heb. 13:20-21).

As someone once said,

“To run and work the law commands,  
Yet gives me neither feet nor hands.  
But better news the gospel brings:  
It bids me fly and gives me wings!”

### *The Invisible God made Visible in Jesus*

Finally, John wraps up this prologue to his gospel with the astounding declaration that in Jesus the invisible God is now seen and touched in the person of Jesus. Multiple times in both OT and NT we hear that God is invisible: he is spirit and no physical eye can behold him (see Exod. 19:21; 33:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15-16). But if God can’t be seen, how can God be known? He can be known because now he can be seen in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. Notice three things here.

First, the Word who became flesh, that is, Jesus Christ himself, is God. He is, literally, the “only-begotten God” or as some render it, “the unique Son of God,” that is, the dearest and supremely special Son. To say that the Son is “begotten” of the Father does not mean there was a time when the Son didn’t exist and that at a point in time he came into being (see John 1:1). By God’s grace, Ann and I “begat” both Melanie and Joanna, our daughters, and they didn’t exist until such time as we “begat” them! But John is describing an “*eternal*” *begetting*. This is a metaphor designed to tell us that the intimate relationship between Father and Son has always been; there was never a time when the first person of the Godhead wasn’t Father or that the second person of the Godhead wasn’t Son.

Second, the Son of God is said to be “at the Father’s side,” or more literally, “in the Father’s bosom,” a graphic metaphor that describes the close and loving intimacy that has existed for eternity between the Father and the Son. Just as a young child leans against his daddy’s chest, hearing his heartbeat and feeling his affection, so is the Son of God in relation to Father God.

Third, because the Son is God and because the Son dwells eternally in the bosom of the Father, “he [and he alone] has made him known.” Jesus has explained the Father. Jesus has “exegeted” the Father! Jesus has given us the full account of who God is and what he’s like (see John 14:8-9).

There is no knowledge of God apart from Jesus. There is no saving grace or truth about God apart from Jesus. For in Jesus is the fullness of everything we need to know and be reconciled to our Creator. Praise be to God for this glorious revelation of himself in and through his Son!

### *Conclusion*

Consider the story of John Newton . . .