



## **The Word of Grace & Truth**

### **The Incarnate Word Series #4**

**John 1:15-18**

**David Sunday**

**December 21, 2014**

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Let's pray together.

Holy God, just as You cleansed the lips of the Prophet Isaiah, I pray that You would cleanse my heart and lips, that I might worthily proclaim Your holy gospel. I pray, Lord, that You would cleanse our hearts and minds from all distractions and all the sin that so easily entangles. Enable our tongues to be filled with unwearied praises to You this Christmas week. For Your light has shone into our hearts, and Your life has captivated us and infiltrated our darkness and death. We praise You for this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's open our Bibles once more to John 1, where we have been throughout this Advent season. This is the last sermon in Advent, and we look forward to the celebration of Christ's birth this week. If you are traveling this week and are unable to worship with us on Christmas Eve, I want to wish you a very merry Christmas. I hope that God's love and peace floods your heart as a church family this week.

As I was thinking about John 1 this week, I was reminded of a birthday party that Kate and my wonderful kids threw for me a few years ago. It was a surprise and it was up at my parents' home in Wisconsin. It was the last birthday I was able to enjoy with my then-90-year-old grandma, Nana Hazel. Kate thought it would be nice to give everyone who was in the room a chance to share a word of affirmation and encouragement to me, so they went around the circle saying all these nice things. After a few people had spoken up, my Nana Hazel blurted out, "That's enough about David! Let's talk about Jesus." That really exemplified the type of woman she was and I will never forget that.

We are getting ready to celebrate the birthday of our Savior. Shouldn't our focus be on Him? Shouldn't we be talking about Him, extolling Him and worshipping Him with our hearts? We can never exalt Christ too much. We can never go overboard on this. There is not a single glory we can ascribe to Him of which He is not worthy.

That is what John did in this great prologue—he praised Christ, the eternally preexistent One Who has always been and will always be, through Whom all things were created, apart from Whom nothing was made that was made (verses 1-3). Then, in verses 4-13, John lifted Him high as the light and life of all men, apart from Whom we walk in darkness and death. But through Him we may become children of God, who were born of God and not of human means. We can become new creations in Christ.

Last week, we dwelt on verse 14, dealing with the marvel and wonder of the incarnation. It is also my favorite verse in this passage: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* This shows us the grand miracle of world history, the fulfillment of biblical theology that God has come to dwell in our midst and the satisfaction of the human hearts’ longing for glory. We have seen His glory, John says.

John wraps up His prologue of praise to the glory of Christ with a word about what His coming into the world means for those of us who follow Him and believe. There is a parenthesis in verse 15 about John the Baptist also extolling the glory of this Christ, saying, “Even though I was born first, He came before me. He ranks before me and He is the One Who gets the glory.” Then the apostle, John the Evangelist, talks to us about what God’s gift of Christ at Christmas means for those of us who believe. It is this: We who trust in Jesus will never find in Him any lack of ability to meet our every spiritual need. Every need we have is, in Him, infinitely fulfilled and sufficient. This is God’s Christmas gift to us. We can never exalt Christ too much. We can never ascribe to Him a glory that does not properly belong to Him, because in Him there is an infinite fullness which makes Him a fountain of grace that will never run dry. That’s what John says to us in verse 16.

Look at verse 16. I want to anchor most of our thoughts in this wonderful verse: *“For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”* Now, I have to confess to you my sin this week. This was one of those weeks where my to-do list seemed bigger than the allotted time God gave me. It’s not that I had any less time this week than any other week. We have the same time every day—God’s time. Sometimes, I feel like there is not enough time to get everything done that I need to get done. But that is not true. There is always plenty of time to do what God wants us to do. I wish I could tell you that I kept looking to God moment-by-moment to fill me with everything I need, having a calm, sweet peace that controlled my heart; that every moment of this week, I was drawing from this infinite fullness that is in Jesus to meet my needs moment-by-moment. But that wouldn’t be accurate.

In fact, last night, as I was thinking about this morning and feeling like I'm still not quite ready, I realized there was frustration and anxiety in my heart about not completing what I wanted to get done this week. What is underneath that? Self-sufficiency. Self-dependence. Where does that come from? It comes from pride.

Beautifully, the Holy Spirit helped me as I was starting to wrestle with this restlessness in my heart. It was as if He asked me, "David, are you living as if verse 16 is true? Do you believe this? Look at what you're preaching on! From His fullness, we have all received. Are you living like you are in union with the One in Whom there is an infinite fullness?" "Fullness of God in helpless babe."

### **There is an Infinite Fullness in Christ**

Do we live like we are recipients of God's fullness? Christmas in itself will leave you empty and unfulfilled if you are focusing all of your hopes on having yourself a merry little Christmas. You will end up dissatisfied. But Christ will not leave you dissatisfied or unfulfilled.

This season, as I suspect many of us are probably feeling a little bit hectic and worn out, I am calling you to believe in the real Jesus. Renew your faith and confidence in His fullness, living as if verse 16 is true. There is an infinite fullness in Jesus Christ.

Do you know what our basic problem is? It's not that we don't have enough money. It's not that we don't have enough time. It's not that we have relationships that are broken and difficult. It's not a bad habit that has run out of control that you cannot seem to get a handle on. These are not our basic problems. Our basic problem is that we are not believing in the real Jesus. We are not taking Him for Who He really is.

Pastor Ray Ortlund says, "Our real problem is that we don't believe in the real Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. Every moment of panic, every vain regret, every hidden hypocrisy, our every failure is alerting us: 'I am not believing that Jesus is enough for me.'" That is what is beneath all our anxiety. We are not believing Jesus is enough. This is my challenge for you this Christmas season: let's start believing that Jesus is enough. Let's live as if He is enough for everything we need in life. Let's stop acting like He's small, on the margins, kind of distant, and unconcerned about us and start living like He is near and big enough to handle every challenge we can bring to Him. He has the government of the world on His shoulders (Isaiah 9:6), so we don't have to bear the weight of the world on ours. Let's stop fixating on our weaknesses, shortcomings, fears and failures and start focusing on His plenty for every need we have. Let's believe and live as if verse 16 is true. There is an infinite fullness in Christ.

What does that fullness consist of? Look at verse 14: *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* Grace is God’s love to the undeserving. It is God’s kindness to us in the face of our sin. “We have seen His glory,” John said. You would expect that glory to knock you flat on your face, but John said that glory is full of grace. It is full of kindness to those who don’t deserve it and full of love toward us in the face of our sin.

That is what God’s glory in Jesus communicates. It is full of grace and truth. His grace is not a wimpy grace. His grace is not a grace that sweeps things under the rug. His grace is a grace that allows us to face the ugly reality of who we are—full of sin and rebellion—and tells us the truth about ourselves without flattering us. It doesn’t wink at our sin or turn a blind eye. He is full of truth and He never lies. Every word Jesus has spoken is faithful and true; you can bank on it forever. His Word abides forever. Every bit of truth in this world is just a beam of light that is radiating from His sunshine. Jesus is the source of all truth.

In Jesus is the marriage of grace and truth. They have come together. In Hebrew (the Old Testament language), steadfast love and faithfulness are the same as grace and truth in the Greek (the New Testament language). Psalm 85:10-11 says, *“Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky. Yes, the Lord will give what is good...”*

He has given what is good in Jesus Christ, Who is full of grace and truth. So we are to live by drawing upon this infinite fullness, drinking from this fountain that will never run dry. When I am feeling depressed and it seems as if there is a spiritual darkness descending over my mind, I am called to go to Jesus, Who is the light of the world. He says, *“Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”* (John 8:12).

When I am plagued by my awareness of guilt and shame and I am unable to consistently do what I know is pleasing to God, I am called to go to Jesus, Who is, in the words of Jeremiah the prophet, “the Lord our righteousness.” I am called to draw from Christ Jesus wisdom from God, sanctification and redemption. Jesus is our righteousness.

Do you wrestle with filthy thoughts? Do you find yourself unable to sustain an hour of holy thinking? Do you find yourself unable to go a whole hour and think only holy, pure and lovely thoughts? When you look at the filthiness of your mind, do you find yourself weighed down with shame? In Jesus, there is a fountain. Zechariah says there is a fountain open to cleanse His people from sin and uncleanness. The very minute a filthy thought rises up in my mind, I am to flee to Him. From Him I have received fullness from God, grace upon grace.

In his letter to Titus, Paul said, “[*He*] gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” From His fullness, we have all received. Are you living like there is a fullness of grace in Jesus from which you may continually draw?

Charles Simeon said in one sermon, “Thus has Jesus in Himself a fullness of light to instruct, of merit to justify, of grace to renew, of compassion to pity and of power to save us, even to the very uttermost of our wants.”

Friends, think often of His fullness. Think less of your lack and more of His fullness. Draw from that fullness. Live as if this is true. Don’t live like you are a pauper; live like you are united to the One in Whom all fullness dwells.

Colossians 2:9-10a says, “*For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him...*” You are complete, Paul said. You are not lacking in anything you need if you are united to Jesus Christ. He satisfies every spiritual need.

### **This Fullness is Freely Received by All Who Believe**

Look at verse 16 again. John said, “*For from his fullness we have all received...*” Who is the “we” of whom he spoke? It goes back to verse 12: “*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...*” All of us who have received Him have received from His fullness everything that we need. We can survey all the fullness that is in Christ and can claim it all as our own. Whatever is in Him is for us. All that He possesses in Himself—everything He can do by His authority in heaven and earth—He wants to do in us. That is our portion. It doesn’t matter how weak we are. Having received Christ, we have all received fullness from Him. The weakest believer has been made full in Jesus Christ.

How does this work? There are many things in our lives we benefit from without fully understanding how they work. Just yesterday, as I was walking into my garage, I looked at my car and thought, “That thing has carried me all over the country and I really don’t know how it works but I know when I get into it and turn it on to drive, it takes me to all kinds of places.”

This is similar to our union with Christ. We don’t know how it all works, but Jesus said it is like this: “I am the Vine. You are the branches. You are in a close, vital union with Me. From Me, you draw constant supplies of spiritual life. I nourish you. I strengthen you. Apart from Me, you can do nothing.” He also said, “I am the Head and you are the body.” If you cut off my head, nothing is going to work anymore. It is from the head that the body derives all its strength, nourishment and direction. We constantly depend on the grace that Christ provides to maintain our spiritual life and vigor.

We receive this from Him freely. We don't earn it. We don't deserve it. We don't merit it. It is a gift. We receive from Christ freely.

So how do you do that? There is a prayer from Martin Luther we have often prayed together. As you reflect on this prayer, bow where you are and engage in this prayer. I want you to be lifting up your heart to the Lord Jesus in Whom is all fullness of grace and truth, and I want you to be engaging with Him right now, saying, "I need You, Lord." That is what Martin Luther said in this prayer. This is how you receive from His fullness:

Behold, Lord, an empty vessel that needs to be filled. My Lord, fill it. I am weak in the faith; strengthen me. I am cold in love; warm me and make me fervent, that my love may go out to my neighbor. I do not have a strong and firm faith; at times I doubt and am unable to trust You altogether. O Lord, help me. Strengthen my faith and trust in You. In You I have sealed the treasure of all I have. I am poor; You are rich and came to be merciful to the poor. I am a sinner; You are upright. With me, there is an abundance of sin; in You is the fullness of righteousness. Therefore I will remain with You, of Whom I can receive, but to Whom I may not give.  
Amen

Lift your eyes. Lift your hearts. This is an example of how to draw from the fullness by coming to the Lord and saying, "I am guilty. I am vile. I am helpless. I do not have what it takes spiritually. I do not rest on my performance. I rest on Your gift of love and righteousness—the gift You sent into the world at Christmas. I continually and desperately need You. Fill me, Lord." When we do that, freely we receive from His fullness all that He has to give.

### **This Fullness Keeps Replenishing the Believer Who Comes to Jesus**

I love the last phrase of verse 16 but it is a hard one to interpret and translate. There are many, many different interpretations of what John means when he said, "*For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.*"

I don't precisely know what the best interpretation is, but I love the idea of "grace upon grace upon grace upon grace." It is a cascade—a waterfall—of grace that never runs dry. "Give it to me! That's what I need." As Murray Harris says, "[Grace upon grace] denotes a perpetual and rapid succession of blessings, as though there were no interval between the arrival of one blessing and the receipt of the next."

I think that is why the NIV translates it: "From his fullness we have all received one blessing after another." It is one grace being replaced by another grace and is continuous. It is never exhausted. There is never an intermission. There is never a time when God says, "My

grace needs to take a rest. People, you're going to need to handle this on your own for awhile." No, it is grace upon grace upon grace, just like the waves of the Pacific Ocean rolling up on the beaches of California. They never stop and haven't stopped for thousands of years. So it is with the grace of God, which pours out on those who trust in Jesus.

There is grace upon grace in constant succession and rich abundance. It is endless grace. There are undepletable supplies of grace. I'm not even sure if "undepletable" is a word, but that's what grace is from Jesus! You can't empty it out. It is fresh today and will be fresh tomorrow. For everyone who looks afresh to Jesus, this gift of love and righteousness, will find hope. "I need You. I need You, Lord."

This grace upon grace is illustrated in verse 17 and in historical redemptive fashion. Here in verse 17, John, who wrote for a largely Jewish audience, reminded God's people of how God revealed Himself to them through Moses.

*"The law was given through Moses."* John was not speaking disparagingly of the law. He was not trying to draw a sharp antithesis between law and grace the way we sometimes see it in Paul's writings. Rather, he said, "That was a gracious gift. God gave the law through Moses. He redeemed you from the land of Egypt, and then He gave you His law so that you could know how to walk with Him. That law remains a gracious gift for believers today.

However, something new and final has come in Jesus Christ. Notice how he said the law was given (passive tense). God gave the law, but something came into being through Jesus Christ. It reminds us of the language in verse three which says, *"All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."*

Nothing came into being without Him. In verse 17, John said grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ. It is like a new creation of grace and truth in Jesus. A whole new reality has dawned upon the world. Joy has dawned upon the world because grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. Through Him, a new creation and new birth into God's family are possible.

It is as if John said, "This is God's best and final gift. He pulled out all the stops. He gave us the best He had to offer when He gave us His Son. He doesn't have something better on the horizon for us. He gave us His fullness when He gave us Jesus, the fullness of grace and truth." Romans 8:32 states, *"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"* (Romans 8:32).

Friend, what would it be like for you to begin every day with confidence in the fullness of grace and truth that are in Jesus? Instead of waking up first thing in the morning and thinking about all the things you have to do, all the ways you have to perform and getting lost in the

endless detour of “my shortcomings, my failures, my weaknesses, my exhaustion,” what if you instead started with an affirmation of faith: “Every morning, Jesus has plenty for my need? There is no lack in Him. He is the fountain that will never run dry. He has fullness for me, grace upon grace. It has never run out for anyone who has ever come to Him and it will not run out for me.”

We admire the sun in its fullness. Think about all the people who get warmth and light from the sun right now. Today is the winter solstice. We get the least sunlight of the year today. I looked up Barrow, Alaska, to see when the sun rises and sets today. It just said, “12am; 12am.” No sun for the people in Barrow.

But the sun sheds light on many people at once, right? It warms many people on this half of the world, but the people on the other side of the world are now in darkness. The sun can only handle half the world at once. That is not so with Jesus. His fullness is so infinite and everlasting that, if every person in the world were to call upon Him, humble himself before the cross of Christ, confess his sin and need for Jesus, there would be no backlog. Jesus would not say, “Take a number.” There would be no bandwidth issues in communication with Jesus. He can hear it all; He can see it all; His hand can assist and help everyone who has need. At the very moment we call on Him, His fullness is able to replenish our every need. It is inexhaustible and can never be diminished. This is our Savior. From His fullness we have all received grace upon grace upon grace.

## **How We May Know that We Are Receiving from His Fullness**

I want to close by encouraging you to ask yourself, “How do I know if I am believing in the real Jesus? How do I know if I am receiving His fullness?” We get some hints in verses 17-18 where there are two applications:

First, you know you are drawing from His fullness when you find yourself resting in Him. I think there is some instruction for us here in verse 17 on the difference between law and the grace and truth that are in Jesus Christ. Law focuses on what we need to do. It’s a gift of grace because it is God showing us His will for us. But the law causes us to realize how far short we fall—how we lack and how we need. Grace and truth bring rest. Grace and truth from Jesus cause us to place all our hope on Him, rest in Him and believe He is sufficient for our every need.

Ray Ortlund says:

We all tend to think, ‘Sure, [Jesus] is gracious. But I’ve used up my quota. There’s no more for me’... Every other religion draws a line,

beyond which its remedies run out. But if you come to Christ, you come to One Who glorifies Himself by never running out of fullness for you. This is not a concession on His part. This is not an exceptional policy He might revoke. This is His glory forever. Believe it. Dare to believe it. And rejoice!

When you draw from that fullness, there is a resting and a rejoicing in Christ that frees you from the endless trap of performance religion, where you are always thinking, “What do I have to do to be in God’s good graces.” Instead, you say, “My soul finds rest in God alone. From Him comes my salvation.” That is the first indication you are receiving from the fullness. Spiritually speaking, rest has come into your life. You have laid your “deadly doing down—down at Jesus’ feet.” You have rested in Him alone and you feel gloriously complete in Him.

The second indication is that the Spirit of adoption is in you. You are crying out, “Abba! Father! God, my Father, I trust You. I love You.” Verse 18 says the only way we can come to know God as our Father is through Jesus Christ. He is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). This is Christianity’s exclusive claim: you cannot get to know God the Father apart from Jesus His Son. If you want to know God, you must come through Jesus.

Verse 18 says, “*No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side...*” Literally, it says “in the Father’s bosom.” It is referring to Jesus like a child in the lap of the Father. That is how close and intimate the fellowship is between the Father and the Son.

One commentator says, “It is as if God has reached into His very being and plucked out His own heart in sending Christ to us.” The only God Who is in the Father’s bosom. God plucked Him out of His heart and said, “Here: I so love the world that I will give My only Son. Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). He will make known to the world My fatherly heart.”

You know you are receiving from the fullness of Jesus when you start to make much of the thought, “God is my Heavenly Father. I am His child. I can rest and trust in Him.” That is God’s Christmas gift to us.

Please join me in prayer.

Oh, Father, we thank You for Your great love for us in Christ. We thank You that You did not withhold Your very heart from us. You plucked out the Son of Your bosom and said, “Go into the world and bring redemption.” So great is Your love, Father! So great is Your mercy! Lord Jesus, I confess that I too often live as if You are not full for my every need. I pray that You

would have mercy on me, a sinner. Forgive me for thinking more of my lack than of Your supply. I pray for all of us. May we celebrate this wondrous gift and find ourselves drawing confidently from the fullness that is in Christ, living as if we have received fullness; as if we are enriched; as if we have sufficiency in You, Jesus, because it is true. We rejoice that You have come into the world and from Your fullness we have all received grace upon grace. Amen.

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*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

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