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Jesus: The Incarnate Word

John 1:14-18

Series #4

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in John chapter 1, the Gospel of John, chapter 1.

We come this morning to one of the high-water marks of the New Testament. Not that some Scripture is more Scripture than others, but some texts, like what we have before us this morning, are so packed with profound truth about God that we will spend our lives learning more and more from these texts. And in particular, the text before us today puts before us the core truth in the Christian faith – the truth that sets Christianity apart from all other attempts at religion – the truth which if you take it away you lose all truth in Christianity – the truth which must be believed and trusted upon to have eternal life – the truth which has been the attack of more heresies and false teachers than any other truth – that truth of truths is that the Word became flesh. The Infinite God entered into finite humanity. The Creator of all came into his creation by taking upon himself the form of humanity. The Eternal One entered into space and time in the existence of mankind. The Word of God became flesh.

In these opening 18 verses, John has already taught us that this Word is co-eternal, co-existent, and co-equal with God – that indeed he was God and he was with God. He has taught us that this Word is the divine light by which all other things are illumined and by which life comes into the soul. He taught us last week that this light has been witnessed to by John the Baptist and has been rejected by the world, and even by his own people. But those who receive this light – who believe in his name – they are given the right to be called the children of God. And this will only happen if they are spiritually re-born by the will and power of God. They will only believe on the Lord Jesus Christ if they are born of God. And then we come to verse 14 in which we learn of God being born as a man. Let's read John 1:14-18.

Your eternal state is determined by what you believe about Jesus. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one will come to the Father except through him. There is no brighter light of revelation to which you need to look – there is no greater life offered than the life given through this Incarnate Word. He is the blazing sun around which our spiritual lives orbit. And he has made himself known to us through his incarnation. This eternal Word has come in human flesh to make known to us the truth about God and the unique glory of God.

Did you notice the segue from the previous section to this one? John told us in verses 12-13 that we will not receive Christ by faith unless we have been born of God. Spiritual life in Christ requires a spiritual birth from God. And he moves from our need for a spiritual birth to describe the Lord's human birth. The incarnation of the eternal Word of God is the clearest expression of a birth that was not by bloods, nor by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, but by God.

And this birth of the Word in human flesh is the key to humans being spiritually born unto eternal life. It is because the Word was born that we can be spiritually reborn by his grace.

And that is what is brought to us through this Word who became flesh and dwelt among us – it is grace upon grace. John describes the birth of Jesus in this one verse, whereas Matthew and Luke take 2 chapters and about 2500 words. That is not because the birth of Christ is not important to John, but it is because he is giving us the theological significance of this glorious truth – that God came in human flesh. And that is the unmistakable teaching here – The Word – that pre-existent, co-equal, co-eternal God that we learned about in verse 1 – that Word became flesh. That is the Greek word *egeneto* again which means that it became something in that moment. It is the word used in verse 3 to say that all things were made through the Word – they were all brought into existence by his power. But the Word was – *eimi* – the eternally self-existent one. He never began in his existence, he simply was. But now, that self-existent one has become flesh. He has added humanity to his deity. He has not lost any deity, but he has added to his deity the nature of his humanity through the incarnation. The Word became flesh.

It is here – right here at the truth about the Son of God in the flesh that so many heresies have sprung up. All of those heresies are seeking for a way to explain how it is that God can be man and man can be God. Some have said that the body of Jesus was like a phantasm or a mirage – that it wasn't real. Others have said that Jesus' Divine Spirit came and inhabited his human flesh at his public baptism and then left him before his crucifixion. Others have said that he was god-like, but not truly and completely God. But the Scriptures are clear – The Eternal Word became flesh! In the 5th Century the Church called a council together of its leaders to determine the truth from Scripture about this dual nature of Jesus Christ. This council – the Council of Chalcedon - produced a lengthy statement of faithful explanation based in the Scriptures about the God-man and his nature. In part it says, “we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; . . . one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized IN TWO NATURES, WITHOUT CONFUSION, WITHOUT CHANGE, WITHOUT DIVISION, WITHOUT SEPARATION; the distinction of the natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person . . .”¹ In other words, there is great mystery in this hypostatic union of God and man in the Lord Jesus Christ, but we must maintain that he is truly God and truly man and that these two natures are without confusion within him and without separation, but that the natures maintain their distinction. He is not two persons, but one person with two natures – the divine nature and the human nature.

If this is true then, which it is, Jesus was the embodiment of the glory of God on earth. And that is the central truth of these 5 verses. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen, or beheld, his glory. The word dwelt among us means that he did not just come and visit for a time, but that he pitched his tent in humanity. He became one of us and lived among us.

¹ Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Faith*, Second Edition; pg. 51.

And this is not the first time that God has pitched a tent in the midst of humanity. You'll remember back in the book of Exodus how the Lord instructed Moses and Aaron in the construction of a massive tent structure which was called the Tabernacle. And you'll remember that this structure was a pretty plain looking tent. It didn't have flashy colors and ornate designs in the material. But inside its tent walls it contained the glories of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. In its midst sat the Ark of the Covenant upon which the Shekinah glory of God would descend and reside. The glory of God was hidden inside the tent structure of the Tabernacle. And in a similar way, we are told here by John, that Jesus came in the tent of human flesh and tabernacled among us. We know from the prophet Isaiah that there was nothing outwardly flashy about his appearance – he looked like a man because he was a man. But within that tent of his body he veiled His Deity. And through his life and ministry he displayed that glory of his deity – glory which was full of grace and truth! In these 5 verses we see how this Incarnate Word displays the eternal glory of God. We see that eternal glory of God first in his unique relationship to the Father.

I. His Unique Relationship to the Father – vs. 14b

- a. This Incarnate Word has a unique glory because he has a unique relationship to God the Father. We already learned about that a little bit in verse 1 where we learned that this Word who was God was also the Word who was with God. So, there is a distinction between the persons of the Godhead, but they are the same in essence and nature.
- b. You have certainly heard of that Greek word behind “the only Son”, or in some translations, “the only begotten Son.” The word is *monogenes*, and it is not a word that is speaking about origin, but rather a word that is speaking about the unique position and relationship of the Son to the Father. We know by the context that he is not talking about origin because he covered that in verse 1. This Word has no origin – he simply was. And from him, all things were made, and without him was not anything made that was made. He was not made – he had no beginning. So, to say “the only begotten Son” does not mean that he had a beginning. It does not mean that he is the first of all of God's creation, because He was God who was creating. It rather speaks to the relationship between the Father and the Son. The Word is the one of a kind, the only and unique Son of the Father.
- c. John is the only New Testament writer to use this word to refer to Jesus – *monogenes*. And he does it to make clear the uniqueness of Jesus as the only Son of God, through whom we can have life. So, the glory we see in Jesus is the glory of this unique Son sent from the Father. This is a glory which is God's glory uniquely – which is shared with the Son and which tabernacled among us when the Son became flesh.

II. His Divine Character – vs. 14c, 16-17

- a. This eternal glory is also seen in the divine character of the Incarnate Word. He is full of grace and truth. This is a condensed way to identify the divine character of this Word in the flesh. He is truly God and therefore he is full of grace and truth. This idea of being full of grace and truth is then picked up in verses 16-17. In verse 16 we read that because he is full of grace and truth, we have all received grace

upon grace. In other words, this is not a theoretical grace which is possessed but never given. Rather, this is a practiced grace which has been received from the fullness of God brought to us in the Word made flesh. And then in verse 17 we read of the Law being given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. So, there is this 3-pronged evidence of the divine character of Jesus here – he is full of grace and truth, we have received grace upon grace from him, and grace and truth came through him to us.

- b. I think it helps us tremendously here if we think of the Old Testament text which is most likely in John's mind as he writes these words. Let's flip back there – turn to Exodus 33 with me. This is after the Golden Calf incident at Mt. Sinai, and Moses has interceded for the people and pled with God for mercy for them. The Lord has agreed to not remove his presence from his people in response to Moses' prayers. Then in verse 18 we read this – *Read Exodus 33:18-23*
- c. This is the truest and most fundamental desire of mankind – to see and know this God of glory. But Moses could not see the unfiltered and unhindered glory of God, lest he be consumed. But God agrees to show Moses his goodness as he passes by Moses, and look down in 34:4-7.
- d. So, Moses asked to see God's glory, and God agreed to let his goodness pass in front of Moses. And then God proclaims his goodness with the description of his character – the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Those last two – steadfast love and faithfulness are the Hebrew equivalent to grace and truth. So, Moses saw the goodness and glory of the Lord pass before him. He heard the description of this fullness from the voice of the Lord. But now, in Jesus Christ, the Word has become flesh and this glory has taken up residence as the One who is full of grace and truth. And it is in the life of Jesus that these aspects of his divine character are seen on display again and again. He is not gracious in this interaction and truthful in this one – no, he is always fully gracious and fully truthful.
- e. And from that fullness then – back in John 1:16 – we have all received grace upon grace. This fullness has not been kept to the Godhead but has been poured out in an endless stream of grace upon humanity. And yet, this endless stream has not emptied God of one ounce of grace. His fullness is unending and because of this His grace is ever flowing. And by this we know that the Word is truly divine – for to be full of grace is to be God. But this Divine Word is in the flesh, and what is the mark of his character? It is grace upon grace to all those who were with him. That is why John can say – we have all received grace upon grace. What a picture that statement paints. From the fullness of Deity, the Word gives grace upon grace. What an incredible way to say that the Word is so full of grace that we have all received more grace than we can identify. It is a mighty ocean of grace that is found in God, and we frolic as children in the unending waves of His grace lapping up on the shores of our life.
- f. And this is what we see as we read about the life and ministry of Jesus in the rest of John's Gospel. We read of a grace filled Savior who gives grace upon grace to those he serves. In chapter 4 he engages the Samaritan woman in conversation so

as to point her to himself as the only water source that can eternally satisfy. In chapter 5, he heals the lame beggar at the pool of Bethesda as an act of sovereign grace. In chapter 6 he is moved with compassion for the crowds who need food and he miraculously feeds the crowd of 5,000. In chapter 8 he shrewdly saves the woman caught in adultery. In chapter 9 he heals the man born blind. In chapter 11, he ministers with compassion to Mary and Martha and then he raises Lazarus from the dead. In chapters 13-17, he interacts with the disciples in the Upper Room before his death by washing their feet and teaching them truths they'll need after his departure. And then, in chapters 18-19, he lays down his life for his friends to save them from their sins. In chapter 20 he powerfully resurrects from the grave and graciously appears to his followers to prove to them that indeed he is the Messiah. In chapter 21, he restores the disciples from their doubts and Peter from his betrayal as he points them to their role as witnesses for him. Each interaction, every word, every truth taught, every enemy confronted, every argument with the Pharisees won, every healed body and rescued soul – all of it is grace upon grace from his fullness.

- g. Beloved, is this your Jesus? Are you downcast and discouraged and disheartened? Are you caught up with the frustration of our current world situation? Are you hopeless about a present trouble and helpless under its weight? When has Jesus ever not been full of grace toward you? Run to the ocean of his grace and throw yourself into its every wave – grace upon grace. Will he fail to give you the grace you need? Hasn't he told you in your hour of need to come to the throne of grace, where this Incarnate Word, who is full of grace will give to you more grace? Hasn't he directed you in your weakness to lean upon his breast in full dependence and find that he has yet more grace for you? That indeed, his grace is made perfect in your weakness? Brother or sister, you do not need to shiver in the cold of the dark night of your lonely despair. Rather, with the key of this promise, unlock that prison's door and come bask in the radiating glory of this God of constant, unremitting, unending, unfailing grace!
- h. And this grace upon grace is given to us in a much more glorious way than the Law. Verse 17 is an explanation of verse 16. This grace upon grace that we know and enjoy is a grace that is much more glorious than the grace given through the Law. That grace given through the Law was given through Moses. And do you remember that scene? The mountain shook, the thundered clapped, the smoke covered the mountain – and the people were afraid. Moses was called up on the mountain where he received the Law – and the heart of it was engraved by the finger of God on tablets of stone. The law came through Moses in a gloriously terrifying, authoritative, and impersonal way. Now consider Jesus. Grace and truth came wrapped in the warmth, life, and human flesh of the Incarnate Word. Notice the key distinction here is found in the verbs. The Law was given, but grace and truth came to reside and dwell among us in Christ. And this grace and truth is evidence of his glory as the Divine Son. He offers to you a way to be made right with His Father and that way is marked by grace and truth. In order to

receive his grace, you have to know and believe the truth. This is the glory of the Incarnate Word.

III. His Preeminent Nature – vs. 15

- a. This glory is also displayed in the preeminent nature of the Incarnate Word. That is seen in verse 15 where John the Apostle quotes John the Baptist. John the Baptist's message about this Incarnate Word points to the preeminence of Jesus. John's message, loud and clear, was that this one who follows him is actually preeminent to him because he was before him. John the Baptist was born before Jesus and his ministry began before Jesus' ministry – therefore, he was before Jesus in that way. But his message was to tell everyone that Jesus is actually before him in rank and honor and preeminence. And that is true, John says, because this Jesus was before him. This is the Greek words again – *egeneto* and *eimi*. The Word came after – that's *egeneto* – but he was before – that's *eimi*. He pre-existed John the Baptist therefore he ranks before John even though he came after John. In other words, John the Baptist agrees with verse 1 – “in the beginning was the Word.”
- b. And the point is that this Word became flesh and we have seen his glory – in particular, the glory of his preeminence over all things – including the great Prophet, John the Baptist.
 - i. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. – Colossians 1:15-20.

IV. His Revealing Role – vs. 18

- a. And then in verse 18 we see the ultimate expression of his eternal glory fleshed out in his unique role as the exegete of the Father. John says, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.” He truly means that no one has ever seen God, and in the context, he means especially that not even Moses saw God even though God delighted in Moses and spoke directly to him. He never saw the face of God – as we read earlier in Exodus 33. But the only God – that is our *monogenes* word again – the only begotten God, or the one and only God – who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. In other words, there is one human who has seen the face of God and that is the Incarnate Word – Jesus the Christ. He is with the Father – in his bosom – in the closest of relationships with the Father. In other words, not only has he seen him, but he was as close as you can possibly be to Him. There was unhindered and perfect communion of relationship filled with love and unity and joy.

- b. And this one who is in that closest of relationships with God the Father – this one and only God himself – this Incarnate Word – he has come to make the Father known to us. He has come to exegete – that’s a good seminary word for you – to exegete the Father to us. He has come to explain him to us – to tell us the truth about Him and to expose the intricacies of his character and nature to us. And he can because he is in this closest of relationships with the Father as the Word of God. This is the chief expression of the Word’s eternal glory. Everything that he does and says is an explanation of the God who made us and of who we long to be made right with. This chief yearning of the human heart to know if there is a God and to know what he is like, is answered in the person and work of the Incarnate Word. This word for exegeting – or revealing something – is used in Luke’s Gospel too. In Luke 24:35, the two disciples from the road to Emmaus experience went back to Jerusalem to tell the others that they had seen the resurrected Christ – and as they were relating their story they said that he talked with them on the road and then he was known to them in the breaking of bread – he was revealed to them – he was exegeted to them. It is a word that is also used in the book of Acts in contexts where Paul is explaining to the Jewish believers the wonders that God did among the Gentiles through him. So, this word carries the idea of revealing something which was previously unknown, and when it is revealed it forever alters the life of the one to whom it was revealed.
- c. Friend – this is what Jesus is to us – he is the revealer of God to us. He is the divine light which hits the spiritual eye of faith and illuminates all truth about God, about you, and about the good news of salvation in Him. He is the only way to God. If you see him as he is revealed in the pages of this book, then he tells you that you have seen the Father – because the Word makes him known. This is why verse 1 starts with the title – the Word. He closes the prologue in verse 18 with an inclusion statement which reflects the truths of verse 1. Jesus is called the Word in verse 1 because he has come to make known the Father in verse 18. And he was with God in verse 1, and is in the bosom of the Father in verse 18. And he was God in verse 1, and he is the one and only God in verse 18.

Conclusion: Do you know this Word? Have you seen him with the eye of faith? Has your spiritual world been illumined with His revealing work? Have you received his grace upon grace? Do you look to him for all that is true, and in receiving truth from Him do you also know the fullness of his grace to you? This light is the life of all men – look to him and live!

Brother or sister, turn your eyes upon Jesus. Your hope in this life is found in him. Your growth from one level of holiness to another is found in Christ. Your strength to take the next step in your trial is found in Christ. Your joy which surpasses all difficulties is found in Christ. Your steadiness of confidence and true hope is found in Christ. Come out from behind the clouds of your ignorance and discouragement and bask in the pulsating rays of Divine light and heat in the person and work of Christ.

- “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. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” – 2 Cor. 3:18
- “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” – 2 Cor. 4:6