

# The Word became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us

Can you imagine sitting down to write one of the gospels? After meeting Jesus, traveling with him all over the map, witnessing miracles, listening to his incredible words, sharing meals and becoming his friend. And then living the despair of his arrest and crucifixion, followed by the incredible news of His resurrection. Then eating with him once again, understanding the Scriptures that were all about him and then seeing him ascend into heaven. After waiting for and experiencing the unleashing of the Holy Spirit and the miraculous birth of the Church and its explosion against all odds and persecution.

And now, you have a moment to sit down and write out these experiences. Where would you start? Well, each gospel writer had their different purposes, but John takes his readers back to the familiar Hebrew account of the beginning... when the cosmos came to be. And He makes some remarkable declarations in the first words of His gospel.

**"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."**

First we observe the peculiar title given to Jesus. John doesn't refer to Him as the Messiah, nor by the name given Him by Joseph and Mary. He is not referenced as the Savior, nor the Lord. He is called the Word.

What is a word? A word is a pointer. It is a representative of some real thing. I could use the word "Africa" and whether written or spoken, that 6-letter word is not itself actually the massive continent on the planet earth. But the word brings us to an understanding of that place. Without having to leave this place, the word points us to it. Then, using other words, we can discuss that place, without ever crossing the ocean and setting foot there.

A word points us to something real, but it isn't the thing itself. The Word points us to the deepest and greatest reality ever, and John makes it clear that the Word is also that thing to which it points.

The Word points.

Second, we see that the Word is described in the past tense. In other words, at the very beginning, the Word already had a past. The Word pre-exists "the beginning."

The Word points.

The Word is eternal.

And thirdly, John declares something that dramatically sets apart the Word from every other religious figure throughout history, and simultaneously focuses who the Word was.

The Word was both with God and was God. John doesn't waste time and unveils a mystery and foundational belief for his readers. In the Old Testament account of creation, it might seem that there was only one Almighty Creator God. But when we look closer we can also see the two other persons of the Holy Trinity: the Spirit (hovering over the waters) and now the Word, were also present.

The Word points.

The Word is eternal.

The Word is God.

I don't get to go into this with more depth as this is the substance of the Evangelical Stream which Pat will cover next week, but I need to give a brief explanation in order to get into the Incarnational Stream which is my topic this morning.

Jesus is the living Word. The Bible is the written Word. The Gospel is the proclaimed Word. These three gifts are the most precious gifts this world has ever received, but they are of no good to anyone unless we interact with them.

Jesus is the living word, but if you don't know Him, it is of no service to you. The Bible is indeed God's written word, but if you don't read it, it is rendered worthless. And the Gospel is the proclaimed word, which must be heard, practiced and declared for it to serve its purpose. With these three gifts we can recover the things our hearts lost and search tirelessly for, but we have to interact with them. Otherwise you will have nothing.

So we can either have everything, or we can have nothing. If you do not know Jesus, do not read the Bible and have not made the Gospel your way of life you have nothing. But, that can all change as these things are available to you for free (despite their great cost) even today.

And so with that background we come to the verse I would like to focus on today.

**"14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."**

This might be the most well-known verse referring to the Incarnation. And this morning we would like to open ourselves to the "stream of living water" which, like the other five streams, is modeled perfectly by Jesus and therefore, as disciples, imitated to the best of our abilities and with the help of His Spirit at work in us.

Specifically, I want to talk about three words: Word, Flesh and Dwelt.

## Word

I've already explained a little about "Word." As we read on, John makes it clear that he is referencing Jesus. In the creation account, how does God create everything? He speaks. Throughout the creation account we read things like "God said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light." It was through Jesus that God made everything out of nothing.

I mentioned that words are pointers. They direct us to some real and other thing. I remember quite vividly when someone explained to me that our lives are like vectors. Do you remember vectors from high school math and physics? Vectors represent a quantity which has both magnitude and direction. We use them to describe the amount of something, but also the direction which it is being applied (which ends up making quite a difference).

For example, velocity is a vector quantity that describes an object's physical displacement over time. We often mix the concept of speed and velocity, making them equals, but their difference is in the direction. A train can have equal speed, let's say 80 miles per hour, but two different directions, say north or south. We would say its speed is 80 miles per hour, but its velocity is 80 miles per hour northbound (or southbound), and the direction makes a significant difference when we are, say crossing a railroad track. If it is moving toward us, that is cause for caution. If it moving away from us, it does not represent the same danger.

So our lives are similar. They have both magnitude and direction. Our magnitude is based on several different factors, including our genetic inheritance, our place in history, our education and hundreds of different things. Some people have different magnitudes based on those differing factors. But in addition to the substance of our lives, we have a direction as well, and that makes quite the difference. Someone with a high IQ which is inwardly focused and uses such a gift for him or herself is simply smart. But someone with a high IQ that is outwardly focused and blesses others with that gift is considered a genius.

When we are born, we find that our direction is set, pointing us every which way but the right way. That is why Jesus begins His ministry instruction us to "Repent." To repent means to stop moving in the direction we have been, turn and move towards God, as we were meant to.

Jesus' life is also like a vector. The magnitude is unfathomable. As I meditated on these verses this week, I recognized that no one has been able to feel the full weight of the magnitude of Jesus. The weight of glory, as it were, is mind blowing. Do we realize what a treasure we have in Jesus? It is truly more than you can even imagine. Jesus' magnitude is great to say the least.

But what I really want to talk about is the direction of Jesus' life. Unlike us, Jesus' life always points us to the Father. In fact, He is the perfect representation of God. If we want to know what God is like, we can observe the Word.

## **Flesh**

The perfect representation of God the Father became flesh. With this choice of words, John paints what might seem like a very crude visual concept, and in doing so established some theological ideas which would be challenged in the first century up until today concerning the goodness of the physical realm.

In Spanish, the word used for flesh is "carne". It is the same word we use for "meat". John says here that this perfect Word through which God spoke everything into creation, now became part of the creation. It took on the very substance of creation and became a man which would then be able to interact with and on the same plane as its creation.

And in doing this, Jesus became someone we could identify with. He was someone, as John says at the beginning of 1 John, "which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands." The Word was translated into our own language so we could understand it.

This is where the word "incarnational" comes from. Essentially it means to take on meat, dress yourself in the substance of those you seek to love. For Jesus it meant to become human and visit creation. For us, it means to become like others and visit them on their home turf.

## **Dwelt**

But it goes deeper than just a visit. And that brings us to this word translated "dwelt." One major theme of the Bible is God's overwhelming desire to be with His children. We see it in the Garden of Eden before things went south. He walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. He was with them.

Then, after the fall, God rescues His people from slavery and then he gives them instruction to build a tent where He then resided among the people. That tent was called the tabernacle. It was the center of the Israelite camp wherever they went. It also determined their movements as they would look to it daily to see if they were to pull the stakes and move or stay where they were at.

Then, in the promised land, the tabernacle found a permanent place in Jerusalem and it was in the Temple that God's presence dwelt. Jesus came and made it clear that He considered Himself the temple. In other words, Jesus was the presence of God on earth throughout His life. But then He left, and the Church was born. The Church, made up of

billions of members, is the current residence of God on earth. As believers and disciples, the Spirit lives within us. Where we are, God is present. Where we go, God goes.

The word translated "dwelt" comes from the same word that is used in the Old Testament for tabernacle. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus dressed Himself in physical matter and "tabernacled" among us. He set up his tent right in our yard. He didn't just visit. He camped among us.

That is our perfect example of what it means to be incarnational. Jesus shows us the way. Unlike every other religion, we do not scale the mountain to reach up to god at the lofty summit. It is God who descends the mountain to be with us. To be like us. To tread our sod, suffer our pains, walk in our shoes and then save us.

And so, we imitate Jesus in His incarnation. We become the vessels which carry the unchanging truth of the gospel, translate it into the local vernacular, and live among those who need to hear it. We go to the lost. We become like them. We find them where they are at. In the streets. In jail. In hospitals. In bars. In places isolated from the Word. As our Lord Jesus did, we leave our comforts and meet people where they are at.

Our work with the shoe shiners began 20 years ago, and early on an intern explained to me one day that he was going to put on a mask and go shine with the fellas. It was novel and not something I had thought to do myself and I thought it was a good idea. But as I watched this intern, and then joined in his ways, and began to see the fruits of this method, I recognized it was not a novel idea at all. We were simply doing what Jesus did. Shoe shiners were not coming to churches, no matter how inviting and open their doors were. It was necessary for us to invade their territory, and when we did, the Spirit was brought into their presence.

A beloved pastor once said, "In order to build intimacy you have to waste time together." Isn't that true? Doesn't that remind us of falling in love? When you are dating, who really cares what you are doing? The important thing is with whom you are doing things.

And even more than that, doesn't "wasting time together" describe Jesus' time in ministry? Jesus wasn't rushing about giving his disciples the 12-step program and then pushing them out and bringing in a new set of disciples like some sort of disciple factory. He was patient. He taught the same lessons over and over. He allowed the disciples to be stumped by answering their questions with questions and making them chew on ideas and think. He ate a lot. We get snippets of meals when he would tell a parable or teach something, but 90% of the mealtime details are left out of our gospel accounts because no one writes out the details of time wasted together.

I am convinced that oftentimes we may have to put in 1,000 hours with someone in order to get a 10-minute window into their heart. There is no other way to access that window.

And so we have made it a priority to invade as much of their lives as we can. We work to get invitations to their homes. We jump at the opportunities to join them to mourn the death of their friends or family. We count it as strategic to be with them in their crises and suffering as well as to celebrate victories. We have stood in lines at the hospital with them as they waited for appointments. We have visited them in prison when no one else would. We have taken treats to them as they serve their mandatory one-year military assignments. We take them home when they are drunk. We walk the streets and pray for and with shoe shiners. We have them in our homes to make cookies and study the Bible.

We make it a point to waste as much time as we can with shoe shiners, because the intimacy we forge can open windows which have been locked shut by pain, fear, pride, guilt, and shame. It is amazing to see what God's presence can do in the lives of people which no man, woman, program, government, or philosophy can ever dream of doing.

But you have to set up your tent among them.

What does that look like in Elizabeth, CO in 2025? When we look at the people around us, are they like us? Do you find yourself always in socially comfortable circles? As a believer, do you "stay in your place?" Or have you taken your tent, hiked into foreign places and set up camp?

To live the stream of Incarnational life, we invade. We cross onto private property to camp. We do it to love others. We do it because Jesus did it for us, and now we have the privilege of walking in His steps for others.