

And the Word Became Flesh (Part 3)

John 1:14-18

December 24, 2017

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Tonight, and tomorrow, many of us will have the opportunity to gather with those we love and to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. I hope that you will intentionally set aside time to reflect on both the reality of the incarnation and its significance. We've become so used to the story. We've become so used to the truth that, I think, we can lose its impact. Think and remember this: that now, just over 2000 years ago, probably in the year 5 or 6 BC, a baby was born; a baby that was a real child just like, perhaps, your own children or one that you've held, babies you've seen, a real human child.

But that little child was also the eternal Son of God. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The One who inhabits eternity, entered into time. The One who created all things, entered into His creation, as we just sang together, and became a creature. The One, who in His deity, fills the universe; in His humanity, lay in a feed trough in the little village of Bethlehem. The One, who as God, is almighty; as man, became completely dependent on a teenage mother. If you're a Christian, you believe those truths. You believe the incarnation because the incarnation of Jesus Christ is at the very heart of the Christian faith. And to reject it is to reject the Christ of the Bible, the Christ of Scripture. It is to reject Christianity.

But while we embrace the truth of the incarnation, I think we need to admit to ourselves and to one another, that it is a hard thing for us to truly grasp. And the reason for that is because of the way we learn so many things, is to compare and contrast it with what we know. But that's impossible with the incarnation. It is utterly unique. There's nothing to compare it to. There's no point of similarity that we can make.

Throughout the history of the church, people have tried to illustrate what it was like for the eternal God to become flesh. Some of have said, it was like a king becoming one of his subjects; the perennial story of the prince who leaves the palace and becomes a pauper. Others have compared it to a king who leaves his throne to seek the woman he loves. Some have said the incarnation could be compared to you as a human being made in the image of God becoming an ant, or a worm, or a single-celled organism. I read a recent book by Sinclair Fergusson that was

trying to show what it would be like for someone, who is absolutely perfect in holiness, to enter a fallen world like ours. And Fergusson and coauthor said, “Image someone who has spent his entire living in the light and the pure air of a penthouse being forced to enter the smoke-filled basement and live out his life there among the worst of people. All of those illustrations have helpful points that they could make, but in the end, there is no perfect illustration of what it was like for the eternal Word to become flesh, because the scale of somethings is just too great to be illustrated. And that's certainly true of the incarnation.

So, we have to rely on the straightforward instruction of the Scripture. As we've been preparing to celebrate Christmas tomorrow, we've been studying what is the most concise and beautiful explanation of the incarnation, when God became a man, of anywhere in Scripture and it's found in John 1 where I invite you to turn again with me this morning. John 1.

Let me read for you John 1, verses 14 to 18. This is God's perspective of the birth of Jesus Christ - the divine perspective.

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testified about Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’” For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.”

In those five verses, John provides us with three crucial insights into the incarnation of Jesus Christ - when God became a man. John begins, and we began as well looking a couple weeks ago, at the nature of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It's encapsulated in those beautiful words that begin verse 14 - “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”. To really understand what that entails, what the incarnation is all about, you have to first consider what the Word was before He became flesh. And we did that. We went back to the first four verses of this magnificent gospel. And there, John identifies these unique characteristics of the Word.

I'm not going to take back through them carefully. Let me just remind you of what we learned there. We learned, in verses 1 to 4, that the Word was the self-expression of God. That's the very idea of the Word. He is the expression of God. He was eternal. He was eternally with God. And, in fact, verse 1 says, *He was God*. He was the exclusive agent of creation. Verse 3 says, *All things were made by Him and without Him nothing was made that has been made*. So, while He was the exclusive agent of creation, because nothing was made without Him, He Himself was uncreated. Verse 4 says He was self-existent - in Him was life and He gave life to everything and everyone. That's what the Word was before.

And then we noted, as we studied the nature of the incarnation, what He became. Verse 14 says, "And the Word became flesh". The word, become, means to come into existence. He already existed eternally as the Son of God, but He came into existence as flesh, as a human being. The incarnation is the story of the One who was and is eternally the Son of God continuing to be all that He had been but adding to Himself full and complete humanity. The Word became flesh. Body and soul, He became everything that you are except for sin.

And then the nature of the incarnation includes where He dwelt. Verse 14 says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Literally, He pitched His tent among us. He lived here just like one of us, with us. He was *Emmanuel*, God with us.

John gives us a second crucial insight into the incarnation. We looked at this - the witnesses of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. First of all, the witness of the apostles. Notice verse 14, John says, "And we [the apostles] [we] saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father..." We saw the glory in Christ that was exactly like what you would expect if He was everything He claimed to be. His claims and what we saw match perfectly and His glory, notice the end of verse 14, was full, was filled with grace and truth.

Verse 15, you had the witness of John the Baptist. "John testified about Him and cried out, saying, 'This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me [He came after me]'..." *He came after me in the time of His ministry. He came after me in the time of His birth, and yet, He has a higher rank than I do. Why? Because He existed before me. Though He was born after me, He*

existed before me. This is pointing to His pre-existence. John says his rank is so much higher than mine, that I don't have the worth and value to remove His shoes.

Now this morning, as we prepare to take of the Lord's table and very much appropriately for our celebration of Christmas, I want us, for a few minutes, to examine a third crucial insight that John gives us here of the incarnation. And it's the mission of the incarnation of Jesus Christ; the mission. Now in verse 15 we have John the Baptist's words as he gives his testimony. In verse 16, John the Apostle begins to speak again. And notice what he writes in verse 16. "For of His fullness we have all received...". That word, *fullness*, directs us back to the end of verse 14. You remember? There he said, we saw the glory of the incarnate Word "full of grace and truth". It is from that fullness of grace and truth that reside in Him, we have all received. Now with the words "we all", there in verse 16, John moves beyond the testimony of the apostles, and he moves to the testimony of all of those who have believed in Jesus. He said this is true of everybody (verse 12) who has received Him, believed in Him (verse 13), who has been born again. And in verses 16 to 18, John explains how we have all received (if you're in Christ how we have all received) of the fullness of His grace and truth, and that, that, was the heart of His mission. It's *why* the incarnation.

So, John here in these verses, tells us two reasons that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us; reasons at the heart of the incarnation, and reasons that should be at the heart of your celebration of Christmas, even tomorrow. Let's look at them together. Two reasons the Word became flesh. Number 1: to bring grace to all who will believe; to bring grace to all who will believe. Verse 16, "For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace." This is part of that fullness that we receive. Jesus brought grace to us. Now that immediately invites the question, why? Why did we need grace? Why did I need grace? Or let me put it very personally, why did you need grace? Why did you need the fullness of His grace? Well, the answer is right here in the context. You go back to verse 3 and you're reminded of the fact that we were created by Jesus Christ. Everything that exists was created by Him. He is the One who has given you life, yes through natural generation, of course, but ultimately, it traces back to Jesus Christ Himself. He made you. He sustains your life. He is your Creator. And yet, verse 11, "He came to His own, and those who were His own [people], [the Jews] did not receive

Him.” Verse 10 says, “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.” Not only did the Jews not realize who He was, but the world didn't understand it either.

You see, the reason we needed grace is, although He was our Creator, we, like the rest of the world, didn't know Him, our Creator. But it gets worse because verse 12 tells us that by birth, we were alienated from our Creator. Notice verse 12 says, “...as many as received Him [Jesus] [who believe in Him], to them He gave the right to become children of God”. What does that imply about those who have not yet come to believe in Him? That they don't have any right to be the children of God; that they are alienated from Him; that they are distant from Him. In fact, Paul even says that we were His enemies.

We have no right to be His children. Verse 13 tells us we also were spiritually dead, desperately in need of the new birth. We needed to be born by the will of God. We needed the new birth. Jesus tells Nicodemus about it in John 3. We were spiritually dead. Why? Because of our multiplied sins against God and His law. Verse 17, “...the Law was given through Moses...” God our Creator gave us His law and said *this what I demand of you. This is what I require of you.* And yet, we responded to God's law with sin and rebellion. We wanted our own way. We wanted to do our own thing and that sin. And we're all guilty of it and we desperately needed atonement - forgiveness for those sins. That's why in verse 29 of this chapter, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to Him and he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes [picks up and carries] away the sin of the world!” Those were the reasons we needed grace. All of those things were true. We didn't know our Creator. We were alienated from Him. We were not His children. We were spiritually dead. We needed the new birth. We multiplied our sins against Him, and we desperately needed forgiveness. We all desperately needed grace and that is exactly what Jesus brought.

Verse 14 says He was “full”. He was filled up with grace. What is grace? It is that quality in God that delights in doing good to those deserve exactly the opposite. Jesus was full of grace. And verse 16 says, “For [And] of His fullness we have all received...” The Word became flesh to bring us grace. I love 2 Corinthians 8:9. In fact, it was part of my prayer earlier this morning.

2 Corinthians 8:9 says this, "...you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich [that is with the glories of heaven], yet for your sake He became poor [that's a reference to the incarnation, that's a reference to His becoming man], so that you through His poverty might become [spiritually] rich." 1 Peter 1:10. Peter says, "As to this salvation [this spiritual rescue], the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you..." It's a reference to the coming of Jesus, and yet, it's not described as the coming of Jesus. It's described as the coming of grace because that's what He brings.

Jesus brought us grace. First of all, grace for salvation. Notice verse 16, "For of His fullness [literally] we have all received". John is referring to something that happened in the past to all believers. At the moment you were saved, at the moment you repented of your sins and put your faith in Jesus Christ, you received grace from Jesus Christ out of the fullness of His grace. This is how the Bible describes our salvation. Listen to Acts 15:11, "...we believe that we [in context, there, talking about the Jews; we believe that the Jews] are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they [Gentiles] also are." In other words, anyone who's ever spiritually rescued, is rescued through the grace of the Lord Jesus. That's your only hope as well. It's through His grace. 1 Corinthians 1:4, "I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus". But I want you to turn with me to 1 Timothy 1 because Paul shares his personal testimony here, and he talks about this grace of Jesus that he came to experience. 1 Timothy 1:12, he thanks God for the ministry, he thanks Christ, specifically, for the ministry that he has received, and then he recounts his personal history. Verse 13, "even though I was formerly a blasphemer [he blasphemed Jesus Christ] and a persecutor [of the church of Jesus Christ] and a violent aggressor [elsewhere in sharing his testimony in the book of Acts, Paul alludes to the fact that he used to, not only beat Christians and have them beaten, not only to have them put in prison, but he had them killed. He was a violent aggressor]." He goes on to say, "Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief." Now watch verse 14. Here's what changed- "and the grace of our Lord [that's a reference to Christ] was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners [to rescue sinners from the penalty of their sin], [and then he says] among whom I am foremost of all." You ever wonder why God saved Paul, why Jesus, on the road to

Damascus, brought this violent aggressor to be His apostle? Well verse 16 explains, “Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that [here's why Jesus saved Paul, so that] in me as the foremost [worst sinner], Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”

Perhaps you're here this morning and you're not a follower of Jesus Christ and you've wondered how he would receive you after all that you have done. Perhaps you too have blasphemed His name, taken it in vein, used it as a curse word. Maybe you have even ridiculed Him. How would He receive you? Well He saved Paul in order to tell you that He will receive you in His grace. Grace! If you believe in Jesus Christ, you have received grace for your spiritual rescue out of the fullness of His grace.

But go back to John 1 because we have also not only received grace for salvation, but grace for life. Notice verse 16 again, “...of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.” Literally, the Greek text reads, “grace instead of grace”. Some think John is saying, here, that the grace that came in the law has been replaced now with the grace that comes through Jesus Christ. And that's possible; that certainly fits with verse 17 in the mention of the law and the coming of Christ. And it is true that both the law and the gospel came from the same person. The pre-incarnate Son gave Moses the law. The incarnate Son gave His apostles the gospel. But, I think, the common interpretation of this expression, the one that's here in the NAS, is the more likely of it. Notice how it's translated “grace upon grace”, *grace upon grace*. Where does John get that reference? Where does he get that expression? Likely, it comes from Exodus 33:13. You remember where Moses says this to God. He says, “...if I have found favor [grace] in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor [grace] in Your sight.” *I found grace, let me find more grace*. That's the idea here. John means that Jesus Christ keeps on giving His people more grace on top of the grace He's already given them.

I don't know what troubles you entered this building with this morning, what difficulties and issues are in your life, if you're in Jesus Christ, though, I can promise you this - He will continually provide you grace upon grace; a continual supply of grace to everyone who believes in Him. Before one display of grace is finished, another one arrives. Like wave after wave, the

grace of Jesus Christ continually, relentlessly inundates the lives of those who know Him. Overwhelming grace that meets every need, whatever your need may be. This is what we get in Jesus Christ. Grace that is sufficient.

I remember reading, years ago, an article written by Charles Haddon Spurgeon (the great preacher of London back in the 1800s) and he was talking about that verse in Corinthians that says, “My grace is sufficient for you”. And he said, imagine back in Joseph's time, after the seven years of plenty when they had stored up all the granaries of Egypt with the seven years of plenty that God had brought on the land. And all of the storehouses are bursting with that grain. Imagine a little mouse standing at the edge of one of those granaries worrying about the sufficiency of the grain for him. Spurgeon said it's just like that for us to doubt the sufficiency of the grace of Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul ends his letters, five of them, with this expression, “The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you”.

How does such grace become ours? Well, John explains. In John 1:17, he explains. He says, “For [because, here's why, here's why this grace becomes ours] the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ”. Now for the first time in his gospel, John reveals the historical identity of the Word incarnate. Notice he says He is “Jesus Christ”. He is the historical man, Jesus of Nazareth, and He was the Messiah that was promised in the Hebrew Scripture. And then he has this point of contrast; an intentional contrast between the law of Moses, in the first half of verse 17, and Jesus Christ in the second half of verse 17. But don't misunderstand him. He's not saying that the Law was bad Jesus and the gospel are good. No! He's saying that the coming of the Jesus was a huge, new development in the eternal plan of redemption. The Law was part of that plan. God gave His Law to Moses. And that Law was good, and it served useful purposes. God's Law reveals God's will to us. It convicts us of sin. As Paul says in Galatians 3, it serves as a tutor to point us to Jesus Christ. But what the Law could never do was save us. In fact, look at John 7. This is what Jesus Himself says. John 7:19, He says, “Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet [notice this] none of you carries out the Law?” This is anticipating Paul in Romans 3 saying, “There is not one righteous, not even one”. He says, *none of you carries out of the law. Not one of you can earn your way into the favor of God by keeping His law because none of you has kept it.* The Law could never bring

salvation. But what the Law couldn't do, Jesus did. Grace and truth. God's goodness and His complete revelation to sinners, notice what he says in verse 17, “were realized through Jesus Christ”. John 1:17 *realized*.

The Greek word translated *realized*, is actually the word we've seen several times in this passage. It's the word *became* or *came into existence*. Now, clearly, John isn't saying that grace and truth came into existence with the incarnation. They existed before. Rather, he's saying that Jesus was the final and complete revelation of grace and truth, and more than that, He's what accomplished those things. That's why the New American Standard translator chose the word *realized*. The English word realized means to bring to reality. In His life and death and resurrection, Jesus brought God's grace into reality for us. He made it possible for God to show us grace. Listen, let me just tell you, that you're only hope and my only hope as sinners, distant from our Creator, is the fullness of the grace of Jesus Christ which all who believe in Him receive. What was the mission of the incarnation? To bring grace to all who will believe.

Secondly, the second reason for the incarnation, is to bring truth to all who will hear. Notice verse 18: “No one has seen God at any time...” Now Moses, you remember, saw God's glory but he didn't really see God. Exodus 33:20 says, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” In fact, God Himself is invisible. He's a spirit. No one can see God physically. 1 Timothy 6:16, “[God] dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see.” But John's not making a point here about God being invisible; not his primary point anyway. Rather, he's making the point that no one has ever fully and completely seen God's essential character; His essential being. So, who then can ever explain and describe God to us? Verse 18: “...the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate, is uniquely qualified to reveal the Father to us.

Do you see His qualifications? Here they are. Number one: He has seen God. *He has seen God*. Look over at chapter 6:46. Jesus says, “Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God [He's referring to Himself and He says]; He has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.” You know what Jesus was saying? He

says, I have seen God's essence. I have seen who God is. I have seen His character unlike anyone else.

Second qualification Jesus has to explain God; not only has He seen God, but He shares the very nature of God. Notice verse 18, chapter 1:18. He's called "the only begotten God". Now clearly, that unique expression refers to Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate. He's the only begotten God. That's a clear reference to His deity. Just to remind you, "only begotten" doesn't refer to birth. It simply means "only", "one of a kind", "unique", "specially loved". Jesus Christ is uniquely qualified to explain God because He is uniquely the same nature as God.

A third reason He can explain God is because He enjoys a unique relationship with God. Again, verse 18: "...the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father..." That's a old, antiquated expression. But it made sense in the first century. In the first century, typically, they ate their meals lying down. You probably won't do that tomorrow at lunch. But they would lean on their left elbow, with their feet behind them, right at the table. The next person, the special guest or their best friend would be lying next to them eating as well. And so, literally, it's like one person's head was in the chest of the next person; in the bosom of that person. That's the idea here. In fact, you remember in the upper room (John 13:23) it says there was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, John, whom Jesus loved. John's point, then, is that Jesus the eternal Word, enjoys the greatest relationship of intimacy with God. It's as if He's the One who always eats next to God, the closest of friends, the most intimate of companions.

But there's more. Notice for the first time, John identifies in verse 18 the relationship between the Word and God. It's the relationship of a father and his son. You see, no one is better qualified to explain God to us than His only, one of a kind, Son, who continually enjoys a unique, intimate relationship with Him. There is no one who knows the Father better. Because Jesus has seen God's eternal character, because He shares the very nature of God Himself, and because He enjoys this unique, intimate relationship with God, verse 18 says, "He has explained Him". The Greek word for "explained" is the word from which we get our word "exegete". During His earthly ministry, Jesus exegeted God. He was the exegesis of God. He explicated

God. He made God known. He forever answered the question: What is God like? How did He do this?

First of all, He did this by His life. Look at John 14. John 14:8, again, part of the upper room discourse: “Philip said to Him [Jesus], 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’” Here, Philip appears to be asking Jesus to do what Moses asked God to do: *Show me the Father's glory*. Verse 9, “Jesus said to him, 'Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” You want to know what God is like? Look at the life of Jesus of Nazareth. He says, *I exegeted God. I explained Him by my life. If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father*. You want to know what God is like? Read the Gospels. You see it in His life.

But He also exegeted God or explained God in His teaching; in His teaching. Let me show you several texts. Look at John 3:11. Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, we [and He's talking about Himself here, we] speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony.” Exactly what is it He's talking about? Look down in verse 34. Here's what He means. “For He whom God has sent [He's talking about Himself] speaks the words of God; for He [God] gives [has given the one He sent] the Spirit without measure.” No limits on the Spirit that Jesus enjoyed. He spoke the very words of God. Go over to chapter 7 and notice verse 15. Jesus had just begun to teach, verse 14: “The Jews then were astonished, saying, 'How has this man become learned, having never been educated?’” That is, He had the normal education of the time. He hadn't been educated by the rabbis. “So Jesus answered them and said, 'My teaching is not Mine, but [whose?] His who sent Me.’” *Everything I say*, Jesus says, *comes to me from the Father. These are not my words, they're His*. He exegeted God through His teaching.

Now, I love verse 16. I'm sorry verse 17: “If anyone is willing to do His will [God's will], he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.” That's a monumental statement. Jesus says, *Listen, if you want to know for certain that what I'm saying is true and is from God, it starts with a willingness to do it if you discover that*. And this is where people go astray. They want to be completely certain, themselves, before they're willing to

submit their will to God and say, *God, if Jesus Christ is Your Son, I will follow Him.* If you're willing, then you'll find out and discover that, in fact, He is everything He claimed to be. Go over to chapter 8; chapter 8:40: Jesus said, "...you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God..." Verse 47: "He who is of God hears the words [that I'm speaking, the words] of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God." You see, Jesus exegeted God by His teaching. He spoke the very words of God Himself. You want to know what God would say to you if He were here, read the words of Jesus. Read the words of His apostles.

What was the content of Jesus' exegesis of the Father? Jot this verse down. Think about it over the next couple of days. 1 John 5:20, "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true..." He came to give us an understanding of God so that we could know God. "...and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." This is why He came. He came to give you the truth, to give you an understanding of God so that you could come to know God.

Christmas is the celebration that the eternal Word, God's only Son, who existed in the most intimate relationship with the Father, took on flesh and dwelt among us. Why? For two great reasons, John says: to bring the truth to all who will listen, to reveal God to man, to exegete God in His life and His teaching. And secondly, to bring grace through His work on the cross to all who will believe in Him. That's what we celebrate tomorrow and that's what we celebrate today in the Lord's table.

Take a moment and prepare your heart as the men come.

Our Father, I pray for those here today, who still don't know you, their Creator, because they have never come to understand the one You sent. Perhaps they have considered themselves to have been searching for truth their whole lives. Lord, I pray that even today, You would bring them to see that the truth is only found in one place - in Your Son who spoke Your very words. And who showed us everything You were like; all that we needed to know about You in His life and in His teaching. Father, before this Christmas celebration is done, it's my prayer that You

would move them to read the Gospel of John; to see the truth that is in Jesus, and to see the grace that He brings. Father, may they come to know You even this Christmas season. And Lord, for the rest of us, most of whom do know You through Your Son, I pray that our celebration would center on these great realities, the meaning of the incarnation, and the reasons. And Father, now as we now take the Lord's table, bring our hearts back to what is at the heart of the incarnation - His mission; His mission to provide grace, grace for our sin through the sacrifice of Himself. Father, we pray that You would forgive our sins. We don't want to come to this beautiful, powerful, holy reminder of what He did for us while we're still treating sin lightly; or unwilling to confess our sin and to express to You a willingness to You to turn from it. And so, Father, each of us individually, in our own hearts, we confess our sin to You so that we can take of this in a way that honors our Lord's birth, His life, His death, and even His resurrection. Receive our worship, now we pray, in His Name, Amen!