

Believe: Why Jesus Came

The Word Made Flesh

John 1:14

Mark Vroegop

“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” (John 1:14).

I want you to think of the last moment when you said: “Oh man, you had to be there!” Now, I don’t mean that awkward moment when you are telling a story and it is losing altitude fast. We’ve all experienced that socially-uncomfortable situation. In that scenario, “You had to be there” is more an apology—“sorry I’m telling you this right now.”

What I’m talking about are those special moments in life that almost defy words. Maybe it was the beauty of a sunset over the Rocky Mountains, the laughter of friends enjoying a meal on Mass Ave, thousands of Purdue students storming the field with TylerStrong on their hearts, a beautiful wedding that brought tears to your eyes, the sound of a judge’s gavel “cracking” at your daughter’s adoption hearing, the singing of God’s people where you felt the presence of God, or a particular line in a sermon where you knew God was speaking.

Those moments are special because there is something other-worldly about them. It’s as though you stepped into a temporary realm of beauty, goodness, power, or love. Those moments are so incredible that at the time you may have found yourself speechless or saying “Wow!”

The Bible has a word for this. It is the word *glory*.

We’ll talk more about this later, but just think about the word *glory* for a moment. It is a word that combines beauty, attractiveness, honor, weightiness, and importance. The visual beauty of a sunset, the joy of friendship, the victory a football game that is more than a game, the radiance of a bride, the hope of adoption, the inspiration of singing, and weightiness of a sermon. All of these are moments that might be followed by “Wow!” They are moments where we see *glory*.

After a three week break, we are returning to our study of the gospel of John, and our text today is a place in the Bible where we see the lightning strike of *glory*. It’s as if John says, “You had to be here; you had to see what I saw.”

“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” (John 1:14).

This verse is a great distillation of very important biblical truths. This is a passage that tells us some critical things about Jesus, and there are sweeping implications for what it means to be a follower of Jesus. This is a passage that shows us the intersection between the presence of the Son of God and his power. We see his humanity and his glory.

Four Words Describing Jesus

I want to look at this critical text to see what we can learn about Jesus. Don't forget that the aim of John's gospel is to show you who Jesus is, what he says, and what he does, so that you would believe in him and have life in his name (John 20:30-31). If you are not yet a Christian, John's aim is to invite you believe in Jesus.

And if you are a follower of Jesus, listen carefully today, because what we learn about Jesus connects directly to how we are to live.

What does it mean that Jesus came?

1. Humility

The first reality as it relates to Jesus is the simple and stunning fact that he became a man. Or as John says it: "And the Word became flesh . . ." It's an incredible statement.

Now, you should note that John doesn't say "the Son became flesh" or "God became flesh." He says, "the Word." We've seen this title before. It is how John introduced his entire book:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:1-5).

When we started this series, I shared with you that the concept of "the Word" is meant to connect with John's readers. In the same way that "liberty" or "freedom" are words in our culture that have historical and weighted meaning, so it was with the concept of "word" in John's day. It represented the essence of the rational human soul and the principle by which everything exists.¹ If you are a *Star Wars* fan, you might think of this as the "force."

John takes this idea and embeds it with new meaning. He tells his readers that the Word is a person who was there at the beginning, was in relationship with God, was fully God, and was the agent behind creation. What's more, this Word was the light and life to mankind. It shown in the darkness, and the darkness was not able to overcome it.

¹ D. A. Carson, [*The Gospel according to John*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 114.

Take note how John starts his gospel by connecting the concept of “the Word” to power, deity, authority, and the revelation of God to mankind. It is a huge word with major ramifications.

And then he says, “the Word became flesh . . .” John is now connecting everything he has said about the Word to the person of Jesus. Everything in the previous verses were embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. This is important for four reasons:

- Although Jesus was a man, he was much more. He was God in the flesh. He healed, he taught, he rebuked, he died, and he rose from the dead because he was God. John wants you to believe this.
- In order for the death of Jesus to be applied to human beings, the Son of God had to become human. He had to be human in order to save humans (Heb. 2:14-15).
- Jesus demonstrated the true power of God—strength and redemption through weakness. The infinite took on flesh. The limitless embraced a human form. God came down.
- It elevates humility as a key element of true Christianity. Jesus didn’t just become human because it was the best way to bring salvation. He did so because it most clearly told us what God is like. And because it shows us what we are to be like.

The Apostle Paul picks up this critical concept in the book of Philippians:

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:3–8).

Humility is at the core of who Jesus is and what he did. The consideration of others is at the heart of Christianity. Pride is the polar opposite of what it means to follow Jesus. Humility is not only the means by which redemption was accomplished; it is the path of righteousness for all who believe in Jesus.

2. Intimacy

The second truth about Jesus that we find in this text is connected to his close proximity and intimacy with his people. The Word not only becomes flesh, but he comes and dwells among us. God in the flesh comes near. He lives among his people.

What’s remarkable about this statement is the meaning of the word “dwelt.” More literally the Greek word (skenoō) means that the Word pitched his tabernacle or lived in his tent among us.² John knew what he was doing when he chose that word. He was connecting the life of Jesus to the Old Testament model where God dwelt among his people through his presence in the tabernacle.

² D. A. Carson, [*The Gospel according to John*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 127.

In the Old Testament, the tabernacle had three functions. First, it was the place where God would come down and his presence would dwell among the people. Exodus 25:8 says “. . . let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.” The design of the temple, the structure of the camp, and the laws the people obeyed were all connected to this reality. The tabernacle and the temple were holy places because God was there.

The second purpose was redemption. It was on the tabernacle and temple property that sacrifices were made. And once a year, at Yom Kippur, blood was sprinkled on the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies for the sins of the people.

The third purpose was for God to reveal himself. Moses would go into the tent of meeting (before the tabernacle was constructed), and after he returned, he would share what God has spoken to him (Ex. 34:31-33).

The tabernacle model combined presence, atonement, and revelation. God came near. God forgives. God talks to us. Jesus came close. Jesus provided atonement. Jesus revealed the Father to us. That’s the ministry of Jesus.

Beyond the amazing connection to the Old Testament, part of the beauty of the incarnation is the closeness of Jesus to humanity. He travels with his disciples. He touches lepers. He talks to the outcast. He heals the sick. He goes to people.

We just finished our two week focus on sharing Christ with unreached peoples around the world. It takes money and people to bring the gospel to them. This year’s Christmas Offering is designed to help a strategic partner do the same with refugees—to go to them. That’s also why we are planting churches around Indianapolis. We believe that church should be personal, missional, and incarnational. We are called to go to where people live. That’s why we are planting another church in Pike Township in 2019. There are more unchurched people to reach in Pike. By putting another gospel-centered church closer to where people live, we increase their proximity to the gospel and their intimacy with a new church.

But I also hope you realize that this is the way every believer is called to live. We live out the life of Jesus as we take the gospel to where people are living. We “tabernacle” the gospel in broken marriages, to people who feel all alone, and to those who are battling addiction to substances or sexual sin. We tabernacle the gospel by walking with people through sorrow and by listening to the pain of someone who is struggling.

The gospel goes to people because Jesus went to us. The Word dwelt among us. He was close and intimate with the mess of our humanity.

3. Uniqueness

The next phrase in this passage helps us to savor the uniqueness of Jesus. Just consider the weight of what John says here: “we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father . . .” Imagine what it must have meant for John to write those words. Imagine the moments, the teaching, the healings, and just the look about him that made John write such words.

Once again, John is pulling material in from the Old Testament. The book of Exodus begins with God's people enslaved in Egypt. It ends with the glory of God filling the tabernacle and leading the children of God through their journeys. The glory of God is a major theme through the Old Testament.

That's why it is very significant for John to say, "we saw his glory." Now what does this mean?

Again, in the Old Testament "glory" was directly connected to the "visible manifestation of God's self-disclosure."³ In other words, glory is how the Bible describes what is indescribable. In Deuteronomy 5:22-25, God's glory was seen at Mt. Sinai with the fire, the cloud, the thick darkness, and the loud voice. The people were terrified. In Exodus 33:35, it is the cloud that covers the tabernacle such that Moses is not able to enter.

The word "glory" can be translated as splendor, grandeur, power, kingdom, praise, or honor. As I said at the beginning of this sermon, it is connected to the concept of weightiness or importance. Tim Keller describes glory as the kind of weightiness that displaces something else or creates an effect on everything. Glory takes all the energy in the room, all the focus, and displaces attention on all other things. Glory leaves you amazed and sometimes trembling. So, John is describing something other-worldly about Jesus.

John certainly may have had one moment in mind. Theologians call it the transfiguration. Luke 9 tells us that one night Peter, James, and John were with Jesus while he was praying. Jesus was joined by Moses and Elijah, and they got a glimpse of Jesus's veiled glory. But I think John has more in mind than just that particular moment. John 2:11 tells us that Jesus's first miracle—turning the water into wine—was for the purpose of manifesting his glory. The point here is simply that John and the disciples saw something divine through the person and work of Jesus.

But there's more. Jesus's glory was not just unique in itself. It was unique by itself. No one is like him. And that's because there is no one like him. That's why John said ". . . the glory as of the only Son from the Father." You see, Jesus possessed a powerful and unique glory that pointed to the Father's glory. Jesus's veiled glory was a marker toward what the triune God's glory is like.

In John 14, Jesus will say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (v. 6). But he'll also say, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (v. 9). The glory of Jesus is connected to the fact that there is no other Son. There is no other means of atonement. There is no other Savior. He is unique in his glory, in his redemption, and his relationship with the Father. Jesus is the only Son.

There is no one like him. That is how a person believes in the first place. They put their trust in Christ alone for the forgiveness of their sins. Jesus is far more unique than any of us realize. But he's also far more glorious than any of us even know. One day we'll see that for ourselves.

³ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 128.

4. Perfection

The final word that describes Jesus is connected to the way that John describes Jesus at the end of verse 14. John says, “. . . full of grace and truth.” This is how John captures the essence of Jesus and his glory. Or you could think of it this way: Jesus’s glory looked like the fullness of grace and truth.

Once again John is pulling in something from the Old Testament. When God met with Moses on the top of Mt. Sinai, this is what happened:

“The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...” (Ex. 34:6). Steadfast love is the Old Testament concept of grace. And faithfulness is connected to God’s truthfulness.

This is the essence of God’s glory—the abundance of both steadfast love and truthfulness. God abounds with grace and truth.

D.A. Carson says, “The glory revealed to Moses when the Lord passed in front of him and sounded his name, displaying that divine goodness characterized by ineffable grace and truth, was the very same glory John and his friends saw in the Word-made-flesh.⁴”

So, the perfection of Jesus was expressed in the full manifestation of grace and truth. That’s the glory of Jesus, the fullness of grace and truth.

This idea of grace and truth has captivated me for the last ten years. It informs a lot of how I think about the Christian life and church ministry. Years ago, I read Randy Alcorn’s little book entitled *The Grace and Truth Paradox*. You may have even heard us say about our ministry in Brookside “we want to build bridges of grace that can bear the weight of truth.” It’s taken from Alcorn’s book.

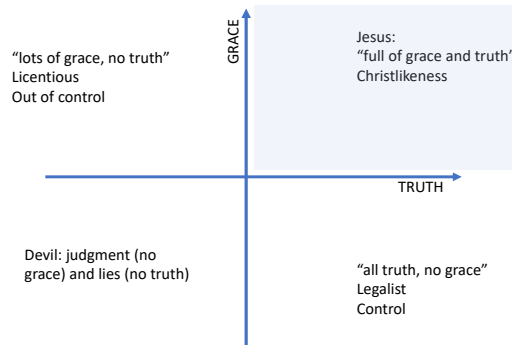
When you read the Bible, you see the fullness of grace and truth in Jesus’s life. That’s one of the reasons why we need to be regularly reading the gospels. And it is why our study in the Gospel of John can be so helpful. As you see what Jesus did, how he acted, and what he said we get a picture of what true righteousness looks like.

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 3 that the process of spiritual growth looks like becoming more and more like Jesus by the Holy Spirit:

“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).

⁴ D. A. Carson, [*The Gospel according to John*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 129.

So, if we are being transformed from one degree of glory to another, and if the glory of Jesus was directly connected to grace and truth, then it seems that the grace and truth paradox is what should mark our lives. Let me give you a diagram for how I think about it.



A few things to consider:

- All of us have a bias—a bend toward grace or toward truth
- Your upbringing probably tipped toward either control or out-of-control
- The most meaningful discipleship relationships are full of grace and truth
- The important thing is the balance of grace and truth
- Jesus was always full of both but didn't apply them the same way (e.g., woman at the well, Mary wiping his feet, rich young ruler, Pharisees)
- The key is to be growing more and more in the application of grace and truth

And when that happens you begin to see something incredible! You actually start to have the life of Jesus lived out in you. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, you begin to see real changes in how you think, what you say, and how you live. You begin to see the life of Jesus take residence in you. And that's amazing.

That is why Jesus came! His humanity, his proximity and intimacy, his uniqueness, and his perfection were for the purpose of rescuing sinners from themselves.

The Word became flesh to rescue you from your flesh. And when you see him like that and see him in you, there's only one word for it: glory.

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