

The Gift of Light

John 1:14-16

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We come to this portion of God's word as we continue in this series transitioning from advent to the Christmas season. We continue in the gospel of John in the first chapter looking at verses 14 through 16 as we look at the gift of light. John as a witness to the living Christ gives to us a testimony and witness to who the Lord is and to who the Lord was even as He came as a child in our midst. I pray that this word to us this morning will be deeply encouraging, deeply strengthening, and that the Lord by His Spirit would encourage and comfort you this morning.

Hear now God's word John 1:14-16.

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 bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

As we come to this section of John's gospel, this brief part of his prologue to his gospel of witness to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are given three very important words which are for us life and promise. The three words in these three verses are flesh, glory, and grace. For in His flesh, we receive the amazing grace of the Lord incarnate. In His glory, we're invited to see the fullness of God's glory in the face of Jesus and His grace because the fullness of His glory is grace and faithfulness. His flesh, His glory, and grace.

As we've been looking at together in this prologue, when John says, "the Word," he is referring to the Lord Jesus Himself that was God as God spoke and all things came to be. Now, God has revealed Himself not only in the word of His promise to the prophets and His word of promise to Israel, but He has also now revealed Himself in flesh. The word is Jesus Christ as he says here, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Here, John is describing the grace of God, that is the Lord Himself incarnate.

Here, what is interesting is he's talking about how this is God's superlative act of self-revelation, not in tablets of stone or in a cloud of presence as glorious as that was to the nation of Israel in the wilderness. It is recorded for us that the Lord descended in the cloud and gave to Moses the law, and as Moses went away from God's presence, his face shined because it had been in the presence of the glory of God. But even there, we learn that Moses was not able to look at the face of God. He wasn't in the presence of his flesh as Moses was in the flesh. Moses was only able to see a part of God's glory. But now, God has revealed Himself in a superlative way.

John has testified to seeing the actual glory of God in the flesh of a child. Here, he says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us," taking on human flesh and human nature. God has taken up residence permanently. He has dwelled in our midst. This is what we sing of when we sing the Christmas hymn, "Christ, by highest heav'n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord: Late in time, behold him come, offspring of the virgin's womb. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity! Pleased with us in flesh to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel." God with us.

This is important because it is a grace to us. It was gracious that God heard the prayer and desire of Moses to see God's glory. But God had to protect Moses from seeing the brightness of His glory, and He only allowed Moses to see the hind part of the robe of God as God made His presence known.

But here, what we see is that it is a grace of God that He took on our flesh. And as we come to the end of this year, are we not reminded of just how vulnerable our flesh is to sickness and death, to

suffering and trial, to discouragement and fear? This is the very flesh that God Himself, according to John's testimony, would be pleased to tabernacle, to dwell, to take up residence in human flesh.

It is a remarkable thing, but something which should in many ways bring us comfort. But it should also in some sense bring us expectant hope and also remind us that our God is not able to be tamed. He is wild in this sense. He will not allow us to put Him in a box. But He calls us to an expectant reality and hope that Jesus the Son of God was made man. The word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

Consider this as the Christian writer Frederick Buechner has in his book *The Hungering Dark* when he describes the incarnation this way. "And nothing is ever the same again. Once they have seen him in a stable, they can never be sure where he will appear or to what lengths he will go and to what ludicrous depths of self-humiliation he will descend in his wild pursuit of man." Buechner continues and says, "If holiness and the awful power and majesty of God were present in the least auspicious of all events, the birth of a peasant's child, then there is no place or time so lowly and earthbound but that holiness can be present there, too." And this means that we are never safe and that there is no place where we can hide from God.

If you are trying to hide from God, this is a word of invitation. Know this. We can never hide from God. Even the psalmist says, "Even if I put myself in darkness, darkness is as light to you." But friend, I say to you wherever you are, even with the few of us gathered in this room to conduct this service, God is present here for Jesus has come in the flesh and made His dwelling known. Whether you are in a nursing home or in a hospital bed or gathered in your living room or your bedroom or your car, whether you're with your family or you're by yourself, He has made His dwelling known. Because God has come in the flesh and the word of God made flesh said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you for I will send to you my Holy Spirit," what was to John as a witness of seeing the God of glory in flesh, we have received the promise by this same John as a witness that Jesus said, "Where two or more are gathered in my name, there I am also." Those who believe by faith, Jesus is present.

And this is both shocking and deeply comforting that He did not consider our flesh dirty or unworthy. He did not consider us too hard to reach for rather He came on a wild hunt for us. "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity! Pleased with us in flesh to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel."

I need this Jesus veiled in flesh. And I believe you do, too. And the glorious thing is if He was willing to be present in this way, how much more so according to His promise is He not present with us now?

But He doesn't just come to us veiled in flesh. John then describes this flesh as he says, "And we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." He says this flesh is God's glory. And I believe what this means for us is that John is using deeply biblical language to invoke very Old Testament pictures to say that God has tabernacled and dwelled with us in flesh, and that flesh is full of glory. Jesus had the glory of the Father, and He invites us to see this glory in the face of Jesus.

You might remember what we read earlier in this series when Paul declares to the Corinthian church, "For what we proclaim is not ourselves but Jesus Christ the Lord with ourselves as your servants for Jesus's sake, for God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus." When John says here that "we have seen his glory," John is referring to the glory of Jesus as he saw Him, as he witnessed the presence of God veiled in flesh. He says He was full of glory.

This is a witness written for us in this gospel of seeing God made flesh. As a disciple, he is witnessing to what God has done. What he is declaring is that God has made His "doxa," His glory, but also His "shekinah" glory. This doesn't just have a "doxa" in terms of the Greek. He's referring to a glory that stretches all the way back to the Old Testament. This is referring to the idea of the shekinah glory of His presence. What he's describing here isn't just an in fleshed dwelling. This flesh is full of glory. Jesus Himself is the glorious God of heaven and earth made man.

This is important because I believe as many commentators believe that John is referring to what transpired between Moses and God in Exodus 33. What's interesting is God appears to Moses by calling Moses out. Then He asks Moses to lead His people, and He asks Moses to be faithful to Him. But Moses says, wait a second, unless I know you are favorable towards me, unless I know that you go before me, I can't go anywhere. And unless the people can understand that you have been good to me, they're never going to believe my testimony.

And he asks God, will you show me your glory? And God responds.

"My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?" [ESV]

He's saying, okay, you say you're going to be here with us. Unless you go before us, and unless the people can understand that you are with us, nobody's going to understand that we belong to you. Show me your glory, Moses is saying.

And the Lord said to Moses,

"This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." And the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen." [ESV]

But even after just seeing God's back, as Moses went from the presence of God and placed himself before God's people, they could not even look at him without veiling their faces because his face and presence were too bright. All he could see was the back of God.

But here, in the fullness of time, God has appeared in flesh full of glory. We have seen His face, John says, the glory of God in the face of Jesus, the son of a Galilean carpenter. God has come, and He has come in glory in the flesh and made His dwelling known. This is what makes Paul's saying that we have seen "the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ" all the more wonderful. And John testifies that this glory has come.

That is a hope for us. We're coming to the end of the year. We think about new year's resolutions. We think about trying to eat better, living better, sleeping more, and trying to be healthy. We understand that our flesh is not very glorious. Although it can be quite beautiful, it is not always glorious. I know I don't always feel glorious at all, ever. And yet the beautiful thing is that God has said something about human flesh for the glory of God took up human existence, a human nature. And John invites us, yes, by faith. Although we have not physically seen the faith of God, we believe the testimony and are called to believe the testimony of John who did see it. This glory that Moses says, "Unless you go up before us, we cannot go," we cannot believe unless the glory of God has come before us. And it has, and now John testifies. But what is this glory? For John describes the glory when he says that it is "full of grace and truth." We just sang a few minutes ago, "O come, let us adore him." The fullness of God's glory is grace and truth.

Here, we typically translate the word "truth" as propositional truth. That is not what is meant here in the Greek, and it is not what John is trying to communicate. He is putting forth that God's glory is

full of grace, and that He is true meaning that He is faithful. Said another way, do you remember what God's response was to Moses's appeal as I just read? Lord, show me your glory. And how does God respond? He says, "I will allow my goodness to pass before you." His glory is full of goodness. And what is this goodness? It is His grace and His faithfulness that He is true.

Why is this important for us to understand that His flesh full of glory is also one full of grace? What we understand is that as Jesus would reveal Himself, not everyone would see His glory. Some would receive Him, but not all did. As He would present Himself and demonstrate His power in the performance of miracles, there glory was on display. But what we learn from the testimony of John and the other New Testament writers is that the greatest glory and faithfulness of Jesus is His cross. It is in His ultimate humiliation, the death of Jesus for our sin.

You see, what John is telescoping for us in the first verses of John 1 is that this one who came in flesh full of glory is one who is gracious and faithful to us even though we are desperately sinful and in need of freedom and redemption. What God understood is what we often are slow to understand, and that is because of sin we are locked in. We cannot reach ourselves up to God. We need God to come to us.

In preparation for this morning's sermon, I came across the story of the man named Jean-Dominique Bauby who was the French editor and well-respected journalist of *Elle* magazine. He was known for his sophistication and his passion for the industry of fashion. At the age of 43, he suffered a massive stroke. He would spend 20 days in a coma. But when he came out of his coma, he realized he could use not a single part of his body for the exception of one eye that could blink. He had to suffer through many different procedures because everyone believed that he was not able to understand what was happening to him. Internally, all of his mental faculties were all completely there, but he could communicate nothing for the exception of blinking one eye.

This would ultimately be told in the story of his life *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* which would become a film. And the reason why this story would be told and eventually become a film was because of what was only learned much later which is that Bauby suffered from what is called locked-in syndrome. This is where everything internally, intellectually, and emotionally was present and able to understand all that was happening to him, but he could not in kind respond, lift a finger, or indicate any understanding until one dear medical personnel realized in a communication in his room that Bauby could blink one eye. She then brought into the room a lettered alphabet and began to ask him finger by finger, and he could blink with his eye once to say yes. What became a few series of letters would become a paragraph, would become a book, and ultimately would become his memoir *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* in which he describes exactly what this was like.

Someone was willing to sit, to watch, and to listen, and to understand that Bauby was very much alive, yet locked in. Because of our sin, we were and are locked in. We need the faithful gracious patience of a God who came in the flesh full of glory, glory to the point of going to the cross to take on our sin and give Himself to death that we might have forgiveness and redemption.

This is the grace that God's glory is so full of in Jesus. And He is faithful. He is faithful to us because He has come and dwelt in our midst. He has shown us Himself and given us grace.

In this season as we remember and rejoice and celebrate that the reason why we look to a manger, to a peasant's child born to a Galilean carpenter from a backwater town, a child born that looks nothing like us yet was in the flesh whom we have not seen with our own eyes but only received the testimony that He came full of grace and truth, we have received the story and invitation. Do we believe that we are in need of a savior and redeemer? And do we know that the Lord Jesus has come in the fullness of His deity and His glory?

But then John says this. He says in verse 16, "For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." You see, it isn't just pointing to what Jesus would do in and through the cross. It's saying what is to us now as those who have received the grace of Jesus that this grace never stops. It is super

abounding grace. Literally translated, it is grace upon grace, super grace, grace super abounding grace after grace. And it is saying that God's favor, God's presence, God's glory has been turned towards us in God's wild pursuit of our hearts to restore us in a right relationship with Him, to know forgiveness and mercy and love.

This morning, I want to offer to you a prayer by way of application. This prayer is taken from one of the Anglican prayer books for the Christmas season. The prayer goes like this.

"Give us grace that we may cast away works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to life immortal."

This prayer is an opportunity for us to respond to this grace, super abundant grace, to say, Lord, we need your grace, the grace of your forgiveness, the grace of your Spirit, but also the grace to cast away works of darkness. We need grace to walk in humility. We need grace to turn towards others in love as you have turned towards us in super abounding grace. And we also need grace to walk in patient hope for the coming of the Lord.

We need God's grace to walk because we, too, are in a season of advent awaiting for the ultimate revelation of Christ who will come again to judge the living and the dead, and to give us grace that we might enjoy life immortal. But until that time comes, we are called to walk and to cast away works of darkness, to take on His marvelous light, to be Jesus's light drawings in the world in humility loving one another.

I close with this prayer as we come to the end.

"Give us grace that we may cast away works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to life immortal."

In the matchless glorious name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.