

The Word Became Flesh

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Date: 31 December 2017

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[0 : 00] Will you please stand now for the reading of the Gospel?

This is the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, as written in the first chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, beginning at verse 1. Glory to you, Lord Christ.

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 anything 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. There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through Him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

[1 : 07] The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him. Yet the world did not know Him.

He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

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.

For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, the only God who is at the Father's side.

[2 : 20] He has made Him known. This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, Lord Christ. Please be seated. Good morning.

Let me say, if you've never been here before, welcome. Neither have I. I've never been here before. But I have met a number of you previously.

I lived next door to Whitney. I lived in the basement of Charles and Sarah Moxley, and I've had the privilege of hanging out with Tommy and Dan.

And Deborah seems to me to be the one who makes everything work around here. So it's been great to meet her as well. As Tommy mentioned, I am on staff at Church of the Resurrection over on Capitol Hill.

Some of you have a history there, a past there. And I've enjoyed it. I've been there about seven months. And I'm on a three-year term of being there in preparation to do church planting.

[3 : 21] So my wife and I are new to D.C. We're originally from California and moved most recently from Sydney, Australia. We love it here. We actually, we're not cool enough to live in Brookland, but we live in Langdon, so we're like kind of close.

And we live there, the two of us with our giant black Labrador, Dylan. Anyways, it's great to be with you. Let's get into this sermon this morning.

I want to start by saying, without dogma, there is no drama. Without doctrine, there is no drama. We are innately seeking this story behind all stories. The question is not whether we will have a dogma, a story behind all stories, an overarching story, a creed, but which one.

In 2011, a philosopher at Duke University named Alex Rosenzweig published his book, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality*. His central claim in that book is that story time is over.

[4 : 33] He says that because physics and biology have taught us that once and for all, everything in the universe can be explained in terms of cause and effect, we are freed from this notion of a big

story, an overarching drama, a dogma.

This means, he says, that we're free to realize now that consciousness is nothing else but the outworking of processes in the brain. That people don't act freely.

That free will is an illusion. That we're determined by causes and effect. And that there is ultimately no reason for being moral other than that it has some evolutionary advantages to it, some survival advantages.

He says story time is over. He de-dogmatizes the world. To his credit, he's pretty candid.

And he realizes in the process of this that even to tell this truth, if you will, requires a story.

[5 : 41] And it's a contradiction that he acknowledges at the heart of his own account, that he himself has to tell a story of the progress and triumph of modern science and the story of a naturalistic evolution.

We are always looking for the story behind the story. It's unavoidable. And when we come to John chapter 1, verses 1 to 18, we arrive at one of the high points of Scripture.

I don't know if you can see, I have a really nice Bible, but it's fraying on these pages. This is, because this is really important stuff.

This is the high point, the telling of the story that is behind every story, the word behind all true words, the light of all enlightenment.

This text not only introduces Jesus Christ as a human being, but it makes the audacious claim that in Christ is encapsulated the meaning of the whole universe.

[6 : 44] It's dogmatic, it's doctrinal, it's rich. It introduces the Gospel of John, but even more than this, it's an invitation into the cosmic drama that is the Gospel.

It claims to be the true story. And as always, the proof is in the pudding. So let's listen together to the claims of this important text.

But first, let me pray. Father, thank you for speaking the world into existence in your word. Thank you, most of all, that that word has become flesh in Jesus Christ, that he has dwelt among us.

And we pray now that we would dwell in him and live new lives in your story. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Here's the first thing we see in this text, the first truth, the dogma that gives us drama, and that is that the universe is a drama with an author.

Life is a drama that someone else is writing. We have no choice but to acknowledge this authorship. Verses 1 and 2 read, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[8 : 07] There it is in the strongest possible terms, the assertion of divine authorship over creation. In the beginning, signals that we are going back, not just to the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in history, not just to the beginning of time, but to eternity, all the way back.

And if there's any doubt about how far back we go, the author says we're going so far back that we're talking about the reality that was with God and indeed was God.

It was the Word. In Greek, the term is the Logos. The Logos, the rational principle of the universe as the Stoics saw it. Or the Logos, the creative Word that God speaks in Genesis.

The Logos, the Word, the divine plot, the script around which God constructs the world. It's not just a spoken or written word, but rather the very self-expression of God.

As Martin Luther said it, the heart of God. His inner being. This means two things that we need to see. First is that God is Himself a speaker.

[9 : 28] He is communicative. He is author. Word. And the breath in which that Word is brought out. In Himself.

But second, it means that the purpose of all creation is just to give God a new avenue for the telling of the story, for the speaking of the script that He is.

It means creation itself is unnecessary except as the raw material upon which God writes the story, His Word, His script. As Calvin puts it, creation is *theatrum gloria Dei*, the theater for the glory of God.

And this is profound in its implications. It means that everything and every person has been created for the purpose of playing some part in God's story.

In Him was life, verse 4 says, and the life was the light of humanity. This is here the secret to unlocking the meaning of history.

[10 : 37] History is not a story of mere biological survival. It is not a story of upward historical progress or downward historical decay. It's a story of divine self-expression.

It's a story that, even if it remains hidden from us naturally, is the story that we are all living in. It's the thing that gives our lives the meaning that they have.

Isn't it amazing that even in a culture, in a city, in a world as secular as ours is, where we have tried formally to shut out the notion of transcendent meaning, that we still, all of us, live as if there really is some meaning to everything, as if there is truth and goodness and beauty.

The reason that is, is because, as verse 5 says, the light is shining in the darkness. And the darkness, even if it has not recognized it or overcome it, it is shining.

It is giving light to every person. Every person lives under the authorship and within this story, without even realizing it, without any hope of evading this reality.

[11 : 57] To talk in this way can sound hopelessly fatalistic to some people, as if to say that we are all props in God's drama and cannot be otherwise.

And furthermore, even more disturbingly, does this mean that if God is the author of everything, that God is also the author of rebellion? And the evil characters that reject His authority?

What can be said about this? I'd say, first of all, the notion that God is authoring all of reality is a biblical one. It's embedded in creation, where God speaks through the Word as we read.

It's embedded in this text. Jesus is called in Acts 3.15, the author of life. A couple of places in Hebrews, He's referred to as the author of salvation.

And I want to submit to you that authorship is the best way to think about God and His relationship to our world.

[13 : 03] But it's only a metaphor. It's not that God doesn't write stories quite as we do, but it's that we only approximate His authorship.

See, we cannot create stories where creatures truly come to life. Most fiction authors, though, I believe, will tell you that in their experience of writing novels, their characters do take on a life of their own, where they surprise them and create changes in the plot.

But what we see in the world here is that God can create characters who not only can love Him and partner with Him, but who can also speak back to Him, who can rebel against Him, who can militate against His purposes for them.

This is the mystery of the world that God authors in the Logos. There's considerable freedom in this script, and yet it is still enveloped in His sovereign authorial control.

And there are witnesses, the text tells us, verses 6 to 8, like John the Baptist, represented in John the Baptist, that call us to recognize God's authorship over us, to repent.

[14 : 25] But here's the reality. If we fail to heed those witnesses gladly, to see that we are characters in the divine drama, eventually we will realize that we are nothing but tragicomic props in the drama.

So again, this is the unavoidable fact that this starts off with, that we are in a universe that is a drama with an author to be created is to live under authority, authorship.

And we have no choice but to acknowledge this. It's unavoidable. But it's not only unavoidable, it is actually the best news that you could ever hear.

Why? Because this author, God, has written Himself into the drama. This is the second main thing I want you to see here. The Word has become flesh and dwelt among us.

This means that God's sovereign authorship over our lives is not only something we must receive, but that we can receive and announce with joy.

[15 : 37] See, the whole world was not only written as a script with God authoring it from the outside, but instead, in verse 9, we are told that from the beginning, the true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

Verse 14, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. What this is telling us is that God's authorial intention, the purpose of this all, was always to write Himself into the story.

And this is the most profound dogma of the incarnation, that is the most profound drama that lies at the heart of reality. The teaching that God, the Son, the Word, took on flesh and dwelt among us, that He intended from all time to participate in the drama of the world.

He didn't author characters that He hated or a world that He was neutral towards, but characters that He loved.

A world that He wanted to be part of. And so from the beginning, His purpose was to step in to live among us. What's even more astounding about this drama is the way in which God is willing to write Himself into this story.

[17:04] He thought to Himself, even if my characters turn on me, I will go and live with them and win them back by outloving their hatred.

I will give them the opportunity to be remade. And so verses 10 and 11 read, He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him.

He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. God the author knew that He was giving His human creatures the freedom to reject Him.

He knew that He was giving them the freedom to hurdle themselves into the abyss. And so He determined from eternity that He would go as infinite light into the darkest possible places that they could conceive.

Hell and death. And outrun them, and outstrip their rebellion, and banish the darkness with a light. An infinite light.

[18:14] And so He allows them, as the Gospel of John will reveal to us as we know so well, to grasp Him and kill Him, putting Him to death as their substitute.

He goes all the way in to their sin. And their death. And by traversing a path into the depths of our story of death, He opens a path up to us to come into His light and life, to join Him in this victorious, heroic story.

So we read in verse 12 that even though His own rejected Him, there is another possibility. He gave the right to become children of God.

Children of God. When we hear this news, this story, this drama told in this way, we can't help but wonder, why is it that everyone does not embrace this hero who would love us so much to write himself into the story and to outstrip the worst that we could possibly do?

Why is it that there are some who continue to insist on being anti-heroes? Why doesn't everyone believe and become a child of God?

[19:40] I mean, there's a number of answers that might be true of people that don't believe.

People in this room, perhaps. People we know, certainly. Maybe they think this is just too good to be true.

And that the world is ultimately meaningless other than the meaning they give to it. Or maybe they think there's an author who has just consigned them to misery.

Or maybe they believe in an author that has created the story but hasn't actually stepped into it on their behalf and has just left them to fend for themselves. Maybe they're afraid that coming under this authorship will mean not freedom, but bondage.

Maybe we will encounter all of these inexplicable rejections. Maybe. Maybe. But God's authorship doesn't preclude tragic elements.

But what I know to be true is that there are a great number of people all around us that have not actually even heard the story. Sure, they know things about Christianity.

[20:47] They have ideas and preconceptions about Jesus. But they have not heard the drama told in this way as a word becoming flesh and dwelling among us and outstripping our rebellion and offering us life and light and love.

And so before we consider all the reasons people might reject, we must be and speak words about this word.

We must be little lights reflecting the light. We must, as those who have the word living in us, make that word flesh in our daily lives, in our community.

Our author has written himself into the script. The word beyond all words has been made flesh and dwelt among us. He has come into the drama as the hero.

This is not just something we have to accept. We do because it's unavoidable. But it's actually the best thing that we could ever hear. And it's something we can receive and announce with joy.

[22:02] And here's what it does. Here's what it does and what it changes for us. The author's participation in creaturely life, it opens new possibilities for the drama of our lives.

The dogma that the word has become the flesh means that your mundane, flesh and blood existence can have a share in divine drama.

If you look at the second half of verse 14, you see the fact that the word has become flesh means that we see his glory. We can know it and believe it.

But the text doesn't stop here. It goes on after the parentheses in verse 15 to tell us that we not only see and recognize, but that we're enabled to participate in the being of Christ and the authorship that he is engaged in in our world.

The authorship of redeeming creation. Verse 16 says that from the overflowing abundance or fullness of Jesus Christ, the word become flesh, we receive grace in place of grace or grace upon grace as the ESV translates it.

[23 : 21] What is grace in place of grace? What is the grace that is superseded and what is the grace that takes its place? Look at verse 17.

The first grace is the law that was given through Moses. The law, the Old Testament witness represented by John the Baptist, the law is grace.

It's a revelation of God. However, the law was always primarily something directed to creatures. It was a communication of grace directed to them from without.

Written on stone tablets in the Ten Commandments. But then we see this other grace. It's not in discontinuity, but it's the perfection of grace.

And that is a grace that is so great that it can even be called grace and truth. The culmination of grace. And this is what comes to us in Jesus Christ. Not just a grace directed to us from God, but the grace of God Himself coming to dwell in and with us and opening up a new way of being in the world.

[24 : 32] Let me put it this way. The communication of God's Word to us in the Incarnation, it has become so personalized, so heightened, that it opens up radical new ways for us to enact the drama, to act as meaningful participants in the drama, both towards God and towards others.

In Jesus, the Word of God has been spoken so close to home that we can be saturated and filled by the very breath of God in which that Word is spoken.

We can be filled by His breath. That might sound weird, but it's a weird thing that happens in the Gospel of John in chapter 20 after Jesus has completed His work and risen from the dead.

He comes to His disciples and He appears to them and He shows them the nail marks in His hands and the wound in His side. And then He does this bizarre thing where He goes up to them and He breathes on them and He says, receive the Holy Spirit.

And they probably said, don't breathe on me. No, He says, be filled with the Spirit. Be made new. Receive my life and my light and my glory.

[25 : 55] Let it overflow to you and let it overflow from you so they can experience it not only in their lives, but they can extend it to other people. And so Jesus not only breathes on them but in breathing on them He says, as the Father has sent Me so I have sent you.

He gives them, He gives you the power to extend His forgiveness to other people. It's amazing stuff. By drawing near the Word and being filled with His breath which is another word for Spirit. Numa, Ruach in the Old Testament.

You are freed not just to be bit actors in the drama or tragicomic props but to be participants in the work that He's authoring. And I know how this might sound, this is all so grandiose, so elevated.

What does it have to do with my mundane life? As a housewife or a bureaucrat or a non-profit employee or an economist or a barista or a graphic designer, it has everything to do with it.

[27 : 03] In fact, it can revolutionize the way you think of your daily life. I mean, think about this. Jesus, even Jesus Himself, He had a really ordinary job as a carpenter.

He wasn't rich. He had a fairly small band of very ordinary followers. He didn't wield earthly power or have a bunch of money. He didn't have tenure at an Ivy League university.

He didn't have a public platform in the media. His life consisted really of small things. We think they're grand because we have them written down, but they're small things.

But they were done in the power of the Spirit and for the glory of God. As He communed with the Father, He was filled afresh with the joy and purpose and a sense of calling even in the midst of the mundane.

The mundane tasks, interactions with small, insignificant people. All of these could be transformed into expressions of the eternal drama that God is speaking.

[28 : 16] Now, I know you and I aren't the Word made flesh, but what Jesus is offering to us in the Gospel of John is an overflowing grace so that we can be little words in our little spheres.

This is what it means to share in Christ's life. It isn't primarily about the size or quantity of what we accomplish. It's an invitation to a qualitatively new experience in the midst of the mundane, to experience our work and our relationships as ways to participate in His work.

Maybe this isn't true of you. Maybe it's just true of the people that I hang out with down on Capitol Hill, but we all want to be so grand. We all think, if I can just accomplish this or get to this point in

my career, achieve these things.

But what Jesus is offering us is the opportunity to be an expression of His Word, to have a dramatic existence in the mundane, to participate with joy, to be full of life and light and love no matter where we are or what our situation in life.

I encountered this morning on the way here my Uber driver. She convicted me the way she told me about God's goodness and the way He had helped her when she was homeless and the way she just wanted to praise Him and I thought, she's probably fulfilling her calling in better ways than I am with more joy and more meaning in a lot of ways than I am right now.

[30 : 00] she's participating in the drama of God and I'm a pastor. It made me think I've got to learn to be so filled with the breath of life and the joy and life and light that in the little things I'm doing I can experience this drama.

So that's our text for this morning. In just a few hours you're going to go out and you're going to ring in a new year. If you're more focused and organized than me you might be making some really serious New Year's resolutions attempting in some way to author your life in advance and that's great in so far as it goes but let me encourage you first to seed the authorship of your life of your story to Jesus Christ in the attentiveness of listening to Him and responding to Him draw near and let Him fill you with His Spirit and direct you.

He is He is already resolved as your author to work in you and through you in unique ways. They're probably different than what you might author but they're far far better.

in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit. Amen. Let's stand together and let's make a confession of this divine drama in the words of the Nicene Creed.

Church of God, what is it that we believe? We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, all that is seen and unseen, and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father.

[32 : 08] Through Him all things were made. For us and for our salvation He came down from heaven. By the power of the Holy Spirit He became incarnate from the Virgin Mary and was made man.

For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day He rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory. For our sake of God, the Holy Spirit and approved of the Holy Spirit in prayer and both of his and of His and O■ Boston on all things normal.

Thank you.