

The Word Became Flesh

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[0 : 0 0] Our reading today that we're going to think about and spend some time on is this gospel reading from the Gospel of John. In the very beginning there, and there's a lens I want to think through it, to look at this through.

So let me ask you this question. Have you ever written a love note? Be honest. Come on. Have you ever written a love note? So, dear Poochie Pie, you are so great. Come on.

For most of us, I think that you've probably done it at some point. I know that I have. A good friend of mine that I grew up with wrote a very nice letter to Condoleezza Rice once.

He got a really nice reply with a framed portrait that was signed. If you haven't done it before, if you haven't tried it, I suggest you should.

I think it's a good thing to do. Send it to a loved one. Write a love note for a band member or someone that you really, really like. I think it's a good thing for this reason.

[1 : 0 7] I think that for most of us, love notes are the closest that we come to being real philosophers. Really. I think that's the closest we come.

And for this reason, I think that loving a person is a little bit like loving the truth. You have to talk about it for it to really make sense.

You have to talk about it for those words, for that love to become something higher. And that's a little bit of what's going on in this chapter of John.

John chapter 1 is what we're looking at. It's one of the most philosophical sections of the Bible. It uses a lot of language and ancient Greek philosophy in order to get across this basic story.

The one that we read just last week. The Christmas story of Jesus being born in a manger. This is sort of being processed through a philosophy kind of idea lecture.

[2 : 0 8] It's really deep. But at its core, I think, it's basically a love letter. It's basically on that spectrum, that continuum of love letters to philosophy.

Of loving something so much that you need to use higher and better language to say something important about it. Something really important. And it's important because what's underneath this passage, what's underneath this great talk.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. What's underneath that are some basic assumptions. One, that the highest thing that you can say is love.

And two, that the highest thing you can love is God. That's, I think, what's underneath some of what's going on here. What's driving these high words, this really deep stuff.

To think about this basic narrative that we all know and tell our children about Jesus being born to become one of us. So we're going to look at this. And there's a couple of ways that you can learn from God's Word in the Bible.

[3 : 1 4] One way is to ask the things that it wants to teach us in some specific sentence. What does it mean for us? Another way to learn from the Bible is to try to move like the passage moves.

And sort of dance with it. See how it wants us to move, to live. So that our lives, hopefully, by the end of this reflection, our lives can become a kind of love letter to God.

So that's what we're going to try to get into here. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, thank you that you have loved us so much that you have sent your Son.

It is hard to express what that was, but it is worthwhile to try to express that. Because you love us and have called us to love you also.

We pray that you will fill our minds with understanding and our hearts with love as we think about these words. Amen. So, as we try to move with this passage, I think there's a couple of dance moves, a couple of moves of our lives that I think that we can get by talking, by thinking about this.

[4 : 28] Here's one that kind of goes with the flow of the words here. Here it is. Christianity is a home for seekers and thinkers and philosophers.

Christianity is a home for seekers and thinkers and philosophers. Is that a little unusual to hear? Did someone forget to mention that to you on your entry paperwork when you were thinking about Christianity?

Do you sometimes feel embarrassed by churches and Christians and the Bible?

Do you feel embarrassed by these things sometimes? Do you remember maybe an undergraduate philosophy professor kind of pushing this criticism on you that you just don't really know how the Christian faith could deal with it?

Do you feel embarrassed by that sometimes? You know who doesn't feel embarrassed by that is the Apostle John in this passage. He loves to think deeply and to take all the resources of whatever philosophy and criticism are before him.

[5 : 42] Here's how he goes. He begins with this basic but profound idea that he had found in Greek philosophy back in his day in the first century A.D.

In the beginning was the word, this creative principle, kind of reason itself, the logos. Something that was the source of everything and made sense of everything.

Everything kind of flowed from it. And whenever we try to think rationally about it, we're partaking in this word, this reason, this logos. And when the Apostle John heard that, he said, yes, there's something there that rings true to this same message that I have received from Jesus Christ.

And there's something, there's a way of talking that works for me too. And not only does it work as a method of conversation with other smart people, this is something that can help us to understand our own message of Jesus better.

And so, and so, John picks that up. And he thinks even more deeply about the message of Christmas. The message of God becoming a human in order to save humans.

[7 : 03] He thinks in a different way about it. In the beginning was the word. And the word was with God. He gives it his own particular spin based on the message of Jesus.

And the word was God. This word, it will be revealed later, is Jesus himself. He was in the beginning with God. And all things were made through him. And without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life. If you have sometimes struggled, how can I possibly talk on the same level as these criticisms of faith and religious thinking that I hear?

How can I possibly think in that same way? Is there a way to have that conversation? There is. And the Apostle John is showing us one way.

People do it today too. Not only in classical philosophy and thought, but people do it today with modern and post-modern philosophy. One book that we pass around in our circles sometimes is by an author named James K.A. Smith.

[8 : 07] He wrote a book called Desiring the Kingdom. Works with a lot of modern thinking in the same way. How can this help us to think better about our own message while still being disciples of Jesus Christ?

This is not something to be embarrassed by. This is something that we actually need and can help us. In the beginning was the word. It goes on here.

More and more of this kind of thought. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Go down to verse 9. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

I didn't understand this kind of thing for a while. I read recently something that helped me from C.S. Lewis. He made this point that in the modern world we're sort of impressed by immensity.

The sort of big distances between here and like the closest star. How far away it is. How far we are from the center of the solar system. Sorry.

[9 : 07] How far we are from the center of the universe. And that makes us feel small. How could we be worthwhile? How could we think something really important with these great big distances?

We're impressed by that. And in a similar way, people in the first century A.D. had a very similar feeling. But they thought of it differently.

Because what they were impressed by was light. They looked up in the sky and said, The sun is so bright. The stars even have light that are shining down on us.

And yet here we are on earth and we have no light of our own. We seem so insignificant. It feels like nothing. And in the same way that we today, we try to comprehend, to get beyond this smallness that we feel.

By gaining knowledge over vast things. By sending things out into outer space. In the same way, in some metaphorical sense, the Apostle John said, Yeah, we don't have light.

[10 : 09] We feel insignificant. And so we need some kind of a true light. The true light from God in our hearts. This is how the Apostle John was conversant with the ideas going on at his time.

If you sometimes feel embarrassed, you're not sure if your own faith is able to hold up. I want to encourage you to press on.

Because this meditation here is something that uses these terms and brings us even deeper into Christian thought.

There's a great quote from one of the great scientists of all time, Johannes Kepler. He said that he was kind of doing this great work of astronomy.

He said, I am only thinking God's thoughts after him. He realized that in his work of thinking and processing, he was following after the thoughts of God.

[11 : 11] And that's why he had confidence in moving forward with knowledge. Knowing God does not cease thought, but inspires it. Just like falling in love doesn't end love poems, but only brings more and more of it.

In the same way, knowing God does not end the pursuit of knowledge, but drives it farther and better. Now, you don't have to be a philosopher, but you can be.

You don't have to be a seeker and a thinker and a skeptic. You don't have to be those things, but you can be. And we need you.

We need you in what we are doing in this community. We need your part in this whole process. Just like a love poem. A love poem does not replace the actual experience of being in love.

And yet, being in love is so much better for having love poems. Have you ever received a love note from someone? You know how much better that makes the experience of being in love.

[12 : 22] In the same way, again, theology, philosophy, debate, big ideas. That doesn't replace actually knowing, the experience of knowing God.

And yet, knowing God is better, clearer, more deep. When we are able to have those things in a helpful way. We need you in this community, if that describes you.

Because it is not only knowing God that we are after here. Like we have some kind of game of ideas we're trying to get to, to eventually solve God.

No, in the same way, in verse 12 it says here, But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he has given the right to become children of God.

God came to us and we can receive him and become his children. It is not simply that we come to know God, but that he knows us. He has come to us. And because of this, this path that we've walked together is worthwhile.

[13 : 24] It's not impossible. We can do this and talk about God together. So, Christianity is a home for seekers and thinkers and philosophers.

It works in this passage, in the Bible itself, and it works in our own lives. And there is something else, though. Because, of course, what we're doing here is not simply some kind of a, I have a cool idea club.

There's something more to what we have going on in our community. This is the second movement I want to get from this passage here. The second movement is this.

The highest use of words is in worship. The highest thing that we can do with our words is in worship.

The kind of simple, basic things that we have to offer that are tied up in our time and the messiness of our lives that we offer to God in worship catches them up in eternity.

[14 : 26] And we can encounter the presence of God. Eternity and time meet for us in worship. That's deep and powerful, and it's crazy to think about.

So, all of these things that we're saying, how do we know that they're not just another page of philosophy? How do we know that it's not just a greeting card platitude, like God helps those who help themselves, or something like that?

How do we know that it's more than that? Again, let's go back to the passage. Verse 14. It says, This all really would, everything we're doing here, this really would just be highfalutin kind of stuff if it had not actually happened.

This really would be just kind of another crash course in ideas if God himself had not actually become man.

If Jesus had not been born into the world, become incarnated in flesh. If time and eternity had not actually met in the person of Jesus Christ, what worth would all of this be?

[15 : 42] It would not be worth very much at all. Instead, though, our worship really is powerful. Our worship really is a meeting of time and eternity, a place where we can encounter God because God himself met time and eternity in the person of Jesus Christ.

And you can see how, even in this sentence, these deep, these powerful descriptions of God, the word became flesh and dwelt among us, it sort of bleeds into worship itself.

And we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. Continuing in verse 16.

For from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. There's a flow into worship.

Because as God kind of elevates our words to think great things about him, whether or not we're philosophers, whether or not we're people who kind of spend all of our time thinking of new ways to say things, all of our words find their highest use in worship.

[16 : 54] That's what's helpful, I think, for whether it's the thinkers and skeptics and doubters and philosophers among us, or the homemakers and businessmen, the accountants, the priests, the administrators.

For all of us, our words, as in this passage, eventually will find their purpose and their highest meaning in worship. That doesn't mean that we will always walk around singing praise songs, but there is sort of a gravity and flow to all of these great thoughts about God.

And not only thoughts, the way that God has impacted our lives, because the highest thing that we can say is love. That's why we talk about it. And the highest thing that we can love is God.

There is a flow of our words toward worship. Let's make that a worship of God in Jesus Christ. So when you talk to your wife, let me ask you this.

Are you using words that will encourage in her worship? When you chat with your friends, ask yourself, how can I help this conversation veer in the direction and flow of worship, of praise to God who gave us this great time?

[18 : 17] When you wake up in the morning tomorrow, offer your words for the day as a sacrifice of worship to God. In this sort of flow, this continuum of kind of basic love notes that we write to a deeper understanding of God, to worship of him.

Sometimes this gets cut up in our lives. We don't know how it all fits together. We don't know how all the pieces link up, either as ideas or as experiences. We don't know why our aunt passed away.

We don't know why we lost our job. We don't know how these things fit together. And yet we see that if God really became flesh in Jesus Christ, then in our worship we can meet God.

And so we come back to that again and again. When we doubt, when we have trouble putting the ideas together, that is why Christianity is a home for philosophers and seekers and thinkers.

Because you can continue to come back to the presence of God in worship. That's why Christianity is a home for all of us. When we doubt, when we have difficulties, we can continue to come back to worship.

[19 : 36] Here when we gather on Sundays, daily as we pray, as we offer our lives as sacrifices of praise to God, will you offer your words tomorrow and in this week as a sacrifice of worship to God?

I know that you may not be, you and I may not be philosophers, but we are lovers. We are people whose words veer toward worship.

Let me just remind you again today that the word became flesh. The word became flesh and dwelt among us because he loved us so much.

Jesus Christ loved us so much. So let's let our love become words and become worship to God in our lives with each other and in our lives in this week.

So let's continue to pray. Let's pray here. We'll be right back.