

John 1:6-18

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Date: 16 June 2019

Preacher: Bing Nieh

[0 : 00] From John chapter 1, verses 6 through 18, on page 981 in the White Church Bibles. I'm reading it John chapter 1, verses 6 through 18.

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 he came to bear witness about the light.

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 all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he was given the right, that 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.

[1 : 17] 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, but only God, who is at the Father's sight. He has made him known.

This is the word of the Lord. Amen. This is the word of the Lord.

We pray that Father, we hear the words of the prophet Samuel. Speak for your servant peers.

And so Father, we come to you. The living God. A speaking God. One who reveals and discloses himself to us.

[2 : 38] And we pray that in obedience and in faith and in willedness, we would hear the voice of the Lord. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The year was 1869. English biologist Thomas Henry Huxley coins the word agnostic in one of his articles.

It's comprised of two Greek parts, which simply means without, and gnosis, which means knowledge. In Huxley's words, it simply means that a man shall not say he knows or believes that which he has no scientific grounds for professing to know or believe.

The term agnostic was largely coined with an anti-theological sentiment and since has become a self-identifying term for a growing segment of irreligious people here in North America.

People who profess that whether or not God exists is not the issue, is ultimately unknowable. The existence of God is frequently debated, but the Bible does not enter into this debate at all.

[3 : 59] It does not engage or entertain the philosophical musings that intrigue us. Instead, it assumes the existence of God and presumes that he has always been.

I speculate that in our day, the existence of God is not the issue. It is the knowability of God that is the issue. The fact that God exists is irrelevant, but the moment someone asserts that they know God, the conversation intensifies.

For example, the debate over extraterrestrials or aliens is one conversation, and it's a conversation that you possibly may or may not have had, but it's an entirely other conversation if someone you know claims to know an extraterrestrial or an alien.

And I don't mean to trivialize the point, but this is probably the feeling that surfaces when you and I enter into conversation with a neighbor, a colleague, a classmate, or a loved one.

They're puzzled. Because when we assert that we actually know God, it changes the conversation altogether.

[5 : 21] It's as if we are sane, we know an alien. For this morning's passage, this is the heart of the matter. God not only exists, but he is knowable. You see that in verse 18.

Verse 18 announces to you and I, the reader, that no one has ever seen God. The only God, or in other translations, the only Son, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

At the heart of the Christian faith is this true, that God not only exists, but he is knowable. He is knowable.

I don't know the circumstances in which you arrived this morning. I'm not sure where you are regarding faith. But my hope this morning is that you leave with this sense that God can be known and that is good news for you and I.

John the writer asserts that God can be known in two ways from our passage this morning. God is known through witness and word. More specifically, firstly, God is known through human witness and secondly, God is known through the incarnate word.

[6 : 42] God is known through human witness and God is known through the incarnate word. Firstly, God is made known through human witness. After such a grand opening in these first five verses, one expects Jesus to be introduced.

Instead, we're introduced to a man named John. Interestingly, he's not even the John who authors this gospel. We have to derive that it's the John the Baptist later on from the 25th verse of the first chapter or the other gospels.

It's quite a different opening from Mark and Matthew who actually disclose their subject in the opening verse of their gospels. It's about Jesus.

And here it is. We actually don't get Jesus' name until the 17th verse. So as not to mistake in John the Baptist into being the embodiment of the divine light that's mentioned in verse five, John the writer, John the apostle writing, repeatedly tells us that this John is not the light source.

He simply bears witness to the light. If verses seven and eight are not clear enough, it's reiterated again in verse 15 and again in verse 32.

[8 : 01] As a matter of fact, whenever John the Baptist emerges in the gospel, he exercises his divine role of bearing witness to the light. He was not the star of the show.

He was not the sun in the solar system of the gospel narrative. He in and of himself had no source of light in himself. Instead, he was a reflection of the sun's light.

He was to be to Jesus as the moon is to the sun. His light was a derived and a reflected light. He was one who bore witness to Jesus.

And we need to know his purpose. His purpose was not only to bear witness in such a way, but his witness was to be an instrument in God's hands so that, did you catch this?

Jesus, the wording is noteworthy, but he came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe. There's that word.

[9 : 03] If you have your scripture journal, circle it. It's the first of 98 occurrences in the book of John. That all might believe through him.

His life was to be about making Jesus known in a convincing fashion. His life was to lead others to believe. His life was a signpost that was supposed to point to Jesus.

His mission, as we'll find later on in the gospel, was to make himself very little so that, in order to make Jesus very big, God would be known through this human witness.

And incidentally, it's not only John the Baptist's purpose to witness so that all may believe, but it's actually John the writer's purpose as well.

Since you have your Bibles open, I want us to read almost the conclusion of the book. Early on in my graduate studies, I had to learn to read books quickly.

[10 : 09] And someone said, it's important, this is how you read a book. You read the introduction and a conclusion. If there's anything you like, you go back and read it. And that's actually that's been very helpful.

And so we're going to do that. We've read the introduction and I want us to turn to the conclusion, chapter 20. Particularly verses 30 and 31.

John chapter 20, verse 30 and 31. It reads this, Now Jesus did many other signs of the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book.

Verse 31, But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

So here you have it. Two human witnesses attesting to making one aim, one goal, one purpose so that the reader may believe.

[11 : 20] Literally, at the front end and the back end of the book, two Johns bear witness with the aim of bringing to believe all who engage in this gospel, witness gospel.

They are not the only ones as we'll find out in the coming months that bear witness, but they are the bookends of this gospel. Well, John the Baptist and John the Apostle are saying the same thing. They want us to believe. And they want us to believe. They are human witnesses that testify to the fact that God can be known.

That God can be known. And you see, today, the nobility of God is still attested to by human witnesses, is it not? It should not be.

I mean, human witnesses today should not be equated to the witness of John the Baptist or John the Apostle who fulfilled their unique roles. But history attests to the significance of human witness.

[12 : 22] Coincidentally, on this day, I can attest that the most significant figure in my formation of faith was my father. because I not only heard the gospel transmitted from his lips, but I saw whatever faith embodiment of it that he attempted to carry.

And I would like to think for many of us, the role of human witness has been indispensable to our believing. The role of witnesses forges the legitimacy of our faith.

One of the undeniable facets of Christianity is the widespread testimony of believers give to this transformation. Forgiveness and reception of life. You'll see it in the page of this gospel.

You see it in the living letter of people's lives today. You see it in a Brandon Hoffman. You hear it as the schoolmakers lead us in prayer.

You see it in the step of faith the Morissettes are taking. And yes, they may be for professional development or it may be for leisure, but the gospel undergirds all of us.

[13 : 29] And they will attest to the knowability of God that accompanies them in all of life's living. God is made known through human witness.

And we'll see a lot more of it in the life of John the Baptist next week. But secondly, and for the remainder of our time I want to dwell on this. God is made known through the incarnate word.

God is made known through the incarnate word. Human witnesses are certainly important to God being made known. But the supreme and perfect means of God being made known is asserted in verse 14.

The word which opened up the gospel in verse 1. Now we have resurfaced in verse 14. The word and the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only son from the father full of grace and truth. Here is perhaps one of the most outlandish assertions in all the Bible.

[14 : 41] The word who is a fun name at this point who stood outside of time above the creative realm decides to enter into human history.

And in this moment God's relationship to humanity and humanity's relationship to God forever changes. All of a sudden human beings can hear, see, and know God in ways never before possible.

The theological term largely derived from this verse from this chapter is coined incarnation which simply means that God clothed himself with humanity.

He became in this moment both God and man. He didn't become more one than the other. He didn't possess various modes. He wasn't a transformer like he was God in this moment and then human in this moment that at all times he was both man and God.

It's worthwhile singing the Christmas hymn veiled in flesh the Godhead seat. Hail the incarnate deity pleased as a man with men to dwell Jesus our Emmanuel.

[15 : 58] And he's identified in verse 17 as the person Jesus Christ the one who makes God known. It is noteworthy that the phrase translated he has made him known is the root of the English word exegeted which simply means maybe interpreted.

Exegesis is the science of the interpretation of texts. One commentator puts it so helpfully Jesus of Nazareth is the invisible God's authorized exegete and exegesis.

God's authorized self-interpretation and self-explanation. See as you and I know a biography is a story of the life of a person by another person.

An autobiography on the other hand is a person's self-explanation and self-interpretation. Jesus the eternal word of God in the flesh is God's autobiography.

If you want to know God if you want access to his thoughts if you want to know his actions if you desire to know his desires you only Jesus makes them known.

[17 : 28] The word that God the Son exeges God for us. In Jesus you have the autobiography of God. God is made known through the incarnate word.

Now the question you and I ask begin asking at least in this introduction or this prologue of John's gospel is what does Jesus make known? Well there's a whole host of things.

John begins to see them in the prologue in the introduction. Well let me tell you about some of these things that I will revisit in my gospel. He is life and you will find later in John 10 he is the abundant life.

He is light. He is not only the light he is the light of the world. He is glory. He is truth. And all these will be revisited and elaborated upon.

But what John highlights exclusively in this first chapter in this portion of the text is God's revelation of grace and truth in Christ.

[18 : 41] From his fullness the Bible tells us in verse 16 we have all received grace upon grace other translations grace in place grace or grace on top of grace or grace in exchange for grace.

The law was given through Moses grace and truth came through Jesus Christ and the emphasis in this opening is on the grace of God given in Jesus. It's noteworthy not only because it's mentioned four times in three verses but it's magnified by the fact that John doesn't mention the word grace grace after verse 17.

For the next 20 or so chapters grace doesn't come up. Now that isn't to say there aren't hints of God's grace it isn't to say that there aren't traces of God's grace but the unique mention of the word here four times and that's it causes us to later for a moment.

This is what this passage brings that is unique to the rest of the book. Grace is being emphasized. And how do we come to define it?

Well the definition of grace that you and I may have grown up with runs along the lines of it's God's unmerited favor. It's receiving something that we simply don't deserve.

[20 : 00] And is that the working definition we have here? The apostle in verses 16 and 17 will help us define it and he takes us back to a significant incident in our Bibles.

He is stitching together two scenes that pave the way for understanding God's grace. Being students of the Bible there are a few places that you can probably come up with where individuals appear to encounter God face to face.

One is Isaiah 6. It's where the prophet sees the Lord seated upon his throne and he beholds the train of his robe and he is completely undone.

But if you reach further back you may recall this scene in the book of Exodus. Exodus chapter 33 to be precise. 33 and 34.

And if you have your Bibles I encourage you to turn there because it will help us define this grace that is disclosed in Jesus. In summary Israel had been graciously delivered from the oppression of Egypt and were being led into a new homeland.

[21 : 17] They were a special people that God had set his affection upon. And as they traveled the book of Exodus documents for us they faltered and they committed idolatry in chapter 32.

And in chapter 33 of the book of Exodus the judgment of God comes upon them and God pretty much tells Moses he's like hey you go ahead I'm going to hang out back here go on without me. And Moses pleads with God he says no God I'm not going anywhere we as a people can't go anywhere if you don't go with us. And so Moses pleads with God to continue with his people and he asks for a sign he says how do I know how do I know you're coming with us and he boldly asks in chapter 33 verse 18 Moses says hey I'll paraphrase a little bit Moses said please show me your glory and God 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 I will show mercy of whom I will show mercy but he said in verse 20 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 the cleft of the rock and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed you shall not be seen so Moses seeks to behold God face to face his desire was to gaze into the face of God but the Bible tells us explicitly that none could see God's face and live so Moses was only able to catch the afterglow or the afterburner of God passing but as God passed God provided assurance

of promise by proclaiming his name and the character he would manifest among his people 34 verse 6 the Lord passed before him and proclaimed the Lord the Lord a God merciful and gracious low to anger abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness keeping steadfast love for thousands forgiving in iniquity and transgression of sin but catch this

John picks up on his backdrop and he asserts this what Moses heard in chapter 33 and 34 John says we saw do you see that you see that right in John chapter 1 verse 14 Moses heard the glory of God in these divine attributes in his character his gracious character mercy loving kindness steadfast love forgiveness justice and John says we saw in Jesus grace for

[25 : 00] John is God's self disclosure and his grace is now being poured out now to a degree that had yet to be experienced it was grace upon grace grace in place of grace the glory that was heard once has now become glory that was now seen well let me illustrate it this way my eldest daughter for the past month has been exchanging letters with her similarly aged cousin in California their letters are adorable they write about shared interest books they are reading activities they will engage in while together I watch her read the letter she receives with giviness and I watch her craft her letters with joy and excitement and as we enclose the letter and stamp it what is represented in the envelope are her gracious expressions to her cousin stickers clothes affection even kisses that are unseen you see the letter is a manifestation an extension of her personality her human disclosure truth but I can tell you this it holds nothing it will hold nothing to that moment on

July 4th the afternoon of July 4th when we touch down in Northern California and they behold one another face to face through Moses a gracious law was given written like this letter but in Jesus embodiment the full glory of God is not written it dwells with his people the law was a gracious written word that was an extension of God himself Jesus is the gracious embodied word who is God himself to rephrase Augustine I know that's dangerous the law was gracious and truthful the son is grace and truth well the phrase announces the exceeding fullness of divine grace it is the idea of one way being followed by another constantly being replaced by a fresh one grace upon grace if you've ever had the opportunity to stand on a coast whether the

Atlantic or the Pacific it's gorgeous to look out there it's all for a whole host of reasons and as one stands there there is one certainty the waves never stop never ever stop they continue after one wave crests another will follow regardless of time of day regardless of season regardless of weather conditions regardless of where you stand the waves billow and roll in and here is the picture of grace that John wants to give to you and I the grace that is received in Christ this is what the Old Testament writer states where the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases his mercies never come to an end they are new every morning greatness is faithful as one because every single morning the waves roll in and they go in and they come and they never stop they never cease the arrival of Jesus is this bombardment this onslaught of the goodness and kindness of God it is the relentless lavishing of undeserved anger and you ain't sitting here you go do you know why Jesus comes to in your agnostic you see him in the media whether he's portrayed well or poorly you hear of him in the news you meet people that claim to know Jesus why this is the grace of the Lord Jesus regarding you wave after wave after wave after wave saying you are mine you belong to me I am your light I am your life and I will save and preserve you this is the grace of God what if you may be wearing noise can't bring headphones and you don't hear anything but he's after and he's coming because that is the nature of his grace in Christ well am I done as this goodness and favor are received the recipient is given a status change verse 12 this is not a marital status this is not a student status this is not a visa status this is not an employment status more specifically according to the text this is not earthly human status familial lineage or a human accomplishment that secures a new status this is a rebirthing process when one receives the grace of God in the Lord

Jesus their status changes it's not something you will under your own strength for the emphasis in the text falls upon reception you see in the verse that's a lot right who did not receive but to all who did receive the word being emphasized is a reception receive do not read this as achieve the text reads but to all who did receive him it does not and cannot read but to all who did achieve him Christ is not something earned Christ is one that has been given and therefore received this underpins all of Christian theology the reception of Jesus as the revealed grace and truth of God this is Jesus filing before his father if he did taxes he's adding another dependent put another one on there add another son add another daughter add another beneficiary for whom

[31 : 53] I will save spare provide for keep the same preserve and share my inheritance with this is the outlandish promise of the Bible God would do something unimaginable in becoming a human to

secure something unimaginable for you and I it's a fairy tale like it's like a fairy tale in so many ways except that it is true and the tragedy the text points out is that the reception is not universal the word actually comes into the world verse 9 and though the world was made through him it did not know him instead of reception the word is met by rejection he came to his own world the world which he made was rejected more pointedly he came to his own people ethnic Israel and was rejected and this rejection is characterized by unbelief and unbelief will play the villain throughout the gospel of John and though as we prayed as the schoolmakers prayed for us this morning though darkness is present and very near in verse 5 it's still verse 5 gives us hope that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it

God is made known through human witness John the Baptist John the Apostle modern day John God is made ultimately and perfectly and finally through his incarnate word Jesus Christ Nazareth may God be known by all who are assembled before before