

The problem of God's glory

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[0 : 0 0] Father, we confess before you, maybe, Father, I confess before you that pride is this thing I see as a problem in others more than I see it as a problem in myself. And Father, many of us can confess the same thing.

We see pride as a problem for others and not for ourselves. We ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would gently but powerfully minister to us this evening, that you might help us to see us as we really are, but gently, Father, in such a way that we will run to Jesus, that we might know him, that we might receive grace from him, grace and power to repent and to amend our lives and live lives that bring you honor and glory.

And all this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. So, one of the things which is a little bit, more than a little bit different about our service tonight is I show some videos throughout the service because we have kids here, there's no child care, and I'm terrible at telling kids stories, even though I have a whole pile of kids myself.

My wife was really good at that. It somehow skipped me. And so we're just going to intersperse our little bit of reflection upon John 1 by looking at some videos. So, we're going to begin by watching a video called Four Types of Christmas.

He talks really quick. You might not get it, all the things he says, but it's just sort of a simple, interesting way for us to begin our reflection on Jesus tonight.

[1 : 4 0] Andrew. When I was in university 100 million years ago, actually just the 70s, there were still lots and lots and lots of Marxists at the university.

And I don't know if you know this about Marxists, but it was held by Marxists for a long, long, long, long, long time that Jesus never existed, that it was just stories that were made up.

And I don't think, I mean, you might find a few people on the internet who think that the stories were all made up today. But even the most skeptical scholars have to recognize that not only in what we now would know of as the New Testament is there lots of evidence that Jesus actually existed, but in fact, Roman and Jewish and Greek historians also made reference to Jesus, and there can be really no doubt that he existed.

And therefore, if he existed, he had to have been born. I mean, one of the things is that Christians don't believe, like Krishna, that he just sort of pops down out of nowhere, a funny color and all of that stuff.

He obviously had to be born. And the question is, well, what does it mean that he was born? Is there any type of significance to the fact that Jesus was born?

[2 : 5 3] And so John is one of the writers of the early biographies of Jesus. We have four early biographies of Jesus, all of them written within the lifetime of many, many eyewitnesses.

It's very interesting. I was reading that. Most modern commentaries and scholars would say that John was the last of the four biographies of Jesus that we have. But I was reading a commentary this week that was written in 1860.

And that commentary writer argued that John's Gospel was written before the year 70 because he makes reference to certain places still being around that were all destroyed in the year 70 when Rome destroyed Jerusalem.

But be that as it may, John is writing this introduction to Jesus. And here's, if you have your Bibles, it's John chapter 1. And John makes some very, very outrageous claims about the person of Jesus, whom we are celebrating today.

We're not celebrating money and we're not celebrating the darkness. And we're not, I'm not wearing a garish sweater. I'm just wearing a black sweater. And we have some cheer and everything like that. But we're of those four times of Christmas we gather here to remember Jesus and his birth in a humble manger.

[4 : 17] And we're going to sort of look at that story again in a moment. And it's very interesting that the way that John begins to introduce Jesus is that he first starts thinking of very, very, very big things.

In verse chapter 1, verse 1, he says, And we've talked about this over the last couple of services.

And this is just a very clear, I mean, it's a completely crazy claim on one level. And the crazy claim is that Jesus was God.

We'll just, we'll continue. Just jump down to verse 14. Remember, verse 1 again, 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. And then in verse 14, it says, And the Word became flesh. And dwelt among us.

[5 : 26] And we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. So this text is making a very, very momentous claim. That what we see in the stable in Bethlehem, when we hear that story, what we see when we talk about Jesus' life, John is claiming that this man, there's no doubt that he was a man, that he's completely and utterly and fully God, and at the same time he's completely and utterly and fully human.

Two different natures in one person at the same time. And a lot of us have a hard time getting our mind around it. And just as we sort of think about that, we're going to look at another video, which tells some of the story of Christmas, but in a very surprising way.

So I find that a very moving video. And one of the things I, I mean, it's just so moving, I think, to see it.

But one of the things which is so clear in that video was that the woman who was profoundly disappointed, they don't tell you, but she might have known when the baby was still in the womb that it was going to be a Down syndrome child.

And whether she found out then or whether she found out when the baby was born. And she has to deal with her profound disappointment that it's not the baby she wanted. She wanted a different baby, a better baby.

[6 : 49] And the baby that she got just disappointed her. If you could put up the first sermon point, Andrew, that would be very helpful. As Andrew puts this up, just the, you know, in some ways if all you do is remember the scripture text, and I have been very successful, and the scripture text is, and the word, that's a very, very subtle term that John uses to describe the second person of the Trinity.

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.

And John's talking about Jesus, and he's saying, 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.

And the problem for many of us is, is that if you read the gospels, it doesn't seem like Jesus has very much glory. glory. And in fact, none of the things, none of the Bible stories feel like there's very much glory in them.

And, because, you know, if you think about it for a second, I still haven't said that point, but you can see it. If you think about it for a second, I was thinking about this a little bit all week. Like, what would be the different things that would happen in my life if I even had a tenth of the power of God?

[8 : 18] Not even a tenth, like a millionth, a billionth of the power of God. If I just had more power, well, I'd have more money. I'll be honest, I would have more money.

If I had God's power, I would give myself more money. I'd love to spoil my kids more, and my grandkids, and be more generous to the church. And, you know, frankly, I'd probably like a nicer car, and cottage, and, you know, I'd probably just start off by saying if I just had an extra \$10,000.

But after I got that \$10,000, I'd probably say if I only have an extra \$10,000. And after that, I'd probably want an extra \$10,000. And, you know, the other thing about me, and I may be just a very bad person.

In fact, not maybe. I am a bad person. I'd be proud if I said I was the worst person here. So I'll say that I'm not. One of you folks are the worst person here. Come here and be insulted.

You know, that's one of our mottos. No. You know, the other thing about it is people wouldn't disrespect me if I was like God. Like, they might say something. They might even say something snarky, but I'd get them.

[9 : 25] Like, I'd put them in their place. And not only would I put them in their place, I'd make sure everybody knew that they were in their place. That's what I would do if I was God. And I'd probably be better looking.

And I definitely would get rid of my wrinkles like if I was God. And, you know, if you go on and on, if, you know, dang it, the other day when it was snowing, there was this person going 60 kilometers an hour on the Queensway.

And because of the snow, it was so hard to get around them. They'd be gone. If I was God, they'd be gone. I would just move that car off to the side. They'd be gone. I could go on and on.

But here's the thing. That's what I would do if I had even a tiny bit like God's power. And, and, and I would definitely want people to think a lot highly of myself as well if I, if I was God.

Like if I had to sort of force to change your minds to make you think that I was smarter, wiser, greater, better looking, just more, I would do that because that's what I would do if I was God.

[10 : 32] And, you know, most of us don't think about this a lot, but the Bible has this very, very interesting way of explaining human beings. And this is one of the ways, it's not right here in the text, you'd have to go through a whole pile of scripture texts, but the Bible teaches that knowingly or unknowingly, I always seek my own glory.

And I write the word I down there not because you can all go home and say, boy, George only seeks his own glory, must be sucked to be in his church, but so that if you're writing your notes down, that's what you would say as well.

Because the Bible claims that we human beings, we, we always want to be thought well of, we want to be successful, we want to be recognized as being successful, we want to be recognized as being right, we want to be recognized as being in the right, we want to be recognized as being like the most right person in our family, the most right person in our school, the most right person in our neighborhood, and we want that and we want that.

And the Bible has a very, very interesting type of psychology around it that when we're successful in some small way in doing that, what happens is we provoke people. I mean, don't you hate it if you have a boss that thinks she's better than anybody else?

Like, doesn't that provoke you? Like, if you're married to somebody and you think that they think they're the best person in the family, doesn't that bug the heck out of you? So if we're successful or think we're successful at being the best, we provoke people.

[12 : 14] And if we're failing at it, if our life is messed up and things aren't going well, then what the Bible says is it isn't that all of a sudden we're not seeking our own glory.

We still are, but we're a failure at it. We suck at it. And so what happens to us in that situation is that we envy people. And in fact, the implication of the Bible is it might very well be that at work, you envy people because you don't think you're doing as well at work as other people, but at home you might provoke people because you think you're better than other people, or it might be the other way around, and we go back and forward.

And the Bible says that the human problem is that knowingly or unknowingly, I always seek my own glory. If you could put up the next point, Andrew. You know, this is all trying to help us to understand this simple part in the Bible where it says, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen as glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth.

And what the Bible would suggest about your problem and mine is that because I seek my own glory, I cannot recognize God's glory in the creation, the manger, or the cross.

Because we would just make things so much more powerful and so much more dramatic. And so, you know, when we look at this story, and it's like a very romantic story nowadays of Jesus being born in the manger, but when we think of him in the cross, when we read the different things, what John is saying is that all the way through, if you were to go and read the rest of John's Gospel, and if you were after reading John's Gospel to go read Matthew, Mark, and Luke, what you should understand is that in everything that Jesus does, well, what does he say here?

[14 : 09] 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. That everything we see in Jesus is revealing the glory of God.

Everything we see about Jesus is revealing the glory about God. Andrew, if you could show us the next video. Today, after my morning service, I was driving home, and I brought communion to somebody who's just got out of the hospital, and I stopped at a Starbucks that I go to on a regular basis to get a coffee.

And I asked the barista what she was doing for Christmas, and I got a two-minute rant about how much she hated her family.

And I felt so helpless. I really didn't literally know what to say to have somebody just vent about how they hated their mother and their father and their siblings, and it was just very, very hard.

And I said a prayer for her later on. I've said some other prayers for her. But I guess, you know, if I could go back in time, because I'm not always very successful when I have conversations like this, and maybe I'll have time at some other future time to have a few words with her.

[15 : 38] One of the things I would say to her is that, because she knows I'm a Christian, is that God knows how crazy and messed up our lives are.

Like, he knows that. It doesn't offend him. And it's precisely because of that that he came for us.

The hard part, one of the many hard parts about the Christian faith is that when it says here, and the word became flesh and dwelt among us, it's interesting, the word flesh, in Paul's writings when he uses the word flesh, it usually means our sinful nature.

But in John, when he uses the word flesh, it almost always, it's the same word, but he uses it with one of the other meanings that the word has, and it means weakness. It means weakness.

It's a way of referring to how frail human beings are. How we never know when the diagnosis might be that we have some illness or some cancer, something that can just strike us down in the midst of all of our plans.

[16 : 50] We can feel like we're masters of the universe, but we're really very frail. And so when it says, and the word became flesh, it's saying that God, the Son of God who created all things, became weak when he took on our human nature.

And he dwelt among us. It means that he sojourned amongst us, that God came and entered space and time. He entered our world.

And it says we have seen his glory. Glory is the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. And it's hard for us to see that glory. It's hard for us to see that glory when he's just a baby in a manger, sort of ignored.

And it's hard for us, especially to see that when he's dying upon the cross. And I think one of the hardest parts about the gospel, and the more I read the Bible, the more clear it becomes to me, and the more I realize I have such a hard time really believing and accepting it.

And I'm so, so glad that it's not about my ability to be able to think it all the time, that when I put my faith and trust in Jesus, when I put my hand out to his, he takes my hand and holds on to me and he will never let me go.

[18 : 06] And he will let me go even though I believe and help my unbelief. He knows when I have doubts. He knows when I forget. He knows when I don't remember. But the thing about the Bible, which is so remarkable, is that Jesus does everything that has to be done for us to make us right with God.

and I contribute absolutely nothing. Like, if I could go back in time and I had the space to speak to that barista, I would go back and say that to have to live with so much loneliness and so much anger and so much pain, you really need Jesus.

And don't ever think that you have to sort yourself out before you come to Jesus. Because Jesus knows everything about you and still he loves you.

And his making you right with God is something that he does 100% and you do 0%. In fact, if you could put up the next point, Andrew, that would be very helpful.

It offends me that God would save me in a way that brings me no glory. You know, because it would be really nice if I could say, well, yeah, I mean, I know I got saved by grace by Jesus, but it's also because I'm so good at preaching.

[19 : 38] Or it's also because I'm such a good husband. Or it's also because I'm such a great dad. Or it's also because of this. Or it's also because of that. But Jesus knows our every weakness and he knows everything about us and he knows that we can never make ourselves right with God and everything that has to be done to make us right with God is done by Jesus in his life and in his death.

And all we can do is receive what he has done. Next point. So what John is saying is that the word made flesh, that means God, made flesh, lay in a manger, hung on the cross, and was laid in a tomb.

That's what John wants us to know. What we celebrate today and remember today is that God, the Son of God, becomes a human being. And it is God, the Son of God, lying in a manger.

It is God, the Son of God, who speaks to us when we read the Gospels. It is God, the Son of God, who dies upon a cross. It is God, the Son of God, whose side is pierced and whose blood comes out.

Next point. He humbled himself to death so that by faith I will dwell with God. See, it's such a wonderful thing here in John 14.

[21 : 06] It says, John 1, 14, 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.

That Jesus, God, the Son of God, who is dwelling with the Father from all eternity, he leaves dwelling with the Father, setting aside his glory and prerogatives and splendor and his appearance as God, his might and his majesty, and all of the things that would just overwhelm us with his glory.

And remaining fully God because God can't stop being God. He takes, he strips himself down to everything except the fact that he's got all of his appearance. And he takes into himself our human nature.

And he doesn't take into himself, you know, a beautiful body or an unbelievably, the strongest body or a superhero body, but a normal, frail, weak body.

And he dwells among us. And he suffers all the trials and temptations that we do only without sin. And he dies on the cross for us so that when we put our faith and trust in him, we will dwell with him today and in all eternity.

[22 : 18] He dwells with us that we might dwell with God. And the path for us to dwell with God goes right through the cross where all of our pretensions of glory and all of our pretensions of pride are all completely and utterly done away.

Final video, please. I want you to stand. Please stand. Just bow our heads in prayer.

Amen. Father, we give you thanks and praise that the gospel is not good advice about how to be more successful.

We give you thanks and praise that it's not good rules that we have to follow. We give you thanks and praise that the gospel is not good rituals which we have to practice.

We give you thanks and praise that it's not information about good institutions that we have to belong to. Father, we give you thanks and praise that the gospel is good news, that it's news about what you have done that we cannot have done ourselves, of Jesus, of God, the Son of God, being born in Bethlehem, taking into himself our human nature, living the life that we could never live, and dying a death on the cross whereby he took into himself and on himself the doom that we deserved and offered to us the destiny that he deserved.

[23 : 58] Father, we thank and praise you for this great love that he has for us, that he has done everything to make us right with you, that all we can do is, with empty hands and no glory whatsoever, put our hands out to you, that you would take our hand as our Savior and as our Lord, that you would be the one who has made us right with God.

Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would move deeply in our lives to make us disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel. And as we are gripped by the gospel, we are learning to live for your glory and the good of many people.

In all this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.