

The Word Was Made Flesh

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[0 : 00] I had shared with Colin in a conversation not terribly long ago that I was working on a series of five messages from the first chapter of John's Gospel.

And that I would be willing to share them with Glasgow City Free Church. Colin was quite excited at the prospect of hearing messages from the first chapter of John's Gospel and in particular the first 18 verses otherwise known as the prologue.

And so dates were given. So far, so good. Naturally, I had planned to begin at the beginning. Verse 1. However, Colin then informed me that my first message, which was this evening, would be a communion service.

So I decided to change my plan and bring verse 14 this evening as more appropriate for a communion service.

Originally, this message that you will hear this evening would have been message 3. So you're hearing this message before it's time. C.S. Lewis called the incarnation the grand miracle.

[1 : 27] In its profundity and mystery, the incarnation surpasses by far every single miracle and all miracles put together.

Here in this single verse, we have the most profound statement about God and Jesus Christ in the entire Bible.

What we have in this verse isn't abstract or armchair theology, but theology of wonder and worship. This verse has huge implications for our Christology and for our understanding of God.

For John, who clearly wrote this gospel and this prologue, I believe that for John, verse 14 is the climax, the summit of his prologue of these first 18 verses of his gospel.

[2 : 43] We can state the truth of the incarnation, but we cannot comprehend it. As Colin mentioned on Wednesday evening, there are certain places in Scripture where we need to take off our shoes for we stand on holy ground.

This verse surely is one such place. With God's help, I want to explore three things from this verse. Firstly, the paradox and mystery of the incarnation. Secondly, the glory of the incarnate Son. And thirdly, the glory of the incarnate Son's dwelling among us. Firstly, then, the paradox and mystery of the incarnation.

I want to zero in to this verse very closely. Firstly, the first thing that John tells us, it has been telling us, of course, that what he calls and whom he calls the word, and we learn, of course, he's referring to Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus Christ.

[4 : 15] But he tells us that this word was already in the beginning with God, and he tells us this word was God. And then he makes this astonishing statement.

Very, very simple words, but in its profundity, incredible. The word became flesh.

Who became flesh? This word that John tells us was in the beginning and already existed.

This word that was with God in the beginning. And this word that John ends up saying is God.

It is this word that became flesh. What does this word became mean?

[5 : 37] This is a Greek word, egineto. John has already used it seven times in the prologue.

When John tells us that all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made, John is saying, all things were egineto through him, and without him was not anything egineto that was egineto.

That word egineto means to begin to exist, to come into existence.

It indicates change. It indicates to enter into a new condition that did not exist previously.

I'm actually hoping that our minds are beginning to get dizzy already. Because one of the things that we believe about God, which is stated crisply in the book of Malachi, chapter 3, verse 6, is I am the Lord, I change not.

[7 : 01] But this word, egineto, is a word of change. Our Lord and Savior has a body in glory.

The word, you see, that John uses in his first verse is not egineto. It's ein, the Greek word ein.

And it means to exist. Not to come into exist, but to exist. Okay.

The word became. What did the word become, John? John uses the word flesh. Flesh.

Now, the word for flesh in Greek is sarx. Why am I telling you this? Because I think it's relevant to help us grasp what John is saying.

[8 : 19] John has used the word, has used the word anthropos three times before verse 14. There was a man, anthropos, John the Baptist.

He was the light of all anthropin, mankind. John also uses another word for a male human being.

This is before 14. But when John comes to 14 and he wants to tell us something that the word became, he uses the word sarx.

John says the word, the eternal word, became flesh. Why, John, are you using this word?

What are you seeking to communicate to us? This is a graphic word that you're using, John. It is evocative. John wants to stress something that sometimes I feel we don't stress enough.

[9 : 37] Oh, we stress the deity of Christ enough, his divinity. John is stressing, this is man qua man.

This is a real human being. This is not an illusion. Hamlet in that, sorry, Shakespeare makes Hamlet say, in the play Hamlet, he makes him say, I know not seems.

John is telling us, it's not that he seems to be human, and it's some sort of trick. But that he is, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh.

John is emphasizing, the real humanity, and historicity, of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is a, a real human being, born in a particular place, at a particular time.

Jesus has a date of birth, and a date of death. Paul, one to, to use daring language, tells us that Jesus was made in the likeness, of sinful flesh.

[11 : 12] What condescension, is this, for our Savior? what humility, is this?

That hymn says, doesn't it, the great creator, became my Savior. The word, was made flesh.

Paul uses a word, kenosis, in Philippians chapter 2. And that word, means emptying. And we, people as, that are theologians, and students of the Bible, we want to be very quick, to say, oh no, no, no, no, no, but he didn't empty himself, of deity.

That's true, so he didn't. But there was an emptying. Paul tells us, there was an emptying. That sort of word, he uses, kenosis, and it means, self-emptying.

He divested himself, at least, of the prerogatives. I don't want, anyone here, to think, about Jesus, as they think of him, and they think of, the stories about him, in the gospels, as if Jesus, has got to, so to speak, that he's not only living, as a human being, but he's also living, so to speak, as God.

[12 : 58] He's living, his whole ministry, his whole obedience, is the obedience, of the man, Jesus Christ. we're in the territory here.

I deliberately, used that, that phrase, for my first point, the paradox, and the mystery, of the incarnation. We don't understand it.

We seek to state it, and we seek to state it, with wonder, and worship. But, John, not only said, the word became flesh, he goes on to say this, we have seen, his glory.

We have seen, his glory. notice, notice, notice the plural there.

Notice, John is, talking about, himself, or the writer, is talking about, himself. He doesn't just say, what a glorious thing, it would have been.

[14 : 17] He says, we, have seen, his glory. I, I, I, I want to ask myself, and I want to ask, everyone here, and everyone on Zoom, have you, seen the glory, of Jesus of Nazareth?

what is this glory, that John, is talking about? Well, it's the glory, of that stunning, humbling of himself.

it's the glory, of his obedience, to his father.

it's the glory, of him living, to give himself, to others.

it's the glory, of, being able, to say, and do, I always, do the will, of my father.

[15 : 58] It's the glory, as Paul puts it, that he became, obedient, unto death, and then Paul adds, even, the death, of the cross.

It's the glory, of God, the father, shining, through, Jesus Christ. It's the glory, of his, absolute, uniqueness.

make no mistake, about it, Christianity, is by, millions of miles, a unique faith.

In none of the great religions, in none of the great prophets, in none of the great figures, of these religions, and I'm not downing them, some of them are, fantastic religions, and people, and we've a lot, to learn from them.

But it cannot be said, of any of them, the word, was made flesh, and dwelt, among us. It's the glory, this is brought out, in our English translations, listen to what it says, in the ESV, we have seen his glory, glory, as of, the only son, from the father, glory, as of, the only son, from the father.

[17 : 49] Some people, the word son, is not actually, in the Greek, and neither, is the definite articles, in the Greek. So, the Greek, would literally read, as of, as of, a son, of a father.

But, both, the ESV, the NIV, and other translations, introduced the definite articles, and introduced, the concept of son.

And that's okay, because, we know that, John, is, is about to explore, the sonship, of Jesus, in his entire gospel.

And even if, as some of the academics, might say, what is being said here, is that, an only son, was so special, in that culture. And, especially, an only son, that was the spitting image, of his father.

Not only in looks, but in values, and in behavior. But, I do believe, that John, is raising the bar. I do believe, that John, is thinking of the father.

[19 : 00] And he says, therefore, glory, as of, the only son, of God, the father. This is the glory, that radiated, and that glistened, and shone, through the man, Jesus Christ.

Because, when he says, we have seen his glory, he's not just thinking, of the incarnation. I'm not saying, he isn't thinking of that. He's thinking about, the entire phenomenon, of Jesus Christ.

The glory, that shone, from his person, in life, was the glory, of God, the father. He, he that hath seen me, said Jesus, has seen the father.

And he, doesn't mean, physically, seeing him. He means, seeing him, with spiritual eyes. Seeing him, in terms, of his love, his loveliness, his compassion, his compassion, his concern, his giving of himself.

We have seen his glory. Have you seen the glory, of Jesus of Nazareth, the son of God? thirdly, the glory, of the incarnate, sons, dwelling among us.

[20 : 48] Because, the first thing is, John tells us, the word was made flesh. And then he tells us, that we've seen his glory. And then he tells us, that he, was among us.

This is the stage, in theatre, where all of this, took place. Dwelt among us.

I don't want to say, a lot, about this. But, is it not, an amazing thing, that the eternal word, lived, among us.

And lived, in our skin, and in our being, as a human, person.

He whose dwelling, was with the Father, entered history, and entered into the census, of the role of humanity.

[21 : 58] as we come towards, the end of this, sermon, I want to ask, this question.

But, in what, capacity, did he, was he made flesh, and, came to make, his dwelling among us? In what capacity, was it?

was it, the capacity, to condemn, and to judge? The Gospels tell us, that he did not, come to condemn.

And, you know, I've been thinking, of that verse, the best known verse, in the Bible, off and on, over the last few weeks, God, so, loved, the world.

I remember, somebody once saying, excuse the pun, there's so, much, in that little word, so. But, John tells us, the capacity, right here, in verse 14.

[23 : 17] Listen to these words, and take great comfort, from them. John says, he came, I'll tell you how he came. Because, that second bit, that I was speaking about, in verse 14, we have seen his glory, glory as of the old, the begotten of other.

You can almost think of that, as a parenthesis, and if it is a parenthesis, we can read it like this. And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

That was the capacity. That was the manner. Full of grace and truth.

grace. Grace. Grace. Grace. Very beginning of the Bible, God reveals himself, as a gracious, God.

At the very beginning of the Bible. Remember that statement, even about Noah. That's not what I was thinking about there, but it's just come into my head.

[24 : 28] Noah found grace, grace, in the eyes of the Lord. Grace is an inherent quality in God.

If I can use human language, it's part of his genome. It's part of his DNA. grace. And, this word grace, is a word, that, is very much related, to Old Testament words, such as, love, and mercy, and kindness.

And notice what John says, think of these other words, mercy, and love, and kindness. And think of what John says, he came, in the flesh, and lived among us, full, of grace.

Overflowing with grace. That he might call us back to himself, the prodigal, human race.

Ah. But he also came, full of truth.

[25 : 57] What does that word mean? The Hebrew word is emeth. It means, stability.

Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness. True. Yes. Reality. God.

Is synonymous with truth. Truth. The New Testament uses the word aletheia.

That word means reliability, reality, and that has connotations of revelation and redemption.

The verse that God used to open up my mind is further on in John's Gospel, chapter 14, verse 6.

Jesus said, I am the way, the truth.

[27 : 19] The truth! I don't simply point to the truth like a prophet. I am. I am. Right standing here before you, says Jesus Christ.

The truth. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the truth of God.

As we come before the table this evening, I trust that we will come in a spirit of wonder and worship.

That the eternal word became flesh. And that we too may have had a glimpse of some of that glory.

And that we will be encouraged, inspired, and far from despair to know that he came for us full of grace and full of truth.

[28 : 50] May the Lord bless these thoughts. Teach one of us for his glory and for our good. Let's unite our hearts again in prayer.