Is Knowledge of God Possible?

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Preacher: David Parker

[0:00] Our text for this evening is found in John's Gospel, chapter 1, verse 18.

No one has ever seen God. The only God who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.
No one has ever seen God. As you probably know, this is the last message on our studies of the prologue in John's Gospel, chapter 1, verses 1 to 18.
Now, my intention in bringing the sort of ministry that I've tried to bring from the prologue of John's Gospel is to lift us beyond even those things that are very much our concern, like justification by faith and, you know, all the more basic doctrines of Christianity, and to try and lift our minds, so to speak, towards God.
Because I do believe that theology, and especially those parts of the Bible that are pulsating and throbbing with deep theology, evoke wonder and adoration.
[1:47] And I think that that is critical for our Christian life and for our Christianity and for our relationship with God.

Human beings gather and amass knowledge about many things. The universe, the history of the human race, the earth.
We find out how things work like viruses and the brain and many, many things. However, there's a boundary where human knowledge cannot cross by its own ingenuity, and I'm talking here about God.
There is an unbridgeable chasm between the creator and the creature. Between the eternal self-existent God and our finite and fleeting existence.
Therefore, the only hope we have of obtaining accurate information regarding God depends solely on God himself disclosing it and revealing it.
[3:04] Because only God can accurately reveal and disclose God. Religion or religions, you could say, represents the human search for God.

Revelation, on the other hand, represents God's search and seeking of us. So tonight, we're going to look at three things from verse 18.
We're going to look, firstly, at the need for revelation. Secondly, we're going to look at the one and only revealer of God. And thirdly, we're going to look at the redemptive nature of that revelation.
Firstly, then, the need for revelation brought out powerfully in the opening statement here of verse 18.
You can catch its mood just by verbalizing it. You can hear its emphaticness, its absoluteness.
[4:20] It's almost saying there's no caveats here. Here is the truth. No one has ever seen God.

No one has ever seen God. And I want you to pick up that emphatic language.
And I also want you to notice that although the word God is the last word in this statement, in our English translations, it's the first word in the original translation.
So the original translation reads, God no one has ever seen. And the second thing I want you to be aware of as we're thinking of this need of revelation, and this statement here that John finishes his prologue with, I want you to notice the tense of the verb, because it's an important tense, and it's the perfect tense.
What's called the perfect tense? Which means something like this. Up until this moment in time, and continuing, no one has ever seen God.
[5:48] It's as if John is saying, as I pen these words, as I make this statement, as I state this truth, it's always been true, and still is true.

No one has ever seen God. Certainly not his essence. Certainly not exhaustively.
not even the great prophets of the Old Testament have seen God through their own spirituality, or through their own energy, or through their own ingenious mind.

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If they've seen God in any kind of way whatsoever, it's because God revealed himself to them. So the first thing I want you to notice here, as we're exploring the first point about the need for revelation, is how emphatic John is here.
And the second thing I want you to notice, is the close link between seeing and knowledge. And I could mention various verses to you, but I'm going to express that close link between seeing and knowledge by a verse that you know very well, from John 14, verse 7, and verse 9.
[7:18] Jesus said this, at verse 7, in John 14, if you had known me, you would have known my Father also.

From now on, you do know him, and have seen him. You see how the two ideas come together there. From now on you know him, and have seen him.
And then if you look at verse 9, Jesus said to him, have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip?
Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father. Do you see the correlation there? Do you see between knowing, knowing, and seeing? So, the idea of seeing God isn't limited to physical, but includes mental and spiritual vision.
Indeed, John may have in mind, in this statement he makes at verse 18, Hellenistic, Greek ideas, or Jewish mystic ideas, about the beautific vision of God, in making such an emphatic statement.
[8:32] There's a famous quote by a blind rabbi, who's meant to have lived around the time of John. Here is his quote, by the blind rabbi, to another rabbi, you have greeted one who is seen, and does not see.

May you be counted worthy, to greet him who sees, and does not see. So, the first thing is, in exploring the need for revelation, notice how emphatically John declares that need.
And notice the link between seeing and knowing. But before we leave this point, does the Bible not say, that we can see, and know God, in creation, for instance.
And, does Calvin, for another example, not argue, in his institutes, that there is, a seed, of the knowledge of God, somewhere, within human beings.
And, can we not know, God, from reading, the Bible. Now, Calvin, himself, has got a very interesting, commentary, on his own, theology, of creation, and conscience, and, and, being able to know God, through those, mediums.
[10:07] And, what Calvin says is this, that, we are, a country, or a nation, or a people, or an individual, can be, so, far, removed, from, the, these, abilities, to see God, in creation, in some sense, it's not really, to see God, of course, it's to see his works.

and, if you're thinking of the seed, within somebody, it's not again, really, to see God, it's to, see and know, something of, perhaps, that there is a God, some sort of conviction, in there somewhere.
And, similarly, with reading the Bible, people can read it, merely as a history book. Calvin is saying, while that is, in a sense, true, theoretically, it's often not true, experientially, or existentially, because people, have gone, beyond, into, a secular condition, that, that, these things are, they don't see them at all.
Notice, Peter's confession, of Christ. Remember, when Christ said, to, his disciples, what's the word on the street, who are people saying, that I am?
And, they said, some say you're a prophet, some say you're Elijah, some say you're John the Baptist, from the dead. But, then he turned to his disciples, and said, but who do you think I am?
And, Peter, came forward, and says, you're the Christ.
[11:46] And, you know, the first thing, that Jesus replied, to that, was, flesh and blood, has not revealed it to you. And, then, what about John?

John says, we have seen. Remember, we were thinking of that last week. John says, we have seen, his glory. But, John, and anyone else, has seen his glory, because God has revealed that glory to them, through the Holy Spirit.
But, we can never see God's unmediated, or unveiled essence, even in Christ. Think of the hymn here, that wonderful, wonderful hymn, Veiled, in flesh, the Godhead see.
There's your paradox. Remember, I said that Christianity, is full of paradox. There's the hymn writer, pointing to a paradox for us. The Godhead see, but veiled.
Even, the, summit, of God's revelation, and the sum, of God's revelation, namely, Jesus Christ.
[13:10] Where, he can say, he that have seen me, have seen the Father. And, that's true, what he's saying. But, nonetheless, it is still, a veiled, revelation.

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It is seen, through a man, known as Jesus Christ, who could be registered, in terms of his birth, in terms of taxation, indeed, in terms of his death.
before I leave this point, before I leave this point, I want to, just mention, words, in the Sermon on the Mount.
Remember that, that, beatitude, that Jesus gave, blessed are the pure in heart, for they, shall see, God.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they, shall see God. And, I want to draw your attention, to, another statement, in Revelation.
[14:17] Chapter 22, verse 4. They, will see, his face. So, what are we seeing?

As we think of, all those different aspects, of this first point, what does John mean, really, when he says, no one, has ever, seen, God?
I think he means, at least two things. I think he means, nobody, has ever seen God, unmediated, and unveiled. No one has ever, peered into the very, heart, and essence, of God.
For no man, shall see me, said the Bible, and live. And, I think, secondly, he's saying, that nobody, can see God, by their own, ingenious, cleverness.
Those, that can, see God, in whatever measure, they're able to see him, see him, because he reveals himself, to those, of his children, and to those of faith, and only to those of faith.
[15:37] And, there is, a real sense, in which, we will see God. And, I wonder, what that will be like. But, I offer you, three words, ecstatic, rapturous, and enthralling.

And, I want us, to think, about, things like that, as we make, our pilgrimage, as Christians. I want us, not to forget, the wonder, and the glory, of the future, to which, we are, inexorably, moving, as believers, in Christ.
That brings me, to my second point. The one, and only, revealer. The one, and only, revealer.
If we look again, at verse 18. No one, has ever seen, God. The only, God, who is at the, Father's side, he has made him known.
The only, God, who is at the, Father's side. John, makes clear, that only Jesus, the incarnate, word of God, is able, to reveal God.
[17:07] If he's, emphatic, that no one, has ever seen God, he's equally, emphatic, that only one, can reveal God, to human beings.

And he gives, two reasons. One, he is God. Two, he is at the, Father's side.
In other words, because of, who he is, and, where, he's come from. Let's look at those, in turn.
First of all, who he is. Now, this English standard version, has the, term, the only God.
You might have another translation, this is why I'm mentioning this. For instance, if you are a lover of the AV, you will read right here, the only begotten son.
[18:08] If you, love, the new, King James version, you will read here, the only begotten son. If you, love the NIV, you will read there, worded rather differently, but the same thing, as the ESV, the one that's God, who's in the bosom, of the father.

And, therefore, some of the, experts, at textual, criticism, or the science, of trying to ascertain, what is the most authentic text, differ somewhat.
But, it doesn't really matter. Because, John's already told us, that Jesus is God, in the opening statement, of the prologue.
And, he tells us, in other parts, of the gospel, that Jesus is God. And, I shall say this to you, that, the most ancient manuscripts, have, what we have, in the ESV translation.
It's just that, some people think, because John has said, in verse 14, we have seen his glory, as of the only son, from the father. And, because he's saying, he's, beside the father, they think it makes, more sense to say, the only begotten son, who is beside the father, or who is in the bosom, of the father.
[19:39] They think it feels, a wee bit odd, to say, the only God, who is in the bosom, of the father. Now, somebody like myself, I'm not worried, one iota about that.

Because, it doesn't matter to me, whether that is, that this is the most accurate, or the other one, is the most accurate. Because, it, it doesn't, challenge, the doctrine, of the divinity, of Christ, in John's gospel.
But, what is absolutely, certain, that John is saying, is, there is no one, except this one, who is beside the father, that can reveal God.

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And, although you've got here, beside the father, it's a rather, beautiful, translation, in the original. And, some of the English, translations, also bring it out, where they tell us, who is in the bosom, of the father.
That's where he's, came from. Isn't this, a beautiful picture, of the relationship, within the being of God, between father, and son.
[20:54] You know, when you read, John's gospel, what you read, is things like this. I don't speak, of myself. I speak the words, that the father speaks. I don't do any works, of myself.

I only do the works, that my father does. I, my only, meat and drink, is to do his will. It's a beautiful, picture here.
The only God, or the only son, begotten son, in the bosom, of the father. It conjures up, deep bonds, of mutual love, and affection.
Almost maternal, instincts, protection, indescribable, closeness. It conjures up, that unity, that Jesus declared, about God.
And that he was, aware of himself, of that relationship, with God. That's why I read, from chapter 5, because they said, you're making yourself, equal with God. Jesus could say, in chapter 17, I am in the father, and the father, is in me.
[22:01] Jesus could say, I and the father, are one. And so, this one, that is so close, to God. And remember, he's been, as close as that, to God, from all eternity.

And remember, that he's been, in the bosom, of the father, from all eternity. Remember, from verse 1, that he's been, facing the father, from all eternity.
Well, says John, only this one, can reveal God. There is no other religion, there is no other, religious figure, because this one, is truly, unique.
This one, is truly, eternally begotten. This one, truly, is the only God. This one, truly, is the word, that was in the beginning, and was with God, and was God.
This identity, and intimacy, of the son, with the father, is the key, to God's revelation, and God's self-disclosure.
[23:15] And what I mean by that, as the key, I mean that, the revelation, takes its, cue, if I could use that word, just now, from who God is, the kind of being, that he is, a God, that exists, eternally, in exquisite love, between the father, and the son, and a God, that seeks, to share, his godness, and his love, with human beings, and a God, that, that wants us, so badly, that he incarnated, to call, the prodigal race, of humanity, back, to that, everlasting love, and warmth, of his own being.

Can we think, of our Christianity, in those terms? That brings me, to my final point.
I've tried to, explore with you, the need for revelation. I've tried to, explore with you, the one and only, the revealer, of that revelation, and I finish, by my third point, which is, the redemptive, nature, of revelation.
Again, notice, the third statement, here, he, has made him, known. Now again, I'm afraid, our English translations, don't quite, capture, the force, of the language.
The word, that John uses here, is a demonstrative, pronoun, with emphasis, and real force, and, the best way, of, thinking of it, in your head, is this, that one, and that one, alone, has made God, known.
[25:34] that's, why, as somebody, has said, there is no, Christ, likeness, un-Christ, likeness, in God.

That's, why, Jesus, could say, he, that hath, seen me, has, seen the Father. All, that you need, to see, of the Father, all, that the Father, wills, to reveal, to you, you've, seen it all, in me.
The word, that John uses, for the revelation, is a word, that we're, very, very familiar, with. Guess what it is? Exegesis. What John is saying is, Jesus, has fully interpreted, God.
He's fully interpreted, his will, and his purpose. He's exegeted, all that needs, to be exegeted, regarding, the being of God, in relation, to, us human beings, and this human race.
He's explained, God, and expounded, God. There's a Christian philosopher, Richard Swinburne, whose book, The Existence of God, and in that book, he argues, the Christian philosopher, Richard Swinburne, that Christianity, is the best explanation.
[27:23] So he's saying, in terms of, what is the best explanation, for explaining, the whole of reality, and everything, all the ingredients, in the whole of reality.

He answers, or argues, Christianity. But you know, Jesus isn't, merely, the best explanation. Jesus is, the explanation, and the only explanation, of God.

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Yes, there was revelation, in the Old Testament. But Hebrews, puts it well, I think, in chapter 10. The law, was a shadow, and not the very substance, not the very reality, not the very image. Partial, and provisional. But now, Christ has come, and he is the reality. He is the anti-type. All the reflections, and the shadows, shine, not only in him, but from him.
One might ask the question, at which points, in the life of Christ, was God revealed? The answer is, at every point, of his life, and ministry. Every moment, from the cradle, to the cross.
[28:54] Jesus, in his being, and life, is the revelation, of God. The whole history, of Christ, is a historical, revelation, declaring, this, is God.

So, the place, to see God, now, is in the historical, incarnate, Christ. And, as you know, in that, incarnate state, he's known as, God with us.
And that's the wonder, of this, glorious, transcendent God. He's also, God with us. God near us. In him, we live, and move, and have our being.
And he's near us. If you don't know this God, if you, still haven't, glimpse, something of that glory, he's right beside you.
He's within you. You're hearing him, through the spirit, of God, right now. And he's asking you, and offering you, eternal life.
[30:16] And as you would have picked up, as we come near, to a close, the great subject, the great subject, of the revelation, is the Father. We might have thought, oh, the great subject, of the revelation, is us.

I'm not saying, that's not part of it. But the principal subject, is to reveal God. Because, one might say, as we, become, aware, that there is such a thing, as God, is going to reveal himself.
And we might wonder, and what is that revelation, going to be? Is it going to be, a revelation of judgment? Is it going to be, a revelation, where God says, I'm not interested in humanity, and all the troubles?
What kind of revelation, is it going to be? It's a revelation, of salvation. It's a revelation, of mercy. It's a revelation, of grace.
It's a revelation, of truth. It's a revelation, of forgiveness, of reconciliation. It's a revelation, of this God, saying, come unto me.
[31:32] All you that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. You see, our redemption, the seeds, and roots, of our redemption, are found, in the being, of God.

That's where, the roots are. It's in the kind, of God, that he is. God is love. God reveals himself, very early on, as a God, that is full, of compassion, and full, of mercy, and full, of grace.
This is our hope. It's because, of the kind, of God, he is. God wants, and that love, which is outflowing, and outreaching, to us human beings, made in his image.
God wants to share his being, with us, and glorify us, even to the point, of what Eastern Orthodox churches, call deification. And there's some idea, of that in our Bibles.
Peter said, we shall share, in the nature, of God. Jesus said, that I want them, to share, in the glory, that we have.
[32:54] He became incarnate, in Christ, and suffered, the death of his son, whom as we saw, is in the bosom, of the father, from all eternity.

This redemption, that we rejoice in tonight, this joy, that the opening psalm, made reference to, is because, of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
The great purpose, of redemption, of revelation, is redemption. The entire incarnation, and dwelling among us, all the way to, and including the cross, and resurrection, and ascension, was for our redemption.
John, that's what's his great concern, in this gospel. John is not interested, in a sense, in theology, for theology's sake.
John, John is only, interested, in theology, in so far, as it will result, in people, believing, in Jesus Christ.
[34:14] Because, he says, these are written, now, Jesus did many, other signs, in the presence, of his disciples, which are not written, in the book, but these are written, at the end, of his gospel, so that you may believe, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing, you may have life, in his name.

That's the reason, that he wrote the prologue. That people might see, the wonder, and glory, of this God, and this Christ, in whom alone, is our hope, of salvation.

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Have you seen, his glory? Have you believed? May it be so.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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