Word Becomes Flesh

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Date: 26 December 2021

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[0:00] on John chapter 1 that we've been in this morning and this evening. We looked at verses 4 through 9 of the introduction to John's gospel this morning. We read verses 14 to 18 for a little bit more context, but we're going to be focusing on verses 16 to 18 tonight.

And John, what he's doing in this prologue, is he's hitting on this theme of the word become flesh and how that sets the stage for understanding who Jesus is and what he's come to do.
And in particular, John wants to introduce you to the stupendous nature of this Jesus. In her little book, Dorothy Sayers, she wrote this little book called Creed or Chaos.
And she says this about what John's talking about in his prologue, the word becoming flesh. She says this, We may call this doctrine of incarnation exhilarating or devastating.
We may call it revelation or we may call it rubbish. But if we call it dull, what on earth is worthy of being called exciting? Let's, before we dig into the text, let's pray for the preaching of God's word.
[1:14] Pray with me. Father, through your word, by your spirit, make yourself known. Help us to make sense of our lives as we get a glimpse of your glory.

Don't hide your face from us, Lord. We want to see you and to know you through your word. We ask this in the name of the word become flesh. Amen.
Do you know about the invisible gorilla? Anybody know about the invisible gorilla? There was this experiment done by a bunch of psychologists and they made this video.
I think you can actually find the video on YouTube if you searched for it some years ago. And there's six people in this video, in this experiment, and they're divided into two teams. Teams of three each. And one group of three puts on white t-shirts and the other team of three puts on black t-shirts.
And they're given, both teams are given one basketball. And what they're told to do is to pass the ball back and forth while also weaving together. And your job, as you watch them, it says, count the number of passes.
[2:20] Can you count the number of passes? And remember the first time I saw this, I was like, well, I got this. Of course I can do this. And I concentrated. It's not very long. It's one, two, three.

By the end, it finishes and it asks, did you see how many passes there were? And I was like, 15. And it said there was 15 passes. Nailed it. And then it asks, did you see the gorilla?
I was like, wait, what? And it goes back and it plays the video again. And what you see is as these people are passing the basketball back and forth and weaving through your screen and you're trying to count, this person in a full gorilla costume walks out slowly into the middle of the screen and beats his chest and walks on past.
And see, what the experiment was supposed to show is that what our brain does when it concentrates on things is it puts the things that we're concentrating on our eyes into high resolution and everything else kind of on the periphery goes into low resolution.
Amazing thing. A person in a gorilla outfit walked in the middle and I had no idea. I just thought I was supposed to count the passes. How did I miss this, right? That's the way our brain is wired.
[3:31] I mention this because John's claim is that Jesus should be our focus, but we live in a world that easily distracts us. We miss the big thing because we focus on so many other things.

It's easy to miss the big thing. There's so many things in life that call for our attention. And there's not necessarily bad things that demand our time and our attention, but they can become so overwhelming that they're the only thing that we see.
But this is the big thing. This is the big point in John's prologue. If I'm going to summarize 18 verses of John's prologue, this is what he wants you to see. This is his big point. Jesus.

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Jesus. There's other details that matter. There's other things that we can say from it. But if you miss that, it is like missing the giant gorilla walking through because you're focusing on all these other details.
You see, when we stop and we focus on Jesus, what happens is big questions actually come to mind. Questions that John wants to answer. Questions like, huh, this Jesus.
[4:37] So is there a God? If there is a God, what is he like? Why don't I see him? And if we press deeper then too, if I believe in this God, does he actually care about me? Is he good? Can I trust this Jesus?

In our passage and its surrounding prologue, John gets at those questions. And I want to talk about those questions too. Let's not count the passes and miss the big point.
Let's look at it together. For outline tonight, it's just two simple questions. One, what is God like? Two, how much do you think he wants you? What is God like? And how much do you think God wants you?
The first one will be the longer point. The second one will hopefully be very, very short. So first off, first question that we want to answer, what is God like? You know, if you remember, in verse 1 of John's gospel, what we said was he starts with creation.
He's echoing the Genesis account, right? In the beginning. And he's signaling, what we said this morning, that he is telling this new creation story. But that's not all, actually.
[5:43] He's also telling not just a new creation story. John is also telling a new Exodus story. Did you notice in the passage that we read that he brings up this character named Moses, the liberator, the one who led God's people out of Egypt, out of slavery.

And it's interesting because if you asked an ancient Israelite, who is God and what is he like? You know what two things they would probably mention are? They said, well, he is the creator and he is the redeemer.
Who is God? He's the one who has made all things. He is the one who, by the power of his word, has spoken all things into existence. Every star, every planet, every molecule, it exists because of God's word.
And John tells us that Jesus is the word of God. Albert Einstein, he once said, if there is a personal God, as the Christians say, who spoke this universe into being, then there is a certain respect and reverence and wonder and dread that would have to come through when we talk about him.
And certainly we would be talking about him all the time since he is the most important reality. Albert Einstein got it. He didn't miss all. He wasn't counting the passes and missing the giant gorilla walking through.
[7:00] So this God who is a creator, he existed before all things. He is the source of life. He himself is life eternal. You know, a lot of times in the Bible, we hear you hear phrases like eternal life.

Right. And what we think of usually, if I say eternal life to you, you think life without end. Right. And that's not wrong. That's a good thing to think. But that's not the only way that the Bible talks about it. Jesus says in John 17, this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you've sent. This is eternal life to know God.
God is life eternal. Communion with him is eternal life. But as you see, the point of creation was that God didn't just create. He said, oh, I'm kind of bored.
Let's create something and let's see what happens. God created for a purpose. He created for his own glory. He created so that we could dwell and commune with him. See, in creation, we were never supposed to ask the question, what is God like?
[8:05] And wonder and shrug. We were supposed to have a face-to-face relationship with him, right? He puts Adam and Eve in the garden and he walks with Adam in the cool of the garden.

The question of what is God's like is more of just a discovery of who this eternal, infinite being is rather than sitting here wondering, scratching your head. We were created for this face-to-face relationship with God.
And that's the tragedy of sin, y'all. That's how John's described it. The world that was made through the word, it did not know him. It's a tragedy that we have to ask questions like, what is God like? Even those who should know him most, part of the tragedy in the story of Jesus, of those who should be able to define what God is like. They were the ones who missed him.

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They were the ones who didn't know. It's like they were counting passes while the gorilla walks through the room. And so we take stabs at it. What is God like? People say things like, I like to think of God as fill-in-the-blank, right?
[9:12] Or different religions make him into something that he's not. I don't know if any of you have done it in the past, as in my family, over the holidays. You get the biggest puzzle you possibly can, like the 10,000-piece puzzle, right?

Because you hang out with the family for a few days and after like a day and a half, you're like, what do we talk about? I don't know. Let's do a giant puzzle together. And you work on it for a long time and it kind of passes the time. It's a nice activity to do.
Maybe it's just me. You're learning a lot about me right now. But imagine that you're doing a giant puzzle, like the biggest puzzle you've ever done. Lots of tiny pieces, but no box cover.
Well, you have all these little pieces strewn about and you're trying to flip them over and try to figure out where they go. And you're just going, what am I building? What on earth is this? And maybe by, you know, some common grace every once in a while you fit a couple pieces together.
But you would be lost. It would take you an eternity. You would have no idea. You'd be asking, what is this puzzle supposed to be? What am I doing?
[10:15] What's the point? What's it supposed to look like? That would be helpful in knowing what I'm supposed to do and how I'm supposed to proceed. Which pieces I'm supposed to put together. When John says that Jesus is the word who is with God and was God and he's shown up, that the word has become flesh, he is saying, in essence, the puzzle box cover has come.

What is God like? He is the creator. He is life eternal that we've rejected. We're created to know who he is and what he's like. And we wander in the dark unless he reveals himself.
But again, you ask an ancient Israelite, what is God like? And they wouldn't just tell you about creation. They'd also say, well, God is a redeemer. God, Yahweh, he is the one who has saved our people.
We were dead without rights. We were in slavery for 400 years. And with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, God did signs and wonders and brought his people out of Egypt.
He kept his promises that he made to Abraham and he brought us to the land of promise. God is a redeemer. God is the God of Exodus. And in redemption, in the Exodus, he brings them out of Egypt.
[11:31] And do you know what happens? Where does he bring them to? He brings them to Mount Sinai. And it's there that he gives his law. The Exodus shows his grace and the law shows his character.

So the law says, you know, when the law says you shall not murder, we don't kill. Why? Because God is the author of life and values life.
We're only supposed to worship God alone. Why? Because God cares about truth and doesn't want us to squander our lives going after false gods. Right? The law shows the character of God.
What is God like? He's the God who redeems. He redeems. And he comes and shows us his character in the law at Mount Sinai. They'd say we know what God's like because he has done all of this for us.
He's given us his law. He's given us his word. In fact, at Mount Sinai, God speaks his law. But there's a problem.
[12:31] They hear him speak and it scares the living daylights out of them. The voice of God comes and they all fall to the ground and they're terrified. They couldn't get close to the mountain.

There's fire and smoke. And the ground's shaking. As great as God's redemption in the Exodus was and as amazing a gift it is to have God's word showing us so much of his heart.
The Israelites still at Sinai, they don't see his face. They couldn't see him fully. And the reason is because we've mentioned all the time in church, right? We are sinful.
And there's this guy named Moses, again, that John, the gospel writer, mentions here. Big deal in the Old Testament. Moses is a big deal. Abraham and Moses are pretty much the biggest deal in the Old Testament.
David, too, right? We'll throw him in. Did you notice John's talking about Moses? Moses leads the Exodus. And he is the one who went up the mountain to receive God's word, to receive the law.
[13:35] And while he's there, he makes a special request of God. You know what he says? Can I see you? It's a question of what are you like? I want to know you more.

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I want to see your face. I want to behold your glory. He wants to know as much as possible what is God like. And what does God say? No.
Why? Because God says, if you would see my glory, you'd be done for. It would end you.
Exodus 33, God says, you can't see my face, for man shall not see my face and live. What is God like? God is holy. You think of Isaiah.
In Isaiah 6, he sees this vision of the glory of God in the throne room. And he has like this existential conniption and throws himself on the ground and cries out, woe is me.
[14:34] I am a man of unclean lips. Ah! Gideon in the book of Judges and Samson's parents. Gideon in Judges 6 and Samson's parents in Judges 13.

They just see the angel of the Lord standing before them. And they want to die. So God says to Moses, you know what I'm going to do?
You can't see my face. What I'm going to do is I'm going to take you. I'm going to put you in the cleft of this rock. I'm going to hide you. I'm going to veil it in a way. I want to give you a piece, but you can't see in full yet.
And I'm going to pass by in kind of just the afterglow of my glory. Not my face. It's too much. I'm too holy. What is God like?
God is holy, holy, holy. Just a little bit. The afterglow. That's all you get to see. And Moses does, and he comes down the mountain and reflecting God's glory.
[15:34] People can't even look at Moses' face. This is what we're created for. This is what we long for. But if we see it, it would end us. Do you believe this?

God is holy. What John is talking about in verses 16 to 18, he's actually saying the same thing multiple times. It might be a little bit confusing at first.
We'll walk through it. Verse 16, he says, From his fullness. Think of Colossians 2.9. For in him, in Christ, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.
So Jesus is God-packed. Fully God. Fully man. From his fullness, we have all received grace upon grace. I've got to be honest.
Knowing this verse for a long time in my life, I didn't quite understand what it meant. A few years ago, I was preaching on this, and I looked into it more. Because what it sounds to me is, from his fullness, we've received grace upon grace.
[16:31] It kind of just sounds like, hey, from Jesus, you get gobs and gobs of grace. Right? Like, more and more grace. Grace and then more. And it just keeps piling up. And that's not untrue. That's just a different sermon from a different passage.

What you see, he's saying in verse 17, it sharpens what he's meaning. In fact, verse 16, 17, and 18, imagine this. They're all connected. So, follow with me. John says, the law was given through Moses.
Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. And again, maybe at first glance, it sounds something like, law bad, Jesus good. Right? The law came through Moses.
Boo. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. But what's the problem with that? It's not the point that he's making. Remember, if you asked an ancient Israelite, what is God like? Say, he's the creator.
And they would say, he's the redeemer. He's the one who gave us his law. We know his character. We know that he loves us. He has blessed us because he's given us his law, his word.
[17:33] The law was a grace to the Israelites. No Israelite at any moment would ever think about denigrating the law. The law shows God's heart. Psalm 119, 17.

Oh, how I love your law. What's God's like? What is God like? Well, here's the law. It was given through Moses. It's a grace to know what God is like and how to relate to him through his law. Okay? But why is he saying the law came through Moses, grace and truth through Jesus Christ?
You see, the law, though, was insufficient. It could not provide what it required.
And also, even though you had the law, what do you still long for? What Moses longed for? You want to see him face to face. You need a better, you need a fuller revelation than the law.
As good as God's grace in the law is, John says, there's a grace after the grace. If you have the ESV Bible in front of you, there's actually probably a footnote there.
[18:36] Because the grace upon grace can be grace after grace. A grace on top of. Right? There's a grace in the law, but there's actually an even greater grace that has come through Jesus. So it's not denigrating the law.

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It's just saying a fuller one. A grace after the grace. We got the law through Moses. Good. You know what's better? Grace and truth through Jesus Christ. And this, in John's prologue, he finally actually explicitly names the word as Jesus.
Most commentators will point out that those words, to grace and truth, which has come through Jesus, they actually recall an Old Testament passage that we just talked about.
It's Exodus 34. Moses, who wants to see God, and he only sees this little bit of the afterglow of God's glory, and that's almost too much for him to handle. He wants to know what is God like.
And you know what God says? The Lord, the Lord. Abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.
Most commentators point out that that phrase, grace and truth, is encapsulating that steadfast love and faithfulness.
[19:43] That's what the grace and truth echoes. And see, what had to be set up then in the Old Testament, it's this God who is not just creator, but redeemer and gives his law. You know what they need to set up in order to, because they can't see him face to face?

They build a tabernacle. Later becomes the temple, right? Tabernacle is just moving around in a tent, but the idea is the permanent structure becomes the temple. And this glory fills, God's glory fills what?
The tabernacle. It's the tent of meeting, where God would meet with Moses face to face. And there's a real qualifier there, though. Moses is meeting with God face to face.
That pillar of cloud that would lead the Israelites, it would come in, and as if it were a veil, be between Moses and God. So he's interacting with God face to face.
What you long for, to know God, to commune with him in such an amazing personal way. And yet, even then, there's mediation. And for the Israelite, walking around, and there's this tabernacle, this tent.
[20:52] It's like this holy tornado in the city center of your heart, right there. And when you sinned, you went to the tent.

You went to the tabernacle. An atonement was made. And this promise that God will fix these things. And as you would leave, this Aaronic blessing was spoken over you. May the Lord bless you and keep you.
Make his face to shine upon you. You'd look over your shoulder, and there'd be fire, and there'd be smoke. And it would be a blessing. Part of why you read in verse 14, starting there, is when John says, The word became flesh and dwelt among us.
That Greek word there is literally, the word became flesh and tabernacled. The word became flesh and pitched his tent among us. God's covenant faithfulness.
God, the very God who dwelt in holy fire and cloud in the tabernacle, moved into the neighborhood. So the grace upon the grace, the grace in place of grace, the grace after the grace, is a fuller revelation of who God is.
[22:02] God comes to dwell with his people. Life eternal enters into time and space and becomes a zygote. And so verse 18 comes, and it says, No one has ever seen God.

We've had to settle for his word, the law, his actions in salvation history. Given through Moses, right? But a greater grace has now come.
Moses, he's led his people, and bread falls out of the air. And what does John say? He says, Jesus is that bread. Moses commands them to keep the Passover.
Jesus is the Passover lamb. Moses strikes the rock, and water comes out to give drink to thirsty, grumbling people. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10, Christ is that rock.
We get to see more than even what Moses saw at Sinai. You know, a candle, it's very helpful for when you're in the dark, but it's nothing compared to the sun.
[23:05] And think about it this way. If you're having a child, pregnancy is an exciting thing. Speaking as a man, right? It's exciting for everyone. There's things that the lady has to go through that may get less exciting.

But in general, right? Pregnancy is exciting. You get to see the hands, the ultrasound. Sound. But it would be very, very odd if when it comes time to deliver, the baby comes out, and the mom and dad are like, Nah, put that baby back in there.
Nope. We were happy with what came before. We got to see little pictures, and it looked like a little alien and a little gummy bear inside my tummy. That was the best. That's all I want. No. No.

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The baby is showing up, and it is a greater grace. It's a grace upon grace. And Jesus is the greater grace. And the Greek word there in verse 18, when it says that he has made him known, referring to the God who no one has ever seen, he has made him known, the word is exegesis.
Well, it's trying to say Greek here at like 7 o'clock at night. It's the word where we get exegesis from. And what we talk about when we talk about exegesis, it's what a preacher does.
[24:15] It's what I'm doing right now. I'm taking the text, and I'm trying to exegete it. I'm trying to explain it to you. It's saying that Jesus is the exegesis. He is the explanation.

He is coming and explaining what is God like. Not because he is God-like or because he's a bite-sized deity. Jesus isn't the cliff notes or the Wikipedia paragraph to understand God. Remember verse 16. And from his fullness. And that's why later on in John 14, there's this disciple named Philip, and he has this question that's basically, what is God like?
He asks, Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us. And Jesus says, have I been with you so long and you still do not know me, Philip?
Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Let me apply this quickly. You want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus. You want to know what God's plan for your life is?
[25:16] Look at Jesus and pick up your cross and follow him. You want to know what it means to be a person? Look at Jesus, the God-man. You want to know how to love and forgive?

Look at Jesus. You want to know how if there is hope for your life? Look at Jesus. So what is God like? He is the creator.
He is the redeemer. The lawgiver. But mostly, what is God like? Look at Christ. Second question, and I promise way shorter answer than the first one.
How much do you think God wants to you then? I kind of hope the answer is obvious. What John tells us in short here, and we'll explain later, is quite simply.
That God wants you so much. That he actually desires a face-to-face relationship with you. That is what he has created you for. And this God, who is creator and redeemer and lawgiver and holy, holy, holy, will not stop until he brings you back to himself.
[26:35] He will go to the uttermost, to the depths. He will even come and become a man and suffer because he wants you.

So. Much. So don't settle for a lesser grace than that. Don't stop looking at Jesus and looking to Jesus.
Don't miss the gorilla walking through you, metaphorically speaking. Don't believe the lie that God doesn't care about you. He wants to show you who he is and the answer of the question of what he's like now through his words, showing the Son by the power of the Spirit.
This is a story that changes everything. It tells us what God's like and how much he wants us. It's a story of love and wonder that we encounter in the stupendous life of Jesus Christ.
That's the story that John's going to tell in the rest of his gospel. And there is no other story to tell or to believe. There is no other. There's no other therapeutic fantasy. There is no other myth of progress. There is no other thing that we are going to tell other than this story.
[27:44] Because it's the story that we belong in. It's the story that we find our role in. And the prologue is not the end of the story.

John actually writes the last book of the Bible. And in Revelation 21, there's this vision. He hears a loud voice from the throne of heaven saying, Behold, the dwelling place.
You want to know what it literally is? Behold, the tabernacle of God is with man. And Paul writes the same thing. Now we see in part, but then, one day, someday, face to face.
What is God like? We will see. And as we know him, we will realize that we're fully known and fully loved.
Thanks be to God. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you that there is still more grace to come. That there is a bright future for your people.
[28:47] That there is a home that we've all longed for. That's being prepared for us. That there's a feast that we're hungry for.

That you're working on. That there's a face that we long to see. That you long to show us. That there is a place that we've all longed for. And so, Father, in the in-between, as we wait in this already but not yet, that we've seen your glory in Christ.
And as we wait for him to return, Lord, would you strengthen us? Would you help us to go back again and again and to see our Savior? To ask that question, what is God like?

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And to return to your word where you reveal your character. Where when we're not sure of answers to questions, we would go and we would see, not an airtight argument, but an airtight person in Christ.
That we grow in our love for you, O Christ, day by day. That this would be a sweet, sweet balm for our weary souls.
[29:58] And that this would be joy. And that this would be life. And that this would be light. We pray all this. In the name of our Savior, Christ.

Amen.

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