

The Coming of Messiah

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[0:00] Let's turn then to John's Gospel and we'll look at chapter 1 where we read and fix our thoughts upon verse 14.

Under the subject, the Word became flesh. John the Apostle tells us, And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glorious of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Particularly the words, and the Word became flesh. Well, it is doubtless fitting for us to ponder the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world, and especially when people's own minds are towards remembering the birth of the Lord Jesus.

We want to think about this, of course, in the context that it was rooted in, in his coming to his own folk, to the Jewish people, to Israel.

And we ought to think about this in terms of the coming of Messiah, here referred to as the Word. The Word who was in the beginning, and the Word who became flesh.

[1:26] He came into this world, and he dwelt among us. And John, as guided by the Holy Spirit of God, sees this coming of the Lord into the world, becoming man, as an utterly unique event in the world's history.

It is not doubtless to be compared, in a sense, with his death, but in terms of what went on in history past, this is something utterly other.

And John clearly sees that what we've got here is that the Creator becomes the creature. The one who's going forth, was from old, from everlasting, enters into our life as man.

Matthew tells us in the opening chapter, particularly from verse 18 of chapter 1, and through into chapter 2, about his coming.

What happened around the time, and then what took place in his actual coming, his conception and birth. And Luke, of course, does the same in part of chapter 1 and chapter 2.

[2:51] But John doesn't deal with the narrative leading up to his coming. John takes us in one astounding verse, and he says something utterly other about him.

The Word became flesh. He looks at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we see later on clearly that the Word, who became flesh, is none other than Jesus the Messiah.

And he says in a word he became flesh. God was manifest in the flesh. That's what he's saying, in effect. Because at the beginning of this chapter he says that the Word was with God, and the Word as to his essential nature was God.

And that Word, who is God, essentially, and yet distinct from the Father, came, and he became what he eternally was not.

He didn't stop being the eternal, but he became man. And it's important for us to think about this in a way that we can derive benefit from.

[4:12] And it's interesting, you see, that the apostles, when they were confronted by the false notions of the pagans, for example, in Lystra, you remember, they wanted to make Paul and Barnabas, they wanted to make them gods and worship them.

They said that Zeus and Hermes had come down. The gods have come down in the likeness of men, basing it on what we call Greek mythology.

There were these notions that the gods come down in the likeness of men. One would go as far as to say it, people were groping after the need to be in contact with God through their thinking, through the thinking of the philosophers.

There was this longing to be in touch with the invisible God. And so when these men did the miracles they did, the answer was the gods have come down in the likeness of men. And some religions take it the other way. Not that the gods came down in the likeness of men, as in Greek mythology, but that great religious leaders become divine by progressing upward in the life of holiness.

[5:39] And you have that false teaching too. They are deified because of the quality of their life. And there are folk around today, if you think about it, who are perceived to be like that by people who have not the faith of the gospel.

But John takes something absolutely different, something that is connected with the history of this world from the very beginning. And he tells us that the one who became flesh was the one who made the universe.

There wasn't anything made that has been made apart from the word who became flesh. He was in the beginning, all things were made through him, verse 3, and there wasn't anything that has been made apart from him.

He was there and he, at a point in time, became flesh. Uniquely the Son of God, and he comes into the world.

And I just want to think about a few things very briefly, regarding the word who became flesh. First of all, the obvious, the word who became flesh.

[6:59] Well, we've noted some of this already, so there's no need to go back over it. But what John does is he takes us into eternity. Difficult for us to think about eternity, because it's not linear.

But we're used to point A and point B or point Z, along the line of history. But eternity's not like that. And in a sense, for God, eternity past, as we say it, is ever-present.

Eternity future is ever-present. And we find that virtually impossible to handle with our minds. But if we can say it, from eternity past, the word was there.

Before anything had existence, God was. He was there. And the word, who was also God, was there.

As to his divine nature, he was face to face with God. And you know very well, from John's use of God in the Gospel, so very, very often when he talks about God, he's really saying the Father.

[8:15] God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. John 3.16 is a classic text where John sees God as the Father.

But here he's saying that the word who was face to face with God from all eternity, in perfect unity of essence with the Father, this word, who was God, became man.

Now, we're not going to spend time on the words in the English, the word in the Greek are hologos. And they're based not on Greek philosophers' thinking, but on the Hebrew Bible. And the word hologos, the word, is based on the Hebrew hadavar, the word, the word, the word who is God's agent in creation.

The personal word of God has his own subsistence. And he is spoken about here as the Father's agent in the creating of the universe.

[9:31] And he's uniquely the reason for all that is in the whole created realm, both visible and invisible, to the bounds of what seems like a boundless universe.

He is the reason for it all. And he sustains it. It is held together by him. In him was life. And the life, that's him, was the light of man.

And there are passages in Paul's letters where, clearly, the Son of God, the agent of the Father in creating the universe, is the one who also sustains it by the word of his power.

And John proclaims him as Jesus Messiah, the Lamb of God, the Son of God. And whatever people say, there isn't any other way around it.

John, an apostle of Jesus Christ, communicated this aspect, this important aspect, of the teaching of the gospel.

[10:46] He could have done what both you did. He told us the story, or look, and how it all came about. But he takes us back to before the beginning began.

And he talks about the word who became flesh. And this doctrine of the full godhood, the unabridged deity of Jesus, is important.

It is to be firmly held, and it is to be proclaimed. It cannot be put to the side, or regarded as an optional thing.

Well, believe it if you like. It is imperative that Jesus we proclaim as the Savior of sinners, is the Jesus who is the eternal God.

In fact, John, at the end of his first letter, in chapter 5, verse 20, he says, about the word, about the sin of God, he says this, this is the true God and eternal life, Jesus Christ.

[11:58] 1 John 5, verse 20. And you can't have it more boldly stated than that. In fact, he says at the beginning of that book, my beloved, flee from idols.

This is the true God and eternal life, Jesus Christ, Jesus Messiah. And, therefore, our starting point, when we think about Jesus, has to be in times eternal.

Secondly, I want us to think about is when the word became flesh. And I'm thinking about here, what I'm thinking about is the time at which.

And the first thing I want to say, in fact, the first two or three things, is really about the negatives. When the word became flesh, not at a time decided on by men.

We're told that the birth of Jesus Christ went this way in Luke's Gospel, chapter 2. And then he tells us about Quirinius, who was governor of Syria, who was fulfilling the emperor's command that all the Roman world should be taxed.

[13:21] And Joseph and Mary went up to Bethlehem to be registered. Now, you might think, ah, that's it. It was at the design of the Roman emperor and those who were executing as well.

Would that be a mistake? It's not by the design of men, nor mere chance, or a bit of good luck, nor by some specific system of events.

There's nothing unforeseen about it. It was something that had been ordered and timed to perfection.

I think most of us know that there's great value in being disciplined and ordered in our lives. There's a value in being tidy-minded, if I can put it that way, so that we do things in a thoughtful way, and we like things not just to happen randomly in our lives, but we like to feel we're on top of things. But in a far, far greater way, this is absolutely certain about the eternal God. He leaves nothing to chance. And whatever modern discoveries may bring us by way of information on this or that, we're glad to experience the benefits.

[14:57] We're glad to reflect on how it all ties in with what? With God's purpose. With God's timing. And the Christian believer ought to think like that.

These things are not random. Yes, of course, secularists and believing scientists will say they're random. They've come in the process of evolution.

Not so. They've come in the goodness of God. They're ordered and sure. God has purposed them to come to pass.

In the Acts of the Apostles in chapter 15 at the first day, General Assembly of the Church, James says, Known unto God are all his works from before the beginning of creation, before the foundation of the work.

Paul in Galatians 4 says in verse 4 that in the fullness of the time, when the time was right, God sent forth his son.

[16:16] This is all about exactly the right time, God's time. There's nothing left in a haphazard way, nothing left to chance.

We mustn't imagine there could have been a better time for Jesus to come in. You might say, well, look, look what he could do nowadays of technology.

If he was here, he could have the world, he'd be on the world stage. Look at the billions that are in the world today, that weren't around. Population when he came into this world was comparatively small.

And you could argue, if you were minded to, if you were sceptical, you could argue, far better if he came now. Look at the technology, all the world could see his miracles, his works, they could hear his teaching, they could see him being taken to the cross and dying there, and so on, and so on.

It could all be televised, beamed around the world, they say. Not so, maybe true it could be, but timing wise, it was in God's time.

[17:35] life. Now, this is something that should encourage us, simply because there are things going on in our own lives that are difficult, that are hard to bear, that we find emotionally disturbing, that we're finding real trials, but they've come, not by chance happening, they're part of the purpose of God, in a way that touches our own lives directly.

And we ought to settle our hearts in this very thing, that all that's happening to us right now is part of the plan of God. And however difficult it is for us, we're to go to him, we're not to turn away, we're to draw near to him, we're to see the practical relevance of the timing of the coming of the word into this world.

As part of God's purpose, a purpose which he has for every one of us, there's nothing left to chance, and therefore we can trust him and the word he's given to us, and we can say that he has appointed our times and our experiences, and we can rest in his case.

I can rest in him and go on. The third thing we want to think about for a few moments is the how of the word becoming flesh, how the word became flesh.

Well, at one level, of course, we can certainly say we're bountiful depth on this one. At one level, we can never penetrate the mystery of the incarnation, of the enfleshment, of the eternal word, when he became man.

[19:46] We ought not to be afraid to say there is a profound mystery here, and we can say to other people when we're trying to explain the Bible's teaching, as to how it happened, I can say reverently, God knows.

God alone knows. It's not given to us to know. We can say what the Bible tells us, and no more. And not all the advances in science, in medical science, in areas of artificially arranging the conception and the implantation processes, so that a child is brought forth.

We can't use that to give ourselves understanding of what took place when, as Dr. Luke himself records, the words that were spoken to Mary, the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and this holy thing that shall be born of you, shall be called the Son of the Most High.

And there we are. We can go no further. It is necessarily shrouded in mystery. It confronts us as mystery, and we are to adore where we cannot explore.

We are to worship when we are left simply baffled by the wonder of it all. And we ought to be content, too, that this is the way it is.

[21:33] It is too high for us. We can never attain to it. Let's believe the report, and rest on the report, that the everlasting word became flesh, that he became man.

Yes, the virgin shall be with child, said Isaiah in 7.14, and bring forth a son, and you shall call his name, Emmanuel, God with us.

Not simply and merely a name given, but the reality. I remember once, how's the time going? I remember once talking to a rabbi who was at the time, a few years ago, he was one of these super anti-missionary rabbis, and I had the occasion to speak to him in Gifnop, and we locked horns on the subject.

Actually, the man's name, was Emmanuel Shoket. Shoket is the butcher, and Emmanuel was his first name, and he said to me, when he was contending vigorously for the Jewish position, so, he said, you say that he, he wouldn't call him Jesus, he kept referring to him as him or he, you say that he is Emmanuel, he said, God with us, am I God with us, and my name is Emmanuel, and I remember seeking to impress upon him, it's not the name, simply, it's the reality, Jesus was never called by the disciples Emmanuel, Emmanuel, but he was and is the reality, God with us, and he actually had nothing to say on that.

That's the point, the hell, the word became flesh, we have so much information, but only so much, and we are left adoring, and we are to proclaim him as Emmanuel, in truth, God with us.

[24:07] I want us to think then very briefly as we finish off, why the word became flesh, and one of the reasons we can get rid of immediately is he didn't become flesh because God was having problems sorting out the mess that man had made in the world.

It's not something as if God said, well, here we are, things are not working, I better try something else, as if he was caught.

It's not like that. It's not, well, I better try another dispensation, and I'll sort things out in this one. It's not like that.

Nor did the word become flesh, simply to be an example to us, and to point up the virtue of martyrdom.

There are people we know about, we hear about them too often, the world over, third to a particular system, and they glorify martyrdom.

[25:16] It's the quickest way into paradise, and all the blessings of it, so they say. But Jesus, the Messiah, the everlasting word who became flesh, didn't come to lift up martyrdom for us, or indeed, merely to be a good example to us.

It's true he is an example to his people that we should follow, but that's only a small part of the whole story. He became flesh, flesh.

He took our humanity in all its parts, really and truly, except for sin and fallenness.

And he entered into a truly human life, whilst not ceasing to be the eternal word. And so the point as to why he came, he came as the adequate substitute for us, as our sin-bearer.

He came in order to represent us, to die in our room instead, and to rise again, crowned our priest-king, in whom and through whom alone we not only have eternal life, but access to the father.

[26:48] And he was up to the task. And he was up to the task only. Now watch what I say. He was up to the task only as the word who became flesh.

man. It is only as we see him as the eternal who became man, that we have a savior who is mighty to save.

The word has come into the world, we say, a slaughtered lamb, we see, a smoking altar on which burns, a sacrifice for me, and we can never disconnect his real work from his real person, the God man.

And when we think about him coming as the babe in the manger, we think about him as the one who came to take away our sin. And that takes us to the final thing I want to say.

I want us to think about as we leave it, the impact of the word become flesh upon us.

[28:12] John says, we beheld his glory. That's the impact. We beheld his glory. The glory is of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

John says, we beheld his glory. glory. This is, if you like, proof positive that we are believers. If we are believers here today, the proof is we beheld something of his glory, not with our physical eyes. That's not what John was saying. Listen to me. The easy thing is to see him face to face. But there will be, I'm afraid, there will be millions at last.

Who will see him when he comes again. Who will wish they couldn't see. It's not the seeing of the eyes, the physical eyes.

It's seeing in our hearts. It's our understanding open. It's seeing the king in his beauty in that way. The king who bled and died to save me.

[29:28] And not alone the gift of life, but his own self he gave me. It's seeing him in that way. Seeing him as our all sufficient and wonderful savior, the eternal word who became flesh for me.

It's seeing him in that way. And that's something we go on with. And it is a difficult, difficult thing, more difficult than I know, not to see with our physical eyes.

things. And all the difficulties that that can bring. It's difficult, really difficult.

to see, to behold with our hearts, with our understanding the beauty of Jesus and to glory in him and to worship him and to serve him with all our limitations, that's what matters.

To behold him in that way, to have a spiritual grasp of his moral perfections, of his holiness, of his love and grace and mercy and long-suffering and all these things that make him what he is.

[30:54] This is my beloved, and this is my friend, this is Jesus, the Messiah, the eternal word, who became flesh for me.

I see the glory, the beauty of the Lord. And what does that lead to? It leads us to want to know more of that.

And so as we ponder John's words, you see, may we be drawn to him in a new way, in a deeper way, drawn to him who left the realms of glory for the cross of Calvary.

And see that we can ask him to reveal more and more to us of his ways, and more of his glory, and more of his beauty, and more of his sufficiency as our Savior.

One thing I of the Lord desired, and will seek to obtain, that all days of my life I may within his house remain, and may be part of that living temple, that I, the beauty of the Lord, behold me and admire.

[32:18] Make that your prayer as we leave this, that I may behold his beauty, who he is who came in the flesh, when he came in God's purpose, how he came, why he came, glory, and glory, in what you behold of him.

Amen.