

The Identity of the Son of Man

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[0:00] So John chapter 1, page 1063. Let's pray. Father, you have revealed yourself to us through the Lord Jesus, and you have revealed yourself! and you have revealed yourself to us through your words. Father, as we come to your word now, might we see Jesus more clearly, that we may see you in your glory more wonderfully.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I wonder when the first visitors came to see you after you were born, took a look at you, what did they say? Oh, he's got his dad's nose. Oh, he's got his mum's eyes.

And when they look at you now, if you bump into people who knew your parents, do they still say, ah, you're the spitting image? If I was standing next to my dad now, there would be no doubt at all whose son I am. He's 80 today, by the way. Happy birthday, Dad.

We look so alike. The family resemblance is there, and actually it goes back generations too. Well, what did people see when they look at Jesus? Well, no doubt there was a bit of the family likeness of Mary. Maybe Jesus had her eyes. But as they looked at his life, they looked at his works and his words, they saw the very image of God himself. That's John's claim in verse 14. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Now, this is a wonderful reading. We've had it several times over Christmas. So I'm not going to focus on the first 14 verses today, but the last four verses instead. But it's worth a few minutes just to remind ourselves of the glorious truths that are contained in that opening part of this chapter, because they echo across the rest of the chapter as well. They flow into the rest of John's Gospel. And as we leave the nativity story behind for another year, it's vital that we don't just take away that warm sense of kind of comfort and glow and nostalgia that Christmas brings up. But we keep in mind the true identity of the baby in the manger. That's our focus today. But here are just four little quick things.

[2:26] And there is so much more from these opening verses. But what do we see of God here? Well, Jesus is the eternal God. Verse 1. John tells us that Jesus was there in the beginning with the Father, existing before the creation of the world. And that means there was never a time when Jesus did not exist. Being fully God, Jesus is no creation, no creature. So when people looked at Jesus, they gazed upon the eternal God made flesh. Secondly, Jesus is the creator God. Verse 3. All things were made through him. Nothing was made without him. So why was it that Jesus was able to calm storms and multiply food and heal the sick and raise the dead? Because he is the one who brought creation into life in the first place. Creation dances to his tune. It answers to his call. When people looked at Jesus, they saw the creator walking about in his own creation. Thirdly, Jesus is the rescuing God. We see that in verses 7, 12 and 13. Across the Old Testament, God again and again comes to the rescue of his people, doesn't he?

That's the whole history of the Bible. God creates a world. People reject him. They get into trouble. God acts, breaks in and works as his works of salvation. Yet as God becomes one of us in Jesus, takes on human flesh, the God who loved the world so much took on human flesh to show, to be a rescuer there in the midst. Showing his love by diving headlong into the swamp of our sin that we might be lifted up out of that swamp and into his divine family. When people looked at Jesus, they saw the rescuing God who had come himself to save his own people. And in verse 14 that I read earlier, Jesus is the God of grace and truth. The light that Jesus brings, verses 4 and 5, is a light that shows us the glorious truths of what God is like. It shines upon ourselves, that reveals in a tangible way that the depth and wonder of the mercy and grace that God has for us. And as Jesus inhabits and embodies this grace and truth, it's no wonder, is it, that he drew to himself those who knew they needed a doctor for their souls? Jesus is a God of grace and truth and his life and words reveal God to the world. Of course, God didn't just start revealing himself through Jesus. He'd been revealing himself throughout the Old Testament, through his actions, through his words passed on by some of the prophets.

Some people even got glorious encounters with God, sometimes in burning bushes or visions or in fiery furnaces. And what we discover, though, as we go through verses 15 to 18, which are our focus today, that even as God reveals himself in these ways, Jesus offers us something far greater.

A perfect revelation, far, far better than the one that we get through John the Baptist, through Moses, even through the Old Testament law. Because as we look at Jesus, we see the ultimate, perfect, complete revelation of God. It's not that these other things aren't important.

So I don't think for a moment I'm saying we can just rip out the first 39 books of the Bible and push them aside. No, no, they reveal God to us. But it's Jesus who embodies that so much more.

[6 : 15] So we're going to look at those three things that are mentioned there. The other testament is about Jesus. John the Baptist, Moses and the law. And then we'll come back and we'll look again at Jesus and see how he gives us a far greater vision of God. So firstly then, Jesus reveals God more than John the Baptist did. A few years ago in my previous post, I went to the official unveiling of the new Bishop of Hartford. You'd like to think, wouldn't you, that he was stood there with a big cover over the top.

It wasn't like that. He was behind the door. But the Bishop of St Albans said, let me introduce to you the new Bishop of Hartford. And everyone clapped. And Michael Beasley walked through the door.

Up until that point, we didn't know who the new Bishop of Hartford was. It was a closely guarded secret. But now he'd been pointed out. And his identity was revealed to the world.

John the Baptist does a similar job, doesn't he? He reveals Jesus. He points to him and says, here he is, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Like a town crier, John the Baptist announces the Saviour's arrival. What an incredibly important moment in world history. What an amazing responsibility. But ultimately, John knew that his signposting was just that. He was a signpost, an announcer. He was the warm-up act. That's why John tells the crowds that he's not worthy to stoop down and untie the Messiah's shoes. That whilst his baptism was vital, a baptism of water for repentance, Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit and power.

In verse 15, he points to his listeners to the fact that Jesus is eternal. His own ministry has a moment of brightness but fades. Jesus' kingdom lasts forever.

[8 : 12] See, despite his impact and his vital role, ultimately, John the Baptist only revealed God by pointing to Jesus. That's great. That's something you and I need to be doing as well, isn't it? Pointing people clearly and humbly to Jesus. But we need more than a signpost.

People are going to know Jesus. They need to meet him. To meet the one that John pointed to and the one that we point to. Jesus reveals God more than John the Baptist. Jesus reveals God, secondly, more than Moses. To the Jews of Jesus' day, there was no one in human history more important than Moses.

Moses was the one called by God at the burning bush. He had led God's people out of slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land or on the verge of it, anyway. He had met with God on the mountaintop and regularly in the tabernacle. No one throughout the Old Testament had a closer relationship with God than Moses did. No one in the Old Testament spent more time in God's presence than Moses has.

And when we look at Moses' life and works, well, there's many things that we can learn from it about what God is like. We spoke about grace and truth coming in Jesus earlier, but that comes, that phrase originates from God's self-declaration of his own character made to Moses.

So if God speaks to Moses, Moses passes that on, we get to know what God is like. The mighty acts of salvation through which God showed himself to be a God who keeps his promise were done, many of them, with Moses at the head of his people.

[9 : 57] They showed God to be a God who rescues, protects, who is mighty, awesome, holy. And then the commands of God given to God's people through Moses reveal God's character, don't they?

That he is a righteous God, a holy God, a God whose will can be known. We can learn so much about God through his interactions with Moses, as we can through the testimony of how God is at work in our lives as well. But those encounters are not the final and greatest revelation.

For all that intimacy, Moses never saw God face to face. He got close, but there was much more to see and much more to know. Whilst Moses' life teaches us so much about God, we still need more.

We need God to speak and reveal himself directly to us in a way that we can more easily understand. God does that in part when he gives the Old Testament law.

But that revelation is superseded by Christ as well. Moses reveals God to us, but Jesus does a better job. We'll see that later. Thirdly then, what do we see about God in the Old Testament law?

[11 : 15] You see, the law given through Moses to the people of Israel was the single greatest revelation of himself and his character. These were the very words of God, some of them written by God's finger on those tablets of stone.

And they revealed God's character, his person. And unlike Moses relating the experience of God or John the Baptist pointing to God, these were words spoken by God himself to his people.

See, much of the time when Moses receives the law, it's a one-on-one conversation between God and Moses. Moses writing things down. But Exodus chapter 20, we read that God speaks to the whole nation at the same time, giving what we would call the Ten Commandments, the basis of the law.

It's unsurprising as the people gather there. They tremble with fear as God speaks to them. They're terrified. They say, Moses, no, you can do it from now on. But God reveals himself to the whole nation as he gives his law.

And one of the best ways we can get to know someone is to listen to what they have to say, or maybe to read what they've written. It's by our words that we make ourselves known.

[12:33] Now, you might come back to me and say, yes, that's true, Dave, absolutely. But actions speak louder than words. And that's true. When we speak to other, to one another, though, as human beings, very often we have a tendency towards untruths rather than truths.

We exaggerate sometimes. Not just about the size of the fish we catch, but about the problems that we have. Maybe we diminish them. Sometimes the words that we say don't really reveal what's going on inside.

And you know that. Someone says, how are you doing? Say, I'm fine. Actually, I'm not fine, but I'm not telling you. We hide the truth. God doesn't do that.

Getting to the real truth about someone, even in one of those tell-all autobiographies, is sometimes hard. But God never lies. His words are always truthful, always reliable.

That's the reason why we make sure that over the course of the year, we're looking at all of God's word revealed to us through the Bible, Old Testament and New Testament. Because God reveals himself through his ancient words and his ancient actions.

[13:46] And consider God's law for a moment. It's not hard to see, is it, how the Old Testament law shows us the holiness and righteousness of God. Who of us wouldn't want to live in a world where everyone abided by the Ten Commandments all the time?

Be great, wouldn't it? Just think the difference that would make. There are wonderful laws for helping people live together in peace. But more than that, since these laws come from God, they tell us about the author.

They tell us the kind of things he cares about. They reveal how holy and righteous God is. That's why the psalmist can write, God, your word is a lamp to my feet, a light to my path.

Shows us the right way to live in God's world. The difficulty is, of course, that although the light is shining, we don't always walk in the way of that light.

Sometimes we're just careless. Other times we deliberately walk away from what God demands of us. And the difficulty is then that we're left with a problem.

[14:56] Because whilst the law is good and holy and righteous, because God is holy and good and righteous, it doesn't truly deal with the problem of our sin and failure. Oh, the Old Testament sacrificial law shows us that despite our sin, God still wants us to draw close to him.

That's what all those sacrifices were about. It leaves us knowing God's holiness, sensing his love and compassion. But it doesn't give us a way of perfectly and permanently being made right with God again.

That's why the sacrifices were repeated year after year. The law does a great job of making us know how we should live and showing us our need for a saviour, but it still leaves us needing that saviour.

On its own, the law can be a crushing weight, giving us commands we can't obey, offering sacrifices that can't atone, leaving us helpless before the holy God it reveals.

But as it shows us the temporary solution, it points us forward to God's ultimate solution, pointing forward to the one who did keep the law perfectly, whose death did make and does still make forgiveness possible.

[16:12] See, the law reveals to us God's beauty and holiness and grace. But it is Jesus who not only embodies these things more perfectly than the law ever could, but who also fulfills those laws' demands, so that by his sacrifice he can deal with our sin and open up the gates of glory.

The law does a great job in revealing God's holiness and the need for a saviour, but what we need is to meet that saviour. What we need is to meet Jesus, the God revealing words in human flesh.

That's why though law came through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. And in Jesus we see a fully embodied, live and kicking explanation and demonstration of God's undeserved love, his truthful, reliable, unchanging nature and character.

And Jesus does that because he is God in the flesh. He is Emmanuel, God with us. That's what John says in verse 18, isn't it? No one has ever seen God, but Jesus has made him known to us.

And in case you are thinking that those words are just of John, and Jesus wouldn't have claimed those words for himself, well in John chapter 14 verse 9, Jesus says to Philip, Philip asked a question, Jesus would you just reveal the Father to us and that will be enough?

[17:49] Jesus replies, Philip if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. He's not saying that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are interchangeable. We know, don't we, that God is one God in the glorious Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a divine family, if you like.

What Jesus means, what John is pointing to, is that when we look at Jesus, when we see his works, when we hear his words, when we study his character, then we hear the words of God and see the character of God and marvel at the works of God.

That's why Paul can say in Colossians chapter 1, the Son is the image of the invisible God. We may not be able to see God the Father, but the Son is his exact representation, a real chip off the old block.

Jesus' words are the Father's words because Jesus only speaks what the Father tells him to speak. Jesus' works are the Father's works because he only does what the Father tells him to do.

Jesus' character is the same as the Father's character because Jesus is God and he shares that divine DNA. In the midst of all the Christmas celebrations, it's hard to get our heads around all those things because the image that comes to mind is of a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in a manger.

[19:15] But as Jesus grows up, we see it more clearly, don't we? We see God's wisdom in Jesus' teaching. We see God's holiness in Jesus' lifestyle. We see God's compassion in the way Jesus befriends the outcast, the sinner, feeds the hungry, heals the leper.

We see God's power as Jesus speaks and calms the storm, as he casts out evil spirits, as he raises the dead with a word of command. And we see God's holiness and love inseparably combined in the way that Jesus goes to the cross to pay for the sin of the world.

When we look at Jesus, the guessing games about God are over. Jesus, his only son, who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has now made the Father known to us.

And I guess that leaves us with a few choices and challenges, doesn't it? See, if we truly want to know God, then we need to get to know Jesus. If we want to be those who obey God, well, then we need to listen to Jesus and obey him.

And if we want to be part of God's family, then we need to follow Jesus because access to the Father is only through the Son. See, the bond between the Father and Son is so close that you can't have one without the other.

[20:45] There are not many ways to God, just one. The various religions are not different paths up the same mountain. If we want to know God, if we want to enjoy fellowship with God, then we must draw close to God the Father through his Son, Jesus Christ.

So here's my first challenge at the start of 2026. Do you know Jesus? Do you know him? I'm not talking here about some academic knowledge of the Gospels, but do you have a living, personal relationship with Jesus as the Bible reveals him?

Is Jesus really your Lord and your Saviour? Do you walk with him through each day? Do you spend time talking to him in prayer, seeking to follow him, glorifying him in all you do?

Jesus came to reveal God to us, to sacrifice himself for us, that we might know God as our Father. Is that true for you this morning?

If it isn't, then why isn't that true? Why not seek him out this year? The Bible tells us all we need to know to start and then grow in that relationship.

[21 : 59] The door is open wide if you would walk through it. Seek him out. Know God for yourself. The 321 course is starting in a week or so's time.

That'd be a great place to begin. Come and have a chat with me afterwards if you'd like some more details about that. If you don't yet know God through Jesus, then get to know him.

That's my first challenge. Here's my second question. If you do already know Jesus, if you've got that relationship, well then, how well do you know him?

See, it's possible that Jesus can feel more like a distant cousin than a beloved dear brother. But if he is distant, then we will be missing out on so much of the joy and peace and hope that are ours in Christ.

And if you feel that there is a distance there, then why not decide now, resolve now, not to settle for half-meshes in 2026, but to wholeheartedly pursue Jesus.

[23 : 07] You're never going to get to the end of him. It will take all eternity to know all there is to know about God. But what a glorious task to set yourself this year.

This year, I want to know more about Jesus than I do right now. And if I can put a warning into that as well, and it's one that we all need to be aware of, no longer how long we have been Christians.

Please don't settle for half-truths in that search. There are a lot of people today who are a little like the former US President Thomas Jefferson. You know about him?

There were lots of things in the Bible he didn't like, so he took a Bible, took some scissors and cut out all the bits that he didn't agree with. He ended up with a God he felt comfortable believing in.

He ended up with a Jesus he felt comfortable following, but it wasn't the real Jesus. Just a cardboard cutout. Friends, don't settle for a half-truth this year.

[24 : 10] Get to know the real Jesus. Get to know the God he reveals to us. And as you read God's word, if you come across things that you think, oh gosh, I wish Jesus hadn't said that, then remember who he is.

That he is the eternal word made flesh. He is the God-revealing word to us. One who dwelt among us full of grace and truth.

Maybe as our corporate resolution this year, we can make it our aim to know Jesus better. And not to settle for anything less than knowing more of the glorious and unchanging God that he reveals.

Will you join me in that? Let's pray. Father, would you continue your work of revealing Jesus to us that we might draw closer to you.

Lord, give us a desire to feed more on your word, to spend more time in prayer, to obey you in all things that we might walk in your glorious light.

[25 : 21] Put that desire in us this year that we might know Jesus more. In his name we pray. Amen.