

And we have seen His Glory

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[0 : 00] Let's turn out the gospel according to John, chapter 1, and the words of verse 14. John, chapter 1, and verse 14.

And the world became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory. This morning we caught a glimpse of the glory of Christ from that story of his coming in the storm on the Sea of Galilee.

We saw there his almighty power as we rebuked the waves and the winds. And there are countless other stories in the gospels of the Lord's mighty acts and great signs and wonders.

John's gospel, too, has many of those stories. But in this passage here, he summarizes for us the glory in one great sentence.

The word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory. And I want to focus tonight for a moment with you on these great and memorable words.

[1 : 34] I feel very self-indulgent in doing so because it's my favorite subject. But also because, while one may feel self-indulgent, it's the foundation of our faith, this fact of the eternal world becoming flesh.

This is the God we worship, this idol we adore. And I want to explore these words a little with you to see something of the glory of our Savior.

And I don't expect to understand them or analyze them fully because that's beyond my ability. But just to expose to ourselves as much as we can.

Or John's own insight expressed in those words. John himself didn't know everything, even about his Lord. And we don't know all that John knew.

Nevertheless, these words are enough to convey to us a great message. This text speaks to us of the Word.

[2 : 52] The Word of God, the eternal Word of God. I want to ask first of all, what was he, this Word? He became flesh. What was he before he became flesh?

We have the answer in John chapter 1 and verse 1, which tells us that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And that's an amazing sentence because it uses very simple words, familiar, everyday words we all understand.

And using those words, John gives us what I think is the greatest single statement in human language. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. So here we have what he was. He was in the beginning. Go back to Genesis 1, when God made this universe, this heaven and earth in which we live.

[4 : 03] And when God made that universe, the world was already in being. In that act of creation, God creates time, and God creates space.

And at that moment, his Son, your Savior, was already in being before time and before space. He already was. He had no beginning. He simply was. To use an expression that the Old Testament uses sometimes, he was the being one.

He never began to be. And in his being, there is no progress. There's no growth. There's no development. And there's no diminution or loss of energy or whatever.

He is the one who simply was, and was, and was. No matter how far back you go, there never was, when the Word was not.

[5 : 14] He simply was in the beginning. Not from the beginning, but in the beginning, when all created being began, he was already in being.

If I can venture, what is in some way so very clumsy statement, he was before time, and he was before space.

He was the eternal Word of God. We ourselves are hissing towards what we call eternity. But we had our own beginning. He had known. We are going towards infinite time, time that never ends, getting to know God and his Son Christ. But he, for he also was before him infinite time, also was behind him an infinitude, which was before time.

[6:19] So he was in the beginning. And in that beginning, we're told that he was God. Whatever God means, John is saying, whatever God the Father was, the Word was God in the same sense.

He was divine. Jehovah's Witnesses want to tell us that the language here means that he was a God. But the words, all experts assure us, must mean the Word was God.

Not a God, but he was God. He was God in the same sense as God the Father was and is God. He had all the attributes of God.

Whatever God was, the Word was. Remember again your precious catechisms that you cannot know too well what is God, a Spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable.

the Word, your Savior, your beloved, he was and is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.

[7:39] That's this person, the Word who became flesh. That's what he was. He was God in the beginning. And in every moment of his earthly life, that's who he is.

He doesn't become a different person, but he's the same eternal person as he always was. And as he teaches and as he's tempted, as he performs his miracles, as he agonizes in Gethsemane, as he hangs on the cross, that's who he is.

He is at every moment God. He speaks with divine authority. He acts with divine power. He suffers as a divine person and purchases a church with what is the blood of God.

How wonderful is that? And so at every point, he is and was God. I keep on quoting the words of one of our great Christmas carols.

Who is he in yonder stall and his feet the shepherds fall? 'Tis the Lord, oh wonder story. Who is he in yonder tree dies in grief and agony?

[9:16] 'Tis the Lord? Oh wonder story. Who is that man? There are three crosses. Imagine a child passing by this very public spectacle on the road into the city of Jerusalem.

Mammy, who is the one in the middle? Who is he? he? And as she knows she has said, that is God, the almighty maker of heaven and earth.

And the soldiers are sitting down, they watch him there. That combination of words is so fascinating.

Him there, the eternal word, eternal son of God, him there. And so he was in the beginning and he was God and he was with God.

Because we have here a reminder that in God there is more than one person. He was with God the Father.

[10:32] And the word is very suggestive fear because it very often, in fact, usually means that he was towards God.

And here the word God has before the word the, he was with God. That definite article always points to God the Father.

He was with God the Father. And so at the heart of God there is that witness. And the person's father and son are living towards each other face to face in loving communion with each other.

The word was towards God. And there were, of course, one, one God. within that one God there is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in this inward lookingness, in their mutual love for each other.

And the Lord prayed that we might be one as they are one. And in our oneness as a church of God, as the united people of God, we have that same to wordness as we live towards and for each other with loving benevolence and almost adoration.

[12:09] Because the person beside you, whatever the genealogy of their believers, they bear the image of Christ and the beauty of holiness and the members of the one body with you.

And so we live together, yes, beside each other, but also towards and for each other, because we are one as God is one.

So that's what he was. In the beginning, was God, was towards God. And then what he became, and it's what he became, that is, let's bear in mind that it is the world who becomes flesh, that is, it's God the Son who becomes man.

It's not the Trinity, it's not God the Father, it's not God the Holy Spirit, but God the Son specifically, he becomes flesh, he becomes flesh.

and he's the same person who was in the beginning, that divine person, he is that same person through the whole story.

[13:35] He's the same one tonight as he was on the cross of Calvary, as he was in the cold, cold tomb. The one at God's right hand, the one in the center of the throne, is the one who suffered and died as the incarnate Savior.

So, what did he become? He became flesh. That word must not mislead us. It doesn't mean simply that he became, that he took a body, although it does mean that, but flesh speaks of our human nature in all its frailty and all its weakness, that is, in the low condition under which we live because of Adam's sin against God.

Adam was human, we are human, but he was human in a high condition, bearing God's image in perfection. We are also human, also bearing still God's image, although so sadly marred.

But we bear that image in a fallen and low condition. And Christ comes into human nature as flesh. What Paul says, in the likeness of sinful flesh or flesh of sin. Not the likeness of flesh, but real flesh.

[15:16] And yet not sinful flesh because he had no sin, but he becomes flesh. And how challenging it is, you know, to, because he doesn't simply take it.

And you might want to ask John, John, why did you say that he became flesh? And why were you not content to say that he took flesh?

But John says he became flesh. He became human, became human in this low, low condition. It means, I think, two great things. It means, first of all, that yes, he took a human body that was in all respects like our body.

He had that physicality that we had. Remember, as a child, how the Lord Jesus, how he grew in stature. He was born as a tiny little human infant.

[16:22] Not much more, perhaps than 20 inches long. And there he is, this little thing. And then he grows and grows, taller, stronger, in his human physicality.

Yes, he is made flesh. flesh. And that flesh has all the exquisite sensitivity of our human nervous system.

And on that cross and his torture, he suffers dreadfully as the bearer of the sin of the world. It's not some idea, it's a fact.

On that cross, that cross would have today a post-god, a place on the grid where all this happened. And a moment in time when that body Christ suffered for our sins.

I might come back to that in a moment. But then he had to a human soul, a human reason, a human mind.

[17:34] And in that there are two amazing things. first of all, that he had an emotional human nature or the emotions of human nature.

He had a kind of feeling. And I'm sure that although there's no word spoken of Jesus ever laughing or ever smiling, I'm sure he wasn't always a downcast, melancholic person.

Because he delighted to do God's will. And every moment of his life, he was doing that will. And it brought him infinite joy and satisfaction.

He was, I'm sure, a contented and a serene and joyful person because that joy, as for us, that joy was his strength as well.

Now, of course, there are moments when the Lord is very, very low. Moments of unspeakable sadness. Remember him at Lazarus' tomb.

[18:50] Jesus wept. Can you imagine, as Samuel Rutherford says, apostrophies, God weeping.

What a sorrow is there. What a depth is there. And, of course, it's at one level, the sorrow of bereavement, the sorrow of personal loss.

Although he has just said to his sister Martha, he who believes in me never dies. And though he live, dies, yet shall he live.

live. And yet there is grief, even though he knows that in death, Lazarus still lives. And knows that all who die in him still live.

But, you know, it's very plain, I'm told again by the scholars, that the weeping and the anger of Jesus is real anger.

[19:55] It's not simply sorrow. It's anger at death. death is an outrage against our human nature. It ought not to be.

With all the disorientation and confusion and mystery which it confronts us, we have a right to be angry with it. Of course, we know why it's here, because of sin.

And yet at that grave, Jesus looks about him with anger. Because death is a violation of the creation that he himself had called into being.

And so in Christ, there is that depth of emotion at Lazarus's tomb. But in Gethsemane, 2, he goes there so low.

Remember, he is so amazed, he is very heavy. He is sorrowful even unto death. He is so sorrowful that he cannot keep it to himself.

[21 : 11] And he says, I am suffering from such grief and sorrow as is likely to kill me, sorrowful unto death.

He is so distressed by it. He is so distraught by it. And he says to God, Abba, could things not be different?

All things are possible to you. There is nothing that God, as we say, cannot do. And so, Abba, can you change things?

Can you give me a different cup? Can you modify the cup? And in many ways, we stand there and tremble.

because she knows the cup is God's will for him. And sometimes we think, well, when we know it's God's will, I knew it was God's will, and so I accepted, I was reconciled to God's will.

[22 : 24] But here is this perfect human being, and he knows this cup is God's will for him. will, and yet he wishes God's will can be different.

And maybe some of you, or maybe all of you have been in that situation, where yes, you know the cup is God's will, and yet you wish that God's will were different, what had been different, let this cup pass.

God's will, and only then the moment of submission, and it's more than that, not my will, but yours be done, not simply born, or endured, but let your will be done.

And he rises on the strength of that sentiment, and he says, rise, let us go, and how solemn it is that he rises from the agony of Gethsemane to the dereliction of Calvary, from one unimaginable sorrow to another, and on that cross such dereliction, such a sense of God's forsakenness.

What does a child feel when forsaken by its parents? How disoriented, how uncomprehending, how absolutely terrified.

[24 : 09] And then on the cross, our Lord has that once in his lifetime experience of being without God.

God, and he calls, and is calling to avoid. There is nothing coming back.

It's not a word, dear father, cried brother for again. It's not a word, dear father, a word of love, of reassurance, of approval, encouragement, even let me know that you've heard me.

No, not a word for the whole world, because it cannot be a word, because you are the sin of the world.

And I cannot console the sin of the world, or speak any comfort to it. you will bring more great comfort to those for whom you are dying, but for you in this moment as you bore their sin, there is no comfort only, this stone wall of divine non-acknowledgement and divine non-hearing.

[25 : 41] How low do we go? never as low as he, never to a depth beyond his comprehension and his compassion.

He always understands. Let's cling to that. And then the affection of Christ is human affections as well.

I'm not going to say too much on this, but there is a human love in Jesus as well as a divine love, a divine loving.

Remember that which young man Jesus beholding him loved him with all the compassion of a human believer for someone who was not a believer.

and his heart went out to that lost young man at a human level. He loved him.

[26 : 50] And the man had been offered salvation in such explicit terms, but he went away sorrowful because the cost was too high.

Sell all that you have, love. Yet the Lord loved him at that human level. I think of John, the beloved disciple, the disciple of Jesus loved.

Didn't he love them all? Yes, but he loved this particular one in a very, very special way. He was his cousin, of course.

He was his auntie's son, his mother sister's son, Mary's sister's son, the apostle John. Beloved. And you know, sometimes we feel guilty because we have friends we love more than others, or fellow believers we love more than others.

But Jesus himself is endorsing for us and authenticating for us this special affection, which is the norm among human beings.

[28 : 08] So we don't have the same affinity with or the same affection for every human being. We love some more than others.

And then Christ, I'm told, he dwelt among us. He came into a human situation among us, this world with all its woes.

And he puts himself into the lot of our fallen humanity. And in that fallen world, he goes about doing good.

He's despised by it, rejected by it, taunted by it, mocked by it, reviled by it.

But yet he goes about doing good. And that's a great model for us as individual believers, but also as the Church of God.

[29 : 16] You go about this community with all its woes, all its needs, and all its glories. You go about us believers doing good.

You are salt and you are light. You are not monks and nuns in monasteries, but you live here in point. I'm also seeing, by the way, that Paul addresses letters to specific congregations, to the saints of God, which are in Ephesus.

Ephesus. They had two addresses. They were in Christ and they were in Ephesus. We are in Christ.

Would a letter addressed to that address find us to so and so in Christ? And then again, we are in point.

and the two are fused. The two coalesce. We are in Christ here in our own situation.

[30 : 30] And so Jesus is there amid the sickness and the demon possession and the foul language and the abject poverty and the oppression of his own native land that am under a foreign power, the Roman power.

And he experiences the whole range of our human mysteries. He is there in the midst of it all. And we can't expect immunity if we are following him.

But then we're told by John we beheld his glory. And I wonder what it means.

And I'm trying to ponder this. Of course it means that the soul flashes of his divine glory breaking through the veil of his impoverished and humiliated humanity.

They saw his mighty acts. They heard his glorious teaching. They saw demons doing obeisance and worshipping him.

[31 : 52] They saw all that we beheld his glory. and they saw on the Mount of Transfiguration where the glory does shine through and God himself speaks of him and acknowledges him.

This is my beloved son and I love him. And that's God's own testimony. And for a testimony it is. They see invisible splendor for a moment.

The underlying glory of the divine form breaking through. And they hear this voice of attestation from his heavenly father.

Yes, John says on that Mount we saw his glory. But I want to venture a step further and suggest perhaps that it refers to what John saw on the cross of Calvary.

There in the body of his humanity Christ had carried his sin to the place where God would execute judgment against the sin of the world.

[33 : 14] And with that body he had carried his own cross. And to that cross his body had been nailed. And at that cross and at that body God visited our sin with what that sin deserved.

And his soul on that cross in that soul in that human soul he again bears the emotional cost the dreadful loss of fellowship with God his father.

Remember always what the old divine spoke of as Christ is sent into hell doesn't take place after he dies.

I will put it provocatively and say that he went to hell before he died as he hung on that cross condemned and forsaken by God.

That was the darkness that place that love couldn't reach where God would not listen listen to any voice that came out of that black hole.

[34 : 40] And can I speak of that cross as the glory of our Savior? God is love. Where does that love shine most brightly?

shine most brightly in the darkness of Calvary. That is the glory. The greatest thing about Christ is that he bore my sins.

Many of them unrepented of. Many of them unconfessed. Many of them not known even to myself. Thank God. His forgiveness does not depend on our enumerating before him all those things of which we are guilty.

But their love, the love of Father, Son, and Spirit bore the guilt of our sin. And their Christ especially in his body and in his human soul suffered all that her sin deserved.

[36 : 01] That's why when John in the revelation sees the lamb in the center of that throne, it is the lamb having been slain.

Because that is his glory that he so loved us as to bear our sins even into the darkness of Golgotha and the black hole of divine deliction.

It's so hard to believe in forgiveness. Can a just God forgive sin? nature cannot see how and shouldn't presume upon it.

But God says yes, who is a God like me who forgives iniquity and transgression of sin.

You will not take it lightly. You will not always feel forgiven. but do please believe it.

[37 : 19] Put your faith in it. The requirement for forgiveness is faith in the grace of God and faith in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross of Calvary.

And where you have that faith which I implore you to exercise at this very moment. Your faith in the grace of God in the love of God in the cross of Jesus.

In that moment your sins are cast into the depths of the ocean. A bottomless ocean of divine deliberate forgetfulness.

Without such an assurance of forgiveness we are useless. With it we have boldness to speak for God and for His grace.

Many have found peace and assurance in this parish when we back at least to 1828.

[38 : 48] Many found it here more recently. May they continue to find it here generation after generation as long as the world lasts.

May this place be known in these terms. You can find forgiveness there. And you can find it here because we preach Christ crucified.

It has long been so may it long be so. let us join again in prayer. Let us join again in prayer.

Let us join again in prayer.