

John 1:14-18

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[0:00] And I invite you to turn with me this morning to John chapter 1. We're going to continue our sermon series here in the book of John. We're going to begin today in verse 14 and continue through to verse 18.

! I'll warn you ahead of time, today this is going to be a more doctrinal sermon than is typical here at Shoreline. There is a lot in this passage and it reflects what's going on in the rest of Scripture. And so we'll be pulling in a lot of theological themes from God's Word. Here, let us hear God's Word.

John chapter 1 beginning in verse 14. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory.

Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness about Him and cried out, This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me.

[1:17] For from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

No one has ever seen God, the only God who is at the Father's side. He has made Him known. Today's passage begins with that reference to the Word.

So let's remind ourselves quickly of verse 1 where John introduced the Word. And as we look there, let's notice a meaningful difference between the two verses, verses 1 and verse 14.

In verse 1, John keeps using the word was, the verb to be, right? In the beginning was, the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God.

In verse 1, John is concerned. He's showing us what the Word was from eternity. Self-existent, divine, distinct from the Father, yet one with the Father.

[2:29] Verse 1 tells us what the Word was from all eternity. That the Word was from all eternity. And verse 14, today's passage, tells us what the Word became in time, in history.

So today is a cool day. Today we get to talk about both the Trinity and the nature of the incarnate Christ. We get to talk about two beautiful, central truths, central mysteries of the faith.

What a beautiful, heavy privilege it is to preach this passage. So here's the brief outline of what we'll do today. We're going to talk about the triune God, one God in three persons.

What does it mean that we have seen His glory? Glory as of the only Son of the Father. And then, secondly, we're going to talk about the incarnation of the second person.

God the Son taking to Himself a true human nature to come and rescue us. What does it mean that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us?

[3:41] And third, we're going to see John teach us why this happened. So that we might behold His glory. So we may receive grace. And so we may know this God.

And along the way, we'll talk about the relationship of law and gospel. Because John brings that up in verse 17 as well. This is a big and weighty passage, even though it's simply five verses long.

So it's a big day. So let's pray before we jump in. Lord, will you do the work that you intend in this Word?

Will you do it in our lives? Lord, and as John concludes this section, saying, He has made Him known. Lord, may we know you. And in so doing, find life.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Verse 1. In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God.

[4:53] And the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. And the Word became flesh. Verse 14. And dwelt among us. We have seen His glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. The God who made you. And all things. Who rules over all. Who has declared the end from the beginning. is one God in three persons.

Father, Son, and Spirit. God the Son, the Word, has always existed from the Father and with the Father in their one Spirit.

The Son is not the Father's creation, but is His very Word. So there is a procession within the Godhead, the Trinity. Father, two Son, and two Spirit.

[5:55] But none of the divine persons are more God than one another. For they are indeed one God. Not three pieces or three parts of one God.

No, they share one nature. And essence. And are one. There are two major errors that we can fall into. When we talk about the triune God.

First, you can confuse the divine persons. Or second, you can divide the substance of the one God. Confusing the persons would be like to reduce the divine persons.

To make analogies and say things like God is three in the same way that the same man can be a son and a husband and a father. That's heresy. It's called modalism.

The divine persons are more than simply roles that the Lord has taken on. They are true persons. Dividing the substance would be anything that cuts the one God into pieces.

[6:56] Either by saying that the Son is a creation of the Father. Arianism. Which contemporary Arians are. That's the error of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormon Church.

Or to say that the Father, Son, and Spirit are like parts of God that kind of add up to God. That's partialism. And that language that I just used there.

Those two categories. Confusing the persons. Dividing the substance. Comes from the ancient Athanasian Creed. It's one of the most important documents from our brothers and sisters in the ancient church.

And I'm going to quote from it at length in a moment. I've decided not to put the words on the screen for you. However, it is worth your reflection.

And so I've put on, if you go to Charlene's website, under the Build section is our church blog. And I've posted the entire Athanasian Creed. It's worth your consideration.

[7:56] And it's truly a shame that many Protestant traditions, including our own, sadly, have mostly lost the use of the creeds.

And they are a rich and biblical and helpful thing. Some may feel that the creeds are maybe too Roman Catholic feeling or something along those lines. But the creeds predate both the medieval and modern papacy and the errors that led to the Reformation by centuries.

And so there's no danger in them. They're a great help to the church. And in fact, the elders have had some discussion of ways that we could incorporate the use of the creeds in our corporate worship here at Shoreline.

So maybe stay tuned in 2023. Okay, so that language of neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance comes from the Athanasian Creed, which our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the centuries and across the continents have confessed together.

That we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance.

[9:10] For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son. And such is the Holy Spirit. The Father, uncreated. The Son, uncreated. And the Holy Spirit, uncreated.

The Father, incomprehensible. The Son, incomprehensible. And the Holy Spirit, incomprehensible. The Father, eternal. The Son, eternal. And the Holy Spirit, eternal.

And yet they are not three eternal, but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated, nor three incomprehensible, but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet they are not three gods, but one God. For like as we are compelled by the Christian truth to acknowledge each person by himself to be God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the true religion to say there are three gods, or three lords.

[10:26] The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son, neither made nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

And in this Trinity, none is before or after another, none is greater or less than another, but the whole three persons are co-eternal and co-equal.

So that in all things, as aforesaid, the unity in Trinity and the Trinity in unity is to be worshipped. We don't confuse the persons.

It's not as if we call him Father sometimes when he's acting fatherly, and we call him Holy Spirit some other times when he acts invisibly. God is forever Father, Son, and Spirit, and we don't divide the substance.

There are not three spiritual beings who in their divine counsel add up to God. We worship one God in three persons. It's with those guardrails in place that we can then look to verse 14 and see that the Word, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, who was and is and is to come, became flesh and entered the world as a human being.

[11:55] The Trinity is a profound mystery, and so too is this, the incarnation of our Lord Jesus. Who is he?

John calls him the Word who was with God and was God. I love how the writer of Hebrews introduces in Hebrews chapter 1 this word.

He says, long ago, long ago, and at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. And he upholds the universe by the Word of his power.

After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. So who is Jesus? He is the Son of the Father.

[13:03] He is himself the Creator. And the radiance of God's glory. And the exact imprint of the Father. He is the one who, by his Word, upholds all things.

But, from eternity past, before creation, and in the creation of the world all the way up through roughly 2,000 years ago, he did not have that name, Jesus.

Until the as we are considering Christmas, he was born as a human child whose earthly parents followed the angel's instructions.

The angel said, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son. And you shall call his name Jesus.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there will be no end.

[14:12] Now, this is important. What happened when the divine son was born a human child? Did he mix some of his divinity with some humanity?

Like, part divine, part human? A demigod like Hercules and the other Greek mythology? Or was his body something of a puppet?

And he pulled the strings of it from on high. John keeps us from both those errors. Look again at verse 14. The word became flesh and dwelt among us.

We have seen his glory. Glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth. No. The word didn't simply animate some flesh from afar, not a remote operator.

The word did not take on a half-and-half relationship with creation. The word became flesh all the way. The creator took to himself the nature of his own creatures.

[15:30] I'll return now to the Athanasian Creed. The right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.

God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds, and man of substance of his mother, born in the world. perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting, equal to the Father as touching his Godhead, and subordinate to the Father as touching his manhood, who, although he is God and man, yet he is not two but one Christ.

One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of that manhood into God, one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.

For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one in Christ. What we see in the Trinity is one God in three persons, the three all sharing one nature and substance.

What we see in the incarnation is one of those divine persons taking to himself a second nature, a human nature. So the Trinity is one God in three persons, and the incarnation is one person uniting two nature.

[17:13] The word became flesh, which means he truly took to himself a human nature, a human body, and a human will, which he had to submit to the triune God in obedience, so that he could obey in Adam's place and in our.

So he did not simply animate a human puppet from afar. He was not a remote operator. The scriptures tell us repeatedly that he can commiserate with us because he has experienced what it is to be human, truly.

that he does not know what it is to be a sinful human. For he was conceived of a virgin without inherited his original sin and never sinned himself.

So when the scriptures say that he was tempted, it was not from corrupted desires within himself, but solely from external enticements, we experience both the corrupted desire and the external enticement.

One writer put it this way, we must never forget that though our Lord was God and man at the same time, the divine and human natures in him were never confounded.

[18:26] One nature did not swallow up the other. The two natures remained perfect and distinct. The divinity of Christ was never for a moment laid aside, although veiled.

The manhood of Christ during his lifetime was never for a moment unlike our own. Though by union with the Godhead greatly dignified, though perfect God, Christ has always been perfect man from the first moment of his incarnation.

He that has gone into heaven and is sitting at the Father's right hand to intercede for sinners is man as well as God. Though perfect man, Christ never ceased to be perfect God.

He that suffered for sin on the cross and was made sin for us was God manifest in the flesh. And as Acts chapter 20 verse 28 says, the blood with which the church was purchased was called the blood of God.

Though he became flesh in the fullest sense when he was born of the Virgin Mary, he never at any period ceased to be the eternal word. and so the word became flesh and John says the word dwelt among us.

[19:49] If you've heard this passage taught before, it's likely that you've heard that the word here is often also that dwell is often used for pitching a tent. He camped out with us.

This recalls most likely the tabernacle, the old covenant of the exodus. And friends, this, this is the purpose of all creation.

This is the reason that the universe exists. God dwelling with his people. When he rescued his people out of slavery in Egypt, he had them build a tent, the tabernacle, for his presence to dwell with them in the wilderness.

Later, that became a permanent structure, the temple. When the Lord speaks of redemption in the scriptures, so often the refrain is something like, and I will walk among you, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people.

and what will be the final state of all things. We read in Revelation chapter 21, this same John, author of the Gospel of John, says, I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

[21:25] And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with

man, he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God, he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

This is the purpose of all creation, that you may dwell forever with this God. One theologian put it this way, this is the completion of this glorious revelation.

Emmanuel, God with us, God himself in human nature, not merely approaching and coming to man, but dwelling among men, never again to be separated from our humanity.

In the beginning was the word, and the word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.

God gave us to God how did we behold his glory? Perhaps the most obvious example of that is the Mount of Transfiguration, where he shone to three of his disciples the glory that is veiled.

[23:18] We said, you know, veiled in flesh, the Godhead see, sung today. also there is the glory of his great sign, and the wonder of his teaching.

But I think John is teaching us that we see the glory of God comprehensively in the person of Jesus. God is the glory of God. One writer put it this way, while the unveiled essence of deity has never been given to mortal sight, the real character of God, and I think that's the real character of God, can be seen in the Son who is the fullest expression of the Father's life.

as we continue this journey through the Gospel of John, we will get to know Jesus, and we will see his majesty, the majesty of his person, of who he is, when we rejoice at the glory of his goodness. I'm going to skip ahead just a little bit to verse 16 and 17.

[24:51] Because John makes this unusual transition, he says, for from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace, for the law was given through Moses, and grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

This is sort of the how we get to dwell with him forever. Moses gave us the law. What does the law do? Certainly it constrains evil, but not fully, right?

God's law, right? I've heard, you know, people don't like going to church because they just feel condemned, right?

The law does show us our need for a savior if we truly look at it and truly look at ourselves. Paul says in Romans chapter 3, through the law comes knowledge of sin.

And so there is this sense that Moses came giving us the law, showing us our need for the savior, and here comes the savior.

[26:00] Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ who went to the cross to redeem us, offering us this grace. Through his substitutionary death and resurrection, we are offered grace through Christ.

Christ it's easy for us to leave it at that. But verse 17 does not say the law was given through Moses, grace came through Jesus Christ.

Verse 17 says the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. And it's not just filler.

See, it's not hard when reading a passage like this and other passages like it in the New Testament to get the impression law, bad, grace, good.

Or the idea that God's law and grace are at odds with one another in some way. 1 Corinthians 15, the sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law.

[27:15] But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Galatians chapter 3, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. Galatians 3 again, now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

All three of those quotes come from the apostle Paul. We spent a lot of time walking along with Paul in the book of Acts, right? Just recently. Reading those statements and more like them might indeed make us think that the law is an enemy, opposed to grace.

But here's the thing. There's like a pattern to most of Paul's letters, where in the first half of his letters he's often talking about our need for salvation, because we've broken God's law and are judged guilty and worthy of hell, and that Christ has provided that salvation for us, forgiveness of all our guilt, what's the second half of his letters?

Paul's instructions for how saved, forgiven, redeemed Christians can obey the law. The apostles, John and Paul and others, they don't hate the law.

They actually expect believers to walk in it. And that's what Jesus is going to tell us in the gospel of John when we get to chapter 14. He'll say, if you love me, you will keep my commandments, both grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

[28:53] And what did he do with the truth of God's law? He reaffirmed it. He intensified it, or perhaps better, he showed us that the true meaning of God's law is much deeper than we would probably prefer.

You've heard it said to those of old, you shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to the judgment. Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says, you fool, will be liable to the hell of fire. Jesus is not opposed to the law.

Quite the opposite. What's being said here in verse 17 then? John isn't saying the law was a bad thing and thank the Lord Jesus Christ for doing away with it.

No. First, by perfectly fulfilling the law himself, anyone who is joined to Christ by faith can be counted righteous before God.

[30:04] So that we are no longer under the law's judgment, and that is grace. grace is not simply permissiveness.

By God's grace, he shows us our need for salvation. By God's grace, he sends us a Savior, and by God's grace, he is making us like the Savior.

That's part of his grace as well. If you've been here long, you've probably heard me say that the biblical concept of salvation is more than simply having your ticket to heaven punched.

There's more good news than that. Last week, we highlighted the good news of adoption. The Lord doesn't just offer us paradise.

He offers to make us his family. You get to be loved by the living God for all time as his beloved child. Another facet of the good news is called regeneration.

[31:09] If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. When God saves someone by grace through faith, he gives them new spiritual life, just as he will one day give them everlasting physical life.

And that new spiritual life begins to reshape them from the inside out in a process called sanctification, where more and more we are conformed to Christ.

And we walk in his way because we love him. And the Lord has remade our hearts to love what is truly good. The law is a good thing.

It reveals the heart of God himself. It is an expression of his own goodness, and we were made in his likeness to be like him.

What a great honor. It reveals the perfection into which we are bound. Is that not a great and glorious thing?

[32:22] Right? We were meant to be like him. I've heard that that doctrine from Genesis chapter one, that we are made in his image. I've heard it put this way, that we're like little mirrors designed to reflect God's glory.

Well, sin, don't take that too far, right? But, if we hang on to that analogy a little bit, our sin clouds and warps and cracks that mirror.

And the creator not only shined his light on us, but he's remaking us, refashioning the mirror so that we can shine brightly again with his own glory.

How wonderful. One theologian put it this way, this final use of the law, that we are to walk in it in glory, pertains to believers in Christ who have been saved through faith apart from works.

In the regenerate life, the law no longer functions to condemn sin, since it no longer stands over against man as the unreachable basis for salvation, but acts as a norm of conduct, freely accepted by those in whom the grace of God works, the good.

[33:43] This is the normative use, is also, I went too far, too many words. All right, finally, verse 18. No one has ever seen God, the only God.

Who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. Now, depending on, it's a weird sentence, right? It is oddly constructive.

And depending on which translation you're holding, the middle of verse 18 might read a little different. This section of John's prologue is the one that gives translators the most difficulty bringing into English.

Some you'll see the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father. No one has ever seen God, but God the only one and only. The unique one who is himself God, the only one himself God who is in closest fellowship with the Father.

I'm not going to tell you that this or that one is the right translation. What I will tell you, it's clear what John's saying. There is one, the Word, who is uniquely from the Father and is in the Father and is himself God who is able to reveal God to us.

[35:06] And he has. Today's passage is laden with rich doctrine, lots of teaching, and it's all for this, that we may know God.

He has made him known. God made you so that you may behold his glory.

And in the person of Jesus, God came so you may be forgiven of your sins to behold that glory forever. and in doing that very work, offering up his life to save us and then taking his own life back up, he has given us the clearest picture of that glory.

You exist to know God, to behold his glory. And guess what? The word became flesh.

indwelt among us and we have seen beheld his glory. Glory as of us, the only son from the full of grace and truth.

[36:29] Let's pray. Lord, I pray that we would be overwhelmed by this passage. Lord, I pray that we would be awestruck at who you are and that you condescended in glorious mercy to enter this world and take the creator, take on creation, creation, to redeem creation and show us yourself so that we may rejoice in your glory forever.

Lord, may we be overwhelmed and rejoice. We pray this in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen.