

# I Want To Meet Someone

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, it's a great delight to see you. I've been trying to come to terms with the celebration of Christmas in the city of Vancouver.

And it does seem that we as a city are going all out to celebrate Christmas. I mean, if you look at the downtown traffic, for instance, what a great tangle it is.

And it's all because of Christmas. If you try and park in Oak Ridge shopping mall, they go up and up and up.

In that parking lot, instead of going down, you go up. And you practically have to park on a cloud by the time you've got to the top and there's no place else to go. So that is wonderful.

The most wonderfully extravagant thing that I think in the whole of Vancouver is that tree up opposite the English Bay Cafe. Have you seen that tree?

[ 1 : 08 ] It is marvelous. There must be a million lights on it. And it's a beautiful, beautiful thing. So, but then you see the building derricks and one of them has a candle on it and one of them has a giant candy cane on it.

And there's magnificent displays of lights everywhere. And it's just, it's a wonderful, wonderful thing. For cynical people like me, you know, in aid of what? Well, obviously it's in aid of our economy.

But my only anxiety about it is that Christmas might become a bit like hockey. And, I mean, hockey used to be an important game to play, but suddenly we've discovered that hockey has nothing to do with pucks and ice at all.

Oh, you know, it has to do with, I think it would be fair to say quietly, it probably has to do with greed.

[ 2 : 19 ] Greed, but I mean institutionalized and sanctified, but greed nevertheless. And so that, you know, you could imagine that this all-out celebration of Christmas is so wonderful in this city.

And I'm saying this partly because I was on the carol cruise last night and the magnificent boats that are floating around in the harbor in the dark of night on the longest, darkest night of the year was a tremendous sort of defiance against the enclosing darkness of this time of year.

So there it all is. The only thing against, you know, the only thing that, yeah, the only rule that everybody has to observe is that ultimately Christmas is not to mean anything.

You know, it's all make-believe. And it doesn't have any sort of heart to it. So, I mean, that's a matter of policy.

But, you know, it's hard not to be caught up in it, and it's hard not to delight in the extravagance of it all and to think to have a, you know, a sort of 50-foot candy cane demonstrated against the night sky.

[ 3 : 40 ] You know, that sort of unlimited supply of sweetness that just satisfies the deep hunger of people. Or, you know, the candle that stands 50 feet high and lights up the night sky.

It's all wonderful, wonderful things, I think. But the difficulty is that nobody wants to say why, you know.

And, of course, if it becomes nasty, sectarian, partisan worship of Jesus, then, of course, that spoils the whole spirit of Christmas.

And so we get caught in that wonderful contradiction in the midst of our brave new culture. Well, if you look at this text in front of you, and by the way, this book which Merv introduced to you called *The Message of Hope*.

This is Eugene Peterson, and what he's done, of course, is he's rewritten. This is a paraphrase of the New Testament. It doesn't say what the New Testament says.

[ 5 : 03 ] It doesn't translate what the New Testament translates. But it tries to put in a very picturesque way what's happening so that you can see there's a wonderful picture of Christ in

Colossians.

And in this it says, He was supreme in the beginning and leading the resurrection parade. He is supreme to the end.

From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything. Everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding.

Not only that, but all the... The broken and dislocated pieces of the universe.

People and things, animals and atoms get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies. All because of his death, his blood, that poured down from the cross.

[ 6 : 07 ] So it's, I mean, it's very imaginative and very, and I think very stimulating, particularly when you find yourself in the place where the old-fashioned words of scripture, the sometimes all too familiar words of scripture, sort of don't grab you as you would like them to.

This will grab you and maybe turn you back to those words with a new appreciation and new understanding. So today, if you look at your thing, it says, verse 14, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

And that is the primary insult that Christians offer to our world. That one sentence, that the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

That is what the world really objects to. That he was in the beginning, that he was with God, that all things were made through him, that as many as believed in him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.

All those things are magnificent and, in a sense, beautiful spiritual pictures. But that beautiful spiritual picture comes crashing to a profound halt in verse 14 when it says, the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

[ 7 : 38 ] That's where the insult comes. That's where Christianity breaks rank with all the kind of religious aspirations of humanity the world over.

By saying that God has tabernacled among us. That God has come down and, in human form, has broken into time and history.

That there is, as John Chapman from Australia, you know, somebody in a meeting said, said to him, you know, have you ever met God?

And he says, well, I would have if I'd been there. In terms of the Jesus who was born in Bethlehem and lived in that time.

So, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. That's where the trouble starts. And that's where the misunderstanding of the Christian faith focuses.

[ 8 : 52 ] Because that can't happen. It shouldn't happen. It didn't happen. It won't happen. All those kinds of things gather around it.

And people want to escape from that. There is so much that's good about Christianity. There's so much in terms of high moral and ethical ideals.

There is so much of spiritual insight and spiritual awareness. Christianity has left such a wonderful spiritual heritage in so many places.

But then it spoils it all when it says, the word became flesh and dwelt among us. That God became a person. Now, I think we live in a time when we're trying pretty desperately to celebrate what it is to be a human being.

With all our weirdness and all our complexities and all our perversities and all our manifest differences. All these things we try and celebrate and somehow to try and take the worst of mankind and show it as the best.

[ 10 : 07 ] And we're trying to do that. But you see, all that is in a sense undermined by the concept that the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

In other words, remember we talked about the word last week? All that man was ever meant to be.

All that man could ever aspire to be. All that man would ever hope to be.

All that the whole of creation is focused on, which is the person of the Son of God. All that becomes flesh and dwells among us.

Now, we're familiar with 200 pounds of lust in the flesh. We're familiar with 200 pounds of...

I use 200 as a round term. Fairly round. And that, you know, you have 200 pounds of greed.

[ 11 : 16 ] You have 200 pounds of aggressive ambition very often in the flesh. You have... You have... We're all familiar with that.

And you have... You have the bondage of the flesh, the prison house that it is, when your flesh is infected with some... Some terminal disease, and you can't leave it. It's there. All the frailty of our human nature is in the flesh. And yet, what this statement says is that the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Well, the reason for that is... And I think that you need to understand this.

Is that the flesh gives us the capacity to make the most complete response to the Spirit of God.

[ 12 : 23 ] It's in the flesh that we respond to God. It's in the humiliation of the flesh. It's in the suffering of the flesh. It's in the achievement. It's in the frustration. It's in all the trials and tribulations that we are as fleshly creatures able to respond to God at every level of our human existence.

And so when it says that the word became flesh, it means that the word became like one of us. In all our inadequacy, in all our shortcoming, in all our failure, he became like one of us.

In order to teach us that the ultimate response of our whole lives is to God, and he has equipped us to do that by giving us life in the flesh, and which he himself has shared.

And so that's a great statement. And it sets Christianity apart from all sorts of other spiritual ambitions of mankind, because it says...

You know, because most religions are a sincere attempt to escape from the body into some spiritual state which is far exalted above the mere 200 pounds of flesh, which is what human beings so often are.

[ 13 : 55 ] We want to escape from that. And Jesus comes right into it and says, No, in that, with all its weakness and all its frailties and all its shortcomings, it's in that that we are able to respond most deeply to God.

And so that our bodies are not a mistake. You know, that they are what we are meant to have.

And that all becomes apparent when you realize that the word who was in the beginning with God, the word who was God, the word through whom all things were created, all this becomes flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.

And of course, that's the... I mean, when I talk about the massive celebration of Christmas in a city like Vancouver, it needs to be tied down to that one sentence.

But not everybody will do it. And there's not much use you trying to do it for them, I might say. All you can say by the enthusiasm and the splendor and the extravagance of their celebration is that they obviously are looking for something.

[ 15 : 18 ] What are they looking for? Well, they don't know what they're looking for. But I think, without being presumptuous, you can say what they're looking for is the reality of the word becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

And that that reality gives us hope. And that hope allows us to celebrate in a most wonderful way. So, there it is.

The word became flesh, made his dwelling among us, he tabernacled among us, and we have seen his glory. The glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

We have seen his glory. But again, it goes on more or less to say that while we have seen his glory, it wasn't really his glory we saw. It was the glory of God that we saw through him.

And, of course, that's meant to be the practical reality of the everyday experience of a Christian man or woman, that when they take upon themselves to be confronted by the Scriptures and they see portrayed in the Scriptures the person of Jesus Christ, they are to see beyond that printed page the reality of God.

[ 16 : 43 ] We behold his glory as of the only begotten Son of God. We see through the person of Jesus Christ to the glory of God. Because look down a little further, you see where it says at the beginning of verse 18, no one has ever seen God.

Well, that remains true. That remains the great philosophical statement about the limitations of our humanity. No one has ever seen God. But we beheld his glory, and that glory revealed something of the nature and character of God to us.

So we see that in Jesus Christ. And it says that we beheld his glory. We have seen his glory. The glory of the one who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Then you start again with verse 15 with John the Baptist. And remember, John the Baptist breaks into this prologue in three different places.

Here, when he breaks into the prologue, he cries out, as he's the one who bears witness to the light, remember. He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.

[ 18 : 03 ] And John the Baptist is the greatest of the prophets. We're told that. And so what John the Baptist has to say is presumably the greatest thing that any of the prophets have to say.

That is, he is to bear witness to the light. And he bears witness to the light in this passage in these words. He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.

And I think all that John is saying in that is that he himself is a creature of time and space. He comes at a certain place in history.

And after him comes one who was before him. And by that he means that while he is locked into history, the one who comes after him is not locked into history because he was before me.

And he points beyond himself, John the Baptist does, to a reality which is revealed in Jesus Christ. When you go on from these verses to the next few verses, they catechize John the Baptist and say, well, who are you?

[ 19 : 19 ] And he backs down from everything. I'm not this, I'm not that, I'm not the other thing. But he says the important thing is that he who comes after me is before me.

And you see, what it means is, and this is part of the, you know, I think this is part of the human instinct somehow, is that, and John is simply saying that it happened to him, that what happened to him was that the one whom he bore witness to was the one who, while in history, having become flesh, having revealed his glory by his humiliation.

Remember, because the glory of God is revealed is revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ. It was in his humiliation that he revealed the glory.

And so John the Baptist is saying about him that though he comes after me, yet he was before me. You can listen to me, but what I have to tell you is about something far greater than me.

And I think this is, I think this is, if I might say it, the hell of being a preacher. It's because if people like what you say, then they might like you.

[ 21 : 00 ] But you always have to talk about something that is infinitely greater than you are, infinitely more significant than you are. And you have to, in the agony of trying to put words together to explain to people, which is the agony that I'm enjoying at the moment, you have to somehow be able to help people to see something which is way beyond either what your mind can comprehend or what your words can articulate.

And I think that's what John the Baptist is saying here when he says that he that comes after me was before me. And then he goes on to say, from the fullness of his grace, we have all received one blessing after another.

Now, I think that that undoubtedly means that because of Jesus Christ, and this goes into it further in the next verse, and we'll come to that in a minute, but because of Jesus Christ, there is introduced into our world the reality of the grace of God.

and when he, when he, I mean, I suffer from anxiety.

I suffer from guilt. I suffer from the fact that I want to maintain an illusion in the minds of the people I respect so that they won't know me as I am, they will know me, they will think of me as being better than I am.

[ 22 : 52 ] And so, anxiety, guilt, and the maintaining of an illusion, you know, because you think, well, this person likes me because the only reason they could possibly like me is because they don't really know me.

And so, I have to be careful that they don't really ever get to know me or else they will soon not like me. And the, so that it's that, you know, that's that constant subversion of all that you are because, because that's, that's, that's what it is.

I mean, that's, that's what we are as creatures. But what he's saying here is, from the fullness of his grace, we have all received one blessing after another.

In other words, the grounds for our anxiety has been taken away. The ground for our guilt has been dealt with.

The ground for our creating of illusion is, is no longer there. And why? Because of Christ bringing grace into our world so that we are profoundly accepted for who we are.

[ 24 : 09 ] And the function of the Christian community is to work that out in relationships to one another. So that you, you have not, that you're not locked into a community where, where your guilt is, is justified, where your anxiety is, is heightened and where the illusion that, that you have to create becomes more and more difficult.

It's, that that's, that's the kind of way we tend to look at life. But when Jesus breaks into our life, when we encounter him, then the whole basis of our life becomes different because anxiety is not permissible.

Guilt has no ultimate reality. because of the forgiveness that is ours and playing a part becomes unnecessary because you can, you can relate to people in the simple knowledge that you are, you are radically accepted, that you are loved of God.

I met somebody this week whom I suspected had been a Christian for many years and he had just discovered that he was totally forgiven.

He had never personally come to grips with that before. He'd never understood. And that's, that's what is meant here when it says, when Jesus comes into our world, when the word becomes flesh and dwells among us, the fullness of his grace, we have all received one blessing after another.

[ 25 : 54 ] together. And so, that's, that's, you know, that's how, that's one of my great ambitions for our thing here, you know. We have it nicely organized so nobody ever has to get to know anybody here, you know.

and we can all establish the illusion that we want to be seen as in this group and that we don't ever have to prove that that illusion is wrong by getting to know anybody.

So, we can, we can keep separated from one another and we like, we like our world structured in that way. But when it says that grace and truth, the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

the law that you've got to be politically correct and that's the way the law works and the law never produces anything.

The law never achieves anything but to establish the grounds of our just condemnation. The law came by Moses and the law can never do anything but default and default and default everybody one after another.

[ 27 : 06 ] But then he says while that came from Moses, what came from Jesus Christ was grace and truth. That those two things came together. A lot of people think that grace is an escape from the truth.

A lot of people see their faith as a kind of fantasy of grace without truth. and then some of those hard-nosed agnostic types see truth without grace.

You know that man is a useless worm in the dirt basically with no ultimate meaning. That's the truth about our humanity. But with Jesus Christ grace and truth come together and that is that man may not be all that he should be but God's grace is more than sufficient to meet him in his need.

And then the passage goes on to say no one has ever seen God but God the one and only who is at the Father's side has made him known.

That that that's the person I mean the title of this talk is I want you to meet someone because you know I don't think anybody can do this for you.

[ 28 : 31 ] People can help you. People can encourage you to read about it. I want you to read this book. I want you to do this. I want you to do that. But it seems to me to be a highly individual experience that through the witness of the scriptures to the person of Jesus Christ you go beyond the scriptures to encounter that person and to meet that person.

And in the midst of of all the the extravagant celebration of Christmas which is on every street of this city at the moment the touchstone of reality is the person of Jesus Christ and how we how we should meet him the one who through whom the father has been made known the man the man Christ Jesus I wish I had 20 minutes more let me talk let me pray for you Father I ask that you will take the jumble of words and that you will by your Holy Spirit shape and direct them to the level of understanding and to the level of faith that belongs to each one of us so that we can see the person of Jesus Christ and that we in coming to know him may have at least a glimpse of the glory of God and that that faith may sustain us and that we may take the whole celebration of Christmas as a tribute to you who for most of the people of our city you remain the unknown

God and we ask that people may come to meet you as you have come to meet us in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ in whose name we pray Amen