

God's Definitive Communication

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back for a short time this evening to John, John chapter 12, sorry, John chapter 1 this time, we read in chapter 12, John chapter 1 and verse 14.

We can read verse 1 as well, but we're looking at verse 14. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 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.

These words of verse 14 particularly, 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.

We're all very much aware of how communication requires words, how we cannot deliver a message or listen to a message or understand a message without words, without the words that comprise the message being known by us.

Even when you come to people with deafness or people who are blind, you still have mechanisms by which words can be communicated to them and by them.

[1 : 25] Sign language or Braille, other methods for other needs as well. Words are absolutely essential, of course, for a message to be communicated and understood.

And it is the same in regard to the way God speaks to us. God uses human language, has used human language down through the centuries to communicate Himself, communicate His own mind, His plan, His purpose, in such a way that came bit by bit to be incorporated into written scriptural forms.

Until the matter was complete, where we now have the privilege ourselves of having a complete body of Scripture in our Bibles. Human language, but God is the speaker.

God, our Creator, has come to us in a mechanism that we can follow and understand. And when we come to Hebrews chapter 1, you remember these well-known words at the beginning of Hebrews chapter 1.

You have the two things there built together in these verses.

[2 : 43] He spoke to our fathers by the prophets. He communicated to the prophets who then communicated what they heard from God and were given from God to the people.

And it became eventually written into scriptural form. But it says He has spoken to us in these last days, the days of the New Testament age.

He has spoken to us by His Son. In other words, the writer to the Hebrews is saying this is actually God's definitive communication. It is in Scripture, but it is preeminently in a person.

He has communicated to us. He gives us the message of salvation in His Son. And that, of course, essentially is what John is dealing with here.

When you find him saying in verse 1, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And then verse 14, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

[3 : 46] And we know from the advantage of having the other Scriptures and the rest of this Gospel itself that he's talking here about Jesus. He's talking about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the eternal Son of God, who was sent by God the Father into this world, and sent in such a way as took our human nature to himself in order to, by that, communicate to us.

Not just by the words that Jesus spoke, but by the fact that as the Son of God, he became also human by joining that humanity to himself.

And it is in that great event and through that great transaction between the Father and the Son, and between the Father and us as human beings, that actually God communicated to us the ultimate, the definitive communication.

And it's that particular aspect of things that you find in verse 14. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory.

Now, two or three things that that sets out before us. And I'll try and deal with it in a way that hopefully any young folks at present can also follow, or even those not yet as experienced in the Christian faith, that you can follow hopefully what we're saying.

[5 : 11] Firstly, he says the Word became flesh. So we're really saying this person, Jesus, this eternal Son of God, who became human, the person that he's now thinking of as he's writing this under God's direction, and as he takes what he knows of Jesus having met him and been with him and heard him and seen all that he did, he's now sending this back in his mind to eternity and saying, this is the one who was the Word from all eternity.

He always was the Word. He always was as a person the one through whom God was going to communicate Himself and His salvation to the world. But to do that, he became flesh. He became human. Now, that involved, for Jesus, for the Son of God, it involved a personal choice. Yes, we know that the Father sent him into the world, that this was something that the Father himself had arranged, and in the process of what we call time, he sent his Son into the world by coming to be born of a woman, by coming to be born into the world, taking our humanity. But it's a deliberate act on the part of the Son as well. He, the Word, became flesh and dwelt among us. And it really takes account of the personhood of Jesus as something very distinct. It really takes us back to the mystery and the wonder of God being three persons, yet only one God. The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit.

[6 : 55] The Son himself is a distinct person. He's not the Father. He's not the Holy Spirit. But he is God. As much God as the Father is, or the Spirit is.

And it is the Son as the Word, as he's described here, who became flesh. He chose himself. He was engaged in a deliberate act of entering into these conditions of time and space, if you like, in this world.

A deliberate personal choice on his part. He was not forced into it. It's not something that came without his own person being involved in it.

And it preserves the distinctness of his person when we think of him as taking this decision or taking this act himself to come into the world.

Though it is also true at the same time that the Father sent him on a specific mission of salvation. And that's shown in the difference between what you find in verse 1 and what you find in verse 14.

[8 : 07] In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God.

Three times the Word was is used there. Used in an eternal sense. Used in a sense that you have to think of the Word as not having had himself a beginning as the Son of God, as God.

Now he's distinct from the God that's mentioned there. In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. There's a distinction there between the one who is the Word and the one who is God.

Who's mentioned here as God, but obviously means God the Father. But when you come to verse 14, the Word became flesh.

He was the Word. He was with God. He was God. Before he entered into the process of time. Before he became one of us. He was.

[9 : 10] He himself mentions this in John chapter 8 where he's disputing there with the Jews. who are querying his claims for himself.

And as they come to investigate or question him and throw things at him. He says they come eventually to say, Our father, your father Abraham.

He says, Rejoiced to see my day. He saw it. And I was glad. So the Jews said to him, verse 57, You are not yet 50 years old. And you, have you seen Abraham?

Abraham? Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham was, I am. The eternal sonship.

The eternal being of God. That's who this is. And yet as the Son of God, He's distinct. He takes this action of becoming flesh.

[10 : 07] He was God. He was with the Word. He was with God. Now he became flesh. He entered into this process of time. And again, Hebrews chapter 10 has something very interesting in regard to that.

Where it quotes from Psalm number 40, which we'll sing tonight in conclusion. Hebrews chapter 10 there, and it's from verse 5 through to the end of verse 7 there.

Consequently, he says, When Christ came into the world, he said, Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared me, or for me.

In burnt offerings and sin offerings, you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the book. A body was prepared for him.

A body he took to himself. That means a human nature, an entire human nature. He entered into that willingly. And this is the wonderful thing. The God who created all things, because you see, he's saying at the beginning of John here, all things were made through him.

[11 : 18] Without him was not anything made that was made. And you could translate it easily, all things were made by him. He is the creator, who created all things that exist.

But then he became himself, part of that creation. His human nature is a created substance. It's a real human nature.

And he became subject to the conditions within the creation that he himself had created by taking this human nature to himself. That's why this word, this God, this Son of God, became subject to the process of time, to the process of growing old, to the process of knowing pain and deprivation, to the process of aging, and ultimately to death itself.

This is the Son of God, through our human nature, coming to be subject to all of these processes. And he willingly entered into that.

And we just cannot conceive of what it must be for God, in the mind of God, in the mind of God, and God the Son, to say, from all eternity, as the great B.B. Warfield, the American theologian, said, that prior to his coming into the world in the incarnation, this was the mind of the Son of God.

[12 : 54] I will go and die for these sinners. He did willingly choose to come into this world by becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

Now when it says he became flesh, that obviously means he became human. He took our human nature to himself. But it doesn't mean in any way that he ceased to be God, that he stopped being what he was before he became flesh.

When we come to see him described in the Gospels, more often than not, he's described as a human being with his human attributes described for us and the things that he did as a human being.

But it is he, the Son of God, who is actually found there. And sometimes it's actually his divine nature that shines through or comes through in some of the emphases you find there.

So he didn't cease to be God in any sense. He's still fully God, fully divine, though he's now also human. As somebody put it, he became what he eternally was not without ceasing to be what he eternally was.

[14 : 20] He came to be what he eternally was not. That's human. Without ceasing to be what he eternally was. That's God.

And he took a human nature with all its faculties. Sometimes you may think that Jesus, the Son of God in our nature, yes, it's a perfect human nature, but surely he didn't have a conscience.

Surely he didn't have all the faculties that we have. surely the fact that we are sinful human beings means that he didn't have a full human nature in the sense in which we have a full human nature.

Well, that would be wrong in our thinking. Jesus did have a conscience in the human sense, but it's always a conscience that pronounces good, that pronounces that he's sinless.

He didn't take a fallen human nature, a human nature tainted by sin. His human nature is perfect and always has been. Never a sinful strand in it, never a sinful thought through his mind.

[15 : 33] And yet, this is part of his uniqueness. He has a full, complete human nature, not a sinful one, not a fallen one. Remember, to have a complete human nature does not require that sin is part of it.

Human was human in Adam before he fell, and Adam was complete as a fully developed human being without sin. Sin is an additional dimension that we caused and brought upon ourselves and upon our humanity.

But Jesus is a full human nature without sin, and yet he took to himself our sin, the sin of his people and its consequences and all that's attached to it, so that you find him in the unique position of having a complete human nature, a full human nature, but one that's subject to temptation and suffering and deprivation and pain without sin.

that is our great savior. And our confession of faith, borrowing from the council of Chalcedon way back in 451, during these centuries theologians were wrestling more with the person of Christ than

anything else.

The Lord came also to include the Holy Spirit at a later stage, but it was the person of Christ. Who is he? What's his position? Who is he in relation to the other persons of the Trinity?

[17:06] Who is he in relation to his humanity? All of these things had to be worked out. We have the benefit of all these great creeds and statements that were brought together by theologians through these early centuries, sometimes at great cost to themselves.

And you see, that's one of the things we must remember is that while heresy is certainly to be deplored, it was because heresy had raised its head so powerfully that faithful theologians had to wrestle with who Jesus is and try and put that into terms that would last down through the ages. And in our confession of faith, which itself is rooted in those past creeds and so on, you have a description of the incarnation as the Son of God taking our human nature without conversion, composition, or confusion.

That's one of the ways you can remember things that are very important about Jesus. No conversion, no composition, no confusion between the divine and his human nature.

What does that essentially mean? Well, there's no conversion. That's to say his divine nature is not changed into a human nature. Not as the human nature that he took changed to us to become divine.

[18:27] They remain distinct, human and divine natures, distinct, complete in the one person. No conversion, no composition.

It's not a matter of his divine nature and a human nature that he takes to himself and then forming some kind of third type of being.

Still just the two, divine and human. Without conversion but also without composition. It's not the creation of another type of being other than God and man.

And thirdly, without confusion. No admixture, no interflowing of the one nature into the other so that there's a mixture of attributes in the sense in which the divine comes to occupy and have that which is not essential to itself.

There is no confusion. They remain distinct natures, distinct from one another yet combined in the one person.

[19:43] Now in all of this is it's deep theology for myself as it is for yourselves but it's one of the great things that the Lord has given us is these details in the gospel because the more you get to know about the person of Jesus and who he is the more wondrous your salvation will be to you.

And the more you actually come to the point where you say well I just don't think I can get beyond this. I don't think I can actually even keep up with this what the word is saying to me about this person this Jesus.

Well that too is precious to you because it confirms what you know in your soul already that this person is God and that this person as God has done such an amazing thing as to come into space and time by taking our humanity to himself and all in the interest of saving wretched sinners like you and I who didn't deserve to be saved.

He didn't choose to do it by staying himself remaining outside of the limits of space and time. He didn't choose to do it as if it were possible anyway which it wasn't by sending some other being such as an angel so that he would represent God.

He couldn't do that because angels couldn't die in the sense in which Jesus died. God became flesh personal choice and flesh in the full sense of humanity without conversion composition or confusion.

[21:25] Secondly the word dwelt among us. It didn't just become flesh he dwelt among us and all the time you have at the back of your mind this is God's ultimate definitive communication this is God speaking to us this is God's message this is God declaring to us what he is about and his plan of salvation the word became flesh and dwelt among us you probably know that I'm sure you do know that the word dwelt there translates a word which literally means tabernacled some people have taken the idea that the use of the word tabernacled really has to do with like being in a tent for a short time has to do with Jesus just being in this world for a short time he tabernacled among us and then he's gone he's only there a few short years then he goes back to heaven of course that's true he was only here for these years having come into this world by taking our nature he dwelt in this world he accomplished his mission then he went back to be with the father in his exaltation but that's not what the word dwelt here means it actually means something that goes back to the old testament days the tabernacling of God amongst his people the dwelling of God in the midst of his

people how was he dwelling in the midst of his people he was dwelling in the midst of his people within the holy of holies as they went through the wilderness and carried the sanctuary with them the tabernacle with them they were carrying inside the very in the very centerpiece of that tabernacle and of the ritual around it in their worship was this shekinah glory the cloud of glory above the mercy seat where God manifested himself by that shekinah cloud he dwelt amongst them and of course we'll see the connection there in a minute with what he says we have seen his glory because that cloud above the mercy seat was characterized by glory it was a glorious cloud it was a cloud that shone that gave forth its own unique light and what he's saying to us is that the word became flesh and dwelt among us and it's better I think to take these words full of grace and truth as describing the dwelling rather than the seeing that's beside it there so it's really the word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth the word that was full of grace and truth himself as he came into this world as God was speaking through him as God was revealing himself through this person of his son in the flesh of humanity he was doing so as one full of grace and truth truth the communication is one full of grace and truth you go to verse 18 you find the same or similar mention there no one has ever seen

God at any time the only begotten who is at the father's side or the only God who is at the father's side on the bosom of the father he has made him known he has revealed him to us he has opened up God to us so that we can see spiritually what God is about and what he's like and who he is and what he's doing and that's what this word in his dwelling amongst us is actually seen to do he dwelt among us and you take that of course through to chapter 2 and verses 18 to 22 remember this is Jesus having cleansed the temple thrown out those who were misusing the temple for their own gain take these things away do not make my father's house a house of trade and then verse 18 so the

Jews said to him what sign do you show us for doing these things Jesus answered them destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up the Jews then said it has taken 46 years to build this temple and will you raise it up in three days but he was speaking about the temple of his body when he was therefore raised from the dead his disciples remembered that he had said this and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus has spoken now we don't have time to go into that but take that with you as far as revelation chapter 21 and verse 22 where you'll find a description there of heaven of the final glory of heaven where it says I saw no temple therein well why is it saying such a thing well if you read it through yourselves in detail and I'm sure you know this in any case by now revelation 21 and at verse 22

I saw no temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb he is the temple of the city of heaven in which we will come to dwell and at the same time he is already dwelling in his people by his spirit and that involves his humanity the God man is the temple and the light of the glory of heaven it's not without his humanity it's not without the flesh that he took though it's now glorified he hasn't left it behind it's not something that lasted just while he was in this world he became man and remains God and man in two natures and one person forever as the words of the catechism remind us and there is also in that finally there's blessing we have seen his glory glorious of the only begotten of the father full of grace and truth and then you find words similar to that in verse 16 of his fullness or from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace it is through him that grace and truth came to us the law was given by Moses that's as much as Moses could do he was given the law by God and he delivered that to the people but he did not change himself so as to take another nature as Jesus did the law was given by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ because they were already in his person and when he came grace and truth came in him and were revealed to us in him they are the properties of the person and therefore from that we receive the blessings grace upon grace grace after grace one layer of grace after another however you come to think about it it's just grace following grace and you know that's we tend to think perhaps of grace as confined only to our life in this world and that we don't need grace after we've gone to heaven well there's a sense in which I'm sure that's true but what [29 : 16] John is talking of here is that grace in the sense of the abundant salvation that's provided for us in Christ it's going to keep coming to us wave after wave layer upon layer even through eternity even in heaven it will be grace upon grace God pouring out blessing after blessing and all because of the word becoming flesh and dwelling among us and he says we saw his glory the glory of the only begotten or the only son of the father full of grace and truth the glory was seen by us says John the glory of this person and it was seen by them especially in the transfiguration some

people think the transfiguration of Jesus was really no more than an indication of what his glorified humanity would be like that's not the kind of thing really that's described in the transfiguration at all it's not left out of it but what came through his human nature in the transfiguration was the glory of his person the glory of his divine being we have seen his glory whose glory the glory of the word who became flesh and we have seen it as the glory of the only begotten son of the father the one who is uniquely the son of the father the lord god has many sons many children and he makes them like himself and they bear his image and will for all eternity in christ but they are never sons and never will be the way he is he is uniquely the son because he is the eternal son who became flesh and the glory that's mentioned as the glory of the son of god we read in chapter 12 and let's finish with this we read in chapter 12 something quite remarkable with regard to the glory of this unique son of god do you remember there that john is quoting from isaiah chapter 53 the passage we know so well lord who has believed a report of what he heard from us and to whom has the arm of the lord been revealed therefore they could not believe for again isaiah said and it's obviously isaiah he still doesn't mind but then he says this isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him now when you read isaiah 53 yes you can see it's about jesus it's about christ but it also talks about god talks about god laying iniquities upon this person it's not immediately obvious that what isaiah saw in the passage as it's described in the passage in isaiah 53 was in fact this very son of god well it doesn't mean that isaiah saw the glory of jesus the way john saw it because he hadn't taken human nature by then but isaiah he still saw this glory and we know now john is saying that it's specifically the glory of the son of god the glory of this person because isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him

and you notice the contrast in verse 43 the pharisees did not sorry the for fear of the pharisees they did not confess many of those authorities who believed him for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from god and so you have put together there in a way that's judgmental really in a in the way that it's put the glory of this person that was seen by isaiah and yet there are some that saw him with their eyes after him having taken flesh and they preferred or loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from god and isn't it a sign of god's grace in your own heart tonight that you can follow in a measure what john was saying that the word became flesh that you believe that that you appreciate that that you wonder at that that you're staggered at the fact that he took you human nature and mind in order to save us so that god might reveal himself in that way to us isn't it confirmably to you that you know he is glorious beyond what you can imagine and that you look forward to seeing him in that glory when he comes you shall see him as he is for you shall be like him and isn't it true that you know something of his blessing you you've received grace but you've received grace upon grace grace after grace from the moment you came to know him if not before right up to the present time doesn't it excite your heart and at the same time quieten your heart and assure your heart that that's something that eternity will contain without without end grace upon grace one experience of

Jesus after another and doesn't it confirm to you what you know in your heart and mind that whatever others think you love the glory of this person more than the glory that comes from man let's pray almighty God we give thanks tonight that we have dwelt our minds for a short time on what we cannot fully comprehend lord we thank you that the glory that belongs to you is so much greater than we can ever describe and we can ever appreciate in this world and we believe even in the next that our human glorified human nature will never be able to fully comprehend all that there is to know of the glory of God we thank you lord that you have come to reveal yourself so wonderfully to us and when we think of the incarnation of the son of God and as we come in these days to dwell our mind more upon it than at other times oh lord we pray that you would fill us with a renewed sense of wonder of adoration and of worship that you have chosen to do such a thing for such people as we are graciously bless us hear the prayers of your people and all for Jesus sake amen