

God Among Us

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Date: 19 February 2023

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[0 : 00] Please open up your Bibles to the Gospel according to John. We're still working our way through John's prologue to his Gospel this morning, and so we'll read from verses 14 through 18 of chapter 1 this morning.

If you're using the pew Bibles there in front of you, you can find this on page 833, if you're using those Bibles, but I do encourage you to have a Bible open and read these as God's Word as I preach.

Follow along with me as I read John 1, 14 through 18. 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 is he of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me. 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.

[1 : 28] This is God's holy, inspired, perfect Word. Would you please bow and pray with me? Lord, Father, we ask again that you would do a miracle among us right now as your Word is sent forth.

We pray that it would go forth in power to save, in power to convict, in power to sanctify, in power to transform, in power to encourage.

Lord, would you send forth your Word and accomplish the purposes for which you sinned. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Every Sunday I come home from church.

I go home and catch my breath for a minute. I sit down. I thank God for all that he's done in the morning service. I go to eat some lunch. And then I prepare myself to do something incredibly risky. I ask each one of my children what they heard in the morning worship service. It's a dangerous thing to do, as you might imagine. Last week, the passage was John chapter 1, verses 6 through 13.

[2 : 43] It was titled, I Saw the Light. And we saw from John 1, 6 through 13, how John the Baptist bore witness to the light. He was not the light, but he bore witness to the light.

The true light which was coming into the world was the one that enlightens everyone. And we had a choice put before us, didn't we? Everyone on the planet has responded to the light in one of two ways.

We have either rejected the light and live in darkness, or we have received the light and become children of God. That was last week. And so we sat down for lunch, and I went around the table, asked my boys one by one what they heard in church today, and one who shall remain nameless. He said, Dad, you just said the word light like a million times. And in my defense, my job is to preach what the word says, what the passage says.

And John seemed to be fixated on that word, light, and so that's what came out last week. It was about the light, and so I took that as a compliment, that I was doing my job on the right track.

[4 : 01] Well, this morning, I'm afraid that we might have a similar situation, except it's not the word light that we're going to be fixated on. It's the word grace.

Every occurrence of the word grace in the Gospel of John, actually every occurrence of the word grace in all the Gospels, occurs right here in these five verses.

John says, We have seen His glory, that is Jesus' glory, full of grace and truth. From His fullness, we have all received grace upon grace.

The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth come through Jesus Christ. I don't think you have to be a biblical scholar to be able to understand and see that John is trying to communicate to

us something about God's grace here in these verses.

Now, I've heard a lot of definitions of God's grace over the years. Some good and some not so good. Most would agree that grace is unmerited favor.

[5 : 05] It is undeserved blessing. And that's good and that's true, but I love how R. Kent Hughes, he gets a little bit more specific here.

Listen to these definitions of God's grace. He says, Grace is God reaching out to us in our sin. He goes on.

He says, Grace is the pipeline through which we receive all of God's tremendous benefits, the greatness of Christ comes by grace.

The greatness of His love comes by grace. The greatness of the gospel comes by grace. Now listen to this last one. He says, Grace is God's love coming to sinners.

And when you put it like that, it's no wonder why John wants us to associate the extravagant grace of God with the coming of Jesus Christ into the world.

[6 : 07] The coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God into the world, is a spectacular extension of the grace of God to sinners. And so if you're a sinner in the room this morning, I have good news for you.

God's grace is extended to you this morning in Christ Jesus. So what we'll see this morning is three ways Jesus extends God's grace to sinners.

This is going to be our outline this morning. If you're taking notes, I encourage you to do so. That'll help you to follow along. We'll see three ways God's grace is extended to sinners.

Three ways Jesus extends God's grace to sinners. First, in Jesus, God draws near to sinners.

In Jesus, God draws near to sinners. John's aim in these introductory verses we've seen in verse 1 through 18 is to show us who Jesus is.

[7 : 12] And you remember his whole purpose, his mission statement for the book of John from chapter 20, verse 31. He said, These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in His name.

That's why John wrote this book. And so, one of the ways that he is highlighting the glory and the worth of Christ is by expanding our understanding of the Old Testament in light of who Jesus is.

So he wants us to know that this man, Jesus, who he's introducing us to is not just another man.

He's not just another teacher, not just another prophet. He is what the Old Testament has been pushing us towards all along, has been telling us about all along, has been pointing us to all along.

So you remember from verses 1 through 4, at the beginning, he connected the dots for us from this man, Jesus, to the book of Genesis. You remember this.

John 1 begins by saying, In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

[8 : 32] And of course, as you hear this, your mind ought to be going back towards the beginning of the Bible. Genesis chapter 1, in the beginning. That link, that connection that John is making here is telling us that Jesus is not just another creature, he is the creator.

But in our passage today, he's making another connection for us, starting here in verse 14. Look there with me. Starting in verse 14, John connects the dots for us from this man, Jesus, to the book of Exodus.

John says in 14, look there, The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. This should astound us. The eternal Word of God, the one through whom all things were created, became flesh and dwelt among us.

He says, although he is in a different category from us, he is totally distinct from creation, yet he willingly chooses not to be distant from creation.

[9 : 46] He chooses to step into it to draw near to sinners. That should astound us. But if you know your Old Testament, this image becomes even more astounding because literally what this says in the original language here, what it says is that the Word became flesh and pitched a tent.

or the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. See, John is connecting the dots for us between Jesus, this man that he's introducing us to, and the tabernacle of the Old Testament.

A couple years ago, we were serving at a church up the road in North Myrtle Beach, and our church was preaching through the book of Exodus, and we realized pretty quickly that the first half of Exodus preaches a little bit differently than the second half of Exodus.

So you have all the stories of deliverance and the plagues and all the excitement and all the action in the first half, and then you get to the second half and you have the law, the instructions, the details, the procedures in the second half.

The first half reads kind of like a Hollywood script, and the second half kind of reads like an instruction manual. That's just how it is. Now, all Scripture is God-breathed, so let the record show. [11:12] Don't get me wrong. It's all God's Word, but we'll just be honest. Most of us are naturally drawn towards the narrative more than we are to the instruction.

It's just our nature. Some passages of Scripture are more easily digested than others, and some passages of Scripture are more easily preached than others.

Well, as we laid out our preaching plan, my turn to preach came, and we realized that my text was going to be Exodus chapter 25 and 26 and 27.

Three chapters worth of instructions and details and procedures for the sanctuary, for the ark, for the table of bread, for the golden lampstand, for the bronze altar, for the oil, for the lamp, for the curtain, and for the tabernacle.

And I'll be honest. At first, I was overwhelmed, and I didn't know what in the world would I have to preach about from three chapters of tedious instruction.

[12:17] But as I dug in, here's what I learned. For one, God cares about the details. You know, that should be obvious.

I mean, my goodness, every little detail was described, and in order, from the dimensions to the materials to the arrangement to the colors to the number of loops on the edge of the curtains, everything had to be exactly as God prescribed because all of it was a visible lesson for the Israelites about the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man.

So this tabernacle, this tent in the wilderness, was where sinful man came to meet with a holy God. And they had to be shown visibly that this was no casual task.

So every detail was there to condescend and to communicate to our senses the reverence that we ought to have when we enter into the presence of God.

Of course, you know, inside the tabernacle behind the curtain was the most holy place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, and it was there that God's presence dwelled in a tent.

[13:35] God wanted His people to know that there was a clear division between them and their sinfulness and God and His holiness. But you know what else I learned from the tabernacle?

Despite this great distance, God wants to draw near to sinners. God wants to draw near to sinners. This whole elaborate system with all the procedures and details, it wasn't just to give the Israelites something to do and to be overly complicated for the sake of being complicated.

No, this was God's way to dwell with man. And it was His initiative. God didn't have to manifest His presence among them.

He didn't have to receive their sacrifices and their worship. He didn't have to allow them even the smallest sense of His presence and holiness, but He did because He wanted to draw near to sinners.

[14:43] So He says in Exodus 25, verse 8, He says, Let them make me a sanctuary. Here's the purpose. That I may dwell in their midst. Consider the heart of God for a moment.

The Lord saw the plight of His people suffering, wandering in the wilderness, homeless, poor, weak, undeserving.

And you know what He says? Y'all build me a tent so I can go be with you wherever you go. And this was God-initiated grace.

And John says that is exactly what is happening here in the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment, the full realization of everything that the tabernacle was supposed to be.

Jesus Christ, He is where God and man meet together. He is where God comes down to earth to be known and to be worshipped.

[15:52] The beauty of His character, the beauty of His words, the beauty of His actions, they communicate to us who God is. Jesus, He is where sacrifice is offered that's pleasing to God.

He is where the presence of God can be known not just by a few but by any who come to Him in faith. Oh, the humility of the Son of God, the humility and the grace of Jesus Christ to leave the glory of heaven and to become human, to willingly choose to dwell in this tattered tent of a body that can be ripped and broken and beaten and stained and drugged through the mud not because we're

worthy of it but because He is full of grace towards sinners and He wants to dwell with us.

Second, John shows us another way that Christ extends the grace of God to sinners. Second, in Jesus sinners see the glory of God.

In Jesus sinners see the glory of God. John continues verse 14, look there, 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.

In Christ we have seen the glory of God and again this should just astound us especially if we know our Old Testament.

[17 : 35] As you know throughout the Old Testament the glory of God we see glimpses of His glory He manifest His glory as a pillar of cloud by day a pillar of fire by night you know how Moses went to go speak with God on top of the mountain and He came down and His face was radiant from spending time in the glory of God but even these were just partial manifestations of the glory of God they were limited that God restrained He held back the fullness of His glory because sinners like us cannot see Him and live isn't that what we read in our scripture reading this morning Sean read from Exodus 33 Moses asked the Lord to show me your glory how did God respond?

He said I will show you my goodness I will proclaim to you my name I will proclaim my steadfast love and my faithfulness I will place you safely in the cleft of the rock I will cover you with my hand but you cannot see my face for man shall not see me and live no one can see the fullness of God's glory and live that request show me your glory that's a bold and dangerous request for sinners to make there's a Jewish tradition that says that when the high priest would go into the holy of holies inside the tabernacle on the day of atonement he was the only one allowed to go in he would enter in with a rope tied around his foot and bells tied around his waist why?

because he was a sinner entering into the presence of God and in the event that his sins were not properly atoned for when he went into the presence of God since he was the only one allowed to go into the room if he were struck down in the presence of the glory of God they would hear the bells jingle and be able to by the rope pull his body out of the room the glory of God is too much it's too holy for sinners like us to be able to take in it's a danger for sinners like us to be in the presence of God but John says this man Jesus has come onto the scene and we have in him seen the glory of God more clearly than a pillar of cloud more clearly than a pillar of fire

God's glory has come down to us wrapped himself up in human flesh in a way that can be seen and touched Jesus came that in him unworthy sinners from every tribe tongue and nation might see the glory of God I wonder if you see him I wonder if you see the glory of God you know one of the atheists favorite arguments against the glory against the existence of God is that we have never seen him Yuri Gagarin he's the very he's the first Russian cosmonaut launched into space in 1961 he famously said well I don't see any God out here we read in our men's group this week a story about Saint Augustine a pagan man brought Saint Augustine an idol one of his idols he held it in his hands he showed it to Augustine and said see here is my God where is yours and Augustine replied I cannot show you my God not because there's no God to show you but because you have no eyes to see him we can't see God with physical eyes we have to have spiritual eyes to see him no one has ever seen

God we would agree John says in verse 18 no one has ever seen God our physical eyes cannot see him that's correct but Christians are those who by the grace of God have been given eyes to see the second half of the verse no one has ever seen God but the only God who is at the father's side he has made him known church if you want to see the glory of God you must be given eyes to see you know one way that he might just open up our eyes to see his glory is by witnesses to his glory there's the witness of nature the heavens declare what the glory of God the skies above proclaim his handiwork day to day pours out speech night to night reveals knowledge there is no speech nor are there words whose voice is not heard in other words everyone in creation has had the witness testify to them of the creator their voice goes out through all the earth their words to the end of the world saying God is there there's the witness of scripture this authoritative

[23 : 06] God breathed perfect witness 66 different books written by different authors in different times in different places and under different circumstances that all holds together as one testimony to God's glory in the gospel of Jesus Christ from beginning to end there's the witness of thousands upon thousands upon thousands of Christians throughout the world throughout the history of the church who say like John the Baptist here in this passage and they point upwards with their lives and their words towards the Messiah and say behold the Lamb of God Christians who have had

their eyes open have been given eyes to see him and are willing even to the point of death to testify to what they have seen by the grace of God but you know the most powerful the most clear the most compelling appearing of the glory of

God is the coming of the Son of God Jesus Christ Christ this is what John is telling us we have seen his glory commentators they they go back and forth they argue over whether or not he's he's talking about the transfiguration here where Jesus went up on the mountain his appearance was changed and he revealed his glory it says his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light and of course he's talking about that but not just that no one no one ever spoke like this man just a carpenter but with understanding and wisdom and authority that no one could explain so that Peter would later say Lord you have the words of eternal life where else can we go we have believed and come to know that you are the holy one of God no one ever did the things that Jesus could do calming storms healing the sick casting out demons forgiving sins performing all sorts of miracles and signs that we'll see throughout this book foretelling his own death and his own resurrection and then dying and rising exactly as he claimed and then appearing to more than 500 witnesses among whom is John who wrote this book to say that if you want to see the glory of God you must look to Jesus do you ever just wish you could get a better vision for who God is for the glory of God do you ever pray that prayer Lord show me your glory if you do let me just challenge you for a moment to do something very practical even this week would you set some time aside and open up your Bible maybe read through one of the gospels gospel of Mark 16 chapters it's the shortest one you could probably handle that in one sitting maybe two just read through one of the gospels and pray and ask the Lord Lord would you show me your glory as I fix my eyes on Christ show me who you are as I look to Jesus show me your glory in the way that this man lived and walked and taught give me eyes to see your glory in the word

God extends his grace to sinners in Jesus by sending forth his glory in a way that can be seen and known but not just that he extended his grace that it might be received this is the third way Jesus extends God's grace to sinners third in Jesus sinners receive the grace of God see God's grace is not just meant to be observed and seen passively no it must be received actively by faith look there to verse 16 John says and from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace for the law was given through Moses grace and truth came through Jesus

Christ we saw the contrast last week didn't we those who reject the light are separated from God left in the darkness of their sin but to all who did receive him who believe in his name he gives this unbelievable right to become children of God who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God it's all of grace if you're born into it naturally by blood it is not of grace if you work for it by the labor of your hands by your flesh by your effort it is not of grace if you if you will it into existence by your desiring by your choosing it is not of grace and it has always been this way look there to what he says in verse 17 we need to understand this he says the law was given through Moses grace and truth came through Jesus

[29 : 02] Christ we need to understand this because some take this as as a contrast as if he's saying before Jesus there was no grace no truth but now that Jesus has come we have grace and truth I don't think that's what he's saying here the law was a grace of God the law was a gift of God's grace I don't think you can read through the Psalms and come to the conclusion that the law was not a gift of God's grace Psalm 19 says the law of the Lord is perfect reviving the soul the testimony of the Lord is sure making wise the simple the precepts of the Lord are right rejoicing the heart the commandment of the Lord is pure enlightening the eyes the fear of the Lord is clean enduring forever the rules of the Lord are true and righteous all together more to be desired are they than gold even much fine gold sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb moreover by them as your servant worn and in keeping them there is great reward is that not a gift of God's grace the law is truth of God it is

God's word graciously delivered God's word come down to us written in black and white where we can read it and hold it and see the heart of God it communicates the holiness of God it communicates the sinfulness of man that is God's grace but John is showing us again once again as good as that was something better has come Jesus Christ has come in Christ grace has come to us in a much fuller more lasting more permanent more effective way Jesus Christ is the word of God made flesh the word of God come down to us full of grace and truth in the tabernacle God drew near in part but in Christ now he has come in full to dwell with sinners God manifested his glory for the

Old Testament saints like like rays off of the sun but now in Christ the sun himself has come to dwell with us and we have seen his glory and God graciously delivered his word but now in Christ the word was made flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth that he might be received and that we might be transformed you all have probably heard me quote this poem from John Bunyan before not Paul Bunyan John Bunyan run John run the law demands but gives us neither feet nor hands far better news the gospel brings which bids us fly and gives us wings see the law graciously reveals God's will to us it makes demands but it does not give us the ability to obey it none of us are able to keep it and when sinners see the law when we come face to face with that holy law of God all it does is expose our sin all it does is show us how far we fall short from the glory of God even if we try to obey it in our own flesh the way we go about obeying the law is sinful we need something better we need the saving grace of God to come to us in fullness we need God's grace to come in power to declare us innocent not because of our obedience but because of the obedience of another one who who came down from heaven to perfectly obey the law in our place we need the grace of God to come and to change us from the inside out so that we we're made new we're made capable of obeying so that we want to obey the law of God so that we we can obey the law of God by his grace we need the grace of God to give us new hearts that love the Lord with all our heart mind soul and strength and love our neighbor as ourself we don't just need a little bit of grace church we need fullness of grace and truth

John tells us that that is what Jesus extends to sinners this morning are you drinking from the fountain of the grace of God not just once but over and over and over and over and over again Martin Luther he says this spring he's talking about the spring of God's grace this spring is inexhaustible it is full of grace and truth from God it never loses anything no matter how much we draw but remains an infinite fountain of all grace and truth the more you draw from it the more abundantly it gives of the water that springs into eternal life just as the sun is not darkened by the whole world enjoying its light and could indeed light up ten worlds just as one hundred thousand lights might be lit from one light and not detract from it just as one learned man is able to make a thousand others learned and the more he gives the more he has so is

[35 : 28] Christ our Lord an infinite source of all grace so that if the whole world would draw enough grace and truth from it to make the world all angels yet it would not lose a drop the fountain always runs over full of grace I'll ask you again are you drinking from the fountain of God's grace in Christ I want our church to be marked by grace not just saved by grace but transformed by his grace let me tell you what that might look like as we close it might look like a group of people whose burdens are lifted we no longer have to labor and to strive by our own effort to earn anything before God it's been given to us by his infinite grace in

Christ that might look like joy and peace and happiness and contentment might look like hope hope overflowing it might look like humility as we imitate Christ who emptied himself considered equality with God not a thing to be grasped but took the form of a servant became obedient to the point of death even death on a cross it might look like us growing to reflect the glory of God as we let grace transform us into his image and it might look like grace extended through us to the world around us you know this grace is not just meant to be received and kept to ourselves if you have tasted of the grace of God share it share it with others around you that all might taste and see that the Lord is good amen let's pray Lord we ask that you would make us a people marked by your grace and we praise you that the grace of God has come in fullness in the person of Christ Lord so that if any sinner would turn and believe and trust in him his sins would be wiped away not only that he would be made like you further and further conformed into your image and so we pray Father that this church would be marked by your grace we pray that others would come to know you as we extend your grace to others we pray this in Christ's name amen to him you