
I'd like to begin with two verses from the first chapter of the gospel of John

John 1.14 NIV The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1.18 NIV No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

In these few words, John has given us a great deal to reflect on - and I'd like to focus on three inter-related themes that emerge

You remember how John begins his marvelous witness to Jesus

John 1.1–4 NIV In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life...

And now this Word, who was with God from the beginning, who is God... has become flesh

The Word, who created all of us, has become one of us... That's what the word incarnation means, as you know - God, who created us through Jesus, has become one of us in Jesus

And that's the **first** of the three great themes I'd like to consider - the **incarnation of God**

And then John tells us that not only did God become one of us in Jesus, he chose to dwell among us

So we might experience the real presence of God among us - and that's the **second** of the three great themes - the **presence of God**

And why did God choose to dwell among us? To reveal his glory to us... says John

And that's the **third** great theme for today - the **glory of God**

The glory of God is the full revelation of who he truly is

To see the glory of God is to know God, to know his heart

We're going to come back to this in a bit, but here's the point John is making: the glory of God is most fully revealed to us in Jesus

There's a wonderful symmetry to all of this - incarnation, presence & glory

God created us in his own image, so that he could become one of us... and live among us... to reveal himself to us

To be human is not the opposite of being divine, as is commonly assumed

The human was created in the image of the divine in order that the human could best express the divine

There is something about being fully human that perfectly reveals God himself - and that is precisely what we see in Jesus

You're familiar with that ancient debate about the humanity and the deity of Jesus, right? - how can Jesus be fully human and fully God at the same time?

Well, I hope you see how John resolves this tension - he tells us that God made us humans in his own image so that the fully human Jesus absolutely be fully God at the same time

But there's more - consider verse 18

John 1.18 NIV No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

It is only in this human Jesus that we come to know God in the first place, says John

That's another question people debate all the time: Is Jesus God?

And so we try to offer proofs of the divinity or the deity of Jesus - like his miracles, or the resurrection, or something along those lines

But John's point here is that the question itself makes little sense

Before we can offer a proper answer to the question "Is Jesus God?", we must first have a clear understanding of who God is

John's point is that you don't really know what God is like until you first know what Jesus is like

So John dismisses the question "Is Jesus God?" as wrong-headed, and he replaces it with the right question: "**What is God like?**"

And John's answer to that question is this: "**God is like Jesus**"

This is perhaps one of the most crucial insights you and I need

All of us carry around with us an incomplete, warped, and broken understanding of God

Early in childhood, our concrete understanding of this word "God" is shaped by the authority figures in our lives - parents, other adults

And if they fail us or even harm us, we form a very broken picture of God in their image

...angry, harsh, vindictive, judgmental, controlling, cold, silent, manipulative, untrustworthy

... or passive, weak, powerless, unsafe, absent, irrelevant

John is telling us that we must get rid of all these broken & destructive images of God that we carry around

And begin to understand God altogether afresh from our growing understanding of Jesus himself

John 1.18 NIV No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

What is God like? well... God is like Jesus, says John

So Jesus came to reveal God to us. But there's more...

The Word of God became one of us so that we might truly experience the **presence of God** with us, in us, around us

John 1.14 NIV The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

Another way to translate this would be to say that God became one of us in Jesus and pitched his tent among us...

Which takes us back to the Exodus in the OT

When Israel left Egypt to travel to the Promised Land, God was present among them, guiding them every step of the way

And the presence of God was with them concretely in the ark, in the tabernacle that they carried around with them

And whenever and wherever they stopped, they pitched a tent for the tabernacle... for the presence of God among them

John is telling us that in Jesus, God has pitched his tent among us

God is present among us, right now and forever, in Jesus

What does this mean for us? Well, it's actually a bit complicated

On the one hand, it does seem like the presence of God is what we long for

Psalms 63.1 NIV You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you...

And I think you and I can resonate with that desire - we do long for God, for his presence...

And yet... deep within us there's a niggling hesitation, a little caution

Even a little fear, possibly - about God actually showing up among us... we don't want to admit it, but perhaps we might feel better if he stays at a safe distance from us

This nagging fear of God's actual presence among us goes back to Genesis

You recall how God made this man and this woman and placed them in this stunningly beautiful world, filled with sheer delight

And, most crucially, God was present there among them, and God's presence with them was their delight...

And God's word to them was wisdom, was peace, was safety

But they decide to ignore God's word, and pursue their own desires

And instantly, death of every kind enters into the story

That simple love, joy, peace that God's presence brought them is now replaced with a powerful sense of guilt, and shame, and hiding

And all of that is too hard to bear, so they move into blame-shifting

And now Adam & Eve are in the most awful situation possible

From the depths of their soul they long for the presence of God

But because sin has entered into them, and taken over...

They are now afraid of the presence of God...

They're afraid of the very thing they long for... they're hiding from what they most desire, from what they most need - God himself

That's the complication... that's the awful dilemma that all of us face

Any genuine encounter with God delights our hearts

But any genuine encounter with God also exposes our sin and our brokenness, to a degree that perhaps we weren't even aware of...

So that makes the presence of God somewhat scary

In God's presence, my sin is fully exposed... what will God do to me?

We see this tension vividly described in Isaiah 6

Isaiah, the prophet, had come to the Temple of God...in order that he could be in the presence of God

Now I think that when Isaiah came into the Temple, he was certainly aware that he wasn't perfect, that there was sin in his life

And - like all of us - he had found a way to push that awareness of his own sin to the periphery of his consciousness

But when he encountered God for real - the awareness of his own sin moved instantly from the periphery to the center

Isaiah 6.1-5 NIV11 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

Woe to me... I am damned, says Isaiah

In the presence of God, the depth of our sinfulness is revealed... and we are undone

This is our own condition - and the condition of every human being

There is this deep tension within us - we long for the presence of God, and yet we're afraid of him

How do we resolve this tension? Well, all our attempts usually fall into three distinct moves

First, we pretend that we're not so bad, there's a lot worse out there

This self-righteousness is an instinctive and immediate response

Have you ever noticed how when we sin, we move instantly to excuse it, to explain it, to minimize it?

And have you ever noticed how when someone else sins against us, we move instantly to maximize it?

But this self-righteousness is simply delusion... and utterly empty

So next, we try to bargain with God

We might actually acknowledge our sin

And then we try to find a way to make it up to him...

I made this mistake, so here's how I'm going to make up for it

The problem here is that it turns out that there's really nothing we can do that will actually make up for the impact of our own sin

If you steal a paper clip from work ...and you feel badly about it, you could buy a box of paper-clips and put it in the workroom

But that's trivial...

Consider some of the more serious things you and I have done that we can't ever really fix... I fail constantly... as a husband, as a father, as a friend, as a pastor... my failures create pain & hurt that I can't fix

Listen to the prophet Micah

Micah 6.6–7 NIV11 With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?

Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

So what now?

We've tried pretending

And we've tried bargaining... there's no way out there

There is a third option

Luke 18.9–14 NIV11 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

God, have mercy on me, a sinner

So we say, God - I desperately need you... my soul longs for you

And yet, I look at my own sin and the evil that I have willingly participated in... and I feel helpless... hopeless

God, have mercy on me, a sinner

But will God have mercy on us? Why would he?

How could he simply ignore our sin and be good to us? Is that who we think he is? Someone who closes his eyes to evil?

Mercy is a complicated request

Asking for mercy says something like this - I have totally wronged you. I have done everything in my power to destroy you and all you stand for. I have rejected you, mocked you, scorned you, ignored you. And now that I face the consequences of my actions, I'm asking you to forget all of that, and simply be good to me.

Why would God do that?

[My conversation with a woman at HCC about grace]

[My conversation with "Rahim" - his account]

So what will God do with our appeal for mercy? What would Jesus do?

Will he have mercy on us? Can he have mercy on us? How?

And that brings us back to John

John 1.14 NIV The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory...

We have seen his glory

And right there, if you're paying attention, you're going whoa....
Hang on there, Sloopy... you saw his glory?

And you're here to tell us about it? Were you not completely
destroyed when you saw his glory? Remember Isaiah?

You seem pretty chill for someone who has actually seen the glory of
God

And John says, yes, and I want you too to see the glory of God in Jesus - that's why I wrote this gospel

**And I know you're afraid of the presence of God, says John, because
of your own sinfulness**

But listen to me, and when you understand how Jesus reveals the
glory of God, you will be drawn to him, and you will trust him, and
you will find mercy, and forgiveness, and restoration, and life

So ... how does Jesus reveal the glory of God to us?

Well, John sets it up for us in a most fascinating way... he gives us 7,
maybe 8 signs that point to God's glory in Jesus

First, John tells us of a wedding in Cana, you know the story...

Jesus, his mother, and his friends were at this wedding, and pretty soon they ran out of wine. So Jesus steps in, and transforms about 180 gallons of water into the finest wine... and there was great rejoicing!

John 2.11 NIV11 What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

So this amazing thing that Jesus did, this miracle, is the first of the signs that John gives us

And then he heals the centurion's servant, in chapter 4

John 4.53–54 NIV11 This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.

And then John stops naming the signs... we are supposed to discover the rest of the signs for ourselves

And so we find a third sign in the next chapter - the healing of the lame man at the pool in Bethesda

Then Jesus feeds the 5000 in the wilderness, and he walks on water

And Jesus heals the blind man

And then he raises Lazarus from the dead

Clearly Jesus he has all power at his disposal,

And perhaps we're starting to think that glory is most revealed in these acts of power... these miracles that assert supreme power

But John has saved up the best and truest for last... there is a final sign - and it completely turns everything upside down

There is a final sign, the ultimate sign of God's glory... the ultimate revelation of God's heart toward us

And in this final sign that the glory of God is fully revealed to us

Now Jesus had spoken of this final sign from the very start

Glory has to do with exaltation, with being lifted up...

And Jesus says something very interesting to Nicodemus in Ch 3

John 3.14–17 ESV "...the Son of Man [will] be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

John's point is that this final and greatest sign of the glory of God is Jesus going willingly to that cross for you and for me

This greatest and most perfect revelation of who God truly is happens when Jesus, the incarnation of God, the presence of God among us, chooses to go to that cross for us

It turns out that the glory of God ... the heart of God... is most fully revealed to us as Jesus lays his life down for us

When Jesus takes upon himself our sin - our sin that has distanced us from the presence of God... our sin that creates fear within us toward God... our sin, whose consequence for us is eternal death

And Jesus takes all of that upon himself - he becomes sin on our behalf, he dies our death for us, with us

It is in the atoning, redeeming, reconciling death of Jesus on the cross that the glory of God is most fully revealed

This is our God - Jesus, who gave his life for us, that we might live

This is our God - our Creator, yes; our Judge, yes; but most crucially, our Lover, our Savior, our Redeemer

This is our God

The One who takes our sins upon himself, and dies our death, takes our hell upon himself...

So that we need no longer be afraid of the presence of God, but instead draw near to him

John 1.14 NIV The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory...

So what is God like?

Well, our God is like Jesus - who died for us

John 3.16–17 ESV “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Remember when Isaiah saw the glory of God in the temple?

He heard the angels calling to one another, saying

Isaiah 6.3–7 NIV11 “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

But his encounter with God did not end there

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

John is telling us that what God did for Isaiah in the temple, he is doing for us all in Jesus

We have seen his glory... the glory of a Holy God laying down his life to atone for our sin

So because Jesus went to the cross for us...

Our sin, our guilt, our shame, our fear... all of it was nailed to the cross in Jesus... all of it died on that cross with Jesus

Colossians 2.13–14 NIV When you were dead in your sins ... God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge ... which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

Romans 8.1 NIV11 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

My response to “Rahim”...

I urge you to receive the grace that God is offering you this moment

[thoughts on cards turned in last week]

Understand the glory of God revealed to us in Jesus...

And trust him... that in Jesus, it is well with your soul
