

Behold the Glory of God in Jesus Christ
John 1:14-18

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After visiting a grand temple, a 12th century Buddhist poet wrote this poem:

Gods here?
 Who can know?
 Not I.
 Yet I sigh
 and tears flow
 tear on tear.

That ancient poem expresses the longing of the human soul to connect with God, to somehow see God and know God. It also expresses the profound sorrow of not knowing for sure if God can be seen or known.

Has God revealed himself to us? Can we really know him? Our text today answers those questions with a resounding yes. These verses tell us in no uncertain terms that God has made himself known. He revealed himself to us by becoming one of us in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ.

In this passage, we have drilled down to the core of the Christmas story. John certainly knew about the birth story of Jesus in Bethlehem. He knew about the manger, the shepherds, and the magi. But John expresses the Christmas story here in terms of its theological significance. He wants us to know that when Mary gave birth to Jesus that night in Bethlehem, it was nothing less than the entrance of God himself into our world as a human being. And in that act of God becoming man, the glory of God was revealed in an unprecedented and unrepeatable way.

This passage is an invitation for us to come and behold the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

I. Jesus Christ is the unique revelation of God (vv. 14-15).

A. The Word became flesh.

1. The Word.

- a. The eternal Word who existed eternally with God before creation.
- b. The eternal Word who was God.
- c. The eternal Word who created all things.
- d. The eternal Word who possesses life in himself.
- e. The eternal Word who is the true light.

2. Became flesh.

- a. Flesh is a term that speaks of full humanity. John could have said “the Word became man (*anthropos*) and that would have been correct. But he uses a term (*sarx*) that emphasizes the fact that Jesus entered into the fullness of humanity. He had a human body, human soul, and fully entered into human experience.

- 1) He was born like all babies were born.
- 2) He grew and developed like all human beings do.

- 3) He had human limitations like hunger, fatigue, thirst, pain, and even death.
 - 4) He had human emotions like love, anger, sorrow, joy, and so on.
 - 5) The writer of Hebrews says that he “shared our flesh and blood” and was “made like us in every respect.” (Heb. 2:14ff)
- b. He became flesh. That means that the eternal Word at a moment in time became a human being.
- 1) He did not cease to be God as if he exchanged his deity for humanity. He continued to be God, but he became man.
 - 2) Jesus was one person with two natures. He possessed a human nature and a divine nature. He was fully God and fully man in one person.
- B. And dwelt among us and we beheld his glory.
1. Here John uses terms that draw upon Old Testament examples of God dwelling with man.
 - a. The term dwelt comes from a verb meaning “to tabernacle” or “to pitch a tent.” This takes us back to Exodus 25 and the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness.
 - b. John says that we beheld his glory. When you put the ideas of a tent and glory together, what do you think of? Again, you think of Exodus 40. In vv. 34-39, Moses describes how the glory of God filled the tabernacle.
 - c. The purpose of the tabernacle was to be a place where the glory of God would be seen as God dwelt in the midst of his people.
 - d. John is now telling us that the glory of God dwells with people not in a literal tent but in the person of Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus Christ is the “radiance of the glory of God” (Heb. 1:3).
 2. John says that himself and others who lived during Jesus’ earthly life saw the glory of God in Jesus Christ.
 - a. They physically saw Jesus Christ as the revealer of God’s glory. See how John describes it in 1 John 1:1-4.
 - b. They saw this glory revealed in the supernatural signs Jesus performed. See 2:11; 11:4.
 - c. In John’s gospel, the glory of Jesus is specifically connected to his death and resurrection. See John 12:33; 13:31-32.
 3. His was the glory of the only begotten Son from the Father.
 - a. This refers to the unique relationship between the Father and the Son.
 - b. This emphasizes the uniqueness of Jesus. There is only one Son from the Father.
 - c. This glory revealed in the only Son is full of grace and truth. This is probably a reference to Exodus 34:5-7. Grace and truth are parallel to “love and faithfulness” in Exod. 34:6.
 - d. This again connects to the idea that Jesus is the revealer of God’s glory. Moses had asked to see God’s glory in Exod. 33. God answers that he will hide Moses face in the rock and then pass by him. He will see the reflection of God’s glory. That revelation of God’s glory is what Exod. 34:4-7 describes. John’s point is that Jesus reveals God’s glory.

4. John the Baptist saw that glory and testified of Jesus that he was superior.

So, Jesus is the unique revelation of God. But John does not stop there. He takes it a step further.

II. Jesus Christ is the ultimate revelation of God (vv. 16-18).

A. The revelation of God through Jesus supersedes previous revelation.

1. The fullness of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ brings us grace in place of grace. The idea is that the fullness of God in Jesus Christ is a grace that replaces a previous grace. The preposition John uses means “in the place of.”
2. What does this mean, “grace in the place of grace?” Verse 17 explains. The law came through Moses. Grace and truth (remember these words describing the revelation of God’s glory in Exod. 34) came through Jesus Christ.
 - a. The law “was given” through Moses. Moses was the mediator of the grace of God expressed in the Old Covenant.
 - b. But grace and truth (revelation of God’s glory) “came” through Jesus Christ.
3. Verse 18 serves to confirm further this idea. No one has seen God. The only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.
 - a. No one has seen God at any time. Remember the request Moses made in Exodus 33:18-22? God, show me your glory. God told Moses, you cannot see my face and live. I will hide you in the rock and pass by you. You will see my back but not my face. In other words, you will not see a full-on display of my glory – face to face. Moses did not see a full expression of God’s glory.
 - b. But Jesus Christ is the full expression of God’s glory. Notice how v. 18 echoes what we read in v. 1 in reverse order. Jesus is the only God (the Word was God). Jesus is at the Father’s side (the Word was with God). Jesus has made him known (In the beginning was the Word).

What is the point John is making here? He is insisting that Jesus Christ is the ultimate revelation of God. Remember what the writer of Hebrews said?

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. (Heb. 1:1-3)

Can we know God? Has God made himself known to us? Yes! He took the initiative and actually entered into our world as a human being. In Jesus Christ, God made himself known in an ultimate way. There is no clearer, fuller, or greater revelation of God than Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Now, let’s step back for a moment and take a breath. We have been trying to unpack an immense mystery called the incarnation. We have seen that God entered our world as a man in Jesus

Christ. In that incarnation, that enfleshment of Jesus, God was making himself known in an ultimate way. He was revealing his glory like never before.

But to what end? Did God enter our world and become one of us just so we could recognize his presence, just to say “I’m here.” No.

Listen to the words of John 3:16-18.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

He came to save us, to give us eternal life, to rescue and transform us. The Chalcedonian Creed of AD 451 is the fruit of an early church council which hammered out some details about how Jesus is both God and man. It is one of the historic statements of true Christian faith. The creed describes in great detail the union of the divine and human natures in one Person.

But there is one little phrase in the creed that we dare not overlook. It says, “begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the mother of God, according to the manhood...”

Did you hear that little phrase, “for us and for our salvation?” Why is it so important for John to tell us in such theological precision and detail about the Word made flesh? It is for us and for our salvation. Consider the devastating tragedy of celebrating a lifetime of Christmases and in the end missing the real purpose for which Jesus came. He came to save us.

How can we receive the salvation he came to accomplish? John told us. Whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. By trusting in what Jesus has done – dying and rising again – we receive the gift of salvation. That means a new life now and an eternal life forever when he comes again. Will you put the weight of your life and eternity in the hands of Jesus by trusting in him?

We began today with a poetic description of the sadness of not knowing if God is here. Listen now to this poetic description of the joyful certainty of knowing that God has come in Jesus Christ. It is from 19th century writer Josiah Condor.

*Thou art the everlasting Word,
The Father’s only Son;
God manifestly seen and heard,
And Heaven’s beloved One.
Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou
That every knee to Thee should bow.*

*In Thee most perfectly expressed
The Father's glories shine;
Of the full Deity possessed,
Eternally divine:
Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou
That every knee to Thee should bow.*

*True image of the Infinite,
Whose essence is concealed;
Brightness of uncreated light;
The heart of God revealed:
Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou
That every knee to Thee should bow.*

He is worthy. Will you bow?