

# **The Word Became Flesh**

## **John 1:14**

Today I want to begin by reading our text in its context. The prologue of John's gospel is the first 18 verses of chapter 1. In it we have a summary of who John came to understand Jesus to be. Here John gives us the themes that he will bring out in his narrative of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It's been three weeks since we last studied these verses so please listen closely as I read them and let the Holy Spirit remind you of the truth of these words.

**1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**

**2 He was in the beginning with God.**

**3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.**

**4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.**

**5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.**

**6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.**

**7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.**

**8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.**

**9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.**

**10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.**

**11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.**

**12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:**

**13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**

**14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**

**15 John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.' "**

**16 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.**

**17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.**

**18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.**

**"No one has seen God at any time."** People in every generation have wondered and asked "Is there a God?" and "If so what is God like?" These are often the first questions that children will ask concerning God: Where is He? And what is He like? Where does He live? What does He look like? Can we see Him? These are questions we'd all like to ask. What is God like?

In Exodus 33, Moses, the man who had such an intimate relationship with God that it is said it was like he talked to God face to face (Exodus 33:11)—Moses asked that he might see God. He said, **"Please, show me Your glory."** (Exodus 33:18). And the Lord answered Moses, **"I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."** But He said, **"You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live."** (Exo 33:19-20 NKJV).

So the Lord put Moses in the cleft of the rock and covered him with His hand as He passed by. And in verse 23 the Lord said to Moses, **"Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen."**

Wanting to see what God is like—that is the same question that Philip asked of our Lord in John 14:8, **"Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us."** If we could just see God! And the Lord replied, **"He who has seen Me has seen the Father,"** (John 14:9).

So John gives us that great vision of God in verse 14 of chapter 1, **"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."** The Word was made flesh, and the Word was God (John 1:1); and we have seen His glory, full of grace and truth. John wants us to believe that:

***Jesus is the glorious God in human flesh full of grace and truth.***

Let's examine this truth step by step:

### **1. Jesus is the eternal Word who became flesh.**

Verse 14 reconnects us with verse 1. The Word who was in the beginning; the Word who was with God; the Word who was God; the Word who created everything that has come into being (1:3); the Word who was life and light (1:4-5); He **"became flesh, and dwelt among us."** John now definitely identifies the eternal Word of verse 1 with Jesus Christ, naming Him specifically in verse 17. The eternal, We call this the incarnation, God

in human flesh. Wayne Grudem in his *Systematic Theology* (p. 563) says of the incarnation,

It is by far the most amazing miracle of the entire Bible—far more amazing than the resurrection and more amazing even than the creation of the universe. The fact that the infinite, omnipotent, eternal Son of God could become man and join himself to a human nature forever, so that infinite God became one person with finite man, will remain for eternity the most profound miracle and the most profound mystery in all the universe.

In this prologue John affirms truths about Jesus Christ that are essential to the Christian faith:

### **A. Jesus, the Word, is fully God.**

We saw this clearly in verse 1. John made those three great statements about the Word. **“In the beginning was the Word.”** Jesus is eternal. John did *not* say, “In the beginning, God created the Word as the first and greatest created being.” But rather, **“In the beginning was the Word.”** He was already existing at the beginning of time because He has no beginning. Second, John wrote, **“and the Word was with God.”** He was equal with God. He was face-to-face in relationship with the Father. And thirdly John wrote, **“and the Word was God.”** He was essentially God in His nature. He is one in essence with the Father (John 10:30).

The New Testament clearly affirms the deity of Jesus Christ. He Himself claimed to be God. You cannot believe the New Testament and deny the full deity of Jesus Christ.

The rest of the Gospel of John will give us one proof after another, signs that Jesus is God. The Gospel will give us one witness after another that these statements are true. Jesus is fully God.

### **B. The Word became fully human.**

John says it simply and precisely **“And the Word became flesh.”** John wants us to know that Jesus took upon Himself our full human nature, except for sin. From that miraculous moment when Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary, He will never cease to be human. He is forever both God and man in one person.

“Became” does not mean that Jesus ceased to be what He was before. Rather, to His eternal deity, He added perfect humanity. This is a hard concept for us to understand. In fact, many debates transpired in first few centuries of the early church as to what it really meant. Some people said Jesus wasn't really a man; he just appeared like a man. Others said he had the body of a man but he didn't have a human soul, instead the Spirit of God replaced the soul of a man. Still others said Jesus was two people in one body—sort of half-God and half-man, thus dividing His unity. Others thought that Jesus' humanity was absorbed into His deity, and thus that He

only had one nature. And unbelievers said it was all nonsense--that Jesus wasn't God at all.

What John states here the rest of the New Testament confirms. When the Word became flesh, the infinite God also took on the flesh, the very nature of mankind. The Son did not cease to be God when He became a man. He added humanity but He did not subtract deity. He was fully God and fully man.

The Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) produced a comprehensive and definitive statement on the person of Christ, which is worth pondering. It is too long for me to read this morning, but you can sum up what we believe by saying, "*Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man united in one person forever, without confusion of His two natures.*" This is the truth of Scripture, **"The Word became flesh."**

In his letters, the Apostle John says this fact is so fundamental to our faith that a denial of it constitutes an anti-Christian heresy: "**every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist,**" (1 John 4:3). That truth is so central to our faith that if you want to test any other religion or cult, ask yourself, "What do they teach about Jesus? Was he God made flesh, or not?" That is the test of heresy. (Ray Steadman, [The Stranger of Galilee - John 1:14-18](#)).

Edward Klink points out three things that can be stated regarding the meaning of **"the Word became flesh"** in the context of the prologue:

1. The notion of "became" does not allow for the implication that the Word transitioned from "God" to "human." Thus the Word of God became flesh without ceasing to be the Word-God.
2. While the meaning of "flesh" is not less than the fact that the Word became "human," it also expresses much more. By becoming flesh the Word embraced humanity in its fullness, the very nature and state of Adam. It was not just human flesh but also the likeness of sinful flesh. So Paul writes in Romans 8:3, **"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh."**
3. The full meaning of **"and the Word became flesh"** is found in the meaning of the Gospel. This may be why John chose the term "flesh" instead of "human." For this term is intimately bound up with the notion of sacrifice. So Jesus says in John 6:51, **"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."**

Jesus became flesh so that He could give His flesh for the life of the world. He became flesh so that He could become the sacrifice for sins on the cross.

**“The Word became flesh.”** Ponder that for a moment. The power of God now moved in a human arm. The love of God now beat in a human heart. The wisdom of God now spoke from human lips. The mercy of God reached forth from human hands that were nailed to a cross. Jesus is God wrapped in human flesh.

Secondly this verse teaches us that:

## **2. Jesus is the eternal Word who dwelt among us.**

Verse 14 says, **“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”** The word *dwelt* means “to pitch a tent” or “to tabernacle.” I think John purposefully chose this word because it reminds us of the tabernacle in the Old Testament, where God dwelt with His people in the wilderness.

The Jews in the wilderness had a tabernacle or tent, wherein they worshipped God, and there the glory of God was seen. The Lord instructed Moses in Exodus 25, **“And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them,”** (Exo 25:8). In the tabernacle over the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant hovered the Shechinah, the glory of God. Exodus 40:34 says, **“Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”** A glorious light, the symbol of the Divine presence, shone ever in the sanctuary.

But this was just a picture of the true sanctuary of God, Christ Jesus, who is **“the brightness of the Father’s glory,”** (Heb. 1:3), the true glory of God, tabernacled among us. His flesh, that is, His body of human nature, was as a tabernacle, in which resided that Divine nature of which the glory in the Jewish tabernacle was the symbol. So in Jesus Christ the tabernacle of God was with men, and He dwelt among us. ([The Biblical Illustrator](#)).

By using the word that was used of the tabernacle, coupled with seeing Jesus’ glory, John wants us to make some connections. Just as the tabernacle was the place where God dwelt with His people so Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. Just as sacrifices and worship were offered at the tabernacle, so Jesus is our complete and final sacrifice, and we have access to God through Him.

So we have seen in this verse that Jesus is God in the flesh who came to dwell among us. Then thirdly,

## **3. Jesus reveals God’s glory in grace and truth.**

Glory is commonly used in both Testaments to denote the visible manifestation of God's presence. God’s glory is the sum of all His attributes and perfection. As with the tabernacle, it is sometimes displayed as a bright or overpowering light. When John says, **“We beheld His glory,”** he means he saw the very presence and power of God. John may

have been referring in part to the transfiguration, when he and James and Peter saw Jesus in His glory (Matt. 17:2). John could not have forgotten that event, although he doesn't tell about it in his gospel!

But I think John is also referring to Jesus' glory as revealed in His miracles. After Jesus turned the water into wine, John reports (2:11), **"This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him."** Before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He said (John 11:4), **"This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."**

But ultimately for John, Jesus' glory was supremely revealed in the cross. When Judas went out of the Upper Room to betray the Savior, Jesus said (John 13:31), **"Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him."** The cross displayed God's glory like no other event in history. How was His glory revealed? At the end of verse 14, John elaborates on Jesus' glory with two phrases:

#### **A. The glory was that of the only Son from the Father.**

The NKJV translates, **"the glory as of the only begotten of the Father."** The term, **"only begotten,"** can be misleading, since in English it appears to express generation or birth. But most modern scholars say that the Greek word does not refer to the "begetting" aspect of Jesus' sonship, but rather to His uniqueness. The word in other places in the New Testament was used of an only child (a son [Lk 7:12, 9:38] or a daughter [Luke 8:42]). It was also used to describe Isaac (Heb 11:17) who was not Abraham's only son, but was one-of-a-kind because he was the child of the promise.

John is the only New Testament author to use the term of Jesus (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). He means that Jesus is the only or unique Son of God in a way that no one else is. While all Christians are children of God (John 1:12), Jesus is God's Son in a unique, one-of-a-kind sense. We become sons of God through the new birth, but Jesus is the eternal Son, co-equal with the Father in His essence.

Piper points out that when John says the glory of the incarnate Word is **"the glory as of the only Son of the Father,"** he does not mean that it's an imitation glory. It is God's real glory. If I say, for example, "I have a book to give away, and I would like to give it to you as my first choice," you don't respond, "I'm not really your first choice; I'm only as your first choice." No. That's not what *as* means when I say, "I give it to you as my first choice." It means: I give it to you as *you really are* my first choice. When John says, **"we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,"** he means, "We have seen His glory, glory as it really is—the glory of the Son of God."

What else was this glory?



## B. The glory was full of grace and truth.

When Moses asked to see God's glory in Exodus 33. Remember God explained that he can't see His face and live, but He will hide Moses in the cleft of a rock, cover him with His hand, and pass by so that Moses can see "His back." Then we read, "**And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation,'**" (Exo. 34:6-7). In that profound experience, we hear of God's grace and truth. He is "**abounding in goodness and truth**," that is "grace and truth."

God has always been a gracious God. He has always been faithful and true. But in Jesus God's glory came in the fullness of grace and truth. "**Full of**" conveys the idea of "filling up to the brim" but also conveys the truth that what fills a person, controls the person. God's glory is full of and controlled by grace and truth.

These two words explain why Jesus came to the earth. They go to the very heart of the gospel. Because He was full of grace, He died for you and me while we were yet sinners. Because He was full of truth, He was able to pay for our sins completely. He forgives the sinner because He bore the sin himself. Because He is **Grace-full**, you can come just as you are. Because He is **truth-full**, you can come in complete confidence that He will keep His promises. When He promises a complete pardon for your sins, He means it. You can take that to the bank. Do you need a trustworthy Savior? Fear not. Jesus is full of truth. Do you need a forgiving Lord? Come to Him for He is full of grace. (Ray Pritchard, [Sermon](#)).

### Conclusion

So what is God like? He is like Jesus. What do we see when we see Jesus? John is very clear in what he wants to stress. We see the glory of God's grace and truth. The essence of what God reveals about Himself in Jesus is, first, that He is true—that is, He is real, more real than all that you can see. God is truth. God is reality. And that is what we see in Jesus. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

And God is grace. Or as John says in his first letter: "**God is love**" (1 John 4:8). God is free and overflowing and lavish in His goodness to sinful people. This is grace. This is the essence of God's reality because nothing reveals the fullness of His deity more than the freedom of His grace. He is full, happy, and sufficient in Himself so that He does not need us to meet His need. But He is surging with infinite energy and fullness to meet our need. That's His grace. That's the capstone of His glory. "**We beheld His glory . . . full of grace and truth.**"

In the Monday, December 15, 2008, Greenville (South Carolina) News, Ed Leap's column was poignant. Ed is a physician. The article was entitled, "Christmas reminds us of Christ's saving grace." Here's an excerpt.

Over and over again, I have asked suicidal or depressed patients what is pushing them to the brink. Their answer is so consistent that it must have a deeper meaning than we realize.

"I'm no good," they tell me. Sometimes they are hearing voices, so I ask what the voices say. "That I'm worthless. That I should die."

The problem is perennial. As long as humans have existed, we have sensed that we were not something that we ought to be. As long as we have been wounded by family, friends or strangers, we have doubted our worth.

The cure for all the fractured suffering of the human heart, all the terror we visit upon one another, all the guilt we bear with bent spines our whole lives, all the horrible, condemning voices, is the fact of grace. Grace, I propose, is the greatest concept in human history.

The Son of God came to Earth and was born into oppression and domination. He came to a broken place and broken people, and in the end was broken Himself. He was broken for the broken and hated for the hating. He was "despised and rejected," so that the despised and rejected would have a Savior.

He told us what we already knew; that we were broken and without hope. He told us the cure would be free for the taking, that contrary to the voices in our heads God loved us.

In bringing us grace He changed the world. He said that we could never do enough to be truly good; but we could accept the gift of life that He offered. In His all-sufficient sacrifice on the cross He negated any other therapy for the misery of humanity. No wealth or position could cure our loneliness; no rule or law could overcome our weakness; no religion or good deed could earn our salvation. Only the gift He brought. Only Himself.

Jesus came. He personally comes to each of offering grace and truth. He didn't stand off at a distance. He is personally reaching out to you. Will you receive Him?