

The Word Became Flesh

John 1:14-18

Introduction

Problem of Separation: Our first dog as a married couple was a Border Collie mutt named Freckles. Freckles was a fun and wonderful dog but she had a particularly bad case of *separation anxiety*. She would get so distressed at our absence that she'd lose her mind (howl, scratch, chew... eat highlighters, *mark my words, more like my carpet*).

- We have a separation problem (Gen 2 vs 3). Communion and fellowship broken by sin leads to disfellowship and exile. We were meant for relationship with God but we are separated from him across the great divide of sin.
- It's not that God can't be in the presence of sin and sinners (plenty of examples), it's that sin can't abide the presence of God.

Problem Remains: We see this problem in Exodus 33-37 when the Moses and the Israelites are trying to follow God. God would lead them by a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. But the people can't see God (invisible) and their sin still separates them from his fellowship. Even **Moses**, the closest one to God, can't abide in his presence. Moses would have to hide his face when the presence of God would come near.

- So Moses prayed: that God would forgive their sins and come to dwell among them.
- So God gave them a temporary solution: **tabernacle** (place where his glory would visit them, where they could pray and offer sacrifices to him) and he gave them his **law** to separate them from other people, protect them, and guide their lives.
- But, despite these temporary solutions, sin and separation remain between God and his people. How will this be fixed?

Recap: 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 was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 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 have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus

Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.¹

- We've spent a lot of time talking about who the Word is. The Word of God, the Son of God, God himself, is coeternal with God the Father. He has always been. The Word is the Creator and sustainer of all things. He is the light of humanity and shines light in the darkness which cannot overcome it. Knowing that the Word is God changes the gravity of this sentence: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The hope of humankind is found in the Word, and the Word just put on flesh. The creator of flesh put on flesh.
- "Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:6-8).
- Without ceasing to be truly God, in the full possession of his divinity, God came to earth and became human, not only taking on flesh, but experiencing temptation, suffering, and the full spectrum of the broken world.
- **The great distance between us and God was crossed by God himself.**
- This is the most amazing event in all of history: the eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, infinitely holy Son of God took on human nature and lived among humanity as one who was both God and man at the same time, in one person.
- Remaining what He was (God eternal), He became what He was not (flesh and blood), that He might satisfy the debt of sinners on the cross and secure our salvation.
- **Incarnation** (*carne asade*) "enfleshment" (into + flesh)

The Word of God took on flesh to reveal God and save us from our sins.

1. The incarnation shows the depth of God's love. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh

How Far Are You Willing to Go?: Distance of the trip shows how much we are loved. Value is demonstrated by how much someone is willing to give (or give up) for something else (e.g., beanie baby, Pokémon card, sneakers, house, baseball card, etc.). What was Jesus willing to give up for us?

- "What a deep descent: from the heights of glory to the depths of shame, from the wonders of heaven to the wickedness of earth, from exaltation to humiliation, from the throne to the tree from worship to wrath. In Bethlehem, humility and glory in their extremes were joined: there was no room for him who made all rooms, no place for him who made and knows all places. But in His descent was the dawn of mercy. Because we cannot ascend to Him, He descends to us" (R. G. Lee). Dog stuck in ice, unable to save himself, man swims out.

This is an astounding thing, for God to take on flesh. And for what? For sinners. "Jesus loves all the wrong people. People who can offer him nothing. People who cannot love him the way he

¹ ¹⁴ Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας. ¹⁵ Ἰωάννης μαρτυρεῖ περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ κέκραγεν λέγων, Οὗτος ἦν ὃν εἶπον, Ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὃτι πρῶτός μου ἦν. ¹⁶ ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος. ¹⁷ ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ Μωϋσέως ἐδόθη, ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο. ¹⁸ θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε· μονογενὴς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

loves them. People who [often] hate him. He doesn't seem hindered at all by their lovelessness or their unloveliness" (Jared Wilson).

- We are not loved because we are lovely, we are lovely because we are loved. Our beauty does not draw Christ to us, Christ's love for us makes us beautiful.
- We are needy people who can't see or know God unless he reveals himself to us, unless he comes to us. "We must accept the essential spiritual fact of the incarnation and the gospel: the Lord comes to needy people—those who realize that without him they cannot make it—those who acknowledge their weakness... The incarnation... [is] not for the proud and self-sufficient, but for the poor and humble" (R. Kent Hughes).
- Intrinsic to the gospel is that Christ saves us, we don't save ourselves. We are not good enough or faithful enough. And, because salvation is wholly from him, it is completely secure. Nothing in all of creation can separate us from his love because he is the author of all creation (cf. Rom 8). If you could lose your salvation, you would. But he can't and he won't ever lose you.

Hypostatic Union: It matters that he is both God (i.e., Word) and flesh (i.e., 100% God, 100% man). If he's less than man he is not an appropriate substitute or an empathetic shepherd; if he's less than God he is not a sufficiently powerful Savior. He is the God-man. Because he is God, when he takes on flesh he is able to save.²

2. The incarnation reveals God's character and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth...¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. Jesus is the one and only Son of God (i.e., μονογενεὸς, cf. Jn 3:16), the Word of God, God become flesh and he has come to dwell with us (i.e., tabernacle, "pitched his tent," remember Moses). By taking on flesh, Jesus makes God visible. God has chosen to dwell among his people.

- In Exodus 34 Moses saw the "afterglow of the divine glory" (Bruce). In Jn 1, "the beloved Son, the incarnate Word, has broken the barrier that made it impossible for human beings to see God, and has made him known."³

Too Good to Be True?: Is it too good to be true that we can know God? In Jesus it is both **good** and **true**. You and I can only fully know God through Jesus, his Word. Jesus is God's divine self-expression, self-disclosure.

- "We long to know who God is and what God thinks and does. In Jesus, his most personal Word, God has 'spoken' to us in the most human way possible, giving us his innermost thoughts and heart, in deeds that are as profound as his words." (Bruner).
- "Do you want to know what God is like? Do you want to know what God does, how he feels, what he delights in, what he is harsh toward? Look to Jesus" (Chandler).

² ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'"). This exclamatory reminder of who John the Baptist highlights the significance of Jesus' incarnation. We think of a second coming as derivative and lesser (e.g., Jr. vs. Sr., LeBron vs. Jordan) but here John reminds us that he's greater because of his identity and glory but also because he is actually first (i.e., pre-existent).

³ "In Jesus Christ the fact of the encounter of God and man is... a Word in flesh and for flesh" (Barth).

- Jesus is God made visible, the self-expression of God. This is why we know that God is compassionate because Jesus saw the crowds and had “compassion on them, like sheep without a shepherd). We see that Jesus cares for the outcast, pursues the sinner, condemns the hypocrite, and challenges unjust leadership. We know that Jesus welcomes sinners to feast at his table, offering the bounty of the kingdom to the least of the world.

3. The incarnation declares God’s grace ¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Grace upon Grace: From the fullness of God in Jesus, through his incarnation, we receive grace. The Gospel of John uses the word “grace” four times in John 1, then never again in the rest of the gospel. His use of “grace” is a reference to the character of God in Exodus 34:6: “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”

Christ vs. the Law: Remember Moses and God’s presence? Remember the tabernacle where God dwelt? Also, remember that in that whole story Moses was going to receive the law of God the second time, specifically the Ten Commandments. God used the tabernacle to mediate his presence but now God has come to dwell in flesh. But he also gave the Israelites his law to govern their behavior and identity.

- Have you ever noticed that the 10 commandments are mostly negative? (e.g., have no other gods, make no graven images; you shall not steal, adultery, covet, etc).⁴ Some explicitly are positive (remember the sabbath, honor your parents) but all of them imply positive things (e.g., don’t commit adultery = be faith; don’t lie = tell the truth, etc.).

The law is good and right, it protects from sin. It teaches us what is wrong. We need the law! But the law is unable to make us righteous. This is why parenting is so tough, we have the law (punishment, rules) but we want heart change. It’s also why we see lawmakers during COVID make all sorts of restrictions then break them (eat out, travel, etc.). “It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me, and I think that’s pretty important also. It may be true that the law cannot change the heart, but it can restrain the heartless, and this is what we often say we have to do in society through legislation” (MLK Jr).

- **The law is necessary but it can’t change our hearts.**

“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:3-4).

- I know it can be discouraging to hear that you’re not good enough and you’re a sinner but, trust me, it is fertile ground for the gospel because Christ came to save sinners. Christ is the only one who can change your heart. There is grace upon grace for every one who puts their faith in Jesus.

⁴ Positive commands are remember the Sabbath and honor your parents.

Dwell with Us: And Christ has come to dwell with those who believe. In Christ, the light of God, the love of God, the grace of God has come to us and it is a foretaste of the promise of God:

- “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:3-4)

Conclusion:

Missing Jesus at Christmas: “Christmas is the only Christian holy day that is also a major secular holiday—arguably our culture’s biggest. The result is two different celebrations, each observed by millions of people at the very same time. This brings some discomfort on both sides. Many Christians can’t help but notice that more and more of the public festivities surrounding Christmas studiously avoid any references to its Christian origins... The holiday is promoted as [simply] a time for family and gifts... On the other hand, non-religious people can’t help but find that the older meaning of Christmas keeps intruding uninvited” in the music and stories of the holiday (Keller). It’s amazing how ubiquitous Jesus is at Christmas yet how most of us miss him. Despite swimming in gospel reminders, many are drowning in their own sin. Despite Christ being in the name of the holiday, the prevalence of nativities, or Linus’ reminder of the real meaning of the season in Charlie Brown’s Christmas special, we still seem to confuse the point. We’ve done a pretty good job of burying Jesus so deep in the festivities that he’s hardly noticeable at all. Amid the trimmings, traditions, decorations, and stories, **how did we end up in the spot of celebrating Christmas but missing Christ?**

Inward Focus: Well, for one, we’ve done what we do best — sin. And we’ve sinned in the way that we sin best — **we make everything all about us**. We take the good thing (the gift of Jesus) and we turn it around to us (“give me all the gifts”). “Sin pulls us away from God’s kingdom and produces in us an obsessive allegiance to our little kingdom of one... Perhaps in ways we’re not conscious of, we have shrunk life down to the size of our own glory” (Paul Tripp). Christmas, for many, is simply a break from work where they can indulge their materialistic impulses to buy the gadgets and gear they want but don’t need. The season of giving too often serves as an excuse to justify our selfishness rather than exalt our savior.

Nostalgia: We domesticate Christmas into a sentimental family tradition. We fill it with nostalgia, garland, and Hallmark movies. We take the time-altering, earth-shattering, paradigm-breaking incarnation of God and turn it into “eight-pound, six-ounce, newborn infant Jesus” with “golden, fleece diapers.” That might be quaint, but isn’t there more? **Don’t miss the significance of God becoming flesh to seek and save the lost.**

God with Us: The prophet Isaiah promised long ago that a servant King would be born to save his people from their sins. But he wouldn’t just be an exceptional servant and an exceptional king, he would be **Emmanuel**, literally “**God with Us**”. When Jesus was born, it was the moment that God became flesh, that the invisible God became visible. Jesus is not part of the

story of Christmas. Christmas is part of the story of Jesus, the story of God. The magnificence of Christmas is not the amazing circumstances of the shepherds or wise men, or even Jesus' virgin birth, but that the God of the universe took on flesh to live and die for our salvation. And the end of the gospel — the sacrificial death and victorious resurrection — is not possible without the beginning. This Christmas I hope you'll reflect on what it means for God to become flesh, for God to dwell with us. To see the invisible God become human. He has walked through temptation, pain, and death and he can save you from your sins. What a truth! We don't have a disconnected or disinterested God who runs the show from a distance. **We have a God who is *with us!*** And his presence changes everything. When Jesus enters our lives, he brings light and life. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

He brings light to our darkness. He doesn't just come to the comfortable and easy places, he goes to the dark and distant places. He enters into darkness and brings light to all who would believe in him. When Jesus sees pain, hurt, oppression, difficulty, he goes toward it. He doesn't look at the brokenness of the world and turn away, he runs toward it. As a result, as his followers, we have the privilege to do the same thing. "For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8). "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6).

Jesus is the light of the world and, for those who believe in him, he calls us to **reflect** that light into a lost and dying world. "The church should not say, 'Look what the world is coming to!' They should say, 'Look what has come into the world'" (Carl Henry *adapted*). "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:14-16).

As I light this candle, a picture of the light of Jesus, and we sing, this light will spread from person to person reminding us of our joy in sharing Jesus to everyone we meet from Philadelphia to the ends of the earth. As Jesus shines in our hearts, we will let our lights shine.

With Jesus as our true light, as lights into the world, Redemption Heights Church, you are sent.