

Who is Jesus? Part 3 (John 1:14-18)

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The lead story in the Dec. 6, 1999 issue of *Time* magazine opened with the following summary from Reynolds Price, then professor of English at Duke University:

“The memory of any stretch of years eventually resolves to a list of names, and one of the useful ways of recalling the past two millennia is by listing the people who acquired great power. Muhammad, Catherine the Great, Marx, Gandhi, Hitler, Roosevelt, Stalin and Mao come quickly to mind. There's no question that each of those figures changed the lives of millions and evoked responses from worship through hatred. It would require much exotic calculation, however, to deny that the single most powerful figure--not merely in these two millennia but in all human history--has been Jesus of Nazareth.”

Why do you think that is, friend? The Gospel of John gives us the answer. In Jesus Christ, God gave us the gift of himself. He is the Son of God incarnate, God in human flesh. And his conception in Mary's womb is the greatest gift the world has ever received. The birth of Christ meant the dawn of the new age, the inbreaking of the kingdom of God, the moment the Lord made good on his centuries-old promise to reverse the fortunes of mankind, to act on behalf of all who languish under the curse of sin.

Well did the angel say to the shepherds in Lk 2:10-11, “Behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Is there a good gift you're longing for God to give you? Have you grown skeptical after years of waiting or prayer that God is able or willing to give you anything good at all? Maybe you can't shake the creeping suspicion God is just like everyone else who has let you down. The historical fact of the incarnation reminds us the question is not whether God will give us what is good but whether we will see and savor Jesus Christ as the all-surpassing, life-giving treasure he is.

It's the singular aim of John's gospel. Jn 20:30-31, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book, but 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.” Friend, no matter where you've come from, no matter what you've done or what's going on inside you right now, know this: there is life for you in

Jesus. And experiencing life in him starts with understanding who he is, which is what makes the Gospel of John so helpful.

We've begun our study of the Gospel of John by lingering in the first 18 verses, which summarize John's answer to the main question of the whole, "Who is Jesus?" John wants us to know Jesus, trust Jesus, and experience abundant life through Jesus. And he begins in chapter 1 by introducing Jesus as "the Word," the definitive self-expression of God.

John explains in verses 1-13 that the Word is eternal, the Word is one with God, the Word is God, the Word is the agent of creation, the Word is the source of life, the Word is the light of men, the Word was authenticated by God's appointed witness, the Word was rejected by those who should have received him, and the Word grants the gift of adoption to all who believe in him. In verses 14-18, we discover his final three answers.

1) THE WORD IS GOD IN HUMAN FLESH

Verse 14 opens with perhaps the most stunning statement in the entire chapter. "And the Word became flesh." It is precisely at this point that we find ourselves peering into one of the great, unfathomable mysteries in the universe. How does the eternal God, for whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, enter a human womb, develop into a child, and be born in a stable? It defies human comprehension.

The Lord hasn't told us everything about the incarnation we might want to know. He has told us all we need to know. The eternal and unchangeable person of the Word, the Son of God, took to himself a human nature and with that nature a new form of existence that was both permanent and irreversible. Notice John the Baptist observation in verse 15, speaking of Jesus. "He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me." The "he" who was before, the Son of God who existed from eternity past, is the same "he" who comes after, the Son of God incarnate who began his public ministry on the heels of John's ministry.

And when the Word became flesh, he didn't exchange his divine status (the Word) for a human status (flesh). The person of the Son added to his divine nature a human nature such that he remained both fully God and fully man. When Paul says in Phil 2:7 that Christ Jesus "emptied himself," he did not abandon his divine nature. He let go of the privileges of existing and acting only through a divine nature and took up all the

limitations and sorrows of existing and acting through a human nature – not by abandoning the former, but by entering into the latter.

The words of the Chalcedonian creed beautifully capture the collective testimony of Scripture. Christ is “to be acknowledge in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ...”

Now here’s the big question. Does any of that matter for ordinary people like you and me? It could not matter more, friend. Unless Jesus is fully God and fully man, Christianity crumbles and we’re lost in our sin.

If Jesus is not fully God, he would be unable to bridge the gap, to relate to the former as well as to the latter, and overcome the separation our sin creates between us and a holy God. And the merit of his obedient life and death would suffice for no favor with God but his own. It takes an infinite person, God and God alone, to make an infinitely satisfactory atonement for the sin of the world and earn an infinitely satisfactory righteousness for all who trust him.

On the other hand, if Jesus is not fully man, then he’s not qualified to represent us – living the life we are supposed to live and dying the death we deserve to die. He can only represent if he is one of us, which he could not be if his divine and human natures were mixed such that he became some sort of superman.

In and through his human nature, Jesus depended on God as a man. Jesus trusted God as a man. Jesus chose again and again and again, without a single exception, to say “yes” to God and “no” to sin. The same Spirit that dwells within every believer enabled him to do it. As a man, he knows our weakness. As a man, he leaned completely on the power of the Spirit. And as a man, he is now perfectly able to show and help us to do the same.

The fact that the Word took to himself a fully human nature and yet never ceased at a single point to be the Word is what gives saving worth and value to his mediation, his righteousness, his atoning blood, his resurrection, and his continual intercession for us as his people. If he is not God, Jesus cannot save us. If he is not man, Jesus cannot save us. But since he is fully God and fully man, he is gloriously able to save us, shattering the power of sin through his triumphant death and resurrection.

Yet he did so with an even greater goal in view. Verse 14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." In Jesus, God came here to stay. If you've ever travelled internationally, you've felt the strain of cross-cultural living. If you're a racial or ethnic minority in our church, you've probably experienced the challenge of worshiping with men and women who don't share your cultural background or history.

None of that, my friends, comes close to the existential chasm between the Creator and the creature, between Holy God and sinful man. Yet that is precisely the boundary, the great divide, the Word crossed for your sake. He sacrificed his own privileges and prerogatives to secure your eternal joy by giving you the gift of himself. Why? So he could be with us and we could be with him.

Is that who God is in your mind? Do you think of him as a God who WANTS to be with you? Who WANTS to dwell with you? When we turn from sin to trust and obey Jesus that's exactly what happens. He makes his home in our heart by granting us the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit such that your body becomes a temple of the living God.

Even as Christians, it's easy to think of God as someone who is out there somewhere, whom we really want to get close to, but is always just out of reach, waiting for us to be more holy, more loving, more diligent. In our minds, we turn Jesus into a kind of heavenly boss man who is primarily interested in the spiritual work he can extract or accomplish through us. We might be part of his kingdom, but we're low life infantry at best – a dime a dozen and not exactly desirable company.

Friends, the God who created this world and everything in it is not interested in selfishly using you. He wants to be with you if you're willing to come to Jesus in faith and repentance, trust and obedience. It's what sets Christianity apart from every other religion on the planet.

Ps 46:11 speaks what is true for every follower of Jesus. "The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress," which means Christian, you are never, ever, alone. When you're lying on your bed in the dark, Jesus is with you. When you're driving to work in your car in the morning, Jesus is with you. If you wind up quarantined at home or in a hospital with little to no human contact, Jesus is with you. He became flesh to dwell with us, and through the Spirit, Emmanuel remains.

2) THE WORD IS THE REVELATION OF GOD'S GLORY

Jesus didn't come to dwell among us because he was lonely. He came to dwell with us so he could bring us into the unchanging delight he has experienced in himself for all eternity. He came to dwell with us with us SO THAT we could see his glory. Verse 14, "...and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

A Jew in Jesus' day would have had no trouble affirming the first half of Jn 1:18, "No one has ever seen God..." In the history of the world, no one had ever beheld the fullness of his glorious majesty. When the prophets of old like Isaiah or Daniel had even a partial glimpse of the glory of God they didn't start live streaming on Facebook or take a selfie. They crumpled to the ground as if dead. Every cell in their body quaked under the existential weight of his splendor.

So when Jesus shows up and says in Jn 14:9, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father," it didn't make any sense. There's no way. You look perfectly ordinary. I'm not falling down dead. How can you say whoever has seen me has seen the Father? The second half of verse 18 provides the answer. "The only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

And therein lies the reason Jesus satisfies our souls. He satisfies our souls because he makes visible the invisible nature of God. God is spirit. Prior to the incarnation, sinful man could not see God and live. But in Jesus, God revealed himself, he made himself known, to sinful man in a tangible way such that we could see him and live. He accommodated himself to the frailty of human sight.

Heb 1:1-3, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature..."

What do we see as we behold an utterly unique, only Son from the Father, kind of glory in the face of Jesus Christ? Verse 15, we encounter a radiance of glory, a resplendent deity, that is "full of grace and truth." God's grace is his undeserved favor. When Jesus makes God known to us, that's exactly what we experience – the forgiveness of sins and all the blessings of restored relationship with God.

The Greek word we translate as "made known" in verse 18 is the same verb from which we derive the English word exegesis. It reminds us Jesus isn't the "nice" side of God or a partial expression of God. He is the very exegesis of God, the perfect and matchless



revelation of all that God is. God, at the core of his being, is EXACTLY who Jesus reveals him to be and ONLY who Jesus reveals him to be – full of grace and truth.

It has become increasingly common to hear people, including former professing Christians, talk about exploring alternative forms of spirituality. It sounds sophisticated and open minded. But verse 18 teaches us there are not multiple paths to knowing God. Nor is he a combination of what all the religions in the world think him to be. He is and will forever be who he has revealed himself to be in Jesus. We don't discover God for ourselves. God makes himself known to us. And he has chosen to make himself known through the person and work of Christ.

Does that make Christianity radically exclusive? Yes. Is that kind of exclusivity a good thing? Yes! Because it means we can be confident and assured in our knowledge of God. We don't have to worry if we're missing something. We don't have to wonder if we'll "discover" some new truth about him through another form of spirituality. The Word is God in human flesh. And as such, he is the climactic and complete revelation of God's glory.

3) THE WORD IS THE OUTPOURING OF GOD'S GRACE

Have you ever walked through your favorite clothing, furniture, or sporting goods store and thought, "Man, this place is full of stuff I would love to have, but I'll never be able to afford it"? Or maybe you've attended a party where there was a table laden with all manner of incredible desserts and it just so happens to be the week you and your wife started a new diet? We know what it feels like to see fullness and not receive it, to observe fullness but never enjoy it.

Such is NOT the case with Christ. He doesn't just possess fullness of grace, brimming over with undeserved favor. He takes great joy, he delights, in pouring his grace upon us. Verse 16, "And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." There is only one requirement. That we abandon our arrogant attempts to earn God's blessings and favor through our performance.

It's tempting for me to think that God's blessing on my family or our church depends on me being a really good father or a really good pastor. Is my family worthy of excellent leadership and care? Is the church, the bride of Christ, worthy of excellent pastoral leadership and care? Absolutely. But does that mean God's favor on us is a referendum on my performance? Not in the least.



From beginning to end, from the first day to the last, every last drop of God's favor, blessing, kindness, help, and strength in every situation – individually and corporately – is an expression of grace. It's undeserved. You can't earn it. And I can't earn it for you. Grace is what the gospel is all about.

What did the law given through Moses that John mentions in verse 17 accomplish? It was a good gift in that it revealed the holiness of God, the sinfulness of sin, and what it looks like to live in a manner pleasing to the Lord. It was gracious in that it specified the sacrifices necessary for Israel to temporarily atone for her sin.

But Jesus is a gift of immeasurably more grace because he accomplishes once and for all what the law could only anticipate and await – the salvation of mankind through his life, death, and resurrection. God hasn't changed. He was full of grace before the incarnation and remains full of grace today. Yet his grace, his undeserved favor, has been **POURED OUT** in Christ in a way the saints of old could never have imagined. And best of all, God hasn't stopped.

The grace, the undeserved favor, we discover in Jesus isn't a one-time release from a dam by the army corps of engineers. If you come to Christ, you stand, as it were, Christian, under a mighty waterfall that never runs dry. Morning and evening, day and night, good days and bad days, happy days and sad days, the grace of God in Christ showers down upon you. As water surrounds a swimmer, so too God's grace surrounds you. It defines you. It governs you. God's unmerited favor is the most determinative force in play in your life.

I love how Murray Harris describes the simple phrase "grace upon grace" or "grace instead of grace." "The reference is to...replenished grace, to a rapid and perpetual succession of blessings, as though there were no interval between the arrival of one blessing and the receipt of the next."

Your sin cannot overcome it. Your weakness cannot exhaust it. The Word became flesh to pour out the grace of God upon you. So why are you hiding? Why are you running? Why are you acting like everything's ok and you can take care of things on your own? You can't, my friend. You need grace. You need Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Jesus is God in human flesh. He grants us the gift of salvation and the presence of God. Jesus is the revelation of God's glory. He grants us the gift of the knowledge of God.



And Jesus is the outpouring of God's grace. He grants to us the gift of the favor of God. He is the most powerful figure the world has ever known because he is the greatest gift the world has ever received – the gift of God himself.

I love it when people say to me, "Pastor, how do we do it? What's it look like to obey this passage from God's Word?" I'll tell you how we do it in Jn 1. We give thanks for Jesus and delight in Jesus. Not just once, but again and again.

I can't wait to discover anew the riches of his grace week after week as we study the Gospel of John. No matter your station, no matter your situation, we all share the same need. We need to know Jesus, trust Jesus, and experience abundant life through Jesus. May that be our experience as we turn to the Word and come to Jesus, again and again.