

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 12/24/17
John 1:14-18 “He Came to Reveal the Glory of God”^{**1}
Christmas Series: “Why Did He Come?”

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Main Idea: In John 1:14-18 we learn why the Son of God came to earth as a human baby. He came to reveal the glory of God.

- I. Consider the identity of the One who came (14).
 - A. When God became man, He was fully man.
 1. He became flesh.
 2. He set up tent among us.
 - B. When God became a man, He remained fully God.
 1. He exhibited glory.
 2. He came from the Father.
 3. He is the source of grace and truth.
- II. Consider the implications of His coming (15-18).
 - A. Jesus deserves reverence (15).
 1. It involves a proper view of yourself.
 2. It involves a proper view of the Lord.
 - B. Jesus delivers grace (16).
 - C. Jesus displays grace and truth (17).
 - D. Jesus discloses the Father (18).
 1. He reveals the unseeable.
 2. He enjoys closeness with the Father.
 3. He's the One and Only God.

Make It Personal: Am I living in light of why He came?

1. If I want to know God, then I must get to know Jesus.
2. If I know Jesus, I can help others know Him through a life marked by grace and truth.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 1:18-25

Who is Jesus? So many people don't know. That includes people who have never heard His name, for sure, but also people who wear crosses around their necks.

We who know Him need to know Him better, and we need to make Him better known, and that happens through the ministry of His Word. That's my calling in life, to know Christ and make Him known to others through the teaching of His Word. That's what this church is all about, teaching the Scriptures so that men, women, boys, and girls of all ages might know Jesus Christ and then get involved in making Him known to others.

That's why we gather this morning. To know Christ better and make Him better known.

This month we're seeking to answer the vital question, “Why did He come?” Two weeks ago we learned from Jesus' Himself who said *He came to serve* in Mark 10. Last week we listened to the angels in Luke 2 who declared *He came to save*. Today we turn our attention to perhaps Jesus' closest follower, the apostle John, who announced *He came to reveal the glory of God*.

In John 1:14-18 we're told the amazing news that God became a man. The text invites us to consider two things. First, the *identity* of the One who came (14). Second, the *implications* of His coming (15-18).

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ This sermon has been adapted from a Christmas series preached at WBC in 2005.

I. Consider the identity of the One who came (14).

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Perhaps no verse in the Bible presents the doctrine of the incarnation more clearly than this one. It begins with the *Logos*, the Word. The first time John referred to Jesus as the *Logos* (in verses 1-3) he spoke of His relationship to God. But in verse 14, he examines a different relationship, the relation of the *Logos* to the world.

John says that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Those are staggering words, and John knew it. To a Greek-thinking world, that was impossible. One thing a Greek would never imagine was that God would take a body.

To the Greek, the body was an evil prison-house that shackled the soul. The great Roman Stoic emperor, Marcus Aurelius, summed up this despising of the body, "Therefore despise the flesh--blood and bones and a net-work, a twisted skein of nerves and veins and arteries." The body was what the Greek sought to escape, not become.

To which John says, "Not the true God. The true God became flesh."

That was such a staggering thought that even some church members didn't believe it in John's day, as in ours. There arose in the Church a group of people called *Docetists*.

The term *docetist* comes from the Greek word which means "to seem to be." Docetists believed that Jesus in fact only appeared to become a man. In reality he was a phantom, his human body wasn't real. That meant he couldn't feel hunger and pain and weariness. God would never succumb to that, so said the Docetists.

Were they right? No, and John had some pretty blunt things to say to docetic thinking people in 1 John 4:2-3, "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come *in the flesh* is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of antichrist..."

So is every person who believes in Jesus a Christian? The answer is *no*. Why not? The question is, *what Jesus?* Some people believe in (and teach) a very different Jesus than the Jesus of the Bible. Are they Christians? They say they are. They may think they are. But the sad, yet biblically correct answer is, *no*. No matter how sincere they are.

This issue is this. *What* you believe about Jesus is as critical as believing in Him. Some people are lost because they refuse to believe in Jesus. Other people remain lost because they believe in "Jesus" but it's a non-existent Jesus.

Suppose I said, "I'm feeling tired and want to rest. I'm going to sit in a chair. It will hold me. I believe it will." And suppose I approached a "chair" that was not a real chair but merely a 2 feet by 2 feet piece of paper being held up at the corners by four pencils. You'd say to me, "You'd better not trust your weight to *that!*" And if I said, "Why not?" you'd respond, "It won't hold you because it's not a real chair." And if I insisted, "But I believe it is a real chair and I believe it will hold me," you'd say, "You'd better check out that 'chair' before you sit on it because merely believing something to be true and reliable doesn't make it true and reliable."

You get the point. The question, then, is what is true of the real Jesus? John 1:14 answers the question for us and tells us two things about the God-man.

A. When God became man, He was fully man. He didn't simply appear to be a man. He was indeed fully man, and John substantiated that with two incredible statements.

1. *He became flesh.* The second person of the Godhead became "flesh." "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see," as the hymn writer put it. *Sarx* is the Greek term. *Sarx* is the same word Paul uses over and over in his letters to depict what he calls "the flesh," human nature in all its weakness and proneness to sin.

There are other words John could have used. He could have said, "The Word became *man*," or "The Word took a *body*." But instead, he used *sarx*. According to commentator Leon Morris, *flesh* is a strong, almost crude way of referring to human nature. It's the most blunt term John could use, with Greek thinkers in mind, to make the point that Jesus, indeed, was fully man.

And the verb "became" is significant, too. As William Hendriksen observes, "It's not 'became' in the sense of ceasing to be what He was before. When the wife of Lot *becomes* a pillar of salt, she ceases to be the wife of Lot. But when Lot *becomes* the father of Moab and Ammon, he remains Lot."²

So it is here. When the Logos became a man, He didn't cease being what He was before. He remained the Logos, God Himself. He assumed His human nature without laying aside His divine. He became flesh. Next, a second incredible statement...

2. *He set up tent among us.* That's what the verb, "made his dwelling," actually means: "to pitch tent." It appears only five other times in the New Testament, here and four times in Revelation. But in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, this word is often used to refer to the tabernacle. And what was the tabernacle? It was a tent, a temporary structure where the presence of God "dwelt" in a very special way.

On that day Mary bore her firstborn son, that's what God did. In the person of Jesus Christ, God pitched His tent and *camped* among us.

Do you like to camp? One of the things about camping is the realization that your dwelling is temporary. I can't help but think about what happened on the second night of our family camping trip in the summer of 1998. Sherry, our daughters, and I stopped for the night in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and set up camp. In the middle of the night, a fierce electrical storm hit, which quickly turned to fifty-plus mile-per-hour winds. As our pop-up rocked back and forth, I was reminded of the temporary nature of our dwelling!

So the God-man set up tent among us. Although His stay was brief, it was real. It was no phantom, smoke-and-mirror illusion. God really became a man and visited the earth. He walked this planet for 33 years, and then returned home to glory.

Is the humanity of the Christ important? Indeed, for in order to do what He came to do, and that is to rescue sinful human beings, the Savior had to be a man. He had to be what we are to fix the problem we created. And He was, for when God became man, He was *fully man*. However...

B. When God became a man, He remained fully God. Notice John's testimonial as verse 14 continues, "We have *seen* his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

The Greek word for "seen" ["beheld" in the KJV] *etheasametha* contains the root word "theater" and suggests more than a casual glance. It involves a careful scrutiny of what is in sight in order to grasp significance. It indicates that John studied the Logos, as did eleven other men, and many others. And what conclusions did he draw? In verse 14, John mentions three conclusions that highlight the deity of Christ.

² William Hendriksen, *John*

1. *He exhibited glory.* "We beheld His glory." It's as if John is responding to a potential critic. "Right, John. God visited and became a man. Prove it." Okay, for starters, we have seen His glory!

Are you familiar with the term *Shekinah*? It comes from the Old Testament and it certainly provides the backdrop for John 1:14. *Shekinah* is a Hebrew word which means, "that which dwells." There were certain times in OT history when God allowed His people to see His *Shekinah* glory.

Like just before the manna came. Exodus 16:10 says that the children of Israel "looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud."

And before Moses received the Ten Commandments, "The glory of the LORD settled upon Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:16)."

The next *Shekinah* reference is especially important. Remember what happened after the Tabernacle was finished? Exodus 40:34 says, "The glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."

Later the same thing happened in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:11). And when Isaiah saw his vision in the temple, he heard the seraphim announce, "The whole earth is full of His glory (Isaiah 6:3)."

Barclay is right, "In the Old Testament the glory of the Lord came at times when God was very close." And there was no time in earth's history when God was any closer than this... *We have seen His glory.*

John's study of the Logos led him to a second conclusion.

2. *He came from the Father.*³ The NIV reads, "The glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father." The KJV renders it, "The glory as of the only begotten of the Father." Back in verse 1 John stated that the Word was with God in the beginning, and that the Word was God. Now we learn that the Word came from God the Father.

New Testament scholar Merrill Tenney comments: "A number of the oldest and most reliable manuscripts read *God* instead of *Son*. If the term originally [was] written as an abbreviation, a change of one letter would make the difference...The evidence for 'only begotten God' is so strong as to be practically conclusive. If this reading be accepted, 'only begotten God' makes an unequivocal affirmation of the deity of Christ, though the term 'Son' is hardly less strong."⁴

Whichever reading you choose, the conclusion is the same. The deity of Christ is supported by the fact that He came from the Father. A third conclusion...

3. *He is the source of grace and truth.* At the end of verse 14, John seems to pick up the last phrase of Exodus 34:6: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in *love and faithfulness*." "Love" is the Hebrew word *hesed* and "faithfulness" is *emet*. It could well be translated, "abounding in grace and truth."

Where do you go to find grace and truth? Where do you look if you need the gift of God's unmerited favor and reliability? Moses says you look to the LORD. John says you look to Jesus, for they are one and the same. Jesus is the source of grace and truth. Indeed, He's full of grace and truth.

³William Hendriksen offers a helpful discussion of the "sonship" question: "To what sonship does the term *the only begotten from the Father* refer? Religious sonship..., Messianic sonship..., nativistic sonship..., or trinitarian sonship...?" Hendriksen favors the latter.

⁴ Merrill Tenney, p. 72.

Those are two things we struggle to keep in balance, don't we? We tend to sacrifice one for the other. Sometimes we champion grace, but at the expense of truth. At other times we stand for truth, but forget about grace.

But not Jesus. He's full of both grace and truth. How can He keep the balance? He can because He's fully man and fully God.

You say, "Pastor Brad, this is heavy stuff."

Indeed, for we are talking about the Infinite One. And it's absolutely vital that we creatures give utmost attention to what the Infinite One says about Himself in the Book He has given us.

Unfortunately, we're living in a day when so many people want the cliff notes version of the Bible. They want to *experience* the Lord, not *think* about Him. That's dangerous, eternally dangerous.

How the two natures of the God-man relate to each other is a mystery our finite minds cannot fully explain. That, in part, is what brought about the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. Perhaps no document says it any better than the Symbol of Chalcedon which reads:

"We, then, following the holy fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood...to be acknowledged 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; as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy fathers has handed down to us."⁵

You ask, "Do I have to say it like that to be a Christian?"

No, but you must believe in this Jesus and none other. You must believe that when God became man He became fully man and yet remained fully God. To believe otherwise, according to John 1:14, is to believe in a false Jesus, which is a deficient Jesus, because to reconcile man to God He must be both man and God.

This brings us to the second critical issue. First His *identity*, now the *implications*.

II. Consider the implications of His coming (15-18).

According to our passage, if God became a man (and He did), then four things follow.

A. Jesus deserves reverence (15). Which is what John the Baptist gave Him.

Listen to verse 15, "John [that's John the Baptist, the man mentioned in verse 6] testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, 'This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"

I admire John the Baptist, don't you? He lived a short life and by no means an easy life—beheaded around the age of thirty. But he was a man who knew his role and embraced it.

His goal wasn't to live a long life. I wonder if that wasn't part of what got King Hezekiah into trouble. In Isaiah 38, he wanted years added to his life rather than simply investing what God gave him, and in the end he stumbled. But for John, all that mattered was living a life that fulfilled God's purposes for him.

⁵ Hendriksen, p. 84.

Is that how you're living your life? Every time I hear the words of missionary-martyr, Jim Elliot, I'm greatly challenged: "He is no fool who gives what He cannot keep to gain what He cannot lose."

When you listen to the message that John the Baptist preached, as recorded here by John the apostle, you hear John's reverence. True reverence is marked by two elements.

1. *It involves a proper view of yourself.* "He who comes after me has surpassed me." Jesus, obviously, outranks John the Baptist. And John knew that. And so he gave Jesus the reverence He deserved through a humble admission of his own place.

A second element of reverence...

2. *It involves a proper view of the Lord.* "Because he was before me." The NASB says that the One coming after me "has a higher rank than I." Jesus was actually six months younger than John, if you compare their birthdays. Yet the Christ who was born had always been, and this places Him in a class all by Himself.

Did you ever wonder why Jesus' death on the cross is sufficient to pay the penalty for your sins? The price for sin is death, eternal death. That's what we deserved. And that's exactly what the eternal Christ endured on the cross. Because the God-man is eternal, He was able to endure in six hours on the cross the eternal punishment we had coming to us.

This means you have a decision to make, my friend. As a sinner, you can spend your eternity paying the penalty for your sins, *or* you can put your total trust in the One God sent to pay it for you. It's that simple. Pay, or believe He paid. Receive what you deserve, or believe He received what you deserve.

"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved," declares the Word of God (Acts 16:31).

And if you do trust Christ, the only fitting response is *reverence*. You will want to spend the rest of your life, not for yourself, but for Him and His honor. Yes, Jesus deserves reverence.

In verse 16 John mentions a second implication of the incarnation.

B. Jesus delivers grace (16). "From the fullness of his grace, we have all received one blessing after another." This is a difficult verse to translate. The NASB gives a more literal rendering, "For of his fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace."

What does that mean? It says that through Jesus we not only have grace, but literally *grace upon grace*. We have grace for salvation (Eph. 2:8). But we also have grace for living (2 Pet. 3:18), and grace for giving (2 Cor. 9:8), and grace for serving (1 Pet. 4:9), and grace for suffering (2 Cor. 12:8), and grace for persevering until Jesus returns (Rev. 22:21).

Grace is like an ocean. As followers of Christ, we get to draw from the ocean of grace. And when we do, it's as if one wave of grace is constantly replenished by another. There is no limit to the supply of grace in Christ Jesus!

Beloved, in Christ we have everything we need to live a life that pleases God. *Everything*. Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with *every spiritual blessing* in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." 2 Peter 1:3 indicates that God has given us [that's grace] everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him. Everything! We have grace upon grace.

The problem is, we do not naturally want to live by grace. In our pride, we're prone to live by our strength and wisdom rather than His. We deceive ourselves with the

notion, "I'm making it just fine all by myself" Yet the truth is, apart from grace, we can do nothing that pleases God.

Dear friend, Jesus delivers grace. Indeed, grace upon grace. But we must admit we need it, which means we need *Him*. God didn't come into this world as a man simply to jump-start our lives. He came to rescue us, and He now calls us to live in total dependence upon Him day by day, moment by moment.

So first, Jesus deserves reverence. Second, Jesus delivers grace. A third implication...

C. Jesus displays grace and truth (17). "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

There was nothing wrong with the law. God gave it. It had a good purpose—to prepare the world for something better. And it did so by revealing man's lost condition and foreshadowing his deliverer.

So the law was good. But, as Hendriksen observes, there were two things the law as such did not supply: "*grace* so that transgressors could be pardoned and helped in time of need, and *truth*, i.e., *the reality* to which all the types pointed (think of the sacrifices). Christ, by his atoning work, furnished both."⁶

It's not that grace and truth were missing from the way made known to Moses. Even an Old Testament text like Psalm 86:15 says, "But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."

But John wants us to see the old order in contrast with the new. Notice the contrasts he uses in verse 17, between law and grace, between Moses and Jesus, and between "was given" and "came." At His coming, Jesus made all things new. When you compare an acorn with an oak tree, yes there's continuity. But there's also something noticeably different.

This is the first mention of Jesus by name in John's gospel. And throughout his gospel John is going to emphasize that Jesus brought something amazingly new that fulfills, surpasses, and replaces the old.

New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce explains: "The wine of the new creation is better than the water used in Jewish religion (John 2:10), the new temple supersedes the old (2:19), the new birth is the gateway into a sphere of life which cannot be entered into by natural birth, even natural birth into membership of the chosen people (3:3, 5), the living water of the Spirit which Jesus imparts is far superior both to the water in Jacob's well and to the water which was ritually poured out in the temple court at the feast of Tabernacles (4:13f.; 7:37ff.), the bread of heaven is the reality of which the manna in the wilderness was but an adumbration (6:32f.). Moses was the mediator of the law; Jesus Christ is not only the mediator but the embodiment of grace and truth."⁷

If you want to see grace, look at Jesus. If you want to see truth, again look at Jesus. In Jesus we see the perfect flesh and blood display of grace and truth.

That brings us to a fourth implication of the coming of Jesus.

D. Jesus discloses the Father (18). "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." Jesus reveals the Father. The verb "has made known" ["declared" in the KJV] is *exagiasato*. It means "to explain, to expound, to interpret." We get the word "exegesis" from it.

⁶ Hendriksen, p. 89.

⁷ F. F. Bruce, pp. 43-4.

Exegesis is what I do (or at least attempt to do) when I preach the Word of God to you. During the week I study in order to be able to *explain* and *expound* what the text says.

That's what the Son of God did when He came to earth. He *exegeted* the Father.

This doesn't mean that Jesus reveals to us all there is to know about the Father. Our finite minds cannot capture the Infinite. God is in a class by Himself. We do not have minds large enough to grasp Him in His fullness.

But it does mean this. In the person of Jesus, we've been given sufficient truth about God to know Him accurately and personally. And because of that, we can fulfill the purpose for which we were created, to know and glorify Him as He deserves.

So in coming to earth, what does Jesus reveal in His *exegesis*? John mentions three things in verse 18.

1. *He reveals the unseeable.* "No one has ever seen God." Not even Abraham, the friend of God. Nor Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face according to Deuteronomy 34:10. Yes, Moses saw the "afterglow" of God's glory (Ex. 33:22ff), but even this majestic experience was veiled.

But know this. The glory that Moses could not see and live to tell about was seen by those who saw Jesus. Jesus revealed the One who is unseeable.

Here's a second thing that Jesus revealed when He came, namely that...

2. *He enjoys closeness with the Father.* The KJV says that the Son "is in the bosom of the Father." The NIV says He's "at the Father's side." To be in the bosom of someone is a Hebrew phrase which expresses the deepest intimacy possible in life. It's what a mother does with the child she loves. It speaks of closeness in the highest degree.

That's what God the Son had with God the Father before He left heaven to come to earth. But our text is present tense, indicating this is what He enjoys right now (Heb. 1:3).

Thirdly, in coming to earth Jesus revealed that...

3. *He's the One and Only God.* It's basically the same word we saw in verse 14. In both verses it speaks of Jesus' deity. No one's ever seen God, but "the One and Only" God, Jesus, the Son of God, the One who right now is intimately close to Him, He has *exegeted* Him. Jesus has made the Father known. He later told Philip in John 14:9, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

So this morning we've considered the *identity* of the One who came—He was fully man and yet remained fully God. And we've considered four *implications* of His coming—one, Jesus deserves reverence; two, Jesus delivers grace; three, Jesus displays grace and truth; and four, Jesus discloses the Father.

Now it's time to ask ourselves an important question.

Make It Personal: Am I living in light of why He came?

Jesus came to reveal the glory of God. Am I living in light of that reality?

You say, "I'm not sure. What do I need to do?" I'd like to lay two non-negotiables in front of each of us.

1. *If I want to know God, then I must get to know Jesus.*

It's true. If you want to know God, then get to know Jesus. The real Jesus. Get to know the Jesus revealed in the Bible. And once you discover the truth about Him, the only appropriate response is to believe in Him and entrust your life to Him.

Here's a great place to start. Make a personal study of John's Gospel. Get to know Jesus. Get to know about His perfect life, His miracles, His teaching, and most of all, about how He chose to die on a cross to bear sin's penalty, not His own sin for He had none, but the sins of every person who would ever repent and receive Him as Savior and Lord. And of course, keep reading and learn about His victorious resurrection from the dead, and His parting promise to return.

Let me say it again. If you want to know God, then get to know Jesus. Not merely about Him, but get to know Him personally.

That's what makes church so important. The church exists to help people know Christ. If you don't have a church, you are welcome here.

"What if I do know Jesus?" you ask. Then there's a second non-negotiable.

2. *If I know Jesus, I can help others know Him through a life marked by grace and truth.*

We just learned that Jesus was known for grace and truth. Ought not the same be true for us if He lives in us? Shouldn't the world see a beautiful balance of grace and truth when they look at our lives? Yes, indeed.

And that's how we can best help others come to know Him. Who can you help come to know Jesus better this week, through a grace-filled life and truth-filled speech? Who comes to mind? Neighbors? People you work with, or go to school with?

Let's pray for them now, that God would open doors of opportunity for us.