

Proposition: In John 1:14-18, we learn two important insights concerning the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

- I. We learn the explanation of the incarnation (14).
 - A. Jesus was fully man.
 - 1. He became flesh.
 - 2. He set up tent among us.
 - B. Jesus was fully God.
 - 1. He exhibited glory.
 - 2. He came from the Father.
 - 3. He is the source of grace and truth.
- II. We learn the effect of the incarnation (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.

Challenge: If you want to know God, then get to know Jesus.

What's the greatest verse in the Bible? How's that for a question?! It's unanswerable, I know. In terms of familiarity, John 3:16 comes to mind. And Psalm 23. And the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:9-13.

Any votes for John 1:14? Concerning it William Barclay says, "It might well be held that this is the greatest single verse in the New Testament." Whether he's right or not is a matter of opinion. But it's certainly hard to overstate the importance of John 1:14, as we'll have the privilege to discover firsthand this morning.

Today we come to our third and final message in our series, "When God Became a Man," from John 1. Our aim has been to get to know Jesus better through the eyewitness account of His disciple, John.

There's no one like Jesus. He's in a class all by Himself. He changes lives. One of the things I enjoy most about being a pastor is getting to see Him do it firsthand!

But what qualifies Him for the life-changing business? What makes Him so unique? Many things. In John 1:14-18, we learn about His incarnation, namely two important insights concerning His entrance to the world.

I. We learn the explanation of the incarnation (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 is more significant when it comes to the doctrine of the incarnation than this one.

**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.

It begins with the *Logos*, the Word. The first time John depicted 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 were 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 despisal 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? Absolutely not. 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..."

Are you ready for a trick question? Here it is. 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? The sad, yet biblically correct answer is, *no*. No matter how sincere they are.

Listen. *What* you believe about Jesus is as critical in believing in Him. What, then, must we believe about Jesus? According to John 1:14, we must make two affirmations.

A. Jesus was fully man. John uses two incredible statements to substantiate that.

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 the *Docetic* 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."

So here. When the Logos became a man, He didn't cease being what He was before. He remained the Logos, even God. He assumed the human nature without laying aside the 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 NT, here and four times in Revelation. But in the Greek OT, the word is often used to refer to the Tabernacle. What was that? It was the temporary structure where the presence of God "dwelt" in a very special way.

Beginning in 6 B.C., that's what Jesus did. He 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. On the second night of our trip west last summer we found ourselves in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. 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!

Don't miss this. Jesus' stay was temporary, but it was real. It was no phantom, smoke-and-mirror illusion. God really became a man and visited the earth. He stayed for 33 years, and then returned home to glory.

So there's affirmation #1: Jesus was fully man. Here's affirmation #2...

B. Jesus was fully God. John says, "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 of "theater" and suggests more than a casual glance. It involves a careful scrutiny of what is in sight in order to grasp significance.

John studied the Logos. So did eleven other men, and many others. And what conclusions did they draw? According to verse 14, here are three...

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 OT, 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 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."

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

2. *He came from the Father.*¹ The NIV reads, "The glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father." The KJV renders, "The glory as of the only begotten of the Father."

New Testament scholar, Merrill Tenney, states (72): "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."

Which ever reading you choose, the conclusion is the same. The deity of Christ is supported by the fact that He came from the Father. Conclusion #3...

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 *emeth*. 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? You look to Jesus. He's the source of grace and truth. Indeed, He's full of grace and truth.

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." Yes, it is, but it's absolutely essential. We're living in a day when people seem to 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 A.D. 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." (Hendriksen, 84)

¹William 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.

So Jesus is fully man and fully God. To believe otherwise, according to John 1:14 is to believe in a hybrid Jesus, indeed a deficient Jesus that can't save us.

What happened as the result of the God-man's entrance to the world? That's the question John addresses next. We move from explanation to effect in verse 15.

II. We learn the effect of the incarnation (15-18).

John 1:14 explains the incarnation for us. Verses 15-18 give us the effect of it. Because Jesus came to earth, 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 purpose.

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 stumbled. But for John, all that mattered was living a life that fulfilled God's purposes for him.

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, what stands out is 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. 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. But not really. In terms of eternity, he'd always been. That meant He was in a class all by Himself.

Which is why His death on the cross sufficient to pay the penalty for our sins. The price for sin is death, eternal death. That's what we deserved. And that's what the eternal Savior endured on the cross. Because He's eternal in nature, when He died on the tree, He was able to endure in six hours the eternal punishment we had coming to us.

Which means you have a decision to make. As a sinner, you can spend your eternity paying the eternal penalty for your sins, *or* you can trust Christ and believe that He did it in your place. And if you trust Christ, the only fitting response to His salvation is *reverence*--to spend the rest of your life bringing honor to Him rather than yourself. Yes, Jesus deserves reverence. A second effect 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? This is amazing. 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.

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, we have everything we need for life, 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, not everyone's interested in living by grace. In our pride, we're prone to want to pull up our boot straps and live by merit. We want to think, "Ah, I'm okay." But we forget that apart from grace, we have no hope.

Dear friend, Jesus delivers grace. Indeed, grace upon grace. But you must admit you need it, that you need Him. A third effect is related...

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 Hendrksen observes (89), 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."

It's not that grace and truth were missing from the way made known to Moses. Even an OT 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 likes to set the old order in contrast with the new. Notice the contrasts 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. As with the acorn and the oak, there's continuity. But there's also something noticeably fresh, even 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, a new order that fulfills, surpasses, and replaces the old.

NT scholar F.F. Bruce explains (43): "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."

Yes, in Jesus we see the perfect display of grace and truth. A fourth effect...

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 *exagato*. It means "to explain, to expound, to interpret." We get the word "exegesis" from it.

Exegesis is what I do (or 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 Jesus did in His incarnation. He *exegeted* the Father.

Be careful now. This doesn't mean that Jesus reveals to us all there is to know about God. 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. Through Jesus, we've been given sufficient truth about God to know Him as Creator and Redeemer. And because of that, we can fulfill the purpose for which we were created--to know God and glorify Him as He deserves.

When He came to earth, in His *exegesis*, what did Jesus reveal? 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 the glory Moses could not see and live to tell about, we've seen in Jesus!

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). John mentions a third truth about Jesus' disclosure. In coming He revealed that...

3. *He's the One and Only God.* It's basically the same word 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.

To put it simply, Jesus became man that He might reveal God to man and reconcile man to God. Let that sink in. Do you want to know God? There's only one way, only one person who can make it happen. So here's the challenge...

Challenge: If you want to know God, then get to know Jesus.

And if you want to know Jesus, get into His Word. It's there we meet Him. And once we meet Him, the only appropriate response is to entrust our lives to Him.