

The Message of His Flesh

John 1:14-18

Turn to John 1 please. We are reading John's opening at Christmas time, because in one way this opening is doing the same thing as the birth stories of Jesus in Matthew and Luke. Those birth stories are telling us how the story of Jesus started, how the story of Jesus began.

John knows those stories, and does not mean to correct them. They are wonderful stories, and important, and John knows that. But he knows there is another side to how the story of Jesus started, how the story of Jesus began. And so in his opening, he tells his story of where Jesus came from.

Last week we went from John 1:1 to the first line of verse 14. Today we'll finish the opening, we'll read vv 14-18. Let's review vv 1-14 first. John begins by looking back at the creation story in Genesis 1. In the beginning, God made the heavens and the earth. And in that first creation story, everything God made, he did by *speaking*. "Let there be light," and there was light.

So John thinks about that story, and he thinks about Jesus, and the Spirit guides his imagination, and John explains Jesus by separating God from his creating words. John looks at the creating words of God, Let there be light, Let there be life, and so on, and John makes those creating words a separate being, a separate person, back there with God at the beginning.

John calls that person the Word, the Message. God and the Word create together. God does not make things by himself, he makes the heavens and the earth by means of the Word, the Message. God creates light, and creates life, through the Message. Here is how John says it.

In the beginning was the Message, and the Message was with God, and the Message was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him, nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

And the Message came into the world, and the world, even though made through him, did not recognize him. The Message came to his own people, his own nation, but they did not accept him or welcome him. The Message was not well received on earth, but rather misunderstood, and rejected.

But, some people did accept him, and welcome him. Some believed in him, they submitted to him and worshipped him. Some said, "My Lord and my God." And in those people, God caused a rebirth. They were born again with an eternal life. And now we're talking about us.

These re-born people can die and end up in a grave, but the grave can't hold us. That eternal life won't stay in the grave. Our souls and our bodies will burst back out of the grave, we'll explode out of the grave, and live with God. That's the eternal life from believing in Jesus.

That's how far we got last week. Now let's go through the last five verses. We'll do this in four parts.

1, He became Flesh, and we saw Glory – 1:14

The Message became flesh, and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

We read the opening line last week. The Message became flesh, the Message became human with all the normal human weaknesses, and he lived among us. We saw all of that. But we saw something else, while he lived with us in the flesh. We saw, in one word, his glory.

Jesus did things people don't do. It was not his miracles. That proved God was with him, but Moses and Elijah did all kinds of miracles, and others, too. It was not that he sometimes knew what others did not know. That happened to God's servants before. Nathan the prophet knew that David had committed adultery. God told him. Those things were not our Lord's glory.

But in Mark 2, there's a story of Jesus forgiving a man's sins. The grumpy leaders say, "Only God can do that." Jesus did not argue, he let it stand. Moses asked God to forgive people, but Jesus did not ask God. He just forgave the man.

In Mark 4, Jesus slept in the boat, and a storm came up, bad storm, in the night. Disciples were terrified, woke Jesus up. Jesus looked around, and spoke to the wind and the waves: "Be quiet!" And right away everything became calm. And the disciples look at each other and say, "who is this that tells creation what to do, and it obeys." And they were afraid, as afraid of who was in the boat with them as they had been of the storm. They had just seen his glory.

He became flesh, and he lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the only explanation is the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father.

Little by little, in all the ordinary days of their life together, the disciples come to realize that this is not just a prophet, and this is not just the chosen descendant of David. Somehow, this is the Eternal God in the flesh. Doubting Thomas was the first to get there. Thomas said, My Lord and My God, after Jesus rose.

Thomas was the first one to say it. But it seems that very soon after the Lord's resurrection, the first followers were agreed on that. A remarkable thing, for devout Jews to say, My Lord and my God. But they did.

The Message became flesh, and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. We won't talk about grace and truth now, but notice it. It comes up again, and we'll take it up then.

2, The Message Existed before his Flesh – 1:15

John the Baptist testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, “This is the one I spoke about, back there when I said, ‘He who comes after me, is ahead of me, because he was before me.’”

“He who comes after me, is ahead of me, because he was before me.” These words do not need to mean any more than, “the one coming after me is older than I am.” That’s basically what the words mean.

This is one of the places where John the writer seems to assume what we know from the other Gospels, here Luke. Luke tells us that Elizabeth conceived John the Baptist about six months before Mary conceived Jesus. So whatever the Baptist means, it’s not that Jesus was born first.

This verse begins, “John testified.” Remember that verse 5 said John was a man sent by God. That means that John tells us the truth. And we actually have two testimonies rolled into one here. Apparently *before* the Baptist saw Jesus, he said, “The one who comes after me, is ahead of me, because he was before me.” That’s John’s first testimony.

Then, when John the Baptist actually *saw* Jesus, he tells his audience what he said before: “This is the one I spoke about back there, when I said, ‘he who comes after me is ahead of me because he was before me.’”

And John the writer, John of Zebedee, listened to John the Baptist back there. John the writer, John of Zebedee, heard John the Baptist say all of this. And he knows the Baptist is older than Jesus. And he knows the Baptist is from God. And he listens to this, and he thinks, “what is John the Baptist talking about? How is Jesus ahead of John because he was before John?”

This is John the writer, thinking about what he saw and heard. And eventually he puts it all together, Jesus is the Eternal Word, the Message, and then he writes the Gospel of John.

3, The Message in the Flesh brought Grace and Truth – 1:16-17

Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

“We have all received grace in place of grace.” The 2011 NIV uses that line here now, which is a change from the traditional translation, and it is a good change. “Out of him we all have received grace in place of grace, grace in exchange for grace. We all received one grace in place of another grace already given.” That’s the right way to translate this. Next verse explains.

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. “For the law was given through Moses, that was the first gracious gift of God; but now, in Christ, in exchange for the law, in place of the law, we have grace and truth in Christ.”

For John, as for Jesus, and Paul, and the NT generally, the law of Moses was a gift, a generous kindness of God. Part of the problem is the difference between the English word “Law” and the Hebrew word *torah*. *Torah* in Hebrew means something much closer to guidance and instruction than how we understand law.

Proverbs 1:8 – *Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction, and to your mother’s torah*. *Torah* means guidance, teaching. Proverbs uses *torah* about eight times, and it is always translated “teaching” or something along those lines, never “law.”

God teaches his people how to live. We don’t know what to do. We really don’t know the right ways to live, so God taught us. Read Ps 119 to find out how thankful an OT follower of God was to have the laws of Moses to guide and shape him.

So, the first grace, the first generous kindness of God, was the *torah*, which we got from Moses. But now, in place of that, grace and truth pour out of Jesus Christ. Out of his fullness, we all received. God’s generous kindness and his truth pour out of Jesus, it is much better than the *torah* of Moses.

This is the first place in John’s opening that we hear “Jesus Christ.” Before this we did not know, although if we are believers, which John’s readers mostly were, we already know.

We started today with v14, which said, *The Message became flesh, and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth*. The Message became flesh, and lived with us, and in his flesh we saw his glory; he was full of grace and truth, straight from the Father.

John the writer likes truth. We saw this when we went through 3 John and 2 John. John is so pleased to have the truth. What other NT writers call “the faith,” John calls “the truth.” There is so much darkness and deception around, then as now. And for John, not only does Jesus *tell* the truth, but Jesus Christ *is* the truth.

Jesus Christ is full of God’s generous kindness and truth, and from this we have all received, it pours out of him and we all drank from it. And my brothers and sisters, all of us who have called Jesus “my Lord and my God” are also drinking of this very same generous kindness and truth. These things still pour out of our Lord on all those who trust him and seek him out.

I know that for many of us these are not easy times. For some of us they are very difficult. That is all true. But be encouraged. John the writer has seen plenty of that, too, and may well be in the middle of it as he writes. God does not think these things are good for us only when all is peaceful and we are in a good mood. God cares about our fears and distresses.

Our fear and distress is not recess from his generous kindness and truth. He wants us to take hold of this. I know about being discouraged and empty, and none of this stuff matters to me.

I know very well how that feels. Is God saying to me, on those days, “Ok, Ed, take a break from me, I’m just a lot of work that doesn’t help, see you when you feel better.” No, that is not what God hopes for from me. God hopes I will stir myself to take hold of the bigger picture.

Jesus became flesh, which certainly means that at times he was discouraged and empty, and none of this stuff mattered to him, either. Don’t you dare ever tell Jesus that he does not know what it’s like! You can say many things to him, don’t say that. He does know.

And he is still a fountain of God’s generous kindness and truth. He is full, and everyone who says, “my Lord and my God” drinks of this, and also has troubles in the world.

4, The Message made Flesh Shows us the Father 1:18

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

No one has ever seen God, but God the one and only Son has made him known. No one has ever seen God, but the Message, whom we know as Jesus Christ, has made him known.

Well, lots of things made God known. Nothing special there. But this making God known is the next best things to seeing God, which takes this to another level. No one has ever seen God, but the seeing the Son covers it all.

I’m going to quote you three other lines from the NT. One is from Jesus himself, later in John, Jesus says, “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father.” Paul in Colossians 1: “The Son is the image of the invisible God.” Hebrews 1, “The Son is the exact representation of God’s being.” The Son is the image of the invisible God, the Son is the exact representation of his being.

Let’s suppose that God ten minutes transports you, later today to his actual Throne Room in heaven. You are there, looking at this unbelievable Throne of God, Holy and Majestic even more than you expected. You know that God is on the Throne, but he’s invisible, so you can’t see him.

You’re fine with that, you understand, you know God is there because you can feel the life and love and glory pouring out of him, but you can’t see him. You ask the angel if you can take a picture of this Throne, with your phone. God allows smart phones in heaven, it turns out.

The angels says, “Sure, go ahead.” The angel grins, this is going to be good. So you take a picture of God’s Throne with your smart phone. And you look at the picture on your phone, to see if it turned out, and in the picture, there’s someone sitting on the Throne! Filling the Throne.

It is Jesus, with scars on his hands and feet, and a crown on his head. In you picture, Jesus is sitting on that Throne. So you look back at the Throne. Still no one there.

You know God is there, but you can't see him. So you take another picture, because you aren't sure what's going on. Is Jesus on that Throne, or not? You look at the second picture, and it is the same. Jesus is there, scars in his hands and his feet, glorious Lord Jesus, crown on his head.

The Son is the image of the invisible God. The Son is the exact representation of the Father's being. No one has ever seen God, but the Son shows us what he's like. "If you have seen me, you've seen the Father." And the Father agrees, make no mistake.

I'll tell you where we get in trouble with this. If someone asked us to explain how God the Father was different from Jesus the Son, we could probably answer that. We would say, "Jesus the Son is more like *this*, and God the Father is more like *that*."

But people, that is always, always wrong. It is impossible for any of us to have a more accurate notion of God than we would get from fixing our eyes on Jesus. It is preposterous, actually, and maybe worse. If we've seen Jesus, we've seen the Father. What if it is true?

Jesus the exact representation the Father's being. Jesus is the perfect image of God. None of us knows anything more truthful about God the Father, than we get from hearing and watching Jesus. God sent Jesus to make himself known. Don't waste it.

I have said these things in the past, and had thoughtful Christians upset with me. They were sure that God the Father was like this, and Jesus the Son was like that, and did not believe what these lines were saying. No one has seen God, but God the one and only Son made him known to us.

One more thing from this last verse. God the one and only Son is in the bosom of the Father. That's what it says in Greek. God the Son is in the bosom of the Father, that's his chest, the front of his body. God the one and only Son is in the embrace of the Father.

That's how I'd translate that. The Son is in the embrace of the Father, from that embrace, that warm family love, parent-child love, the Son makes the Father known.

In vv1-2, we read twice that the Word was *with God*, the Message was *with God*. At the end we get it more strongly. Not only are they together, but real close, family embrace, parent-child embrace. That's the relationship between the Father and the Son. And that Son, that Message, became flesh, on Christmas day. How about that! And lived with us, and showed us the Father.

Folks, we are in the most amazing story on this planet. The world looks so ordinary, and in these days of winter and covid, the world can look scary, dreary, lonely, even doomed. But we celebrate the Eternal Message becoming flesh, conceived by the Spirit, and born of Mary. The Message lived among us and showed us the Father, brought us life and light and grace and truth.

We are in a world that still does not recognize him, and still does not receive or welcome him. That was his world then, and it is our world now. The same world.

There were troubles then, and there are troubles now. Back then, some received him and trusted in him. And by some doing I don't really understand, God's choice and our choice, we now ourselves are among that group, the some who welcomed him and believed.

We are among those who say to him, "My Lord and my God." WHOEVER received him was re-born, born of God himself. We are in that "whoever." Light and life pour out of him, and grace and truth pour out of him.

From his fullness *we all* have received grace in place of grace, *we all* have received the grace and truth that spring out of Jesus like from a fountain. Each one of you put your own name the *whoever* that received him, and put your name in the *we all* who received the grace and truth don't lose heart. We have reason to celebrate and worship and give thanks.

And by fixing our eyes on Jesus, we are seeing the God that no one ever sees. Knowing the story of Jesus is the most important thing we could know about who God is. Amen.

PRAYER: Father, it is only a few days to Christmas, only a few days until we remember the day Jesus was born, the day he appeared into the world in the flesh. Father, thank you for writing this story, and thank you for writing us into it. Thank you that your Message was full of life and light, and you gathered us in, so we can have that life and see that light.

Thank you for the Message, who himself is full of grace and truth, and it pours out of him everywhere he goes. Thank you for bringing us to him, and changing us when we drank from his grace and truth. And in this all, we get the perfect picture of who you are, our Great Invisible Father. Thank you for making this story happen, for sending your message to the world, because you loved the world. And thank you for writing us into this story. O Father, help us grab this and live it out in these difficult days. Father, remember our distress. Encourage us. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give us a spirit of unity among ourselves as we follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.