

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.

In the beginning was the Word. That's how John begins. He calls Jesus "the Word." What he means by that is that Jesus is God's Message, God's Speech. If we could separate God himself from the words that come out of his mouth, Jesus would be the words that come out of God's mouth. Jesus himself is "the Word, Jesus is God's words, God's message, God's speech.

If we could summarize everything God had to say, it would be a person, the one we know as Jesus of Nazareth, Christ and Lord. The most important thing God has to SAY to the world is to send a PERSON into the world. That person, Jesus Christ, is God's primary message to the world.

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.

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 five 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.

Little by little, in all the ordinary days of their life together, the disciples come to realize that this was not just a prophet, and not just the chosen descendant of David. Somehow, this was 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. He came from the Father, full of grace and truth. I love that line. Folks, we have welcomed Jesus into our lives, we have been re-birthed by God himself, and Christ has filled our lives with grace and truth. He has filled our lives with grace and truth.

We doubt it, because we have troubles. We do indeed have troubles. Christ said that in the world we would have troubles. At the same time, through Christ God has filled our lives with grace and truth. *In this world you will have troubles. But take heart! I have overcome the world.* 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.

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?" And eventually the Spirit guides him to put it all together: Jesus is the Eternal Word, the Message.

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 and it is a good translation. "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 the other 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. 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.* In English we say, "your father's instruction and your mother's teaching," but the Hebrew word for parents showing their children the right way to live is *torah*. Proverbs uses *torah* like that 8x.

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. What other New Testament 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. God hopes that we will stir up each other to take hold of the bigger picture. On our own we don't do that well at this. Together we are to do this for each other.

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.

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.

4, The Message Shows us the Father – 1:18a

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 for ten minutes God transports you to his actual Throne Room in heaven. You are there, looking at this unbelievable Throne of God, indescribably majestic and holy. 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 will 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 your 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.

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.

What kind of Person do you imagine the God of the Old Testament to be? If you would put the God of the Old Testament in human form, what kind of human do you think you would see? Don't bother, people. It has already been done. The God of the Bible already put himself in human form, because he knew we were not getting understanding. Jesus of Nazareth is the God of the Bible in human form. The Son is the image of the invisible God. The Son is the exact representation of the Father's being. If you have seen me, you've seen the Father.

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 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. None of us knows anything more truthful about the God of the Bible, than we get from hearing and watching Jesus. Don't waste it.

I have said these things in the past, and had thoughtful Christians upset with me. It has happened in my seminary classes, and in early years it happened in this church. (That person is no longer here.) 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. People, no one has seen God, but God the one and only Son made him known to us.

5, One and Only Son in the Embrace of the Father – 1:18b

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. Picture the Father with his arms around the Son, holding him close. 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 verses 1–2, 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.

The world looks so ordinary, and 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. 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. By welcoming Jesus we have entered into a flood of grace and truth. Amen.

PRAYER: 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. 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 out the big story. 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.

