

**Find Life in the Son:
God as Man Revealed
John 1:14-23**

Introduction

He was the last surviving apostle, writing at the end of what could arguably be called the greatest century in human history. What made it so occurred in the first third, especially the final 3½ years of that period. A Person unlike any other human before or since stepped onto the stage of history and changed it forever. He changed John forever, along with the other apostles—Peter, Andrew, James, Philip, Nathaniel, Thomas, and more. Many more. The woman at the well and her whole town of Sychar. Thousands in Galilee and Judea. He rocked Jerusalem and alarmed its civil and religion leaders. They crucified Him, but He rose again, and then forty days later ascended into heaven with the promise to return while 500 of His followers watched.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the apostles preached Jesus. 3,000 converts on the day of Pentecost. Soon another 5,000. Christianity spread like wildfire despite every effort to stamp it out: Samaria, Ethiopia, Antioch of Syria, the province of Asia (now Turkey). It crossed over to Europe—Philippi and Thessalonica in northern Greece, Athens and Corinth in southern Greece, ending in Rome itself, the capital of the Empire.

John recalls the Person with whom he walked over sixty years earlier who precipitated all this change. Since we studied the early verses of John's Gospel the Sunday before Christmas, today we start with the climax of those prologue verses of John's Gospel.

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. **15** (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") **16** For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. **17** For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. **19** And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" **20** He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." **21** And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." **22** So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" **23** He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the

wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

1. Incarnation Observed: We have seen His glory (14-15).
2. Grace Received: From His fullness we have all received (16-18).
3. Testimony Given: I am a voice . . . (19-23).

1. Incarnation Observed: We have seen His glory (14-15).

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Word—you know from our study of John 1:1-14 the Sunday before Christmas, John began his Gospel with these majestic words:

John 1:1-5

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

To the Greeks the logos was the foundational principle of reason and order. To the Jews, the logos was personal revelation from God. Words communicate meaning to those who understand the language. Jesus communicated God to us. He made God knowable.

Hebrews 1:1-3a

¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Became flesh

God is spirit, but God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity, became flesh—fully human while remaining fully God.

Dwelt among us—tabernacle, pitched his tent among us

Recalls the shekinah glory of God that filled the tabernacle in the wilderness

The very presence of God, pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, that led and protected the Israelites in their exodus from Egypt and wanderings in the wilderness before they took Canaan, the promised land

We have seen His glory—we have closely observed His shining splendor

Throughout his three and a half years of earthly ministry John and the other disciples observed the glory of the deity of Jesus manifest in His teaching, miracles, and sinless life. But it's very possible that John is referring particularly to what Peter, James, and he himself observed on the mount of transfiguration, when Jesus' deity broke through the veil of his humanity in shining splendor as Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah about His exodus from earth.

You remember that when Peter suggested they build three tents, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, God the Father interrupted.

Matthew 17:5

He [Peter] was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him."

Glory as of the only Son from the Father

The monogenesis, the one of a kind
According to John 1:12, we are given the right to become children of God if we receive Him instead of rejecting Him as many have, but Jesus is unique as the eternal Son of God.

What was the character of that glory?

Full of grace and truth

Completely good, favor displayed that human beings do not deserve. God is astonishingly kind—full of grace and steadfast love.

Completely reliable—reality you can bank on.

God is completely trustworthy.

Jesus displayed a fullness of these divine qualities, not just a reflection of them.

Colossians 1:19

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

This summary description seems rooted in one of the earliest self-revelations of God to man.

Exodus 34:5-6

⁵ The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

2 Corinthians 4:6

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

John 1:15

(John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'")

If Jesus were just a man, even a good man, his existence would be marked by His physical birth, and John the Baptist would have existed before Jesus did.

But Jesus has supreme authority because He existed long before John did. He is eternal. John the Baptist was born about six months before Jesus was born to Mary, but that was not the beginning of His existence. He existed as God the Son from eternity past. Verse 27—"the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."

If you want to know God you must look into the face of Jesus Christ. If you reject Jesus, you are rejecting God.

Applications

- In what ways do your ideas of what God is like match or contradict the eyewitness testimony to the character, words, and deeds of Jesus?
- In what ways does your practice of religion leave Jesus out?
- What patterns of life can you set that will help you keep your focus on Jesus in how you think and what you do?

2. Grace Received: From His fullness we have all received (16-18).

16 For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. **17** For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

We cannot become God, but Jesus came to let us experience from His divine fullness the grace and truth that mark His intrinsic character.

The disciples were not just eyewitnesses of Jesus' powerful life, they were radically changed by it. As everyone who has ever come to know Jesus has been. Jesus gave them life from God through the new birth. God's lifeforce flowed into them through Jesus.

John 1:13

Who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Those who received Jesus for who He really is rather than rejecting Him were given not only the rights and privileges of being children of God, but were actually born again with His life in them.

Grace upon grace—like wave after wave of grace from God through Jesus; not just at the beginning when they believed, but ongoing. That's what accounts for believers' growth in the Lord. That's what guarantees they will make it all the way home. God keeps on treating us far better than we deserve.

The law was given by God through Moses. Moses was not the source. The law was perfect, but it could not save us. Its function was to demonstrate how badly we need and Savior, and to point us to Him.

Grace and truth (qualities already identified with the shining splendor of God's character) came through Jesus Christ—directly from Him as the God-man.

Moses talked with God face to face, but that means he talked to Him personally, not that he gazed directly on God in all His deity. Only members of the Godhead could do that. As God, God the Son, who is eternally at the Father's side, has made God known—He has exegeted Him. He has drawn out who He is, explained Him, interpreted Him, so that people could understand who God really is and what He's like.

On many occasions Jesus Himself taught this truth. For instance, consider His words in John 14:6-9

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

⁸ Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

People who have a direct encounter with God cannot remain the same people they once were. How could they? Other human beings mark us. How much more God Himself?

Applications

- What are some ways God has changed you through your relationship with Jesus?
- What examples of God's repeated unmerited goodness and kindness toward you can you recall?
- How are you maintaining closeness to Christ so that His grace and truth shape your life?

3. Testimony Given: I am a voice . . . (19-23).

¹⁹ And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰ He confessed,

and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." ²¹ And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." ²² So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³ He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

Jews would refer to the Jewish leadership, which centered in the Sanhedrin, seventy elders who governed Israel, with the High Priest at their head, as suggested by a delegation from Jerusalem. The priests and Levites were the guardians of temple worship, which was at the time was dominated by the sect of the Sadducees, the more liberal wing of the Jewish leadership who did not believe in miracles, angels, or a literal resurrection of the dead. Verse 24 discloses that the ones who sent these priests and Levites were, however, of the sect of the Pharisees, the conservative group who did believe in these Scriptural doctrines. As their name conveys, Separatists, their focus was on keeping separate from the prevailing Greek and Roman culture of the times in order to preserve the Jewish culture and ways. With vast throngs flocking to the Jordan to hear John the Baptist, who proclaimed repentance to prepare for the coming of the kingdom of

God, this preacher in the wilderness had to be vetted by these guardians of the Jewish nation and religion. John was not from one of their schools. He preached not in the synagogues but in the open air. His lifestyle was odd. But the power on his life! Great power as one filled with the Spirit of God.

Their questions reveal their awareness of OT prophecy and that John is no ordinary man: Are you the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed King whose coming would free Israel from her oppressors and establish a kingdom over all the earth?

Are you Elijah, whom Malachi predicted would come before the great day of the Lord?

Are you the Prophet like Moses that Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 18 would arise from Israel and to whom the people would listen?

The ministry of John is so extraordinary that people are thinking in apocalyptic terms. His ministry is too disruptive, too unusual, for him to be just another run-of-the-mill prophet. It had been 400 years since Malachi, but this prophet is so unusual that people naturally jumped to the conclusion that maybe he's even the long awaited Messiah. And if not the Messiah, the powerful prophet Elijah preceding the Lord's return in judgment, or the prophet Moses predicted would come to whom the people would listen,

more so than they did to the voice of God through Moses at Sinai.

John's answer to all three questions: I am not.

So what do you say about yourself? What explains the following you have? What gives you the authority to preach as you do?

Later they would ask Jesus the same kind of question: "What gives you the authority to do what you're doing?"

Jesus answered their question with a question: "John the Baptist—was he from God or not?"

They refused to answer. If they had said, "From God," He would have said, "Then why did you not believe him?" But if they said John wasn't from God, they would lose face with the people at large, because they believed John was obviously a prophet from God.

John 1:23

He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

John was not sent out approved by the leaders of the Jews. He was sent by God. His answer uses words from Isaiah 40, and when

he utters them, he brings with them the momentous context of those words:

Isaiah 40:1-5

¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Isaiah's prophecy brings comfort from God to His people, promising their restoration and redemption from their sins. It is a restoration made possible by a royal visit from God Himself, who will display His glory for all flesh to see. Isaiah foretells that someone in the wilderness will cry out for Israel to prepare the way—to build a highway for the Divine visitation. That someone is John the Baptist. Isaiah saw his ministry 700 years before it happened.

John says, "I am the voice Isaiah foretold." That means that the royal visit of God is near.

So get ready. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

John's life and ministry is not self-focused. He sees his own significance as centered in the message he brings: the King is coming.

This is the spirit of the prophets and of the apostles and of every true preacher of the Word. They turn attention away from themselves to Jesus the Savior-King. They do not see themselves as great. They do not garner applause for themselves. They point people to Jesus and His glory.

God has not left the world without witness. He has made Himself known through the prophets, the apostles, through Jesus Christ Himself, and His church made up of the saints of God who spread the good news everywhere. That is the mission Christ gave all His followers, not just the prophets and apostles. There were 500 gathered when He ascended to heaven. To them He gave the great commission to make disciples of all ethnicities, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all He had commanded them. We are to be a voice turning hearts toward this Jesus, God the Son, who as man in human flesh, revealed God to us.

Applications

- What about your life would cause observers to ask what makes you different?
- Who are the persons you are pointing to Jesus?
- In what ways do you make much of Christ?

Conclusion

What have you done with Jesus? Do you know Him? Does He know you as one of His own? Philosophical speculations, cultural mantras, pseudo-intellectual sidesteps will all crumble in the presence of His majesty. No excuse will do. You must deal with Him. He will certainly deal with you. It's just a question whether He will be your eternal Savior or condemning Judge.

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