

# “We Beheld His Glory”

John 1:1-18

Halifax: 24 December 2006

## Introduction

Ordinarily, on the Sunday closest to December 25,

- I break from our regular sermon series to say something about the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - This is the time of year when the thoughts of so many are turned to this glorious topic.
- As we have just completed a section in our study of Matthew’s gospel, and as we have Brian Murray coming to preach next week,
  - I have every good reason to continue with that custom.

And so for my principle text this morning, I have chosen a portion of John 1:14,

- the marvellous words, “We beheld His Glory.”

Although you may not often speak of it with these words,

- *Beholding glory* is something you do all the time.
  - Advertisers are constantly at work to show you the glory of the products they are advertising—
    - they want to show you the glory of a Chevrolet over a Ford,
    - or the glory of a particular pair of Blue Jeans over another.
  - Some of you may have been to musical performance over the holidays...
    - You were able to behold the glory of the performance...
    - Or perhaps you are a sports enthusiast who was able to behold the glory of your favourite hockey team or a famous boxer or race car driver.
    - Or maybe you love movies or literature and delight in beholding the glory of your favourite author or producer.
- If you exchange gifts this Christmas,
  - You will behold the glory of the gifts you receive...
  - And perhaps the glory of special meal that someone has prepared in celebration.

- I realise that by using the words “beholding the glory” of such common things,
  - I stand in danger of cheapening the phrase,
    - but I want you to understand that “beholding glory” is something that we human beings do all the time.
    - We were made to love glory, and we are always delighted whenever we see it in small ways or great ways.

But my topic today is about a glory that is entirely without parallel...

- It is a glory that excels all other glories a thousand times.
  - It is “**His** Glory,” the glory of Jesus Christ revealed in the flesh.
    - John says, “We beheld *His* glory.”
  - My outline is quite simple this morning...
    - I want to look at the words of our text
      - First, I want to look at the word “His”
        - Whose glory is it that we beheld?
      - Secondly, I want to look at the word “We” in that statement—
        - Who is it that beheld His glory?
      - Thirdly, I want to look at the word “glory”
        - What is that glory that was beheld?

TRANS> So let’s begin with “his”

### **I. Whose glory does John speak of when he says, “We beheld *his* glory”?**

- Well from the beginning of verse 14, you can see clearly the one whose glory John speaks about that was beheld is the one about whom He says,
  - “And the Word become flesh and dwelt among us...”
  - And of course this refers to the Lord Jesus Christ...
- But to fully understand who He is,
  - we will examine what John means when He calls Him “the Word,”
  - and then look at what he means when he says that “He came in the flesh.”

A. So first, what does John mean when he calls Him “the Word,” or the Logos?

1. In verse one, John describes His nature.

- a. He begins by telling us that He was in the beginning:
  - “In the beginning was the Word.”
  - 1) With these words, “in the beginning,” John refers to Genesis 1 and the creation...
    - Moses begins his writings with: “In the beginning God...”
    - John is linking the Word up with that time before the creation of the world when he says, “In the beginning was the Word.”
  - 2) By this John is telling us that He was already in existence when all things were created.
    - In other words, He is one who has no beginning as we do.
    - He was already there at the beginning.
    - He is not part of what was created, but of what is self-existing...
      - in a whole different realm than ourselves.
- b. Then John goes on in verse 1 and says “the Word was with God.”
  - 1) This speaks of communion with the divine nature.
    - There is some way that He is in fellowship with God, knowing Him and interacting with Him.
    - He is a social being who is in society with God... **“with God.”**
  - 2) John has more to say about this relationship in verse 18 where He refers to Him as “the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father.”
    - This tells us that the Word is the Son who has a very sweet and intimate relationship with the Father...who is God.
      - We know this because the Son is said to be in the bosom of the Father—in the place of acceptance, closeness, and confidentiality.
    - And we also see that it is a relationship between two distinct persons...
      - The Son is a son to the Father and the Father is a father to the Son.
        - They are not the same person, but live in a relationship.
        - We learn later in John’s gospel that the Father gives all things to the Son and that the Son always obeys the Father...
          - The Apostle Paul points out in Philippians 2 that the Son obeys the Father even to the point of coming to earth to die on the cross!
  - 3) And so there is this marvellous interplay of love, of giving back and forth and of delighting in one another that has gone on for eternity...

- God is not the cold, detached, isolated God of Unitarianism,
- but a social God in communion with Himself for all eternity.
- Of course, the Spirit is the third person who lives in this eternal communion.

TRANS> But let no one think that being the Word, because He is the Son, is thereby less than fully God.

- c. John goes on to say (in verse 1), that “the Word was God.”
  - 1) He explains this in such a way that there can be no mistake that He is fully God.
    - He is telling us here what the Word is in His very essence... He is God.
      - It is like saying of a coin that the coin was gold...
        - you are describing what it is in its nature.
        - He is telling us that the Word, the Son of God, was God.
  - 2) And I want you to consider that you cannot be God in any partial degree.
    - God is, by very definition, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.
    - He can know no deficiency or imperfection of any kind.
      - To say that the Word is God is to say that He is fully God.

TRANS> So this is how John describes the nature of the word.

- 2. In verses 2-4, John goes on to speak of Him as our Creator...
  - a. There was already a clue that he was going to speak of Him in relation to us as Creator in verse 1 when he said “in the beginning”...
    - I showed you how that ties the Word in to Genesis 1:1...
    - Well now John repeats this again in verse 2 when he says, “He was in the beginning with God.”
  - b. Then in verse 3, John describes Him as the Creator of all things—absolutely everything outside of Himself.
    - He makes it absolutely clear that nothing was self-created or created by anyone else with the words:
      - John 1:3: “All things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made.”
      - Self-creation is an absurd notion if you think about it, and here John tells us plainly who the agent of all creation was.

- The Father called all things into existence, and the Son carried out the command.
- c. And because this is so, it follows in verse 4 that He is the source of life and light.
- There would be no such thing as life or light if not for Him.
    - He possesses life and light within Himself from eternity by nature...
      - And He reproduced life and light by creation.
    - We have it because He created it where it was not—where there was only darkness...
      - We are able to know and to think because He created us with the capacity to do so.
      - You could not think if God had made you a stone,
        - and you would not have anything to think about if He had not either created things for you to think about or revealed Himself to you.
      - He is the originator of it all!

TRANS> And so you see how John describes the nature of **Him... Him** whose glory was beheld.”

- He makes it very clear that He is none other than God our Creator.
- He seems to be preparing us for the very astounding statement that He makes in verse 14...
  - That this One, God the Creator, became flesh and dwelt among us!

B. He tells us that that one whose glory we beheld is God the Creator who became flesh and dwelt among us!

1. He surprises us with this in the narrative...

- a. Most of you are probably quite familiar with this passage so that it doesn't stand out as much...
- But look at how striking it would be if you reading this for the first time...
  - John has been going along talking about the Word, describing Him as God who created all things...
    - and then suddenly in verse 14 he says,
      - “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us!”

b. This is remarkable!

1) He doesn't just say that He became a human being—but that He became **flesh!**

- The word **flesh** speaks of man in His weakness and dependency...
  - The One who hung the stars in space is found nursing at his mother's breast, dependent on her for his very sustenance.
- The word **flesh** also speaks of the human nature in its weakened condition after the fall...
  - as that which perishes and returns to dust...
  - "all flesh is grass"—it withers up and turns to nothing.
- The very Author of life was found dying on a cross!

2) John further tells us that the Word came to dwell among us!

- He whose eternal habitation is in the heavens,
  - who dwells in glorious realms that are invisible to us in our capacity as human beings,
    - came to crawl about on the earth with us in our habitation, fallen and cursed by Him on account of our sin!

2. Now we would naturally suppose that by coming in the flesh His glory was diminished...

a. And in certain ways, it was indeed veiled—there was a great condescension on His part...

- That is Paul's focus in Philippians 2—that He "made Himself of no reputation"
- But that is not John's focus here!

b. John is looking at it from our perspective,

- And He is saying that when the Word became flesh, it was then that His glory was revealed to us...
  - It was not to hide His glory from us that He became flesh and dwelt among us, but rather to reveal His glory to us!
  - It was not until the Word became flesh that we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
  - It was through the medium of the flesh that we beheld His glory.

TRANS> So to sum up the first point,

- when John says "we beheld His glory," the word **His** refers to the Word made flesh.

- Now we are ready to consider the next word—the word “we”...

## **II. Who is the “we” that beheld His glory?**

A. The “we” includes John and all who were privileged to actually see Jesus Christ while He lived on earth.

1. John is not talking about what you might call “spiritual” seeing here.

- You know, when you are converted you can say that you were listening to a sermon and you finally saw the Lord...
- You don’t mean that you saw him with your physical eyes, but that you saw Him spiritually—you came to know Him.
- John is not talking about such spiritual seeing...

2. He is talking about those who actually looked upon Jesus with their eyes.

a. He is talking about himself and those who were alive when Jesus became flesh and blood and dwelt among us.

- John was very opposed to a sect that arose in his day and taught that Jesus did not actually come in the flesh but just appeared to do so...
- They were called the Docetists.

b. At the beginning of verse 14, John says that the one He has called the Word (or the Logos in the original) truly did become flesh and that He dwelt among us—

- He was not a phantom or an apparition, but one, as John says in the opening of his first epistle,
  - 1 John 1:1: “which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled...”
  - John had genuine person to person contact with the Word made flesh day after day for a period of three years.

TRANS> The “we” who beheld His glory are those who were alive and who saw Him when He was here on the earth.

- But some of you who are alive today might say,
  - But what about us?
  - If this appearing of the Word in the flesh was so important, why did only one generation get to see it?

B. There is no need for you to feel cheated just because you did not get to see Him when He came in the flesh.

- The Lord has made provision for you to know all you need to know about Him and His glory that revealed...
1. The Lord graciously and deliberately set apart certain men to be apostles...
    - a. They were appointed by God to see Him and to walk with Him and then to give us a complete record of everything we need to know about Him.
      - The apostles are our eyes.
      - Under God's care and superintendence,
        - they have recorded in the scriptures all that we need to know about Jesus in order that we might have life.
    - b. John also speaks of this in his first epistle...
      - after he tells us that he and his fellow apostles saw and heard and touched Jesus, he adds...
        - 1 John 1:3-4: that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.
        - They had left us a record of His coming in writing so that we can have all the benefits of it and all the joy that goes with it.
  2. This is God's way of revealing Jesus to us today...
    - a. We are to come to the scriptures that He has given us through the eyewitness of the apostles.
      - This is how we come to know Jesus and behold His glory.
      - We can't say that we have seen His glory in the same way that John says He saw it—with our own eyes,
        - but we can say that we have seen it through the witness that God has given us in the scriptures.
    - b. There is no disadvantage to this method...
      - 1) When Thomas refused to believe until he saw the risen Christ and touched his wounds,
        - Jesus appeared to Thomas and invited him to see and touch,
        - but then He pronounced a blessing on those who believe without seeing:
          - John 20:29: Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

- Thomas was not supposed to believe without seeing because he was called to be an apostle.
  - But with this blessing, Jesus shows that all those in future times who would believe without seeing are just as blessed.
  - You are just as blessed as those who saw.
- 2) You must not say, “My faith would be stronger if only I could have seen Jesus.”
  - No, you might have seen just bits and pieces of what you need to know.
    - What’s more, you might not know how to interpret the things you saw—
      - A lot of people saw Him die on the cross, but had no idea **why** He died.
        - The apostles explain all that to us in the scriptures.
  - With the scriptures God Himself has given you everything you need in order to believe and be blessed.
    - If you don’t, it is all your fault.

TRANS> So you see that even though John properly refers only to himself and his contemporaries when he says “We beheld His glory”

- it does not mean that you are excluded from the benefits of the revelation of this glory.
  - You are able to see through the eyes of the apostles.
  - In this qualified way, you can also say, “We have seen His glory.”
- But there is one more thing we need to see about the “we” that say Christ’s glory before we move on...

C. The “we” that beheld Jesus’ glory had two very different reactions to it.

1. John describes the first reaction in verse 10-11 when our Creator came to reveal His glory in human flesh...
  - a. He says:
    - John 1:10-11: “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”
    - Not only did the people of the world not know their Maker when He came,
      - but even His own covenant people whom He had called and redeemed out of Egypt did not receive Him.

- b. This only goes to show how deeply the depravity and the corruption of the human race extends!
  - Here is the most glorious glory that was ever revealed on earth and the people of the world had no regard for it!
  - Now the opera lover may think there is something wrong with the hockey fan who can't see the glory of his favourite performance of the Marriage of Figero...
    - And the hockey player may wonder at how the opera enthusiast has no appreciation for Gresky...
    - Both may wonder how his neighbour could be so blind...
  - But that is nothing compared to the blindness and corruption of the sons and daughters of this world who have God's glory brought so near to them and cannot appreciate it!
    - This is a depth of blindness and corruption that speaks of spiritual death and ruin.
    - And it is a death and corruption that characterises the whole human race.
  
- 2. But thanks be to God, there was also a second reaction to the revelation of the glory of God...
  - a. In verse 12, John says,
    - John 1:12: But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name...
  
  - 1) There were some among the great mass of those who saw Jesus that recognised glory when they saw it!
    - They saw it and they rejoiced!
    - They received Him and believed in His name...
      - That is, they trusted Him as their God and their redeemer.
      - They looked to Him as the Son of God from heaven who had come to save them.
      - When He said, "I have come that they might have life" they believed Him.
  
  - 2) And we are told here that they were given the right to become the children of God.
    - a) They were personally adopted into God's family...
      - Brought into His household and made joint heirs with Jesus Christ!

- It is an unimaginable privilege!
  - Forever and ever they will be members of God's house, living in the communion of the blessed Trinity...
  - Sharing in the love that continually flows between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...
  - Giving and receiving love and service and worship according to their capacity as creatures!

b) As Paul says of this adoption,

- The glory of it has not yet been revealed... it is something that the whole creation is waiting for...
  - It will be fully realised at the last day.

TRANS> This marvellous privilege of sonship is given to all who received him when He appeared in the flesh...

- and it is given to all who have believed the testimony of those who received Him ever since...
  - to all of you who believe on His name today!

b. But how is it that these ones received Him when so many others rejected Him?

1) Well, it might seem better to ask how it could be that anyone could have rejected Him!

- Surely, you would expect that if our Maker and the Redeemer of Israel should come to us in human flesh,
  - We would all welcome Him and receive Him!

2) But in verse 13, John explains that receiving Him is not natural to us.

a) He explains that those who received Him were those:

- 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."
- Receiving Him was not something that was natural to them...
  - It was not of blood—something they inherited...
  - nor of the will of the flesh or of the will of man—something they could bring about by their own will power.

b) You see, the reaction of those who did not receive Him when His glory appeared is the natural reaction of mankind because we are fallen sinners...

- The whole human race fell in Adam...

- We are all by nature the children of wrath, dead in trespasses and sins.
  - We are dead and cannot make ourselves alive.
  - The rejection of the Son of God only proves that this is true...
- c) And John is saying that those who did receive Him were born of God.
- Again, it was not in them or in their corrupt nature to receive Him.
  - God acted upon them to give them eyes to see the glory of the Son of God when He came and hearts to believe.
  - They received Him because they were born of God.
- This is true of any one who believes.
  - If left to yourself, you would never see His glory because you are dead in your sins.
  - But if God gives you life—if He cause you to be born again—then you are able to see and believe!

TRANS> Well now we get to the best part...

### **III. What is that glory that John says we beheld in the Word made flesh?**

A. John tells us at the end of this verse...

- It was the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth!
1. He is presented to us as the One who comes to give us everything we need as fallen, ruined, corrupted sinners!
    - a. His glory is that He is **full** of grace of and truth!
      - He bursting forth with it!
      - He is like a fountain bubbling forth with grace and truth for us!
      - It is flowing out of Him for us!
    - b. In verse 16 John says,
      - John 1:16: “Of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.”
      - He actually imparted this grace to us...
      - The picture is like that of a mighty rushing river with one grace after another coming to us—grace after grace, one grace after another!
  2. And in verse 17, John explains what this means...
    - John 1:17: For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

- a. Moses, in the law, told us what God requires of fallen sinners if they are to be accepted of God; forgiven, and blessed with life...
  - He told us that it was a lot more than we could provide for ourselves...
  - And in the promises and sacrifices, He showed the people of that time that a sacrifice for their sins that was without blemish was what He required.
  - And through those Old Testament rituals that involved the slaying of bulls and goats and lambs,
    - He presented Christ to them in a shadowy way, but He had not come in truth—in reality—only in pictures.
  
- b. Who could have thought that God would send His own divine Son to be that sacrifice?
  - 1) Who could have thought that Son would be willing to come—to assume our flesh—and then to die the shameful, cursed death of the cross!
    - He came in truth—for real—not just in promise or type!
    - The Law came by Moses... we were told what was required of us...
    - But grace and truth came by Jesus Christ!
      - He actually brought to us everything that God requires of us as fallen, ruined sinners...
        - that we might have the adoption of sons!
        - To all who receive Him, to them He gives the right to become the children of God!
  
  - 2) Through the coming of the Son of God in the flesh,
    - We see the glory of God at its highest pitch!
    - Oh yes, we might see His glory through fire and smoke and worshipping angels in a heavenly vision...
      - But this is nothing in comparison with what we see in Christ come in the flesh!
    - Here we see the very essence of His glory in a way that we can understand!
      - That He abounds with grace and truth...
      - That He is a God who overflows with and supplies miserable rebellious sinners with what they truly need for forgiveness and eternal life.

- B. Just look at this glorious revelation of Him as the Word who became flesh!
1. In the Word made flesh, we see the glory of God's wisdom...
    - who spoke as no man ever spoke...
    - who astonished us with His gracious words and doctrine
    - who teaches us how to relate to our God, to live in true wisdom as His sons and daughters!
      - How perfect the wisdom of our Lord! In Christ made flesh we see it!
  2. In the Word made flesh, we see the glory of God's power...
    - We see Him in the little boat and the stormy sea of Galilee commanding the wind and the waves, and they obey Him...
    - We see Him driving out Satan and causing him to fall from heaven...
    - We see Him going to the cross with all our sins and rising God to life and victory...
      - What glorious power belongs to our Lord who conquers all!
  3. In the Word made flesh, we see the glory of God's justice and wrath...
    - We see Him exposing sin for what it is—ripping through the façade of righteousness that the Pharisees had erected....
    - We see Him denouncing the wicked and pronouncing eternal judgement upon them...
    - But above all, we see Him on the cross bearing in His own body the very wrath that we all deserve...
      - our sins being laid on Him...
      - God's justice demanding nothing less than the shedding of His blood for the remission of sins!
      - What glorious justice and wrath belong to our God!
  4. In the Word made flesh, we see the glory of God's compassion...
    - We see Him going about everywhere doing good—healing the sick, casting out demons, feeding the hungry, opening the eyes of the blind...
    - But even more, that He should leave the glories of heaven to come and die on the cross in order that we might be pardoned and might have life as God's sons!
      - Where is compassion like this?
  5. In the Word made flesh, we see the glory of God's responsiveness to faith

- As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God...
  - See how the Syro-Phoenician woman comes to Him and pleads His mercy and how He responds to her faith...
  - See how He promises that all who come to Him, He will receive...
  - Though we be great sinners, He rejects none who call on His name.
6. In the Word made flesh, we see the glory of God's patience...
- There He is, mocked and spit upon by His enemies...
  - enduring the contradiction of sinners when He might have immediately called down fire from heaven and turned them to ashes...
  - What longsuffering as He waits to be gracious!

C. We could go on and on!

1. I am convinced that when we get to heaven,
  - it is not that God will have some greater revelation for us than was given to us when Christ came in the flesh...
  - The difference will be that we will then fully understand the glory that was revealed to us at the cross!
  - Those who did not receive Him will be filled with shame and disgrace and will feel His wrath upon them,
    - knowing without question that it is wholly deserved.
  - And those who received Him will enter into the joy of eternal fellowship and communion with our God...
    - We will marvel at His glory as never before...
    - We will understand well what we only understand in part now...
    - And we will rejoice to live in the love of our God forever and ever.
2. My friends, Behold the glory of the Word made flesh!
  - He has been revealed to us in a way that we can fully understand!
    - Do not pretend that it's all fuzzy and unclear!
    - Do not resist the word you have heard today that tells you about His glory!
  - Look at Him!
    - He is full of grace and truth!

- Don't let your fear or your corruption make you all fuzzy about Him.
- Come and believe, come and receive Him...
  - You will not be disappointed!
  - You will rather be brought into His house to live in sweet communion with the Father and the Son for ever,
    - enraptured with the glory of His grace and truth to the sheer delight of your soul.