

John 1:1-18

Beholding His Glory, Receiving His Fullness

We beheld His glory – v. 14; And of his fulness have all we received – v. 16

When you think of the passages in Scripture that emphasize the truth of Christ's deity, a number of passages come to mind.

Hebrews 1 should readily come to mind: *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; 3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high* (Heb. 1:1-3)

Philippians 2 is another passage: *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow* (Phil. 2:5-10).

And then of course John 1 should also be included in that list. I'll never forget the time I was told either by a Bible professor when I was in college, or perhaps it was a preacher, or it might have even been A.W. Pink's commentary on John – I don't remember the source but I remember the comment itself which pointed out that when you do a careful analysis of the prologue of John's gospel, it's amazing to see what great concepts are conveyed with the use of simple words. Look at the number of one syllable words that are in these opening verses and how few words there are that are 3 or 4 syllable words. **{cf. Jn. 1:1-4}**.

The Holy Spirit sure is brilliant, isn't He? He knew how to move John to express such deep and important theological truths with the use of simple words. And with the use of these simple words we are taught of the eternity of Christ – He was with God from the beginning of time. And we're taught the Deity of Christ – He who was with God from the beginning is Himself God as the text reads: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God.* Do you see the emphasis on the second person of the Trinity being God? Note the phrases: *with God; was God; with God.*

We're then told that this One who was with God and is God is also the Creator of the universe so much so that *without Him was not anything made that was made.* And then in vv. 4-9 you see the emphasis on Light. *In him was life; and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but*

was sent to bear witness of that Light. 9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

When I read these verses I'm reminded a little bit of the kind of lamp you have in your home which has the capability of growing brighter each time you turn the knob. Doesn't the brightness of Christ shine with increasing luminosity as you read these verses? He shines in the darkness and He's the light which lighteth every man – i.e. He's the source from which the light of life springs. Truly the subject of John's gospel is Christ, the second person of the Trinity who is with God and who is God.

I know I point out every time I conduct a study in John's gospel that this gospel contains a very clear purpose statement as to why John wrote his gospel. That purpose statement is given to us in 20:31 and says *But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.* That's something to keep in mind as you read this gospel. And that's something to keep in mind as you may have occasion to hand out gospels of John to unbelievers. This is a gospel that was written with an evangelistic outlook. Its aim is to convince you that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Now when you keep that purpose statement in mind then it helps you see why John begins his gospel the way he does. You might well ask the question – what does it mean that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? What exactly, John, are you trying to convince me of when you say *these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?* What it means is simply this – Christ was with God and Christ was and is God and this Jesus that John writes about is the Creator of the universe and the source from which the light of life springs.

Now as we read these opening verses in John's gospel another question should arise in our minds as we read these words – and it's a practical question which goes like this: What kind of response should we have toward these words we read that convey such profound truths with the use of such simple language? And when it comes to answering that question the thing to keep in mind is that John has written his gospel in retrospect – i.e. he's looking back on his experience of Christ and is writing what he remembers of that experience.

And the point that I want to stress now is just this – John's experience needs to be your experience and in order for John's experience to be your experience, John's actions must become your actions. And what were those actions? Verse 14 tells us in the words that are in parentheses. *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.* Verse 16 also conveys to us the action of John and his fellow disciples: *And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.*

Here, then, is the response that these opening verses of John's gospel should bring forth from us:

We Should Behold His Glory and We Should Receive of His Fullness

And that's what I want to direct your attention to this morning – Beholding His Glory and Receiving of His Fullness. Think with me first of all on:

I. What It Means to Behold His Glory

Listen again to the words of v. 14 *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.* We beheld Him, John says. Or to put it plainly and simply – *we saw Him.* Now you can tell from John's opening verses to his first epistle just how much of an impact beholding Christ had on John.

Look at how big of a deal John makes of this in the first 3 verses of 1st John: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; 2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) 3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

How quickly we can read the words *we beheld His glory* and we can pass over those words as if they were nothing more than an historical reflection of the part of John. I would suggest to you this morning that in those words *we beheld His glory* you find the very key as to how you're to read John's gospel and how you're to read your Bibles. Simply put – you should read your Bible with such care and with such attentiveness and with such prayerful preparation that you too behold His glory the same way John and his fellow disciples did.

And what is it that you behold when you behold the glory of Christ? What do you see and what do you hear? And what do you handle? You certainly see the One who was in the beginning with God and you see the One who is God. You behold the invisible God taking to Himself a tangible form as the Word was made flesh. Indeed you're able to behold the King of all Creation and the Ruler of the Universe become a baby laid in a manger.

You're able to see and hear what those shepherds saw and heard as they watched over their flocks by night. You're able to see the heavens opened and you're able to see and hear that angelic choir sing *glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men.* This word in our text *behold* means *to look upon and view attentively.* You might say that it's the NT equivalent to that musical term you see so often in the Psalms – *Selah.* *Selah* means to pause. And the application that most often is drawn from the word is that you should pause and reflect. That's how you're to read your Bibles. You're to behold or pause and look upon and view attentively.

I preached at the Wheeler Mission this past Friday night and I conveyed to them the same kind of thing I'm emphasizing to you now. I didn't preach from this text on Jn. 1, I

preached from John 5:20 *For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.* And I suggest to you now, what I said to those homeless men at the Men's Shelter that when you read your Bibles and when you behold the glory of Christ you will be moved to marvel. I compared that word *marvel* with another word that describes the impact Christ had on those who saw and heard Him which is the word *astonishment*.

Marvel and *astonishment* was my theme and that's the impact beholding the glory of Christ should have on you especially as you're a follower of Christ. The term *marvel* means *to be wondered at* or *to be had in admiration*. To marvel at someone is to stand in awe of that person. And in the gospels we find numerous accounts of multitudes standing in awe of Christ. I think a text that captures this sentiment of standing in awe is found in Mk. 7:37 *And (they) were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.* In an earlier statement in Mark's gospel in the setting of Christ raising from the dead a young damsel who had died Mark says in Mk. 5:42 *And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was [of the age] of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment.* Astonished beyond measure and astonished with a great astonishment – you can certainly see the impact that Christ had on people during the time of His earthly ministry.

And if you will imitate the action of John in beholding the glory of Christ then you too should be moved to marvel with an astonishment that is very great, that is indeed beyond measure. What I'm telling you now is in a sense so simple and yet so neglected. We're so prone to treat our Bibles as if it's only a theological textbook. In a sense it is that. Indeed we're told in v. 18 *No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.* You can't gain knowledge about God apart from Christ for the simple reason that no man, especially no fallen man has seen God at any time. But here comes a theology professor, if you will, in the person of Christ who has always been with God because He is God and now Christ declares Him.

That word *declare* comes from a Greek word that is similar to the Greek word from which we get our term *exegesis*. As a preacher I'm to practice exegesis which means simply I'm to draw out of the text it's meaning and I'm to convey that meaning as well as the application of that meaning to my listening audience. The term stands in contrast to another Greek word which is *eisegesis*. *Eisegesis* is the practice of reading into the text a meaning of my own instead of drawing out of the text the intended meaning of the author. Now here is Christ declaring and exegeting or explaining God to His followers.

But the Bible is not merely a theology text book. I've been reading a book on apologetics that defends the Bible as the Word of God and I love that this author sees the Bible as more than just a unique and incredible book. He describes it as a window. It's a window through which we behold the glory of Christ. And if you're utilizing your Bible as that window then you will be moved to marvel and astonishment.

You'll be astonished at Christ's doctrine as the multitudes were of whom we read in Mt 7:28 *And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine.* And especially as you perceive His doctrine to be connected with His life and death and resurrection, you'll be moved to confess what John confesses in v. 17 *For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*

And you'll marvel as you behold the miracles He performed just as His disciples marveled as we read in Mt 8:27 *But the men marveled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!* I remember several years ago hearing an evangelist preach on the text and he drew the application from it that we'll be engaged in the same practice in heaven when we in our marvel say to each other – *what manner of man is this that could bring us to heaven and give us eternal life and even justify us before His judgment throne?*

So don't ever forget what may come across initially as an insignificant parenthetical remark by John when he says *we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.* Make that your practice when you open and read your Bible. Heed the call to worship that says to you as we read from Isa. 40:9 *O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!*

So I trust you have some idea of the action and the attitude that is to accompany your Bible reading. Would you consider with me next that not only are you to behold the glory of Christ, but now we must consider:

II. What It Means to Receive His Fulness

Notice the words of v. 16 *And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.*

We behold His glory and we receive of His fulness – most especially do we receive His grace. To behold to see and to receive is to appropriate. I have some friends on Facebook (one friend in particular) who is very zealous for his Calvinism. His zeal reminds me of the kind of zeal that often times characterizes a Christian shortly after he discovers the truth of the doctrines of grace.

In one sense that Christian becomes very happy because he gains a sense of assurance that he may not have ever had before but in another sense he becomes very angry because he feels that he's been misled by those who failed to expound or apply the doctrines of grace. And in the zeal that springs from that anger it's not uncommon to see various memes posted on Facebook that take issue with certain phrases that are commonly used in Arminian evangelism. For example – I've seen on numerous occasions Facebook posts that say *Nowhere in the Bible are you told to ask Jesus into your heart.* Stop calling on people to ask Jesus into their hearts.

Now I recognize, I think, as clearly as anyone how evangelism has been abused and how easy believism has made many proselytes twofold more the children of hell (Mt. 23:15). On the other hand we must not ever forget that there needs to be the personal appropriation

of Christ into our hearts in order to be saved. *But as many as received him, v. 12 says to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.* And if by the phrase *asking Jesus into your heart* a Christian means appropriating the truth of Christ into his life by a personal act of faith, then I, for one, am going to be very careful about how I criticize that Christian or how I criticize the use of that phrase.

I don't know how many of you know it, but the late Ian Paisley who in many respects is the founder of the Free Presbyterian Church, utilized invitations to come forward at the end of his evangelistic services. I don't know that there are many if any of our brethren in Northern Ireland who still do that – there may be a few, but even in Paisley's day the practice was frowned upon by many of Dr. Paisley's ministerial associates.

I've never forgotten, though, when I had one of those associates come over from Northern Ireland to teach a modular course in homiletics an anecdote that he shared with us in the class which served the purpose of warning us students not to throw out the baby with the bathwater. He told of a certain evangelistic crusade that was being conducted by Dr. Paisley. And at the end of the service he did his usual thing and called people to come forward and receive Christ. And he implored people to come and he tried to wave them forward with the motion of his hand and in the course of his appeal he noted a lady in the audience that seemed quite trouble and Dr. Paisley could tell that she was resisting.

And so he looked right at her and he directed his exhortations right to her and before he was done he had left the platform and gone right to where this lady was standing and he spoke with her personally and pleaded with her to go forward and receive Christ. Now this minister who was teaching the class I was taking, who shared this story, recalled how he and a number of his ministerial colleagues were standing in the back of the auditorium observing this episode if you will. And he told us how he could see Dr. Paisley speaking with this lady and using very large gestures, and they could also see this lady repeatedly shaking her head. She was not going to go forward. But as Dr. Paisley continued to plead the whole matter finally came to a head and these ministers in the back could see the lady say with her gestures – *O alright, I'll go forward.* And as she went forward these ministers in the back expressed their disgust at the whole matter and their belief that all this lady was doing was going forward to get this pesty evangelist off her back. They were sure that the whole thing would come to nothing.

But then this homiletics professor told us – you know, when that lady went forward and received Christ she never went back into sin but instead went on with Christ and became a faithful church member with a glowing testimony for Christ. And I remember Dr. Cairns tells us some time later that one of the reasons Ian Paisley utilized the invitation system was because he expected souls to be saved when he preached the gospel. Could it be because we don't expect souls to be saved that we back off completely from trying to persuade men and women to come to Christ?

Are we so afraid that we might drag in a few tares with the wheat that we become timid in pleading with souls? Paul writes in 2Cor. 5:11 *Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord,*

we persuade men. And I remember another occasion when I heard Dr. Paisley pray that the Lord would raise up men and women that would become power persuaders of sinners. So we know the abuses of modern day evangelism but let's not react to those abuses by failing to invite men and women and children to receive Christ. I hope you have received Christ this morning and if you haven't received Him I hope you will and I would encourage you to receive Him. Why? Because as many as receive Him, to them He gives power to become the children of God, even to them that believe in His name.

And lest we abuse the notion of receiving Christ and some harbor the idea that they've somehow contributed to their salvation, we're given in v. 13 the explanation as to how receiving Christ happens. Let me read to you vv. 12,13 to get the full sense of the meaning: *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: 13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Do you see how salvation, in the end, is all of God and all of Christ? It is not by virtue of your lineage or your will or anything man can do. It's completely of God. And because it's completely of God that's why you plead with men to come to Christ. Their hearts are hard but God's Word and God's Spirit are more powerful than the hardest heart. Salvation is just like Lazarus coming forth from the grave after he had lain there for 4 days. But when Christ gives the word *Lazarus come forth* – then there was no power that could keep Lazarus from coming forth from death to life. And today Christ assigns the task to us as Christians of calling forth Lazarus from the grave. Will you excuse yourself from the commission because it's impossible for dead men to come forward? Or will you trust and hope in the power of the gospel of Christ.

There needs to be personal appropriation of Christ. It won't do only to marvel at Christ's words and deeds. There were many who heard Him and saw what He did who nevertheless rejected Him in the end. You must receive Him and you must call on others to receive Him not because you trust in their ability or willingness to respond but because you trust in Christ to raise the dead the same way He raised you from spiritual death to spiritual life.

So make sure you behold Him. If you truly behold Him in John's gospel and in God's word then you will be moved to marvel and astonishment. But make sure you don't stop there. Make sure you receive Him and that you receive Him not merely as a one time event in your life but that you receive Him as a practice in your life. And then call on others to receive Him as well. Make sure you've beheld Him and have been so amazed by Him that you have no trouble or fear in speaking to others about Him and explaining to them what manner of man and what manner of a Savior He truly is.