
LIFE IN HIS NAME

GRACE AND TRUTH

John 1:14-18

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

Charles Spurgeon pastored 5000 people in the city of London as a Baptist preacher in the 1800's. Perhaps he was the pastor of the first megachurch. He also had two orphanages. He founded and supported two orphanages in the city of London. Spurgeon was very moved by the children that he saw in need there in London. Every Christmas Day, he and his wife would go to those two orphanages. They would visit the children there. He would share with them and give them some instruction then he would give each child a silver coin. Spurgeon made a practice of this every single Christmas Day until his last, when he was unable to do so because of his health.

He spoke on occasion of the Puritans' aversion to Christmas. He did, because he would have considered himself a Puritan of sorts, even though he lived some 150 years later. He spoke this of their opposition to Christmas: "In Cromwell's days, the Puritans thought it an ungodly thing to keep Christmas. They therefore tried to put it down, and the town crier went through the street announcing that Christmas was henceforth no more to be kept, it being a popish, if not a heathenish ceremony."

There is a little insight there into some of the history of the church, history that is not really a bright spot for us. But what he is saying there, if you are unfamiliar with his terminology, is that the Puritans in the 1600's tried to stop Christmas because it probably had heathen origins. If not, it had Catholic origins, and we want nothing to do with it as Protestants.

Spurgeon kind of poked fun at this a little bit and said he was pretty sure that all the townspeople just ignored the town crier and celebrated Christmas anyway. He said he was quite certain that all the preaching in the world would not stop Christmas. Ray Rhodes, Jr. did a little study and kind of

outlined Spurgeon's theology of Christmas, if you will, and why he thought it was a valuable time. He said it was a valuable time as a time for friends and family to be together. It was a valuable time to rest. Many laborers only got two or three days off in the entire year. It was also, most obviously, a time to rejoice. He gave a justification and explanation of purpose for Christmas in his day.

We read today the end of John's version of Christmas. Verse 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..." John takes us to the miracle of Christmas and he teaches us the really amazing thing about Christmas. We looked at this last week when we looked at the first 13 verses of this chapter. The miracle of Christmas is found in the Person of Christmas. The fact that Jesus is who he is, and that he became a man, is amazing. That is what makes us step back and marvel at Christmas itself.

He puts it in the starkest language here in verse 14: "The Word became flesh." It's stark. It's bare. It's even surprising. John could not have said that Jesus became a man in a more stunning fashion. He was made flesh. In fact, if you go to John's first letter - 1 John, Chapter 4 - John tells us, "Here is how you identify a spirit that opposes Christ. The spirit of the antichrist is the one who denies this truth: denies that Jesus came in the flesh." John is driving hard after this amazing truth. The Son of God became a man.

In fact, when you read these five verses (verses 14 through 18), as we are reading them, it seems like John gets thrown off his stride. We are reading, "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." That's the end of verse 14, right? If you jump to the beginning of verse 16, it seems like that's the continuation of his thought. "For from his fullness we have all received..." But before he gets to that continuation of thought, there are parentheses. In fact, in many translations it is literally in parentheses, and he tells us about John the Baptist. "(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.'")" In fact, it seems like such an interruption that some interpreters, translators, and commentators have actually said it wasn't there in the original.

I think it was there in the original and I think it has a purpose. I think it is a historical marker of sorts. John repeatedly through this section talks about John the Baptist, and that will be the major theme of the next study in this chapter. Everyone knew John. John was this popular historical preacher, prophetic, masses of people followed him, and the Apostle John is inserting this known

person to give us a historical reference, a marker. He is emphasizing just how amazing it is in light of who Jesus was.

We looked at that last week. Do you remember we said three things last week?

- #1 - We talked about Jesus identified here as the Word, the Logos.
- #2 - He is Uncreated.
- #3 - Life and Light.

We just gave that general description from those first 13 verses, describing who it is that we are talking about. He is the Logos, the powerful, creating, wisdom of God, the Word of God, reason itself, design, revealing purpose and meaning. So we came to these conclusions: There is ultimate purpose and that purpose is a person. It is Jesus. There is design. There is meaning. He is the Word of God, and God's Word is powerful. God's Word creates as it goes forth.

This is an amazing thing, but right now I am preaching the Word of God, coming through me as a flawed human being. I am doing the best I can to proclaim God's truth. I am reading the Scripture. We have been singing it. We have been reading it, and as it goes forward, it goes forward in power. It actually creates what it describes as it is proclaimed.

I have good news for you! We preached on joy through the book of Philippians. We spent weeks and weeks just talking about joy. Do you remember that? So, how are you doing in the category of joy? Have you been joyful this week? About three weeks after we finished Philippians, I was sitting one morning having my quiet time, sitting on my couch and said, "Wow, I am such a hypocrite. I have no joy. I am so irritable. Everything irritates me. I irritate me." How is it?! We talked about joy week after week. I wrote something to this effect in my journal: "Just wait -- it's coming," because God's Word creates what it describes. It is powerful.

We have this thing in us that thinks, "Okay, I hear it. Now I must do it." And there is a place where we engage God's Word in faith, but God's Word is powerful. "The Word became flesh." "In the beginning, God created..." "He said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." If you are a Christian, the reason you are a Christian is that God spoke, and life came into your heart. Logos. There is design. There is purpose. There is creation. There is power. Jesus is light. He is life-giving, pure, and enlightening. The uncreated Son of God became flesh. Stunning.

In today's passage, we look now at what we said was the fourth thing that John says about Jesus, and that is:

- #4 -- Grace and Truth.

But I think there is a subtle transition. I don't want to overstate what it says about who Jesus is and why he came, but I do find this emphasis in these verses. These verses tell us why the Word became flesh. This is God's purpose: Jesus came to make God known. Jesus came to reveal the glory of God, full of grace and truth.

Now, why is that important? Why is that important? Well, because we have a problem. We don't know God. And our relationship with God is broken. Because we don't know God, and because there is a deep separation between God and us, there is brokenness in all of creation. Scripture speaks of this and calls it sin. So Jesus comes to reveal God to us, where there is largely an absence of the knowledge of God.

Benjamin Franklin -- a name familiar to most of us, important American -- he wrote an autobiography. His autobiography is an important work, not just because it describes his life as a very important person, but it was actually a pattern for other autobiographies. Also, he was seen as the ideal American, at least for some. Andrew Trees writes these words: "Franklin's autobiography gave definitive expression to many elements of what would come to be seen as the American character: individualism, optimism. He came to embody the American dream - the idea that anyone, no matter how humble his or her background, could rise to the highest level in society."

There is reason to believe that Franklin saw himself as recording something of a standard or an ideal. His story is amazing. It is an amazing story of rags to riches, coming from nothing and becoming so significant. I don't know what you remember about Benjamin Franklin. He wrote Poor Richard's Almanac. He came up with this theory to explain electricity, invented the lightning rod, became rich (from the Almanac more than the lightning rod, I think), and very influential on many levels.

In his autobiography, there is an interesting description. He uses this word to describe the mistakes he makes in life. He speaks of "erota." It is Latin for "error." Initially, Benjamin Franklin was a printer by trade. Obviously, printing back in that day was a little different than what we do today. There were no computers, obviously, and no Word publishing. It was a little bit like a typewriter. A

few of you are old enough to actually remember what a typewriter was, where you would have to set the type in - you know, these ancient printing devices -- then the pages would be printed and collected together. So when you made an error, it was difficult to find the error. It happened frequently and was virtually impossible to correct.

I actually remember this: finding old books with a slip of paper slipped in that would have the errors in the book. Are any of you old enough to remember that? No? Well, you would find this little loose slip of paper and it would say, "Page 13: This word should be this word. This should say this instead of that." There would be a little list of errors.

This is really interesting to me. I hope I haven't lost you as we just traveled through American history for a moment. Think about the ramifications of calling the sin in your life a "typo." He doesn't call it moral failure. He doesn't call it moral lapse. He doesn't speak of sin. He doesn't embellish it. It was just an "erota." It was just one of those things that happened. We all have typos.

I want to tell you that your sin is not just hitting the wrong key. The ripple effect of our internal and external brokenness and rebellion against God is immense. Whenever you now go to read about someone who was part of colonial America, what is the first thing you think of? Do you know the first thing I think of? Slavery. I think of slavery and racism. This was such a troubling erota in our country that we went to war within our country, bloodshed beyond comprehension where Americans are killing Americans. 150 years ago the Civil War ended and we don't seem to be close to solving the problem of racism. You see, sin is hard to fix. It is hard to put things back together when they are really broken because of our rebellion against God.

John says Jesus came to make God known, to bring us back into relationship with God. Here is, I think, the key to understanding this passage. There is a comparison that takes place between Jesus and Moses. I want us to look at that a little bit because he makes a direct reference here to Moses. "For the law was given through Moses (verse 17); grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." But the comparison goes much deeper than that. There is an entire skeleton to this passage which, if we just take a minute and look at this comparison, it will be clear to you.

Moses was an amazing man of God. You could talk about his accomplishments. He led the children of Israel out of Egypt. He was a man of amazing character. He walked in tremendous humility. This is an odd thing to do, but if you made a list of the most humble people, not only would I not be

on it, but Moses would probably be first. He probably was so humble he never thought about this numbering. Hopefully some of you get the irony of trying to award someone "The Most Humble Person," but he might have been it - phenomenal man of God, leader of God.

Now, Moses was a friend of God. He walked with God. He had an intimacy with God, which was unparalleled for his time. We can look at a lot of aspects of his life, but the theme of the John passage is that Jesus came to make the Father known, and Moses played a key role in the revelation of who God is, for his day. I am going to give you four things that God revealed to and through Moses.

1. God revealed his character to Moses and through Moses. Do you remember Exodus, Chapter 3 and 4 -- the burning bush? Surely you have seen a Disney movie with a burning bush in it, right? In this case, the book really is better than the movie. I really thought that was funny. I don't know if you guys are even awake this morning. Moses has this encounter -- God calls him -- he argues with God -- and in the process there is this discussion: "God, I don't even know your name. Who do I say sent me?" Remember, the name of a being represented their entire character. And there is this great moment of revelation where God declares to Moses, "I am who I am: Yahweh." The covenant name of God is given and revealed, and is how God is known to the children of Israel.
2. God reveals his glory to Moses. Great moment of revelation at the burning bush, and then there is a revelation of God's glory to Moses. I think the best way to see that is to look in Exodus 33 and 34. You can turn there if you would like to. There is a moment in Moses' life where he has this great encounter with God. He comes down off the mountain, and the children of Israel have sinned greatly. They have made a golden calf. They are in a terrible state. God says he is going to judge them, and Moses begins to pray for them. He intercedes for them powerfully and effectively. Then, he basically says to God, "God, I want to see your glory. I want to behold your glory." If you look in Exodus 33:12-16:

Moses said to the LORD, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." And he said, "My

presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. And he said to him, “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?”

I know we picked up right in the middle of the encounter, but here is what’s happening: He is praying to God, and there has been a progression. Moses has moved from a place of asking God not to wipe us out in judgment, to helping us fulfill it, to now going with us. He is arguing for the presence of God as something important.

Verses 17-18:

And the LORD said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” Moses said, “Please show me your glory.”

This is an amazing request. The conversation -- if you will, for lack of a better word -- the prayer conversation started with God wiping the people out in judgment. Now Moses is asking to visibly see the glory of God.

And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.”

You may remember, now we hear the echoes in John 1. Do you remember John 1:18 that we read earlier? “No one has seen God and lived.” Now Moses is asking to see God’s glory. God is saying, “Yes, I am going to show you my glory, but you can’t see my face and live.” Okay? That’s the context. Go to Chapter 34, where it actually happens. God puts Moses in the cleft of the rock and passes by. Verses 5-8:

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. 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, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving

iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.

This is a great scene of God's revelation of his glory. God reveals his character. God reveals his glory.

3. Thirdly, God reveals to Moses and through Moses his desire to dwell in the midst of his people. God reveals to Moses his desire to dwell in the midst of his people. God had Moses build a tent of meeting. It was a precursor to the tabernacle, to the temple. It was a tent where God would dwell right in the middle of his people, teaching us an important lesson about what God really desires: to be with us.
4. God revealed his law to Moses. The Ten Commandments. What it is that pleases God. What God requires and how we are to live. Just consider those four categories: Character, Glory, Desire, Law. We know much about the fundamentals of who God is because of the ministry of Moses.

Now, we are back in John 1. Go back to John 1, if you would. We ended our reading today with this verse: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." Jesus came to make God known. He is identified here as God, and yet also as the one that came to make God known. Let's just compare now what we see in these five verses with what we have looked at with Moses.

1. Jesus reveals the character of God. In the gospel of John, do you remember we said there are seven "I am" statements? Jesus makes these seven claims. I am...the bread of life... I listed out the seven for you last week and said in addition to those seven, there were two emphatic "I am's," one in John 8, and one at the end of Jesus' ministry. There is a purposeful, direct connection being made between Jesus and that Exodus 3 event where God proclaims his name to Moses. Jesus is claiming to be divine, and at the same time revealing the very character of God through his earthly ministry.

When you see this...alright, listen, it takes a little bit of work, it takes a little bit of discipline. This is not SportsCenter. It takes a little bit of work for us to see this, but when you begin to

see it, John is making the claim that Jesus helps us understand all of the bible, all of history, all of redemptive history.

- 2.** Jesus reveals the glory of God. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father...” Moses enjoyed a unique and rare experience of beholding God’s glory. We now behold the glory of God in Christ. We will come back to that in a moment.
- 3.** Jesus reveals and fulfills the desire of God to dwell in the midst of his people, not only in the midst of his people, but in his people. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Literally, the word there is “tabernacle.” Jesus pitched his tent in humanity.

And then #4 -- We have been building comparisons. Here we have a progression that might be called a contrast.

- 4.** Moses revealed God’s law. Jesus reveals and imparts grace and truth. “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.” Verse 16: “For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

We want to just take a minute to look at this last element of grace and truth. Everything we have said to this point has been building towards this declaration: “We beheld his glory, full of grace and truth.”

Now, when we speak of grace, we speak of God’s undeserved favor, kindness, help. I want you to think for a minute in order to grasp this: God’s unmerited, unearned, undeserved favor. Let’s bring it down to a human level and think about it for a moment. I want you to think, “Okay, this service is going to end, and I am going to leave, and I am going to try to be full of grace for the person closest to me.” If you are married, that would be your spouse, one of your children, close friend.

I know that we are condescending. We are coming down a great bit, but I am trying to get you to think about how you are going to be full of grace to another person. That means you are going to show them kindness they don’t deserve, favor and blessing they don’t deserve. When they mess up, instead of punishing them, you are going to absorb their punishment on yourself. You are going

to forgive them, be patient, be forbearing, be kind. Are you ready? How long do you think you'll go?

Okay. Jesus -- full of grace, right? -- full of truth. Have you ever thought about how hard it is to be true all the time? To be true in terms of who you really are? True to the truth? We could talk about on one level the fact that we often just get it wrong because we are in ignorance. Many times the whole issue of racism is such an issue because we don't understand other people who aren't like us. We may be confident in our assertions, but way off when it comes to the truth. Even when we, in our own limited, finite capacity do understand the truth, it is very hard to be true all the time. There are times when you ask me how I am doing. I may not be doing great, but I just don't want to explain it. I don't think in that moment that I am lying to you. I am actually just speaking pastorally in the moment. That was really funny!

Alright, I will illustrate it this way. There is a story in the Old Testament. It's one of my favorite stories because it is so bizarre. It takes place when King Jeroboam led the first divided kingdom. Israel is in two kingdoms and he is leading the kingdom. He's got a problem because he doesn't have Jerusalem in his kingdom, and all these people are going to go down to Jerusalem. They are going to worship there and he's going to lose them. They are going to rebel and they are going to come back and kill him.

So he says, "You know what? I'm going to create my own Jerusalem. I'm going to create my own system of worship." Out of thin air, he just came up with these places of worship, and he made these golden calves. We have seen that's a problem. He has two of them, and he puts one of them in Bethel. Then he says to the children of Israel (this is horrible), "This is the God who brought you up out of Egypt." And he creates his own priesthood and his own feast days. The Scripture says he just devised them. He just made them up.

God is not happy with Jeroboam, so he sends a man of God to pronounce judgment. We are not told this man's name. He is an unnamed man, and he shows up. The scene is awesome! He goes in. He stands at this altar, and he says, "God is going to bring judgment. He is going to kill every one of these false priests right here on this altar, and as a sign, this altar is going to crumble right now and ash is going to pour out of it. As he is pronouncing this judgment, King Jeroboam walks in and says, "Seize him!" When he stretches out his arm and says, "Seize him," the judgment of God falls on him and he freezes and can't move. The fear of God falls on this corrupt king.

So now, he says to the unnamed man of God: "Would you pray for me?" He's afraid. So he does. He prays for him. The altar crumbles. Ash pours out. It's a dramatic scene. Then, what is really hard to comprehend, the king says, "Hey, why don't you come over for lunch? I'll give you a reward. You need to get refreshed. You need to take a break."

The prophet says this: "Listen, God told me, 'You go and deliver this word, and you return home. You don't eat bread. You don't drink water. You don't even go home the same way until you have accomplished this mission.' So King, you could offer me half your house and I won't go." The king says, "Okay." He leaves.

On his way home he meets a prophet, and this prophet has heard about this spectacular scene at Bethel. He says, "Hey, why don't you come over to my house for lunch?" "No, no, no. I can't come over to your house for lunch because God has told me that I have to return home. I can't eat bread. I can't drink water until I get home. I'm on a mission. I have the Word of God. I can't come," to which the prophet then tells a lie. He says, "You know what? God told me that you should come to my house and have lunch." And he does. He goes to lunch with this lying prophet. He is at lunch with the lying prophet, and then the lying prophet really tells a true prophecy and says, "You are not supposed to be here. God just told me you are not even going to be buried in your own tomb. You are not even going to make it home."

There is irony in that, isn't there? If you won't listen to God, you want to listen to someone else, God will just speak his judgment right through what you are listening to. He finishes lunch and leaves. On the way home, a lion attacks and kills him. The lying prophet hears about it, goes out, and finds his body. The lion is right there and hasn't eaten the man. It's a symbol of judgment, right? He has killed him, but not eaten him. He takes the body home, puts it in his own tomb, and says to his sons, "When I die, put me on this guy's bones. He is a real prophet."

Is that not the most bizarre story you've ever heard? Here is the lesson I take away from it: It is hard to be true to the truth to the very end. I mean, he comes in to Bethel. What courage it takes to stand at this altar and say, "God is about to give you a supernatural sign about something supernatural in judgment that's going to happen." He confronts the king, he shouts down the king, he freezes the king, he unfreezes the king, refuses the king's flattery, doesn't go to lunch. In a moment of fatigue and weakness and pressure he believes a lie, violates the Word of God, and is killed in judgment. It's hard to be true to the truth till the end.

Are you with me? How many times have you had a great day? You've been doing great. You get right to the end, then - boom! - you blow it. You will be on a date -- this has never happened to me -- but it's going great, then you say something stupid.

Now, stay with me because we are just getting started. Full of grace: impossible for me to even comprehend. Full of truth: I can't even begin. Put them together. Now, you've got not just two impossible things, but I don't know how they fit together. They seem to contradict. I mean, if I'm holding your hand, encouraging you, forgiving you, showing you grace, but never compromising the truth, when do I say, "It's okay?" When do I confront you? When do I challenge you? When do I stop you? When do I just support you?

We often pit grace and truth against one another. Jesus is full of grace and truth! As you read John's gospel, you see the signs, you hear the declarations. You come to the woman at the well. Here is this woman -- Jesus breaks every imaginable social barrier. She is a woman - he is not supposed to speak to her. She is immoral - he is not supposed to speak to her. She is a Samaritan - he is supposed to hate her. He is forbidden by their customs to even say "Boo" to her. He starts a conversation with her. He leads this woman to the point of salvation. In the midst of it, he confronts her with her sin. He tells her, "The man you are living with is not your husband. You have had five husbands and you are living with someone you are not married to."

She is so transformed. Here is a woman who is at the well in the middle of the day when no one goes to the well, when no one else is there, because she has to go alone, because she has been rejected by everyone and has really no friends. She lives in an element and a level of dysfunction we can't even imagine. And Jesus, full of grace and truth, sweeps into her life, calls her out, and saves her. She runs through the town. She brings the entire town to Jesus! A witness they would have never even spoken to now has them convinced. There is a transformation that has taken place here that can only be explained as the glory of God, full of grace and truth. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory...full of grace and truth."

Let's pray.