

The Marvelous Mystery of the Incarnation, Part 2

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 1:14-18

Preached on:

Sunday, September 15, 2013

Turn to the gospel of John once again. We come now to the second part of our study of the Marvelous Mystery of the Incarnation. We're in John 1 and we will be in verse 14-18 this morning. Let me read the text to you.

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testified about Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was he of whom I said, He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’ For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.”

I trust our study of Christ is more than just informational to you. I pray that it is exhilarating because he is the lover of our soul. Notwithstanding the feebleness of the preacher, a true believer who can think of Jesus and even examine him closely and not experience a heart-warming exhilaration, will soon find himself being warmed by infinitely lesser things. When the subject of our Savior no longer promotes within us an inward sensation of deepest joy and delight, our heart will soon pursue other lovers that will take his place.

As I think about it, it's much like a disease. The busyness of life and all of the lure of the world will gradually silence the weak voice of conscience within you if you're too careful. Your secret devotion to God and private worship will be the first to go. I mean, why make it a priority to spend uninterrupted time with someone that you care so little about. The priority of private prayer will become an unwelcomed intrusion in your life and your sacred closet of communion will no longer be a sweet sanctuary. It will become an unsightly storeroom filled with junk that you want to keep the door closed.

The next symptom will be a loss of appetite for the Word of God but you will be too distracted with other things to even realize that's going on. Who needs to be nourished by the Living Word when your soul is feeding upon the delicacies of the world? This is how it works, folks. We have to be so careful. And gradually you begin to love Christ from a distance. The sound of his voice will grow weaker. The glow of his face will grow dimmer. The warmth of his presence will grow cooler and finally you will find, really, no joy at all in him. Days and months and even years will go by without you even noticing that you are no longer feeling, experiencing, the felt presence, the love of Christ. But, oh, you will be able to soothe your conscience with the salve of Christian service though it is nothing more than religious routine.

That is the danger. Your public worship will be irreverent because you really have no private worship, that's nonexistent. So you come to church and you sing the hymns and

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you read the Scripture passages, you greet the saints, you endure the sermon out of duty not out of desire. And what you will find is gradually your love for Christ will become cool, then it will go to cold and eventually it will become calloused. And that's where many saints live, it's a very tragic thing. Calloused by worldliness and spiritual neglect and finally your Christian life is nothing more than kind of cold, dead formalism.

We could be like the saints in Ephesus in Revelation 2. You will recall they were hailed for their deeds, their toil, their perseverance. The Lord honored them because they would not tolerate evil men. We don't do that here. They were praised because they continued to persevere and endure for his Name's sake without growing weary. We can all be like that. But, friends, there can be times in our life when the lover of our soul grows heartsick because he looks beyond all of that. He strains as he looks into your heart to see if there is really any love for him. He longs to experience the most precious ingredient in any relationship and sometimes he looks into our hearts and he sees, like those folks in Ephesus, that we have left our first love. And we, like them, unless we repent will find our lampstand removed.

So, dear Christians, do not neglect the cultivation of your soul. For when you do, you will forfeit the inexpressible joy of experiencing the felt presence of Christ in your life. The very things we've just sung about. You know, when that enjoyment is gone, your religion is a sham. You will have no power, no zeal, no courage. You will find satisfaction in nothing and perhaps the worst thing of all is you will become accustomed to feeling nothing in your spiritual life. And you won't even know it. And then when the Word of God is opened up to you to examine the living Christ, it will be academic, kind of boring, something that you must endure.

Beloved, I know this disease very well because I fight it, myself, every day of my life. And unless you fight it, it will defeat you. If this describes you, won't you repent of it right now in your heart and let the first fruits of that repentance be manifested by focusing with me on the marvelous mystery of the Incarnation of the lover of our souls. We return to the final climactic verses of John's prologue here in verses 14-18 where he reveals four marvelous categories of truth.

Last time we were together, we looked at the first two. Let me review them very quickly: the first one that we see is the glory of the Incarnate Word. In verse 14, he says, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." So, the Logos, the divine Word, this personal God who is the source of revelation and truth and wisdom, who already existed at creation, became flesh and dwelt among us. This speaks of Christ's divine nature being united with a human nature to form one being. Though he never ceased being God, he became man. Fully God yet fully human with a human nature, yet without sin. As a man, he was, according to Hebrews 7:26, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." A son of a virgin according to the flesh but Emmanuel, God with us, according to the Spirit.

And as you will recall, this had to happen because the atoning work of redemption required a theanthropone, a God/man. Only God is perfect, therefore, he is the only one

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that could satisfy the perfect justice of a holy God. But only man could be the acceptable substitute for the guilty party. This is why the eternal Word became flesh. The Incarnate Son of God would live among men as a man in order to die in place of men, in place of you, in place of me and thus, fulfill the purpose of the incarnation in his crucifixion which is really the climax of his condescending grace towards us who believe.

In Jesus we not only witness the glory of the Incarnate Word but also the glory of the Father that he perfectly reflects. We looked at that last week and secondly the historical life of the Incarnate Word. Again, we noticed that “the Word dwelt among us.” The eternal Word pitched his tent, he tabernacled, he lived amongst men. And we looked at a number of striking ways in which the Old Testament tabernacle foreshadowed the Word that would eventually come. In verse 14, he say, “and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father.” Though veiled in human flesh, those who saw Jesus saw the nature of the Triune Godhead and even as the glory was hidden within the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and the temple, it also remained veiled within the body of the Incarnate Word.

I want to add a little bit to these glorious concepts. The word “glory” bridges the parallel between the divine presence in the tabernacle and the divine presence that emanated from the Incarnate Word when he dwelt amongst men. From time to time, the Lord manifested his glory in both darkness and light during the days of the wilderness wanderings. In fact, you may recall in Exodus 24 right before the Lord revealed what he wanted with the tabernacle, he instructed Moses to come up to the mountain and the text tells us that a dark cloud of his glory covered Mount Sinai for six days. And then out of the midst of the cloud we read that he invites Moses to come and in verse 17 of Exodus 24 we read, “And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top.” We also know that it was a thick cloud of darkness in the temple, the temple of Solomon, when according to 1 Kings 8:11, “the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD,” The priests were unable to even minister.

We can see that the glory of the Lord was revealed, for example, to Isaiah in Isaiah 6, and to Ezekiel in the very first part of his prophecy. Then later on in the New Testament, you will recall the glory of the Lord came upon the shepherds who saw it in the blinding light of the Shekinah when the angels announced the birth of Jesus. We saw the glory of the Lord with Stephen. As he was being stoned we read that he saw the glory of the Lord and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. We saw it at the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James and John. It was the glory of the Lord, that Shekinah that enveloped Saul on the road to Damascus at his conversion and blinded him and yet, produced within him the light of Christ.

So, indeed, those of the first century, as John said, “beheld his glory,” and I’m sure they beheld it in a thousand ways beyond what we find recorded in the canon of Scripture because, certainly, the glories of the Lord are infinite beyond our wildest imagination. Yet here in the human flesh of the divine Logos, they actually beheld the temple of God as Jesus would later indicate in chapter 2 where he said in verse 19, “destroy this temple

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and in three days I will raise it up.” Verse 21 says, “he was speaking of the temple of his body.”

Now, “beheld” is a verb that refers to far more than just physical sight or some casual glance. It carries with it the idea of wonder and admiration as the eye of the mind focuses on something that is utterly astounding. They examined him. They studied him. They pensively reflected upon his being. It’s as if we could say we beheld, we actually viewed his glory.

As I was thinking about this, it came to mind that we are all made to behold. Not to be beheld, but to behold. We have been given eyes. We are curious. We have a capacity unlike any other creature to marvel and to meditate upon that which we see. Now, many things will catch our eye of wonderment and contemplation. We love to behold the beauty of awesome wonders like a sunset or a sunrise, the constellation of stars. Don’t you love to look at those beautiful pictures of the Hubble telescope as we can look into the heavens? We love to see the Northern Lights. Who doesn’t stop to see the comets streaking across the sky? A solar eclipse and so forth. We love to behold the magnificence of a flower. A hummingbird will always catch my eye when I’m sitting on the porch. We love to behold a newborn baby or a bald eagle soaring in the heavens. We love to behold the raw power of a volcano, the hurricane, the tsunami, a tornado. We love to behold the great paintings of great artists like Michelangelo. Some even enjoy Vincent Van Gogh and Picasso and other forms of sixth grade art. We even love to behold things that destroy brain cells, like Duck Dynasty, the View and so on.

The point is, friends, we have been made to behold but no one has ever seen anything so magnificent as the Incarnate Christ because no one has ever seen God and lived. John and the others beheld the divine glory of the Son as they witnessed the supreme excellency of his divine perfections, as we studied last week. Those perfections that would shine forth through the veil of his human flesh during the days of his humiliation. And in due time, in the coming day of his exaltation, the complete fullness of his glory will illumine the flesh of the divine Logos who will return in power and in great glory as King of kings and Lord of Lords. Nobody will miss it then.

But while he dwelt among us, they saw the glory of his divine attributes. Can you imagine being in intimate relationship with a sinless being? They saw the brilliance of his teaching, the wonder of his miracles. They saw his infinite condescension, his matchless grace, the glory of his unfathomable love. They even saw the effulgence of his hidden glory emanating from his body on the Mount of Transfiguration, a glory in which the redeemed will bask for eternity.

But notice, his glory they beheld up close and personal and the glory that we can behold from a distance, is further described in verse 14 as “glory as of the only begotten from the Father.” Now, this phrase “only begotten” is a favorite among the cults because they want to read into it the implication that somehow the Lord Jesus Christ was a created being, not the eternal self-existent God. For example, the Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that Jesus

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is a lesser God than the Father for he is here called God's only begotten Son. But the term has nothing to do with one's origin. It really carries the idea of uniqueness, of singularity, one-of-a-kind. For example, even though Abraham had other sons, in Hebrews 11:17, Isaac was described as Abraham's only begotten son. Now, why? Why is that? Well, it was because Isaac was the singularly unique one-of-a-kind son because he was the son of the promise. God's covenantal blessings to Abraham and his progeny would only flow through Abraham's only begotten son, Isaac.

So, Jesus is the Son of God, shall we say, in a metaphysical sense. The only begotten Son. The singularly unique one-of-a-kind Son to be distinguished from believers for we are adopted children. So, this is a reference to Christ's Trinitarian Sonship. He is the Son of God from all eternity as was so clearly stated in verse 1 of chapter 1. So, John is underscoring here the unique relationship Jesus has to the Father. Mind you, this was a concept that was utterly blasphemous to the Jews, yet in verse 18 we read that he was "the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father." "Bosom of the Father" speaks of proximity to and personal intimacy with the Father. It speaks to the idea of the enjoyment of sweet communion, oneness and love that Jesus had with the Father.

In chapter 3:35, John tells us that "the Father loves the Son." In 6:46, we read "not that any man has seen the Father except the one who is from God, he has seen the Father." Jesus said in chapter 10:30 "I and my Father are one." And so we will see this as a major theme throughout John's entire gospel. So, Jesus is the Son of God by nature from eternity.

And then John adds in verse 14, "glory as of the only begotten from the Father." Both the phrase "only begotten" and "from the Father" modify glory. This brings us, then, to our primary subject for today and that is: 3. the fullness of the Incarnate Word. You know, too often I fear Jesus is pictured as merely a little baby in a manger. Or, sometimes he's pictured as kind of a 1960s hippy peacenik. Or, he's pictured hanging on a cross. But as we come to these truths, dear friends, we will be able to elevate him to his proper position as the Son of God, the eternal self-existent Creator/sustainer/Redeemer and consummator of all things.

Now, I want you to notice in verse 14, again, we read "and we beheld his glory, glory as from," or literally from "beside the Father." Now, why was the glory they beheld in the Incarnate Son so inconceivably magnificent? Well, because his glory was the same as the Father and as a result of his eternal relationship with the Father. Hebrews 1:3 says, "he is the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his nature." So, we might say Jesus is the effulgence of the glory of the Father, the very image or the very impress of his substance. In John 14:9, Jesus told Philip, "he who has seen me has seen the Father."

So, this helps us understand this astonishing statement in verse 14, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." I love that phrase. What a promising

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phrase. What a comforting phrase. It could've said "full of anger and wrath," "full of judgment and fury," but it doesn't say that. He was full of grace and truth.

Beloved, here we see the pinnacle of divine glory, the very heart of the gospel, so incomprehensible that even angels stoop to observe in sheer wonder. Think about it: grace and truth. These are two indispensable elements of salvation. No man can be saved without them yet Jesus came into the world to save sinners. So, naturally, he had to be full of these two glorious attributes: grace and truth, among many other attributes, I might add. But man cannot even believe the saving truth of the gospel apart from saving grace and yet only by believing will he ever receive that grace.

In Acts 18:27, we read that sinners believe "through grace." And Paul described the message that he preached as "the gospel of grace" in Acts 20:24. In Ephesians 2:8-9, that passage we're so familiar with, we read "for by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works so that no one may boast." And then Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:9 that "this is the grace that was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." Literally, before time began. So, it makes sense if it was granted then, it had to be granted by the one full of grace and truth that pre-existed before time began because it was Jesus that created time and space.

Well, this should not have been a surprise to the Jews. All of this was described in various texts in the Old Testament as we look at passages describing Jehovah. Do you remember when the glory of the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai and passed by in front of Moses? God made a very comforting statement, a sobering proclamation in which we can all rejoice. There in Exodus 34:6-7 we read something about this grace and truth. There he told Moses, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished." So, we see grace and truth all the way back in the Old Testament. David said in Psalm 25:10 that, "All the paths of the LORD are lovingkindness and truth." And in Psalm 40:11, again, David says, "Thy, O LORD, will not withhold Thy compassion from me; Thy lovingkindness and Thy truth will continually preserve me."

Beloved, without his grace and truth we could not endure this life, we could not live. So, when applied to the Lord Jesus Christ, naturally, we see the same attributes being manifested in the Incarnate Son. He is full of grace and truth. Now, think about his grace. By definition, let's just call it undeserved favor. Just in his condescension from heaven's throne to a lowly manger we see the staggering reality of grace. What did we do to deserve such a thing? During his voluntary humiliation on earth, he was the demonstrated unmerited favor for sinners of all stripes from prostitutes to publicans, from hypocrites to adulterers, all manner of people, all who lived under his holy and just condemnation.

But, my friends, his every word, his every expression, his every thought, his every gesture, his every touch was motivated by his love for undeserving sinners. Even his miracles of physical healing lavished grace upon those in desperate need. And then from

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there we can see how he was willing to shed his blood on Calvary so that grace could cleanse sin and pardon guilt through justification. But more than that, in verse 12 we read that “as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God even to those who believed in his name.” All of this, beloved, flows from the well of divine grace, the fullness of this attribute within Christ. Bear in mind that Christ alone could merit the grace of God for sinners like you and me.

Jesus was also the personification of divine truth. I was reading recently some Barna research and I was fascinated to see how there’s a steady decrease among the followers of different branches of Christianity and adults of different ages who believe in absolute moral truth. According to his research, 70% of evangelicals believe that moral truth is absolute. I don’t know what the other 30% believe other than it’s not there. Only 9% of born-again teenagers believe in absolute moral truth. That is frightening. Of course, you must understand, I do not believe they understand what a truly born-again person is. It’s one thing to say you’re born-again and it’s another thing to be born-again. 42% of non-evangelical born-again adults believe in absolute moral truth. And then I thought this was humorous, 24% of non-born-again Christians. You know, that’s an oxymoron. There is no such thing. It’s like a non-borne human being. I mean, if you’re not born, you’re not a human being. If you’ve not been born-again, you’re not a Christian. Anyway, only 24% of them believe in absolute moral truth. And then only 16% of followers of non-Christian religions believe in absolute moral truth.

Naturally, people without Christ are not going to believe in absolute moral truth. They will prefer relativism. They will prefer tolerance which will always accommodate the lusts of people that hold to these types of things. I mean, all we have to do is look at the moral free-fall in our country to see this. We have a country of entitlement, a culture of drunks and drug addicts and sexual perverts and murderers and street gangs and greedy politicians. You look at our public schools and they basically have the same morality as a prison. You look at our public officials and they are as crooked as a barrel of snakes. This is what happens when you move away from absolute moral truth that is found in the One who is full of grace and truth.

Uncertainty has become kind of the new and acceptable truth of our day. Cynicism has become, really, the new virtue. In fact, in many circles you are considered arrogant if you hold any absolutes because that would exclude the more important measure of determining truth and that would be things like subjective feelings and personal perspectives. I might add that this is the whole basis of the Emergent Church movement. They came into being to make Christianity more palatable to a post-modern culture that prefers doubt and skepticism over moral truth that might make a person feel guilty because, after all, if you feel guilty, you don’t feel good about yourself and then you have this view of God that somehow he is holy and he might judge you and then you might just need a Savior and we can’t have that. And then if you have a Savior, you might just have to make him the Lord of your life and you certainly can’t have that. Do you see how it all works together?

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So, they end up contextualizing Christianity to adapt to the culture. Their role would be to adjust the message of Christ to make him more tolerant of other views; they jettison divisive things like Bible doctrine by dogmatic preachers and preaching because, after, all post-modernists don't like that. I might add that no one has ever liked preachers over the course of redemptive history so they have replaced pastors with what they call narrators who facilitate "dialogue" in their congregations. Can you imagine if we all had an equal say and we all just kind of pooled our ignorance and rather than a pastor preaching to you the Word of God, we all just kind of share what we think truth is all about? So, they replace "thus saith the Lord" with "I saith."

My friend, even as there are fixed inviolable absolute laws in the physical order of the universe, so too there are fixed inviolable absolute laws in the moral universe because they were both created and they are both sustained by the same person, the Incarnate Word, the divine Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, in verse 5 we learned that all things came into being by him. So, of course, there is absolute moral truth and I might add that it exists outside of us, whether we know it or believe it or submit to it or not. It exists. It is as certain and fixed as our immutable God. It was delivered on Mount Sinai to Moses in the soul-terrifying display of majesty and holiness and power when God gave truth to man in that way.

In fact, we read in Romans 2, beginning in verse 15, that it has been written in the heart of every man. There we read, "their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus." Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:12, those who perish will do so because they "did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved."

Do you remember when Jesus stood before Pilate? He said, "I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice," but you will recall that Pilate was convinced that there was no such thing as truth so Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" John 18:37. Certainly, his cynicism proved that he was not among those whom the Father had given to the Son.

So, John makes it very clear, even in the very beginning of the prologue in verse 1, that Jesus was the Incarnate Word. He was the source and revelation of divine truth and wisdom and apart from him, no man could ever be saved. So, he was full of grace and truth. Don't you know when John was writing this, his soul was just excited. He knew how much the Lord was full of grace and truth because he knew him so well. He loved him and he was so familiar with him.

But remember, too, that prior to his incarnation, saving truth was veiled in all of the Old Testament shadows. Veiled in things like symbols and types and ceremonies and rituals and feasts and convocations and sacrifices, even prophecies and on and on. But then when the Logos dwelt among men, they saw the final reality of all of those shadows, the substance was realized in the Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1, beginning in verse 1, we read that "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in

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many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.” My friend, unless you believe the truth of the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, you will perish in your sins. Unless you accept God’s full revelation of himself in Jesus Christ, you will never be saved. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father but through me.” He also said, “If you continue in my word then you are truly disciples of mine and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.”

I hope you know the truth, the truth of your sin, the truth of God’s holiness, the truth that you are under divine judgment and wrath unless you repent and trust in Christ as Savior. Paul reminded the Ephesians in chapter 1, verse 13, “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.” And he also expressed thanks to God for the conversions of the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians 2, verse 13, he said God had “chosen them from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.” There we have it again.

But I want you to notice John, the evangelist, here goes on to add in verse 15, he says, “John,” referring to John the Baptist, “bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’”” The herald of the Messiah King was not merely a passive witness, he was a bold, loud, unashamed witness of the Lord Jesus Christ and the gospel of grace. No one could possibly miss his message. Would that we be the same in our witness. In essence, what he is saying here is he that comes after me, with respect to my current mission and message, has already been active among men long before I was even born.

But I want you to notice in verse 16, he says, “For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.” This, again, is one of those profoundly encouraging and exhilarating statements in Scripture. The word “fullness” underscores, once again, the absolute deity of the Incarnate Word. It is the same word which is found in Colossians 1:19 and also 2:9. There we read, “For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,” referring to Christ. And then also in Colossians 2:9, “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.”

Now, I want you to notice, verse 16 closely. He says, “For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.” The word “of” translates the Greek preposition ek which signifies “out of.” Out of the fullness of Christ, we believers have all received. Now, let’s think about it: what have we received from Christ? Is there any way we could possibly count the things? It is out of his inexhaustible fullness we have received everything that we will ever need for this life and eternity.

Now, John has already told us that we have received grace and truth, you have to have that in order to be saved. He will tell us later on in chapter 17 that we have received God’s own Word. He will tell us in chapter 20 that we have received from him the Holy Spirit. My mind immediately went back to Romans 5 where we are reminded of the benefits that are inherent in our justification, that Paul delineates in the first 11 verses.

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Let me rehearse them for you: because of Christ we have peace with God, we have access to him, we have a permanent standing in grace before God, we have the jubilation of coming glory, we have joy even in tribulation, we have proof of salvation, we have hope through a subjective awareness of God's love, we have salvation from the wrath of God and we exult in God. 2 Peter 1:2-3, we read that in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, he goes on to say and by his power he has granted to us everything. Everything pertaining to life and godliness. So, my friends, when we think of Christ, think of this limitless reservoir, this inexhaustible fount of blessing that flows out of the fullness of our Savior and Lord.

And then he says, "grace upon grace." This has the idea of just undeserved blessings piling up higher and higher and higher, layer upon layer, time and time again. Can we even begin to count them in our life? All the ways he has manifested his all-sufficient grace to meet every possible need? Think for a moment of some great difficulty you have had in your life or maybe some difficulty you're in right now. Is his grace not sufficient? Are you not enduring and even enduring with joy because of the hope that you have in Christ? Are his mercies not new every morning? Is his faithfulness not great? So much so that we can sing great is thy faithfulness?

As I was meditating upon this passage, my mind went to Ephesians 2, beginning in verse 4. Paul said this, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Beloved, in our Tennessee vernacular, "You ain't seen nothing yet."

Seldom does a day go by that I'm not called upon to bring grace and truth to bear upon some poor soul who is either in the bondage of their own sin or dealing with the sins of others. And almost inevitably, the problems that I will deal with are like scrambled eggs and there is no way that I can put Humpty Dumpty back together again. But I can point them to Christ, the one who is full of grace and truth because only when they go back to Christ and understand who he is and commune with him and cry out to him and worship him and believe in him and trust in him and follow him, can they find help and hope. His grace is always sufficient. Truly, "we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us." And I offer this consolation to those of you who may be struggling today: won't you look to Christ for out of his fullness, you will find grace upon grace upon grace and on it will go.

But I want you to notice the stark contrast at the conclusion of John's prologue. A contrast between what was given to us through Moses versus what came to us through Christ. Verse 17, "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ." Now, think about it: in the law of God, he revealed his righteousness, he revealed his holiness, his justice but he did not reveal his grace and truth. Paul explained to the Galatians that, according to Galatians 3:24, "the Law has

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The Marvelous Mystery of the Incarnation, Part 2

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 1:14-18

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become our tutor to lead us to Christ.” The law exposed the heinousness and the consequences of sin but it did not reveal to a sinner how to procure the final remedy. The law demanded perfect righteousness but only through Christ can we be made righteous. The law prevented man from approaching God but through Christ’s atoning work, the veil was rent and we were allowed access now to come into him. In Romans 5:2, we read that “we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we do this through Christ.”

Through him we have access to the throne of grace where we are admonished to come boldly in time of need. In Romans 8, beginning in verse 3, we read, “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” What a wonderful truth.

And then John concludes with this amazing summary statement in verse 18, this final verse of the prologue and here we see: 4. the character of the Incarnate Word. What does it do specifically? Notice what he says, “No one has seen God at any time,” and you could add here a “but,” “the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” You see, what man could never see under the law was fully revealed by the one who was in the bosom of the Father. The only begotten, the only unique Son, the one who retained the same unfathomable intimacy with the Father in his incarnation that he enjoyed with him from all eternity.

Now, under the dispensation of the law, remember, again, the full glory of God was hidden from men. Exodus 33:18, remember, Moses begged God, “show me your glory,” but God would only show him a fleeting glance of his back, not his face. But, O dear Christian, we can now see what was once hidden. We can see the revelation of God himself in the Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:6, “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

When the Ark was brought back into the temple built by Solomon, the Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness of a cloud. But in Christ, we can see God. Jesus said he is the light of the world. He is the one who calls sinners out of darkness into his marvelous light. For this reason, Peter calls believers in 1 Peter 2:9 “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” And John will later say in 1 John 1, beginning in verse 5, “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.” And in verse 7, he says, “but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

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This, of course, helps us understand this final phrase. Verse 18, John says, “He has explained Him.” “Explained” translates the Greek verb *exegeomai*. We get our word *exegetis* from that which is the method of determining the meaning of a biblical text in its historical and literary context. So, what he is saying here is Jesus is the only qualified interpreter or explainer of God. Again, remember, God’s grace in the Old Testament was applied to those who sought mercy and grace through faith in anticipation of the full revelation of God’s grace that they did not fully understand until Jesus was revealed. Now in him the truth that was once obscured has been fully revealed; it has been fully accomplished. So, this helps us understand more fully what John is saying in verse 18: no man has seen God at any time but the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, he has explained him.

Beloved, in closing, may I remind you that the issue is not so much the idea of not being able to see God because he is spirit and because we just have finite physical eyes, although that is true. But the issue here more accurately is that God is revealed only through Jesus Christ. If you want to see God, if you want to understand God, if you want to know God, look to Jesus, study Jesus. He is the image of the invisible God, Colossians 1:15. He is the explanation of God because, according to Matthew 11:27, “no one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

And I pray that he has willed to reveal him to you today. If you’re here without Christ, I would plead with you as a minister of the gospel to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. See him as your only hope of salvation. Put your trust in him. Understand his grace and truth and you will be saved.

Dear Christian, let’s all long to love him more today, okay? Don’t live at a distance from the one who dwells within you. Cultivate your fellowship with him. Cultivate that secret devotion to him so that you can enjoy all of the fullness that flows from his glorious person and you will be blessed and he will be glorified.

Let’s pray together.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths, may they bear much fruit in our lives that you might be praised, that you might be exalted in everything. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

We pray you’ve been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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