

The Gracious Glory – *John 1:14-18*

Introduction – Verse 14 is the stuff used to build Creeds. This verse, more than any other in the New Testament, provided the foundation for the doctrine of the person of Christ in two natures and one Person, fully man, and fully God (Nicene Creed and Definition of Chalcedon). The doctrine of the Incarnation sets Christianity completely apart from any other religion, and its implications are manifold and to our great benefit. And in these verses (14-18), are some of those implications. They are doctrinal and deeply pastoral. They are “*grace and truth*”, and they reveal the gracious glory of God in the Person of Jesus Christ. He is declared to you in this passage, once again an offer for your soul.

The Word Became Flesh – The Word (that Word that was in the beginning, that was with God, that was God, that Word) became flesh. God became a man. This verse is the basis of the doctrine of Jesus being fully God and fully man, two natures, undivided in one Person, without confusing or annulling either of the two natures (see the Definition of Chalcedon, 451AD). Being fully God (Col 2:9) and fully man (Gal 4:4, 1 John 4:2-3) pushes the limits of our ability to fully comprehend. “*If we conceive of this union in a way that makes sturdy common sense to us, then that means we have fallen into heresy. This is the miracle of miracles*” – Wilson. God became a man so that He could die, being the only and perfect necessary sacrifice for our sins while also being the perfect mediator who could sympathize with us in our temptations, so that He could be our perfect High Priest and Mediator, and so that He could provide for us the perfect example of loving, sacrificial servanthood.

(v15) - It would be hard to find a more impressive spiritual leader than John the Baptist. He was a man of great courage and character, faithfully calling the whole nation and even the Roman soldiers to repentance and faith. He boldly confronted the hypocritical religious leaders and even wicked Herod. Yet he was not the Savior. John had to “cry out” and point his followers to the One Who, even though he came “after” John, had already pre-existed “before” John. Jesus was God. Jesus was the Word made flesh.

And Tabernacled Among Us – First of all, not only for the three years of his ministry, but for the previous 30 years, Jesus “*dwelt among us*.” He lived in a common family with a father and mother, sisters and brothers. He was a baby and then a young child. He was the son of a carpenter in Nazareth. Human life was truly His which again made Him able to sympathize with all He ministered to. Secondly, He was a true human and friend interacting with others. John was the “disciple whom Jesus loved” and spoke of their human fellowship in his epistle (1 John 1:14). Finally though, he chose the word better translated “*tabernacled*” to bring forth a particular image for his readers who were readers of the OT. The tabernacle was also called “*the tent of meeting*” and was the place where the LORD “*spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend*” (Ex 33:11).

And We Beheld His Glory – This does not mean that when they looked at Jesus there was a halo or spooky glow about Him (although there was something of that sort at His transfiguration). The image of the tabernacle is where the “*shekinah glory*” of God was present. God’s presence was seen in the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day (Ex 13:21) and this glory then filled the tabernacle. In verse 18 John writes, “*No one has seen God at any time*,” because no one had seen *the Father* at any time. Remember, Moses begged God who had promised His gracious rest and deliverance for His people, to show him His glory (Ex 33:12-23). There, God had said, “*no one shall see me, and live*” – and as He passed by, His gracious, compassionate, and good glory was revealed to Moses – with and in His name. Similarly, as the disciples walked with Jesus, the revelation of Jesus’ glory became more and more tied to Jesus’ cross and the exaltation that ensued – a glory only those who have faith see in the Word-made-flesh and such events.

The Only Begotten of the Father – “*the glory of the one and only Son*” (NIV) is not a literal translation, but helps in emphasizing the uniqueness of the Son (Jesus) to His Father, “*who is in the bosom of the Father*” (v18). In theological terms, the Son is the only Person who proceeds from the Father, and this is an eternal state. This perfectly close (bosom-like) fellowship between Father and Son is unique to Jesus, but we are going to see in John how that is offered to us in Christ. The Word was with God, intimately and perfectly, and the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, in fellowship and compassion, to lead us to the Father. No one has seen the Father, but Christ becoming a man has broken down the barrier such that Jesus could say “*Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father*” (compare John 6:46, 14:9). *But do we dare draw close to such glory?*

Full of Grace and Truth – *The answer is yes*, because the glory of our God is *full of grace and truth*. This grace is abundant – “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace” (v16). “There is laid up in Him, as in a treasury, a boundless supply of all that any sinner can need, either in time or eternity” – Ryle. This is the point of the seven signs in the first part of the book, to reveal the gracious saving glory of Jesus, from providing the finest wine at a wedding feast, to restoring a man lame for 38 years, to feeding a vast crowd with five barley loaves and two fish, to raising cold-dead Lazarus from the dead.

This grace for grace, or grace upon grace, blessing after blessing, is referring to the unending giving of the Father. Through Moses the law was given, its Preamble declaring the freedom brought forth by God (Ex 20:1-2). The moral law was holy, just and good. But it could not justify. It worked wrath as it revealed our sinfulness (Rom 4:15, 7:7-8). The ceremonial law was full of examples of our need for a substitutionary atonement for those sins, but it was a schoolmaster only – to lead us to Christ. In this way, Moses, like John the Baptist, was a witness (testimony) through the law pointing all who would believe to Jesus (Heb 3:5-6). In this way “*grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*” in a way that Moses and the law could not (Rom 5:6-8, 10:9-10). The covenant of law is seen as a gracious gift from God, yet it is replaced by a further gracious gift, the “*grace and truth*” embodied in Jesus Christ.

This prologue (vv1-18) is only the overture and you have heard its themes. The entire gospel of John is before you to meet and to draw nearer to the One who is the gracious glory and truth of God – He “*exegetes*” (v18) or declares Him in His life and in this gospel. “*The Lord has come to bring us truth, but it is not the kind of truth which censures, condemns, and punishes; it is gracious truth, truth steeped in love, truth saturated with mercy. The truth which Jesus brings to his people comes not from the judgment-seat, but from the mercy-seat*” – Spurgeon.

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