

To Be Known

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Date: 22 December 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, folks. I feel slightly inadequate this morning because this is an incredible set of verses that have an enormous amount of truth in them. And as I said, when we spoke at the 1 John upstairs, I said you could spend a week off Bible teaching meetings and you probably wouldn't get through the section that we have. And I think it's equally can be said of the verses that we have before us today. There is so much in the verses that we have today that we are just going to scratch the surface ever so slightly and hopefully we can just see something of God's glory in there. Christmas is undoubtedly a wonderful time of year.

You know, over the last, we had a weekend in Vienna and over the last few weeks we've been in and around Edinburgh and we've seen the twinkling lights and the Christmas markets and the Christmas jumpers and you think of all the festive goodies that you've eaten, the lively parties that you might have been to and the joy of exchanging presents. Have you done that already or have you still to do that? These things all contribute towards the magic of Christmas. And yet, amidst all that excitement and activity, it's easy to lose sight of the slightly deeper meaning and the significance of Christmas. Last week, the children offered us that scene in the nativity sketch that they put on, a poignant reminder that at the heart of Christmas, there is a baby named Jesus.

You know, he is the centre of it all. And as we were imagining in that sketch, if Christmas was a photograph, then rather than being tucked at the back somewhere in a corner, Jesus is and should be the front and centre. I don't think it's a new idea to anybody here today. You know, even the simplest children's Christmas carols that we sing remind us that Jesus came into this world as a baby.

And as we sing the more traditional carols, I think there's further truth that we find that help us just to consider his birth and what it means for the Son of God to be found as a baby in a manger.

I was smiling as we sung that first song there. I hadn't known the words of the hymns that we're going to sing this morning. But as we sung through that, I thought that is our message this morning. It is exactly what is found in these five verses. And not that you might be able to remember that at the minute, but if you go home and you Google the words of that first hymn there, you'll just be, you'll smile. You'll get a bit excited. I was sitting on the bench there and I'm quite excited because even in the breaking of bread that we had upstairs first, the section that Ian read and the way that this ties together is just incredible. But when you think of the Christmas story, what do you see?

[3 : 3 8] Is it just a serene image of Jesus lying in a manger, surrounded by shepherds and wise men and animals? You know, that classic, not like Peter's picture with the mistakes, but that classic scene, which is beautiful and heartwarming. Is that the full story? Is that all that we consider?

Well, John invites us to just look at Christmas in a wider context. I know we haven't necessarily read it in these four, five verses, but John invites us to look beyond the message and to reflect on what arguably is the most extraordinary event in human history. In that first verse that we read in verse 14, we encounter a profound truth that can transform our understanding of Christmas.

And as I've said, as we explore these verses, there is so much in there that we could speak for a week, but I promise I won't keep you here until the Christmas Eve service on the 24th. John 1.14 starts like this. It says, The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. This, as I said, is a statement that just encapsulates the very heart of Christmas. Perhaps you've even seen those words on a card.

Not that many of us send that many cards anymore on a mantelpiece. And again, we don't have the abundance of mantelpieces anymore, or you've sung them in a carol. Have you really considered what these words mean? Well, I think this morning we're just going to spend a few minutes just thinking about that. What does it mean for the Word to become flesh? Craig, a couple of weeks ago, spoke to us about this. And in the opening verses, in verse 1, John identifies the Word as Jesus.

It said that he existed in the beginning, he was with God, and he was God. Now, I don't tend to be technical this morning because I don't know any Greek or Hebrew, but we are going to think about a couple of words this morning because there's a rich meaning in the words that are used. This word, this word, the word, and you've probably heard this. I'm not going to tell you something that you haven't heard before, but most of you heard that word logos, which is word, is the word.

[6 : 09] That's the Greek word. To a Greek audience, it was this principle of divine reasoning or creative order. You know, something to the Greeks that was abstract and profound, you know, something that existed beyond the created world. And to a Jewish audience, it would symbolise God's creative power. You know, recall Genesis chapter 1, where God spoke creation into being. So for the world at that time, both for the Jews and the Greeks, this title referred to God as an eternal creator who existed outside of time and space and matter. And also that he is the reason for the cosmic order, just the things that govern the created world. Well, John takes both of these perspectives and he makes this astonishing claim that this eternal divine word, the creator of all things became flesh.

You know, Jesus, the eternal one, took on a human body and entered the world that he made.

He wasn't a distant God, watching from afar. Instead, he becomes one of us, fully divine and yet fully man.

And I know over the years that we have thought about this when, in fact, even just that song that we sang with the children when we were going through John previously, when we talked about God, the Lord, he has been fully man and fully God.

And you might ask yourself at Christmas time, why did he do this? Why would the eternal God who existed before time, who created all things, why would he come in human flesh and be born as a baby in a manger?

[8 : 26] Why would you do that? Why would you, if you think of God, mighty and majestic and full of power, why would you come and take on human flesh and be found in a manger?

Well, John tells us that. It is to reveal God's glory. And I think it's an incredible thing, you know, just to reveal God's glory and not only that, but to fulfill his redemptive plan for humanity.

John writes, he dwelt among us. This is a phrase that, again, both to the audience of the day would remember that that dwelling, he made his dwelling among us, would be a throwback to what happened with the nation of Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness to the promised land.

The Greek word for this, dwelling, or dwelt among us, is that he pitched his tent or he tabernacled amongst us. And as soon as I say that word, your mind goes back to the Old Testament and you see the tabernacle there in the wilderness.

You know, we're transported to that place where God's presence among his people was in that structure of wood and fabric.

[9 : 48] you know, a sacred place that the national Israel, that went with the national Israel as they journeyed through that land.

But, God's presence is no longer confined to a structure of wood and fabric or stone, you know, when that was made into a stone temple.

Instead, when we come to this little section here, we find that he lives amongst us in the most intimate way. You know, and that just means the closeness of God.

We often say this, that God came near. But do we really appreciate how near God came to us? Not only did he take on human flesh, but he lived amongst us and he experienced everything that we experienced.

He experienced joy and sorrow, everything that, weariness, you know, he walked alongside as one of us. You know, this is the wonder of the incarnation.

[10 : 50] Just that, what we mean by that is that the eternal son of God, the one who created all things, would come into this world, not as a distant observer, but as an active participant.

Now, consider this, without a body, it's more difficult for us to relate to God. It's why the nation of Israel and the Old Testament went astray so often.

Because their view of God and the way that they're related to him is different to the way that we see him now. You know, our minds can only really think in the frame of reference of created things.

What we can touch, what we see, what we hear, what we can smell. By becoming human, Jesus closes that gap, from being that divine, eternal spirit to being something that we can, as we have sung, something that we can hold in our hands.

And he lived a perfect life in that body. And he offered that life as a sacrifice so that we might be free from the judgment deserved by our rebellion against God.

[12 : 04] You know, that's why we, that's why we celebrate communion. salvation. The bread and the wine reminds us of his body that is given for us and the blood that is shed for our salvation.

Jesus took on flesh so that he could give that body up for our redemption. He had to take on flesh to be able to do that. And that is just the most incredible when you start to really look in that and see it and just appreciate what that means.

I mean, I got excited when I was studying just, you know, this first 18 verses as we've been going through that the last few weeks. There is so much truth in that.

In fact, the whole Bible, you find threads that come from the first chapter here in John that just run through the whole Bible. And that's why at Christmas time, we, it doesn't matter where you go in the Bible, you can find a thread that will link us to Christmas.

But there's no other section that I'd rather speak about this morning than just this little section here. You know, a baby that was born in Bethlehem that was destined to grow up and carry the weight of sin, of the world's sin to the cross.

[13 : 18] You know, as he journeys from that manger to the cross, it just underscores the profound love and God's commitment to redeem his people.

Well, John goes on to say, and we have seen his glory. But what does glory mean in this context? You know, in the Old Testament, God's glory was often displayed in incredible, awe-inspiring ways.

You know, you think about the burning bush or you think about the thunderous display with the cloud and fire on the Mount Sinai with Moses.

Or the radiance. We've thought about the tabernacle already, but off that radiance that existed within. In fact, there was a curtain that was hung there because God's glory was so radiant that those who, the curtain was there to shield people from that, otherwise they would not have survived.

The glory is the manifestation that is shown to us in his majesty and his power and holiness in the Old Testament. In fact, when we think about Moses, and I was reading this recently, when Moses encounters God's glory, when he comes down that mountain, his face, and he didn't even have the full revelation of God's glory, he only got a glimpse of the back as it passed through as he was hidden in that rock and yet his face shone so bright that men were afraid.

[14 : 42] In fact, it tells us in the Old Testament that Moses had to veil his face because it shone that bright. This is probably one of the hardest words to sometimes get a head around.

What does the word glory mean? Well, I had a quick look in the dictionary and there is so many things that we can think about here but, and again, this is a word that, you know, I struggle with English, right, but *doxa*, which is the word where we get doxology and doxology is just the liturgical praise of God but the *doxa*, that is the Greek word for glory and you see in here that it covers things like the abundance or the wealth or the treasure and if somebody has that then there is honour that is given to them.

We see that in the second point there around the dignity and the honour that is given to somebody as, who we would like to glorify.

You see there that it refers to the splendour and the brightness and the majesty as we've seen and we, again, just pull your mind back to that image in the temple where that radiance shone so brightly.

And then we come to point four in here and there's more than this, it's just a little clip that I took there but we think about the glorious moral attributes and the infinite perfections of God.

[16 : 16] It says this, that Jesus is the brightness of the Father's glory in Hebrews chapter one. You know, these are just the attributes of someone that invokes praise. It's the manifestation of these things that we've just thought about.

And sometimes we, I mean, I don't really follow football but I'm sure there are some football fans in here and you might be called a glory hunter. Sometimes we speak of something in all its glory and all its revealed and everything that is revealed about that thing.

You see the full picture. It's just a manifestation of all of the attributes of God. But when we come to the Lord Jesus, it's not necessarily speaking about these awe-inspiring, majestic, mighty revelation of God's glory.

It takes on a much more personal, profound dimension. You know, Jesus, even though he is majestic, even though he is all-powerful as we see when he calms the wind and the waves, what Jesus reveals to us about God is his character and his nature.

We go on to read in our verses that he was full of grace and truth and the witness, the disciples got to witness his first hand in his teachings, in his miracles, in his compassion, the way that he dealt with people, got to witness it in his death and his resurrection.

[17 : 51] And each of these scenes that we see, especially in the Gospels, just give us a glimpse of the nature of God. John describes the glory as the glory of the only one, of the one and only son who came from the Father.

You know, Jesus is unique in the fact that he is God's eternal son, fully divine and fully man. And through his life he shows us exactly what he's like.

I was thinking about that verse just that was quoted in the little dictionary extract in Hebrews chapter 1 that says that the son is the radiance of the glory, of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.

So when we see Jesus, everything that we see about his being has just given us a glimpse of God's glory. And remember, just to try and summarise that, the one who was eternal in spirit and in a way unrelatable takes on a human body to become relatable, to show us what God is like.

And in everything that you read in the whole of the Bible that talks about the Lord Jesus, it just gives us a glimpse of who he is and it gives us a glimpse of the glory of God.

[19 : 12] You know, there are many things that show us God's glory and I think the word is used over 400 times. It's actually used a lot more than that but 400 times roughly and there's some words that would be very closely linked but some of these will come to mind and I encourage you over your lunch today or over the next few days just recall some of these because you'll just get excited when you start to see just this thread that goes through the whole of scripture.

Psalms 19 verse 1 I'm sure I don't really need to ask anybody to see it but the heavens declare the glory of God and the sky proclaims his handiwork. You come to Isaiah chapter 6 verse 3 and it says this holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty the whole earth is full of his glory.

You come to Romans chapter 1 and it says this for what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes namely his eternal power and divine nature has been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made.

So we see it in creation but we see it in man. We see it in you and I. Man was formed as the highest creational display of God's glory and in the Bible it tells us that man is the glory of God.

God's glory of God but it also tells us in Romans chapter 3 verse 23 that we've fallen short of that glory and we aren't the people who God created us to be.

[20 : 45] When Jesus comes in we see that that glory is re-established and for all of us who believe in him and we've been thinking about this last week in the section that Graham covered to all that believe in his name who received him who believe in his name he gave the right to become the children of God and in a sense a little bit of that glory has been restored.

In fact even just in the gathering today it tells us in scripture that the glory of God is on display because the way that God created us to be is displayed here.

If you're a believer if you're a Christian if you're one of God's children as we've read just in that last verse then we display God's glory and we do it in the way that we live in the ways that we try and emulate the Lord Jesus and some of that has been restored.

We're reminded in 2 Corinthians 4 verse 6 it says this for God who let light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus but we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not us and that is just a little bit of God's glory that comes through us but it's just a faint picture in comparison to what we see in the Lord Jesus.

When we see the Lord Jesus we see God his life his actions his words reflect the heart of the Father God and whether that's through if we just look at the miracles through the gospels you know whether that's healing the sick or comforting the broken hearted or confronting injustice Jesus reveals the very nature of God in a ways that we can understand and that we can relate to.

[22 : 43] John concludes this verse by saying that Jesus is full of grace and truth. These two qualities are at the core of who God is and what is offered through the Lord Jesus.

You know grace is God's unmerited favour to us. His love and his mercy is freely given despite our rebellion and our unworthiness.

You know I've already quoted Romans chapter 3 verse 23 and it says this we've all sinned and we've all fallen short of that glory. None of us could ever earn God's favour through our own efforts and yet through Jesus grace is extended as a gift.

His sacrificial death on the cross provides the ultimate expression of this. Offering salvation to all who believe and that is something that we come to sometimes just gloss over at Christmas time.

But again just to summarise a baby was born in a body in order to die and the only way that we can be offered salvation is in the death of the Lord Jesus.

[23 : 52] You know grace means that we don't have to strive to earn God's approval. It's not about what we do but it's about what Christ has done. There's a quote by Martin Luther and it says this the law says do this and it's never done.

Grace says believe this and everything is already done. We're not going to spend a huge amount of time on that verse that it talks about that the law was given through Moses and grace and truth came through the Lord Jesus.

We're going to focus on this grace and the truth as beautiful attributes of the Lord Jesus that is on display. Truth on the other hand is the ultimate reality of who God is.

In a world that is full of confusion and lies and shifting values grace and love.

He reveals God's plan for humanity and he reveals the path to a relationship with him. Jesus is the embodiment of both grace and truth as we see there in the end of verse 16.

[25 : 03] It meets us in our brokenness. You know grace offers us forgiveness and hope. And truth grounds us guiding us in this world.

And I'm sure you know as we often say when we meet on a Sunday morning that there is so much conflict and confusion and chaos in this world. And yet when we come here and we think about the truth it is something that grounds us both in our thoughts and in our thinking and in the way that we live.

Truth also just reveals to us God's love and the purpose that he has for all those who believe in him. And then we come on to the last point here.

The father that has been made known. So what does all this mean as we approach Christmas? You know before I share some points, in the New Testament when we read about God it normally refers to God as a father.

it's the reason that the Lord Jesus came in the form that he did. And when you start to realise just the intricacy of the whole story you realise how glorious the message of the gospel is.

[26 : 19] Jesus came in the form of a son because that's how he wants us to relate to God as a father. And in the New Testament that's what we see right the way through. We see it when the disciples asked the Lord Jesus to teach us to pray he says father who art in heaven.

Paul in all of his letters when he prays he prays to God as a father. And the Lord Jesus has shown us the relationship that we can have with God as a father in his life on earth.

But what does it mean when we come to Christmas what does this mean to us? What do we take from this? Well first of all it reminds us that there is far more to this story than just a baby in a manger.

It's a story of God stepping into the world. to rescue us. The eternal word becomes flesh so that we can know God.

So that we can experience his love and that we can be transformed by his grace. Secondly it challenges us to see Jesus for who he really is. He's not just a figure in a nativity scene or a character in a Christmas carol.

[27 : 28] He is the creator and he's come to be the saviour. He's the embodiment of God's glory. And if we recognise that truth it should change how we approach Christmas and it should change how we approach life.

It should change how we live day to day. And finally it calls us to respond. You know if Jesus is full of grace and truth, if he is the revelation of the eternal God, if he took on a body and as the words of that carol would say born that man no more should die, how should we respond to him?

Will we allow his grace to change our lives? And will we build our lives on the truth that he reveals? You know Christmas time it's often because we take a day or two off but Christmas time is a time for reflection and it's a time for renewal.

It's an opportunity to rediscover as we've been doing over the last three weeks in these 18 verses to rediscover the heart of the season. You know to move beyond just a surface level a few carols and a carol service and a few Bible verses on a Christmas card on the mantelpiece.

And it allows us to just engage with the profound truths that we see in this section. You know as we celebrate Christmas and all the busyness you know we just had a conversation just before we started and everybody that you talked to and I'm sure that Hazel and the team that were on the welcome team this morning when they shook their hand and said how are they then they probably said I'm busy.

[29 : 12] Well Christmas time is a busy time but let's not allow that busyness to overshadow and distract us from the wonder of what we're celebrating. the word becomes flesh God comes near his glory is revealed and it's revealed in a gentle way that's full of grace and truth.

You know whatever you are in your relationship to God this truth invites us to draw near. You know if you already believe then it should fill our hearts with gratitude and it should shape the way that we live our lives and that is a big challenge to us because it is so easy to just live as the people out in the street rushing about our daily lives doing all the things that on the surface celebrates Christmas the giving of presents and the kindness and all the other festivities that we enjoy.

joy. But if you're uncertain about Jesus then what I want you to do is to take this season as an opportunity to just explore his love towards you and the magnitude of what he has done for you.

The God of heaven the eternal creator coming in the form of mankind taking on a body so that that body could be put on a tree and across so that you and I could be reconciled to God.

You know this Christmas may it may be a time for us just to reflect on that and to allow the revelation of God through Jesus to illuminate our hearts and our minds.

[30 : 56] Let's give thanks for this incredible gift and allow this grace and truth to change our lives in a way that extends far beyond the 25th or even to the 6th when you take your Christmas tree down but the truth that we see in the Lord Jesus and the glory that we see of God in him let that shape our lives as we go into 2025.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father we thank you this morning for your word that reminds us of who you are. A God who is full of love, a God who before the world began had a wonderful plan of salvation that would come together in the death of your son.

And so our Father at this time of year we thank you for this opportunity just to reflect on the real meaning of Christmas, on the reason that the Lord Jesus came into this world.

Our Father we thank you that in him we see your amazing love displayed. and not only your love Father but the full attributes of your glory. Father help us to be inspired by our thoughts of him this morning.

Help us to praise and to worship you for all that we see in your lovely son. And our Father as we spend time together with family and friends may it be that we can encourage ourselves and that we can be encouraged within ourselves as we consider him.

[32 : 30] Father we thank you for this time that we have spent this morning. We thank you for all that the Lord Jesus means to us. And we thank you for we ask his things and we give thanks in his name.

Amen. Amen.