

Incarnation

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 March 2020

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 0 0] Well, great to see you this morning, folks. My name is Graeme. I've got the joy of being the pastor here at the church. Let me encourage you to have John chapter 1 open in front of you. And we're just going to pause as we begin this afternoon and we're going to pray.

So let's close our eyes, let's just still our hearts as we come to God's words today. The words of Psalm 18.

This God, His way is perfect. The word of the Lord proves true. He is a shield for all those who take refuge in Him.

So, Father, we pray that you would help turn our eyes to that which is true today. By turning our eyes to your Son, Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Well, with John chapter 1 open in front of you, let me just tell you what we're going to be doing as we build up to Easter, which is just around the corner. We're starting a new series today that we've called Ichthus, which I'm sure the Greek boffins out there will know is the Greek word for fish.

[1 : 0 0] So what the earliest Christians used to do to let each other know that they follow Jesus is that they drew a fish symbol in the ground. Because Ichthus is a Greek acronym for the phrase, Jesus Christ, God, Son, Savior.

So this was their common confession about all those who followed the Lord Jesus. And it's why, besides the cross, the fish has become the recognized symbol for Christianity down the ages.

As many others, countless others, make this their confession too about the Lord Jesus. And so what we're going to be doing on the Sunday mornings as we work our way up to Easter is we're going to be thinking and working through some of the key moments in Jesus' life.

These moments that take us to the heart of who he is and what he came to do. Because I recognize there's many of us here today who are investigating the Christian faith, which is a wonderful thing. You are so welcome here.

Let me just encourage you that there is no greater place to start thinking through those claims of Christianity than by looking at the life of Jesus Christ as we find him in the Gospels.

[2 : 1 3] And for those of us here who are following Jesus, maybe we've done so for a week, maybe we've done so for many years. It's my prayer that we would increase both in our knowledge of him and that we would increase by God's grace through his spirit in our affections for him as we together we savor the saviour.

And so let me just get, crack on, get us to the first one of these. Let me just tell you about an experience I had recently on the city bypass. So I'm in the car and I'm heading out of town.

Now you get the whole idea of a bypass, right? That you try and bypass the traffic. Well, this particular day I was driving out of town and I'm hitting the bypass and I recognise that the cars are crawling along.

Now normally when you see that you recognise that it's because either some of these cars broken down up ahead, maybe their battery's gone flat or it's because people are trying to join at different junctions and it slowed the thing right down.

But not in this particular day. So the bypass was crawling along and do you know what was making it crawling along? It was the sun. It was the sun.

[3 : 24] It was so unbelievably bright that drivers couldn't see where they were going. The sun was forcing them to slow right down and the speed of the bypass dropped to about five miles an hour.

It was an incredible thing to see and think about. I wonder if you've ever had an experience like that. I guess that's kind of why they invented sunglasses, isn't it? I was thinking of it this week.

Google's a wonderful thing. And I didn't know this until this week that apparently the sun is 93 million miles away from the earth. Did you know that? Learned something today, right?

Great fact. 93 million miles away from the earth. And it got me thinking, I wonder how, if that, from our point of view, is how we react to something that is 93 million miles away, how bright must the sun be?

And then I got thinking, I love to think on these things. I wonder how close one could get to the sun before you just shriveled up and died. What could we take in?

[4 : 29] How close could we get before simply our bodies just gave up the ghost? Here's the thing about this passage today. If that's the case with the sun, then how much greater the case if we were to ever encounter the one who made the sun?

Now here's the confession that you know if you are an Old Testament Jew. Really simple. It goes like this. You cannot look on God and live.

You cannot look on God and live. You cannot take him in. If you were to take it in, you wouldn't be here to tell the story. You cannot look on the God of the universe's glory, his greatness, his goodness, his otherness, his majesty, his holiness, his splendor.

This is who the God of eternity is. And you know as an Old Testament Jew that you cannot look on God and live. And you find this repeatedly in the Old Testament when people encounter the living God.

The prophet Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 6, he fears for his life when he finds himself in God's presence. Because he realizes he's not aware of his smallness, he's more aware of his sinfulness.

[5 : 46] That who is he, an unclean human being, a sinful human being, to come into the presence of the three times holy God. He falls down and he declares, woe is me, I am done.

We see it again similarly. Ezekiel, he finds himself in the presence of God, a prophet, falls on his face. And you get this constant refrain in the Old Testament. You'll see it on the screen.

Who is able to stand before the Lord? This holy God. Which is a cracking question, isn't it? Who can stand before him?

And so with that backdrop, you can appreciate the sheer audacity of the claim that John makes in the prologue of his gospel. If you've got it there, John chapter 1.

Who can see the glory of God and live to tell the tale? John puts his hand in the air and he declares, I can. I can tell you.

[6 : 48] What does he say at verse 14? See these words. We have seen his glory. Now either your boy is wearing some spectacular sunglasses that offer him some unparalleled UV protection.

He needs to get a patent on that quick. Which given we're talking in the first century, we're calling that unlikely, okay? Or something's happened.

And what's happened, verse 14, and this is where we hit the jaw-dropping claim that's right at the heart of the Christian faith, that the words became flesh.

The words, the one, if you want to scan your eyes back to the beginning of John's gospel, when your boy doesn't go for any small talk, does he? He just goes straight for the jugular. What does he say?

The words who John has introduced us to at verse 1. The word who is eternal. This is what we're learning about the word. The word who, through whom all things were made.

[7 : 55] The word, the one who sustains the stars and planets. The word, the one who gives life to every human being who holds our lives in his hand. Let me just take this opportunity to say, in our world at the minute, let's not lose sight of the fact that our God is sovereign, that it's him that holds our lives in his hands.

So we act with wisdom. We wash our hands. We want to love the people around about us by doing that and by visiting and by going to see them and helping them in any way that we can, kind of loving our neighbor.

But let's not lose sight of the fact that our lives and our times are held in the hand of our good father. So back on track. The word is Jesus.

This is what he's saying. The word is Jesus. It was him who became flesh. Jesus Christ, get your heads around this, took a human body.

And whilst not relinquishing one ounce of his deity as God in the beginning, he stepped into our humanity. He entered our existence.

[9 : 04] He inhabited our skin. He stepped into our situation in all its frailty, in all its brokenness, and all its vulnerability.

Jesus Christ, the theme of heaven's praises, the one on whom angels long to look, God became flesh.

in what is known as the incarnation in Christian circles. And the old hymn we used to sing, thou who was rich beyond all splendor, all for love's sake became us poor.

Thrones for a manger did surrender. Sapphire paved courts for a stable floor. Thou who was rich beyond all splendor, all for love's sake became poor.

There's a reason that this doctrine, this truth, has been and will be celebrated by Christians down the ages. And we saw him, says John. Worth maybe dipping into this guy, John.

[10 : 10] He's a fisherman who Jesus called to come and be one of his 12 disciples. John finds himself, not just one of the 12, but part of the inner three, along with James' brother and Peter, meaning that he gets to watch, he got to watch Jesus up close and personal in action, right?

Brought into things, seen things, the teachings, the interactions, the miracles, the people whose lives Jesus transformed, who he called to sin no more after they'd encountered him.

He heard Jesus explain his mission. And here's something cool I was thinking about this week. At the end of John's gospel, what does he tell us? He tells us that Jesus is hanging suspended on the cross, bearing the sin of all those who would look to him in faith.

Jesus points to his mother Mary, or rather, sorry, looks at his mother Mary, speaks in her direction, who's standing next to John, and says to John, John, you take care of her as your own mum. And church tradition, if you look it up, tells us that John cared for Mary for something like 11 years or so before she died.

Now, here's the point. These two are living together. Right? Probably having an educated guess that they're not making small talk with one another. Right? Another tea vicar?

[11 : 28] No, they're not doing that. What do you think they're talking about? Do you not think they're spending every waking moment talking about Jesus? Remember when he said that? Oh, how cool was that?

How brilliant was that? Do you remember when he did that? I could not believe it. Do you remember how the crowd reacted? Do you remember how they marveled at his teaching? Like they'd seen nothing like this before.

And so John, having lived this kind of life and having thrown himself into chewing it all over, has written this gospel so that you and I, down the generations, would find ourselves here able to read about the life of Jesus.

And as you read his gospel, the thing is that you get a sense that this guy's never stopped being thrilled with the risen Jesus. maybe a challenge for some of us today.

Have we grown cold in our affections for him? You've been a Christian for years. Today, are you still thrilled with the person and the work of Jesus?

[12 : 27] You know, I think about the Christians, particularly I'm thinking about uni, the lecturers who have had the greatest impact on me as I've journeyed through. And it's those who I can tell have just never stopped thinking about Jesus.

And they are 80, pushing 90, they're still learning things, they're still marveling at this. I've got a guy, a lecturer, who weeps his way through Hebrew poetry. He just finds it that beautiful that he encounters the God of the Word and this is him.

John has never stopped being thrilled with the person of Jesus. How can John say that he's seen God's glory? Let's rattle through three quick things from this text.

He can say it because he saw Jesus. John wants us to know where Jesus came. Okay, 14 to 18 in the text, follow with me. Verse 14, it says, he dwelt. He dwelt quite literally.

He tabernacled. That's the word. If you know your Old Testament, this is the tent that we read about in the Old Testament that Israel carried with them before the temple was constructed.

[13 : 34] The tabernacle that signified God's presence with his people, that God desired to dwell with his people. And where has the word dwelt?

It's tabernacled. Where? Among us. With us, as we were singing about earlier, because you might have half expected, given who Jesus is, that when he came to earth that he would go straight to the palace.

And we have to say that that would be humility enough on his part if he did that. Having waiters serve him, having people bow to him, making sure that the world recognizes him. But where is he?

He's not locked away in the green room of some concert venue, saying to the bloke on the door, would you make sure that no one gets in here unless I say. He's not in the business class of British Airways, saying, can you just draw the curtain please so I don't have to interact with the riffraff who are in the economy class.

Where is he? No. Born in lowly Bethlehem, grows up in joked about Nazareth. And where is he so often in the Gospels when he's not praying?

[14 : 45] Who is he with? He's with people. People. Engaging them, teaching them, healing them, helping them to think, listening to them, eating with them, crying with them, speaking with them to the extent that people look on and they mockingly give him the nickname the friend of sinners.

As he steps in, as he calls a world to himself and says, you need to stop going your own way, you need to turn from your sin, repent, start going my way, Jesus turns up and offers the world himself.

Of course, as we see Jesus interacting with a world, this is how we should interact as those who would follow him, by engaging with the world, loving the world with the heart of Jesus.

Do you see how in the person of Jesus, God chose to dwell among his people in the most personal way possible? He dwelt among us.

John wants us to know where he came, he wants us to know how he came. End of verse 14, he came full of grace and truth. You get the same double words again at verse 17, for the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

[16:03] And we think about that word, grace. You know, mercy, not getting something that we do deserve, that's the definition of mercy. Grace, getting something that we don't deserve.

God's grace to us, to undeserving, rebellious human creatures, comes not in the giving of stuff, but it comes in the giving us of his son.

What we need to understand is if in the person of Jesus, it's as if God has reached into his inner being and he's plucked out his own heart in giving us his son Jesus.

Such is his great love for a lost world. He came full of grace and truth. And if you think about it, in theory, he could have come and not brought grace and truth.

He could have come and he could have laid down the law. Right? I don't know if you've noticed that. It's what they do in rugby. I remember growing up playing rugby, never really understood it. You commit a foul, you need to back off 10 metres.

[17:07] And if you don't back off 10 metres by the time the ref sees it, you're back another 10 metres. And technically, you can keep on going all the way to the tri-line if you keep making the same mistake. The ref says, get back, get back.

You committed a null foul, get back, get back. I was thinking this week, Jesus could have so easily come and said, see those Ten Commandments. You know those Ten Commandments, the ones that you stink at keeping? I'm here to make it 20.

And you know what's happening. If you don't believe it, he's going to be 30. He's going to keep on going. No, in Christ, John says that we have received grace upon grace.

In other words, God's grace to the world and that in which in particular he has already consistently shown to his people down the ages reaches new heights in the coming of Jesus.

I encourage you to come along the next few weeks. We're going to see exactly how that grace works itself out specifically in Jesus' life. Come back next week and we'll see another wonderful truth about who he is.

[18:10] But you see for now that he has come full of grace and truth. Talking of grace, our little girls, their favorite game at the minute, one of their favorite games is to run into any room in our house, to shut the door, turn the lights off and say spooky, spooky.

They love doing this. Which is all fun and games, right? Until somebody's banging heads or somebody's running into a cupboard and spooky, spooky turns into daddy, daddy, mommy, mommy. But here's what they're gradually learning in the school of hard life.

School of hard knocks, the school of life. That you can't see where you're going and you don't know what you're doing when you're living in the dark. What does John call Jesus at verse 9?

He calls him what? The true light. The light by which you can see. The light that shines into the room of our dark existence where we are groping around trying to figure our existence and our lives out.

What does the light bring as he shines? He brings truth. Truth about us, truth about our world, truth about our God, truth about our predicament.

[19 : 24] And so the wonderful thing about these verses is if you're here today and you want to know grace, if you're here today and you want to know truth, John's pleading with you to see that you are living your life in the darkness, that you are on the wrong end of this holy God's anger against our sin.

And he's begging us to come in to know the truth, to come to the light by giving our lives to Jesus Christ. John wants us to know where he came. He wants us to know how he came.

Finally, he wants us to know why he came. Here's the thing that I've noticed people do when they know that a baby's on the way. They start trying to guess the sex, right? And they say, well, I've got a feeling that it's going to be a girl.

It's got a hunch it's going to be a boy. And you say, how do you know? And you say, well, I guess my sister's baby, right? And I think I've got a kind of gift in this. And you say, well, maybe you got lucky with a 50-50.

But people say that, don't they? They try and guess. I've got a feeling. I know. And the thing is that people also do that with God. I think God might be like this.

[20 : 35] On and around, I couldn't possibly believe in a God like that. But what this truth, the incarnation, is telling us is that when it comes to what God is like, we no longer have a choice.

God has made himself fully known. How do you know what the baby is when it comes out? Here is God in the flesh. Here is God making himself known to a world.

Why do we know that? Because of what John says about Jesus at verse 18. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, he has made him known.

It's out in the open. Jesus, the one who, and you've got to wonder at this, the one who has been from eternity past, who was face to face with the Father, right, which means he's qualified to tell us and to show us.

Jesus has taken on flesh and come down to us with the words of the text, the express purpose of making the Father known to us. In other words, if we want to know what God is like, we need look no further than to look to the Son, Jesus.

[21 : 55] And we have to see that there's nothing other than lovingly, loving consistency between the Father and the Son. He is the exact representation of God the Father.

He is the image of the invisible God. And what that means is that if you and I want to see what God is like, if we want to know what he thinks, if we want to hear him speak to us, then we simply have to look to Jesus.

John says, we saw his glory. As we looked at the Son, we saw his glory. You know, just as we close, I wonder if you're here today and you're saying to yourself, that's all very good for this guy because he saw Jesus.

Maybe if I had seen Jesus, if I see Jesus, I too could see his glory. I'm never going to see Jesus. How can I see his glory? Well, just as we close, let me tell you one story to help convince you on this a little bit.

It's a story I recently heard from a Christian speaker who works down in London called Richard Bergonin. He's the author of the Word One to One. And after one of his talks, he was telling this story. A Chinese woman ran up to him and she proceeded to tell him the story about how she became a Christian.

[23 : 07] And I don't know if you know this. Many of you know that when Mao was in power in China, he wanted to put an end to Christianity. He wanted to stamp it out. He wanted to stop its spread. And one of the ways that he tried to implement that was to tell all the Christian missionaries to get out.

And the Christian missionaries had no choice, really. They had to get out and they took everything with them except their Bibles. The local people, after the Christian missionaries had left, they picked up these Bibles.

They had absolutely no interest in reading them. But what they realized is that these Bibles were made of really, really good paper. Really good paper. They could feel it. So they thought, that would make some great wallpaper for our houses.

So they went back and they started rolling this paper on their walls. And this lady was one of, I think she was the fifth generation of people who had become Christians by reading about Jesus in the house of the wallpaper.

And they nicknamed it the Bible Room. And so she was one of the, she was, I think, the fifth generation of people to become Christians in the Bible Room. So what that means, here's the point, if you and I, by faith, have eyes that will see Jesus for who he truly is, as we read of him and encounter him in the pages of the Bible and trust him as our Savior and King, if we will have eyes to see it, we too can say with John that we have seen God's glory.

[24 : 40] And that's why, if we want to see our friends and our family members and become Christians, come to know Jesus for themselves, and that really is the heartbeat of this church, then the best way to do that is to get reading the Bible with them.

Where are they going to meet Jesus? As he walks off the pages of Scripture. For God who said, let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Jesus Christ.

Why don't we just take a moment, friends, and let's respond to God's words today. Today, I want you to do a couple of things, maybe just in the silence.

Maybe you're here today and you don't know Jesus as your Lord and your King and your Saviour. Just to encourage you to use this moment just to think about his claims as we've read about them there in John chapter 1.

And also, if you're here and you are a Christian, I want you to both maybe bask in the truth of this, but I also want you to pray for a friend that you can think of in your life who you desire and you long that they would come to know Jesus.

[25 : 54] So maybe just in the silence now and then I'll pray. Why don't we just lift our prayers to God knowing that he hears us because we pray in Jesus' name. And so Father, we thank you, gracious God of heaven, for this time together today.

Thank you, Lord, for the freedom that we enjoy in this country to meet together. And it's our prayer as we've heard your voice today as it resounds in John chapter 1.

We ask us, Lord, we ask you, Lord, that you would help us this week to lift our eyes off of ourselves. Lord, we know our proneness to wander. We know how much distracts us and we pray that you would help us look to Jesus and in so doing savor something more of your glory.

Lord, we ask that your spirit would come and he would help us this week to do just that. Thank you for this time together. We commit this time to you in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.