

The_Word_Made_Flesh (1)

Tonight's scripture reading comes from the book of John, chapter 1, verses 1-14 .

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through Him all things were made . Without Him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. ⁶There came a man who was sent from God, his name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light. ⁹The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or husband's will, but born of God. ¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

This is God's Word.

One of the problems with Christmas is that we think we're getting meaningfulness too easily. You go to a Christmas service or you go to a Christmas party even, and a couple of people say a couple of words. You come and you sing Christmas carols. You ought to see your faces when you're singing Christmas carols. It's sort of dreamy and happy, and that's good because we're immediately connecting Christmas to family and reunions and gifts and time off from work and things like that. But we settle for too little, because the meaning of Christmas is inexhaustible, but it's filled with theologically powerful, life-changing truths. And one of the reasons this week and next week we're going to look at John chapter 1 is because while the beginning of Matthew and the beginning of Luke tell you about the facts of Christmas, tells you what happened, you know, shepherds, angels, baby in the manger and all that, John 1 doesn't mention any of those things. What John is concentrating on is what all those things mean. Not so much what happened at Christmas, but what Christmas means. And so we'll start this week, next week. It's a rather short little series, getting us ready to really get out of Christmas what we ought to get. And what I want to do tonight is simply meditate with you on three aspects of the most pregnant part of this famous passage. It's in verse 14 where it says, *The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us so we could see His glory. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us with His glory.* I just want to break those three things down and talk about them tonight to see how powerful the meaning of Christmas is.

First, first we're told at the beginning and at the end of the passage that Jesus is the Word of God. Now, your word, a person's word is the clearest and ultimate revelation of who you are. And I can give you maybe a little bit of a trivial example of this is if you study somebody, you may make inferences about a person. So you might notice that she sometimes drinks tea, sometimes drinks coffee. And you see her drinking coffee, sometimes tea, you say, well, if I'm going to have her over, I guess maybe I'll put both out or I don't know. I guess she likes both. But what do you do? Ask her. Ask her. Call her up and say, do you like tea and coffee? And she says, no, I only drink coffee if I have to. I like tea. And now you know. Because her word reveals her better than her actions, you have to make inferences you can't tell. Maybe a better example would be this. There's a number of people that I take the subway with every day that evidently live near me. I can't quite tell where, but I know they live near me. Sometimes I see them walking to the subway. I can infer a lot of things about them by the way they dress and, you know, even their facial expressions or what they're reading and things like that. But if you ask me, have you met them? Have you met him? Have you met her? Do you know him? Do you know her? And if they've never spoken to me, I would say no. If a person has never spoken to you, you don't think you've really met them. Because they're words, speaking, that's the ultimate and clearest expression of who you are. It's you reveal yourself through your word.

Now when it says that Jesus Christ is the Word of God, that's an amazing statement. It's saying you can't know God except through Christ. Oh, it doesn't mean you can't know anything about God except through Christ. Just like I can know all kinds of things about those people that I see even though they've never spoken to me. You know, if I've never heard them speak or they've never spoken to me, you can learn a lot of things about God. You can know all sorts of things about God. You can believe in Him. You can do all sorts of things that you believe God wants you to do. But to know Him, it takes Jesus. Because Jesus is the ultimate revelation of who He is, who God is. One commentator on John chapter 1 says this, this is what John 1 is saying, "Jesus is the supreme revelation. If we are to know God, neither rationalism nor mysticism will suffice, for God chose to make Himself known finally and ultimately in a real historical human being."

Now, we don't have time to break all that down, but let me just take one part of what he just said. It says neither rationalism nor mysticism is the way to find God or know God. Let me give you an example. Let's take the rational side. Many times people say, "I want to believe in Christianity and I need reasons. I need to see the reasons why it's true. I need some rationality here. I want to know what are the reasons for me to believe that Christianity is true." Now, of course, properly understood, there are plenty of reasons to believe Christianity, and there's lots of them. We can go through them. But if a person goes past that and says, what I really want is a slam-dunk, watertight argument that proves Christianity is true, now you're going down the wrong path, and here's why, for two reasons. One reason is Philosophy 101. If you go into any Philosophy 101 class, the professor there will show you

that there actually are no slam-dunk, watertight arguments to prove anything at all. You know that. It can be very funny if the professor, you know, one of the things the professor will say, there's no way for me to prove that I am not a butterfly dreaming I'm a minister. You know why there's no way to prove things like that? Because when you say, well, I know who I am, and I know where I'm standing, and you're using your cognitive faculties, right? And the philosophy professor will say, you're using your cognitive faculties. Well, prove that your cognitive faculties work, that what you see is really what's out there. I know this sounds like the matrix, but what the philosophy professor is going to say is, there's no way to argue that your cognitive faculties work without using the cognitive faculties that you're trying to prove work, which means you're begging the question. You're assuming the thing that you're supposed to be proving, and so you can't really prove much of anything. And it's true. At a certain point, when people say, I want a book that proves that Christianity is true, you can always say, well, where are you doubting? And usually they say, well, I doubt it because this, this, this. And usually the people are assuming themselves certain beliefs that they don't have watertight arguments for anyway. So, the philosophy professors will tell you that's not the way to go anyway. There's plenty of reasons to believe what we believe, but there's no slam-dunk watertight arguments. But that's not actually the reason why we shouldn't go there. Here's the reason why. This text is telling us that God has spoken rationally. In fact, do you notice the word where it says, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God? Do you know what the Greek word is that our English word, word, translates? The Greek word there is logos, from which we get our word logic. What does it mean to say Jesus is the logic of God? Here's what it is. God has not given us a watertight argument to prove that Christianity is true. He has given us a watertight person. Not an abstract argument. A watertight person is the compelling proof that God is who He's...that the God of the Bible and Christianity is true.

Now, this is not anti-rational when I say that. When...to say that Jesus Christ is a watertight person, and that's the compelling proof we're given, rather than a watertight argument, is to say you have to look at Jesus. You have to look at the accounts about Jesus' life. You have to look at His claims. You have to look at His teaching, and then you have to compare that to the way He behaved. You have to look at the accounts about His resurrection, and you have to use your mind. You have to think. You have to say, well, now how does that fit, and how does that fit, and how do I explain that? And I will say to you that if you are willing to do that with an open mind, you will find in the end that Jesus Christ is a watertight person against whom in the end there can be no argument because He's perfect, and His life towers above all other lives, and He's inexplicable. But that takes the thinking, does it not, to study, to read, but that's how you find the compelling proof that God has given you because the compelling proof that Christianity is true is not a watertight argument, which is an abstraction, and which is an impossibility. It's a watertight person, and you've got to look at Him, and you've got to look at the data of His life, and the data of His teaching and His claims, and you have to process it. You have to do it with your mind. Have you done that?

Have you really taken it that seriously? That's where you know this is true, looking at Him, because He's the Word of God.

So do you want to know God? Do you want to know that God is real? Do you want to know Him personally? It can only happen through the Word, because that's how people work. That's how persons work. You know them through their word, and Jesus is the Word, the ultimate, clearest revelation of who God is. But that's not all. Christmas is not just about Jesus as the Word. The whole point of Christmas is He's the Word made flesh. Now, what's that mean? The Word made soft. The Word made soft. The Divine made human. More than that, the Word made vulnerable. The Word made killable. Now, when it says the Word became flesh, it means a couple of things. One of them means that God has become vulnerable. Christmas is so radical because it's the... Christmas highlights the fact that only Christianity, of all the religions of the world, says that the Divine Creator of the world has become human and therefore is vulnerable. He's come down.

So, 1964, right? Kew Gardens. A young woman, 28-year-old woman named Kitty Genovese was going home to her apartment, and she was assaulted on the street by an assailant. And she cried out, "He's stabbing me. You know, he's... Help me." Now, there's still a lot of debate about what happened, but the one thing I can tell from reading everything is this, that up in the apartments, lights came on and people looked out. She was screaming, she was saying, help me, I'm being stabbed. Now, all we know is this, nobody came down. Nobody came down to see, to help. You know why? Because you risk your life. You're vulnerable if you come down. Nobody came down. And when the lights first came on, the assailant ran, thinking somebody was going to come down. When nobody came down, he came back in about five minutes and he killed her. Pretty famous incident, as a lot of you might remember. But you know what Christmas is telling us? Christmas is telling us when Jesus heard our cries, when the Lord of heaven heard our cries, he came down. He made himself vulnerable. Oh, and he didn't just come down the way those people would have come down at the risk of their lives. He didn't come down at the risk of his life. When the Lord of the universe came down, he came down knowing it would cost him his life. But he came because the Word became fleshy, the Word became vulnerable, the Word became killable . Wow! And Christmas means that.

But then, you know, Hebrews chapter 2 draws out the implications of this idea of the Word became flesh. Hebrews chapter 2 says, since we have flesh and blood, he too shared in our humanity. For this reason, Jesus had to be made like his brothers in every way so that he might become a faithful high priest. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Now, one of the most fascinating implications, and the book of Hebrews is drawing this out, is that if it's true that the God of heaven has become flesh, then he understands you because he's been where you've been. He knows everything about you. And why is it that so often at Christmas, we sing, wonderful,

counselor. You know, those are the words from Isaiah. Wonderful counselor. Have you ever thought about what that means and why we sing them at Christmas? The best counselors are people who have been through a problem, and they've come out on the other end, and they're okay now. And then they talk to people who've been through...they're going through the same thing. Those are counselors who understand. And you know what this means? Why Jesus is the wonderful counselor? Because the Word became flesh.

Years ago, I had a young x-ray technician who went to my church in Virginia, and he told me this story that he said, I had a real revolution in the way in which I practiced my profession. Because back in those days, I'm not sure just how uncomfortable it is now, but back in those days, because it happened to me, if you were getting an x-ray of the lower part of your body, a lower GI series, you would get pumped, filled with fluids, you know, and making you very, very uncomfortable and in a lot of pain. And then very often, x-ray technicians and people like that who might have lacked a little bit of bedside manner, they slap you on the table, and they turn you this way, and they turn you that way. Hurry up. Wait a minute. Hold on. And of course, you're in pain and agony, and they're very brusque. And matter of fact, he said he was like that until a year went...one year, he got a kidney stone, and they put him on the table. And he went through it. He'd never been through it. And he said, oh, my. And he said, I've never, ever treated people again the way I had before because I've been on the table.

Now, again, what is Christmas? Christmas is saying something that no other religion wants to say. No other religion dares to say that the God of the universe, who created the universe, has been on the table. Hunger, loneliness, homelessness, grief, rejection, betrayal, torture, injustice. He's experienced it all. And what does that mean? Have you been betrayed? So is he. Are you broke? So was he. Are you lonely? So was he. Are you facing death? So did he. So you can go to him. He's the wonderful counselor. You need to trust him. You need to go to him with what you've got. And if somebody says, and you might, and I understand this, he said, "Wait a minute, I have gone to him. I was in trouble, and I went to God, and I prayed, and I poured out my heart, and he didn't listen to me. He denied my prayer. I feel like he's abandoned me." Don't you understand the meaning of Christmas? God has experienced that too. What? God knows what it's like to be abandoned by God. God knows what it's like to have a big prayer turned down, because in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said, "Father, if there's some way that we can save the world without me going to the cross and experiencing all this infinite agony, please let this cup pass from me," and he got turned down.

See, you know what Christmas means? That when you're in trouble, and when you're struggling, and when you've got problems, and you feel like God isn't listening, in fact, he's not answering your prayers, don't you realize that Jesus, the wonderful Counselor, has been there? Christmas means you can't just rail at God, saying, why are you allowing all this suffering? Because he's experienced it himself. He even knows what it's like to feel

abandoned by God. Have you thought about that? You must frame your struggles with the knowledge that the Word became flesh. You can go to Him with anything, because He knows. He understands. He's been there. Do you? Do you trust Him like that?

So Christmas means the Word has become flesh, but the last and the most amazing thing that's said here is the Word became flesh and dwelled among us so that we could see His glory. Now, if you're reading this in Greek, you see something that you can't see in English. It's astounding, because John, the writer, could have chosen any number of very common words for reside, live, dwell. The Word became flesh and lived among us, dwelled among us, resided among us. Okay, there's all sorts of words. He didn't choose any of them. What he literally says is, the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. And John is deliberately taking the Greek word that readers of the Old Testament in the Greek translation, which was very common back then. It's called the Septuagint. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, he uses the very word for tabernacle that was used of the tabernacle that under Moses was set up in the wilderness. And just to make it absolutely clear what he's trying to talk about, he says, Jesus, the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and now we beheld His glory. He's making us remember the fact that when Moses was on the mountain, he said, I want to know you. I want to know you, Father. God, I want to know you. I want intimacy. I want power. I want connection. And so show me your glory. Let me see your face. And remember what God said? "I can't. It'll kill you. You will not survive it. But here's what I will do. Let's build a tabernacle, a great tent, and that will be my dwelling place. And in there, you'll have the sacrifices and you'll have the priests, but I will dwell in the Holy of Holies behind the veil because my glory must be concealed. You can't behold it. You can't have it. You can't know it. You can't touch it. It'll be there, but it'll be concealed in the tabernacle, which is exactly the opposite of what we're told here, that when Jesus is at the tabernacle, we behold the glory that Moses couldn't have. Now, what does that mean? And here's what it means, two things, one general and one specific. Here's the general. It means that Jesus Christ is the end of religion as we know it. Christmas is the end of religion as we know it.

Dick Lucas, who used to be a teacher, he's a retired pastor in London, gives an imaginary dialogue between a Christian in the earliest days of the church and a pagan neighbor to get this point across. It's a wonderful dialogue, which I feel like it just epitomizes what the teaching is here. He says, "Imagine a Christian talking to a pagan neighbor, and the neighbor says, 'Oh, I hear you're a Christian. Great, a new religion. Tell me, where are your temples? Where's your temple?' And the Christian would say, 'Well, we don't have any tabernacles or temples because Jesus is our temple.'" "Oh," says the pagan neighbor. And the neighbor says, "Well, but where do your priests do their thing?" You know, priests have to have a place to do their thing. And the Christian says, "Well, I'm sorry, we don't have any priests. Jesus is our priest." "What," says the neighbor? "Well, where do they do their sacrifices?" You know, you have to curry favor with the gods. You have to do all kinds of things to get their favor so they accept you. You have to do this and that and have rituals

and observances, and there's rules and there's regulations and sacrifices. Where do they do all that? And the Christian says, "We don't do sacrifices anymore because Jesus is our sacrifice." And finally, the neighbor would say, "What kind of religion is this?" And the answer is, it's no kind of religion at all because all other religions say, if you do all this stuff, you'll be accepted. And Christianity says, because you're accepted in Christ, now you do all these things. The religions say, live this way and you'll be accepted. Christianity says, no, you're accepted because what Jesus Christ has done and now you live this way. It's exactly the opposite. And so, all the stuff of religion is gone because Jesus is the tabernacle. He himself is the end of tabernacles and temples and sacrifices and all that. He's the end of it.

So, first Christmas means the end of religion as we know it. We don't get a religion we get a person. That's the point. The Word. But then there's something more specific, and that is, "How is it possible that we can behold the glory that Moses didn't?" And the answer is this. Why wasn't Moses able to see the glory? Why did God say, it'll kill you? Well, long story, but if you have been wronged, I don't mean just slighted, if you have experienced life-affecting injustice and evil, someone's done something to you, a gap opens between you and the perpetrator. No? Sure. A gap opens. And if that perpetrator just says, I'm sorry, you know that that doesn't close the gap. It's a serious thing. And something, some action has to happen to close that gap. And it's not usually very obvious what that would be. And you know why you feel that gap? Because you and I are made in the image of God, and that's how people in the image of God experience injustice and evil. It's such a serious thing. It can't just be shrugged off. Something has to happen. Well, but the gap that you and I experience between each other when we harm each other is nothing compared to the infinite gap between the human race and God because of what we've done, because of what we've done to His creation, because what we've done to each other, and we're part of His creation. There's a gap, and that's the reason why God says, something has to close that gap. There has to be atonement. There has to be something that closes that gap. You can't just come into my presence, and the tabernacle was pointing to it because there was sacrifices, and there were priests. And now when it says, the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and the tabernacle is the place of sacrifice, here's what we're being Jesus Christ came to earth to become vulnerable. To become vulnerable. Why? So that He could become killable. Why? So that He could pay the price, and He could close the gap. And that's the reason why at Christmas you have the glory of God become a baby.

In the Old Testament, you know, we're being told at Christmastime that the unscalable majesty of God, and the transcendent holiness of God, you know, has become a baby. What does that mean? A baby is accessible. A baby is safe. A baby is embraceable. And what this means is because Jesus Christ has died on the cross, and paid your debt, and closed the gap. Now just as God came into history, so now the glory of God can come right into your life. The life-transforming glory of God can come to you. Yeah, that's what Christmas means.

The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us so that we now behold the glory that Moses wasn't able to see.

Now let me conclude this way, being very can be no halfway measures with following Jesus. You know why? You know what this is saying? That Jesus is the glory of God, embodied? That He is the Word of God, the ultimate expression of who God is? And it doesn't just say He's the Word of God, it says He's the Word who was God. That's getting us into the Trinity, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. But here's the main point. The main point is that Jesus is claiming all through the gospels to be God. He says, I'm going to judge the world, only God can do that. He says, I can forgive your sins, only God can do that. He's claiming to be God. So unlike the founders of other religions, unlike the other figures in the Bible, Jesus is not one more prophet or sage pointing to God. He is the God to whom all the prophets and sages point. And that forces your hand, does it not? Got to say this every Christmas. It forces your hand because if you have a man, a human being, claiming to be the judge of the world and the ultimate God, the living, true God, if a man claiming to do that, you either decide he's a fool or he's wicked and you run away from him or else you throw everything at his feet and say, command me and build your whole life around him. But you can't go halfway. You can't just like a man who talks like this. You can't just like Jesus when these claims are made about him. It's all or nothing.

Secondly, please go to him as your counselor. Whatever ails you, he's got the medicine for it in your chest, in his chest, and he'll put it in your chest. And you know, I was rereading Mark chapter two, where that man who's crippled, his friends bring him to Jesus and they lower him through the ceiling. Remember that? They lower him through the ceiling. And when Jesus walks over to him, even though he says nothing, you remember what the first thing is that Jesus does? He says, my son, your sins are forgiven. He didn't say anything. Now in the Bible, there is no place where God ever, ever gives forgiveness if there's no repentance. God does not give forgiveness to people like that, unless there's repentance. And therefore, why would Jesus have done that? He didn't say anything. And the answer is, look at the wonderful counselor. There must have been in his side, inarticulate, unexpressed, fragmentary yearnings for grace and mercy that Jesus was so sensitive to and responded to, even though he hadn't expressed them. So eager is our great high priest to give us grace. Why wouldn't you want to trust somebody like that?

And last of all, do you know what Christmas means when it says the Word became flesh? It means the real becomes ideal. You know, in *Man of La Mancha*, that great musical about the Don Quixote story, you've got this man who looks like he's mad. He goes insane. He thinks he's a knight, and he goes off into the world, and he comes to this inn, and at the inn, there's a prostitute working in the kitchen named Aldonza, and Don Quixote starts to treat her as royalty, and he sings love songs to her, and he treats her with love and respect. And at first, she's bemused, and then she's angry, and finally in the end, she's transformed. But

he's a madman, and that's the message of that narrative, the story, the musical, and that is that it takes a madman to see royalty in a prostitute. Why? Because at one point, he says why he's decided to be mad. He said, maddest of all to see the world as it is and not as it ought to be. It's a great line. Maddest of all to see the world as it is and not as it ought to be. Here's the real, here's the ideal. There's a concrete slab between the real and the ideal. The ideal will never enter the real. You know, the reality is what we're stuck with, and if you're sane, you live in reality. And he has decided, I'm not going to live on the basis of the real, but on the basis of the ideal, which makes him insane. But if you believe in Christmas, do you? We don't have to choose between the real and the ideal. You know why? Because at Christmas, the Word became flesh, which means the ideal smashed a hole in that concrete slab and became real. And when you believe in God through Jesus Christ, that ideal comes into your life. And even if you feel like Aldanza did, that you're gutter grime, he can come into your life and treat you like royalty because you are both a sinner and a king or queen in him, and he can change you into his likeness. Because the real, that's what Christmas means. The ideal has smashed a hole and has come into the real and is now transforming us into its likeness. Therefore, don't look at anything about your life and say, that'll never change. Christmas means anything can change. Christmas means you can trust him. Christmas means you have to follow him with all your heart.

Christmas means a lot of things, and we're not done. Come back next week, we have more of John 1. Right now, let's thank God for what he's already told us. Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you that Christmas means inexhaustible things, but we thank you that we've gotten a chance to look at a couple of them tonight, and we pray that you would help us obey and trust and love the one who became vulnerable for us. Change our lives with the theology of Christmas. Change our lives with the truths of Christmas, this Christmas. Let us not settle for just feeling warm and inspired. Make us more like your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.