

Myth_Became_Fact, Tim Keller

In John, chapter one, verses 14 through 18. As we move through the Gospel of John, we come now to these verses. John 1, 14-18.

¹⁴The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory. Glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, he who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.") ¹⁶From the fullness of his grace, we have all received one blessing after another. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God but God, the one and only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

This is the word of the Lord.

Let's look at it. John is giving us, in these few verses, verses 14 to 18, the great doctrine of the Incarnation. And the doctrine of the Incarnation in a nutshell, is that the Divine One, the One who is beyond all time and space, has come down into nature and taken upon himself a human nature, and actually and really become one of us and dwells with us. *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.* Now, why? You know, by the way, everybody tells preachers, people don't want doctrine, especially not people in New York City. Give them something that will inspire them, help them get through the week. Who needs a dusty old doctrine, especially one with such a long name, Incarnation. But I'm not going to insult you like that. Oh, no. Because I want you to know that there isn't anything more practical than this doctrine. This doctrine is your only hope.

Imagine for a moment somebody gives you a book. And it's a very weird book because on the one hand, there's passages of tremendous profundity and beauty in them, and they're fascinating. And yet the book just doesn't hold together. You just can't follow it. There's too many loose ends, there's too many inexplicable parts. And you read it and reread it, and you can't really make sense out of it. And then one day somebody comes along and says, guess what? There was a chapter missing. And here it is. And they give you the missing chapter, and it's the center of the whole book. And now when you read the chapter with that, I mean, the whole book with that chapter in it, not only does the chapter explain everything, all the inexplicable parts now start to get coherent. It explains all the themes, all the plot and the plot angles that you couldn't figure out before. But not only that, the missing chapter enables you to see all kinds of new meanings that were already in the book, but that you couldn't see before. And friends, listen. Now you read it with just joy, because now the profundity and the beauty is also coherent. And you say, this is wonderful. And you read it and you weep.

The radical claim of Christianity is that the doctrine of the Incarnation is the missing chapter, not only in human history, but in your own personal life history, your life, our human history is like that great and confusing book. And this is the chapter and this is the center of it all. And if you receive it, it begins to all make sense. And the beauty of it will pierce your heart like a sword. And if you reject it, you'll stay in darkness. What could be more practical than that?

Now look, the doctrine of the Incarnation, as John gives it here is really fairly simple. It's got two parts to it. First of all, John says the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God really became a man. Jesus Christ really came down and became one of us. But then why did he do it? Just for a show? No, John says there's a purpose to the Incarnation and that is so we might behold his glory. *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.* That's the two things.

And let's just look at them for a moment. First, he really came to earth. God really became man. So many of the novels and of the epics and the songs and the legends of the ages have a recurring myth in them, a recurring theme. It recurs with amazing regularity and it goes like, there's a great king or a great person in our life, and when we have him, everything is golden. But he leaves. And it looks like he'll never be back. And everything goes wrong when he leaves. And our country falls under evil influences. But in the nick of time, just before all hope is gone, he returns and he reveals himself to his followers and he gets an army together and he takes back his own.

I mean, that's the Robin Hood myth. That's the Arthurian myth in many ways. And all those legends, that's the heart of the Lord of the Rings, the famous and well-known modern epic. It's certainly the theme of, of just countless science fiction novels, but it's even there in the songs. You baby boomers, you remember The Youngbloods? Do you remember who they were? And they had this one song that went like this. It says, songs may come and songs may go. We will surely pass when the one who's left us here returns for us at last. We are but a moment's sunlight fading on the grass. The one who left us here, the one from another world, when will he come back for us? See, it keeps coming up in so many songs and epics. Why? The Bible has a reason.

The Bible gives an explanation. And it goes like this. The Bible says, because there really was a high king, and we all lived in his light and his glory and his warmth. But we decided to set ourselves up as our own kings. We decided to be our own masters. And in a sense, what we did when we did that, was we pulled our roots out of the only soil, the soil of his presence, the only soil which can really nourish the greatness that he put into us at the beginning. And so when we decided to be our own king, the king left. And when the king left, a darkness and a cold fell on the world and fell on our heart. And nature went haywire. And our own hearts just shriveled up and shrunk up so we could experience very little joy. And

we forgot who we were. But even as the king was leaving, he turned and he whispered a promise.

The Bible tells us all about this. You can see it. The promise is in Genesis 3:16. Look at it sometime. The king turns around and he whispers a promise, and he says, I'll be back. I'll be back. I'm going to come back and I'm going to do battle against the evil and against the cold and the darkness that you let in here. And I'm going to suffer and I'm going to be bruised, but I'm going to win. I'll be back for you. And then he left. And you see, that promise has been living consciously and unconsciously in us for years. Forever. And it's come down to us in countless myths and legends and epics.

And now John makes the announcement. John, chapter one, verse 18. And what's that announcement? The king has landed, and he's revealing himself to his followers, and he's getting an army together, and he's going to roll back the darkness. You know, the Word became flesh. The king has landed, and we beheld his glory. He's revealing himself to his followers, full of grace and truth. He's come here to roll back all the darkness.

Psalm 96 tells us that when he finally wins for good, the trees themselves will sing for joy and nature itself will explode with glory. But until then, whenever he takes a heart, there's singing and there's light and there's joy, and your amnesia lifts and your eyes clear up and you say, it's you. The myth has become a fact. The legend has stepped into history. The eternal has become reality.

Now, you know, that wonderful writer J. R. R. Tolkien, in one of his essays, puts it so perfectly. He says this writing like a writer, all right? He says the gospel is that the underlying reality and truth that all good stories glimpse and give you that joy when you read them or you hear them. The underlying joy and truth and reality that all good stories glimpse has actually broken into history. Jesus Christ, God become man, dying for our sins, rising triumphant over the graves. He says it's the one story that's the truth. It's the one myth that's the fact behind all the myths. It's come into history and it's so lodged at the root of our thinking and our hearts. Tolkien says that. He says, and I quote, "To reject it leads either to sadness or to wrath." It's the one story that's true. And if you reject it, you'll live all your life in despair. And you'll look at the other stories and read the other stories and go to the movies and go to the plays and get the joy, but it goes out because it's just a play. And down comes the curtain, and you're out in the darkness and it's gone. But the king has landed. The Word became flesh, and he's revealing himself to us. We beheld his glory, and he's getting an army together and he's going to roll back the darkness, receive him and roll. That's what John is saying.

So we've already come in a way to our second point. The Word became flesh, myth became a fact. The eternal became reality. The legend broke into history. So what? Why? What's the

purpose? And we've already touched on it. It's over here. Second points are always over here.

We beheld his glory. Actually, sometimes they're over there, aren't they? We beheld his glory. Now, the reason that none of us or very few of us here are dumbfounded by that statement is because we know so little about God. Anybody of the Jewish faith who had read this when John wrote it thousands of years ago, now, any Jewish believers or any Jewish people who are reading this would have immediately been absolutely thunderstruck by the claim *and we beheld his glory.* You know, we have really sentimentalized the presence of God. When we think about the presence of God, we think of something so cozy. We think of tea by the fire. You know, the presence of God, and right, Jack Frost nipping at your nose. That's not the way the Bible depicts the presence of God. And any Jewish people reading this must have been dumbfounded because they know that the presence of God is the most potent and dangerous substance, the most dangerous thing in the universe.

In Exodus chapter 19 and 20, when God comes down on Mount Sinai, he turns it into a raging inferno, and he says, don't get too close. My presence is on the mountain. And he's very concerned. He says, if you come forward too close or if you touch the mountain, my glory might break through and kill you. And in Exodus 33, when Moses said, I want to see your glory. I want to see you face to face, what did God say? He says, well, just cuddle up here, you know, just cozy on up, and I'll just open myself to you. No, he says, Moses, if you see my glory, it will kill you. Now, why?

A lot of people really hate that part of the Bible. Really hate that whole idea. Can't believe a God like that. But we're not talking about a God who's cranky or cantankerous. Is God like Sherman McCoy in *Bonfire of the Vanities*, who always takes a limo to work because he doesn't want to deal with the riffraff, you see, he just doesn't want us around? Is that the reason why the holiness of God is traumatic and fatal to us sinful human beings? No, not because he's cranky. It's because of who he is and who we are.

Still the best illustration, the best illustration, I still have to keep coming back to this one is the illustration of the solar system. Look, when you get a bunch of planets together, the only way that they can be a system and not a junkyard. The reason a bunch of planets can be a system is they all agree on having the same center. All of their centers are the same. That's why they're a system. That's why they can work together. That's why they're not colliding with each other. If you get a bunch of planets together who have different centers for their orbits, they destroy each other. You see? They mash each other.

All right, now look at God for a moment. He centers. He's the center of all things. He is the center. He is the solar. He's the source. And he makes everything turn on his own glory and goodness, or another way to put it, is all of his actions, all of his attitudes, everything turns

upon his glory and goodness. The only reason he does anything is because it's right, because it's true, because it's good, because it's holy. So, you see, everything turns upon his goodness and his righteousness and his truth.

All right, now look at you. What is your center? What do you orbit around? Or better yet, put it this way. What do all of your decisions turn upon? What do all of your actions turn upon? What really controls them? Is it truth? Is it righteousness? And if we're honest, we'll say, well, we'll take it into consideration if something's true. We'll take it into consideration if it's righteous. But what really is the thing that all of our actions and desires turn upon is our happiness. That's the bottom line. That's the center. That's what everything turns on. Does this fulfill me? Does this please me? Does this give me joy and honor? Does this give me comfort?

Well, when you get God and man together, what happens? It's like getting planets together. They don't have the same center. There's a cataclysm. And so when God and man ever gets together, there's immediately the sensation of tremendous tension. Because his center, everything turns around and turns upon holiness and truth and righteousness. But in our case, everything turns upon comfort, fulfillment, and our own joy. And so when we get together, there's this tremendous trauma. There's this tremendous antipathy.

Now, I don't believe, if you know yourself, that I'm talking about anything very abstract. You know it personally. Whenever we get close to God, I just mean not close to whatever or any kind of description, but whenever you start to hear the real God of the Bible described, whenever you start to draw close and really deal with him as he reveals himself to be in the Bible, you don't like him. If you really allow yourself to act through your instincts to see what's really down there, talking from your own center, you start to feel. You start to say things like this. You growl and you say, why did you let this happen? Why did this go this way and this go this way? If you're in charge, why did you let that happen in my life? And you're kind of surprised at your own bitterness. And you feel profoundly guilty, and you turn around and you get out. You leave. You're uncomfortable. Why? Because you see two different centers. Him, everything, everything he does devolves and turns on holiness and righteousness and truth. And everything we really are concerned about is what makes me happy, what pleases me, what is my own comfort, what fulfills me. And just like Adam, when he got near God, had to run and dive into the leaves. We find ourselves running away too. We're scared of him, we're afraid of him. We're guilty, we're angry. Yet underneath the fear, at a deeper level than the fear, there's this desire for his beauty. There's this desire to be near him. Like Moses. We're saying, I'm afraid of you, but show me your glory. And that is the missing chapter. This is the thing that explains all the contradictions of our city, explains all the contradictions of our lives. Why there's so much greatness and so much depravity at the same time. Why? Why is human society such a contradiction? Because there it is. This

is the human condition. We can't live with him and we can't live without him. We're running toward him and we're running away from him.

At the same time, we're whiplash back and forth between this deep need for God and this absolute fear and a revulsion. Why do you think we go back and forth the way we do? Why do you think you got the approach avoidance thing you've always had with religion? Why? Why do you think? Because on the one hand, we're struggling to get near him. On the other hand, we're struggling to get away from him at the same time. If you don't understand that, if you don't understand that, your whole life will make no sense. It's the missing chapter. If you don't understand that, the world and history make no sense, it's the missing chapter. And yet John then has the audacity to say yes, in spite of the fact that glory of God, the holiness and presence of God is something fatal and traumatic to human beings. Now in Jesus Christ, we behold his glory.

How could that be? How could that be? How could it be that the thing that was denied to Moses comes to us? How could it be that the raw presence and power that turned a mountain range into a raging inferno is now in our hearts and is all a burning joy and strength? How could that be? How could we have overcome this approach avoidance problem? We were running toward him and running back, away from him at the same time.

And the answer is, it's right here in the doctrine of the Incarnation. Jesus Christ is the God-Man. You see, the wages of our sin, the punishment for trying to be our own king, is death. For Jesus to pay that, he had to be a real man, a real human being had to pay that. Not an angel, not a demiurge, not some kind of apparition, but a real human being. But on the other hand, he not only had to be man, he had to be God, because He was God. His death and his blood had infinite value. It can pay for anything. It can pay for all of us. That's why In Acts chapter 20, we're told the church is. We're told the church is something that God purchased with his own blood. And what is the blood of God worth? What is the value of the blood of God? Infinite. It's anything. And therefore, God is actually able to cover our sins. And therefore, he's able to come into our life with his presence. So, it's no longer a hostile and a fatal thing. And he can melt us and change us and turn us toward him. And that's the reason why this unbelievable privilege belongs to anybody who approaches God, through Jesus Christ, we beheld his glory. The vision of God is the most exciting and the most satisfying experience possible.

The Bible tells us that on the final day we'll see him. And the minute we see him, that will inflict in us a joy and a glory that will never go out. It will transform us utterly. And yet even here on earth, when we receive Christ as Savior by faith in a partial way, we still can come into his presence. We still can sense his presence. We still can see his glory. And even in a faith partial way, not the literal final way at the end of time, but even in a faith partial way, that's an astounding and transforming experience. That's why in First Peter 1:8, Peter says

to Christians he's writing to, he says, "Though you do not see him with the eye, yet you love him. And believing you rejoice with joy, unutterable and big with glory."

Did you hear that? You don't see him literally, but you love him. This is something that's available in Jesus. And believing, you rejoice with joy, unutterable and big with glory, it changes anybody who has that experience. What made Paul the way he was? What gave him the courage to be beaten and stoned and flogged and to keep on going back? What gave him the wisdom and skill? He says this slight, momentary affliction. Slight. That's really. That's one of the big jokes of the Bible; this slight momentary affliction. What makes it slight doesn't feel slight, does it, friends? But it is the way Paul looks at it. This slight momentary affliction is being outweighed by a far greater weight of glory. He's seen it. He's changed.

There's an old puritan that wrote this, John Flavelle, he says, and listen, "All good things lie in the vision of God. Just as all rivers come from and are in the ocean." Why are your emotions and minds unsatisfied by all the things you have here?

You bring a great ship into a narrow channel and she can't sail, but she runs aground. But give her sea room and depth and she sails like the wind. And so it is here all that delights you on earth can never satisfy you. The comforts you have here are only drops inflaming and not satisfying the appetites of the soul. But the lamb will lead you to fountains of living water. You know what he's saying? He's not talking about anything esoteric. You know what he's talking about? The joy. When you first fell in love, the first time you thought, now I get the joy. Or maybe when you first got married, now I get the joy. Or when you finally got into the career, the field that you wanted to, you broke in, now I get the joy.

And you know what? It never came through. Why not? Because you mistook the river for the ocean. Because you mistook. These things are just little drops that inflame your thirst but cannot possibly fulfill it. And you will destroy your relationships. If you think, now I get the joy, a lot of you listen. Some of you may not be married because he's got to be perfect. Why? Because that's the only I got to get the joy. That way you'll destroy him or her. If you try to say, there you're mistaking the river for the ocean. You'll destroy your marriage. You'll destroy your career.

You know, it's so odd, is there was this commercial for a psychiatric hospital. And in the commercial, it was a TV commercial, and it showed a man coming home to all of his beautiful house and his children and his wife being very depressed. And it shows him being depressed. And then it asks this question. Do you come home to all the things you've ever wanted and feel you had nothing? Do you come home to all the things you've ever wanted and still it's not enough? They say you need psychiatric help. The Bible says you're finally seeing things as they really are. The commercial says you're going insane. The Bible says you're finally going sane. You know, of course, all the things you've ever wanted aren't

enough. There's enough people out here, I'm sure, that have finally figured that out. I don't suggest that you check into the hospital. Yet you're seeing things as they are. Of course, those things aren't enough. They're the river, they're drops.

This is the joy; *we beheld his glory*. Now, look, if it's true that myth became fact, if it's true, the legend broke into history. If it's true that God became man and now, we behold his glory. Let me just close by saying nobody in this room can possibly walk out the same.

If you say, right now, I want this truth in my life, it's the missing chapter in my life. I want to start to live as if it's true. If it is true, then it should affect you like this. First of all, if Jesus Christ is king, some of you need to meet him. Have you met the king? Has he revealed himself to you? Are you in the army that he's raising? The purpose, this chapter tells us the purpose of Christianity is to show you that God is not an abstraction or somebody to be followed in a general way. He is someone to be beheld. This truth tells us that he's a person to be beheld. It has to be.

You know, people say, oh, you know, the reason there aren't a lot of Christians around New York City. New York is big, and it's jaded and it's cynical and it's debauched and it's sophisticated. I know a city that was a lot worse. It was called Rome. More debauched, more jaded, more cynical, more violent. And Christianity swept through that place. People were getting converted so fast, faster than they could throw them to the lions, they kept on getting converted. What could have possibly swept through a city like that? And of course, the same thing could sweep through this city if it's seen to be what it is. Christianity is not a set of mythical principles. I'm not talking when I say, have you met the King? I'm not saying, do you say your prayers? Do you go to church? Are you a moral person? Have you met him? Christianity is a person to meet, to receive, to be beheld. That's what this is saying. Have you met him? Have you received him?

Are you really a Christian? Don't tell me. Well, I say my prayers. I'm a pretty good person. You know, if you've met somebody, don't hold on to your life. One writer said, the main principle of hell is this. The one principle of hell is I am my own. And if you hold onto yourself, in the end, you'll be utterly and completely alone. You've got to give yourself to him and you've got to say, I've been seeing you, O Jesus Christ, as a teacher, as a model, as an example, or as a kind of mythological figure. And now I see you as someone who entered history to be my deliverer and my king. I receive you as that. You got to know him.

Secondly, if Jesus Christ is the king come to earth, if he's really God, come, man. Let me say something to Christian brothers and sisters. My dear friends, do you know what the Bible is saying? The Bible is saying that you can see his glory. When I read you that verse, 1st Peter 1:8, where Peter says to the Christians, he assumes this. He says, well, you've never seen him with your naked eye, but you love him and you rejoice every day with joy,

unutterable and big with glory. Now, do you? Do you really know him? When you pray, when you get near him, does his love become real to you?

Does his passion become real to you? Do you feel his support when you read about him? Do you find that the spirit of God comes and makes the ideas about him big and majestic, big with glory? Do you look at his cross and you see, do you see all of his attributes shining there in a harmonious way? Do you say, the cross, how could God hate, sin and love me at the same time? The cross. And it just electrifies you and builds you up. Does that happen?

“Well,” you say. Some of you say, “it’s been a long time since I felt like that.” There’s a place where Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist minister, says. He says, “You know, there have been times in which when I was praying the glove and the glory came in so hard, I had to say, please stop. And tell God, you’ve got to stop, because I think I’m going to die.” And I read that sort of thing and I’ll be very happy to confess to you now, I know shamelessly little of that. What about you? Will you admit it to yourself? I’m not admitting it to you. I’m not asking you to admit nearly as much. Just admit it to yourself. It’s your life. It’s available to you.

“Well,” you say, “Spurgeon, those people, they were great saints of old.” They were availing themselves of exactly what you have available to you. And that is a God who wants to be beheld. Look at everything he’s done to come near. Look how far he’s come to come near. What do you have to do? I call you to do this.

Whatever there is between you and him, whatever hedge is there, whatever fence is there whatever is keeping you from having that knowledge of his presence and the sense of his glory, you’ve got to tear it down. What is it? Are you just too busy? Are you so distracted you don’t have time to behold him? Is it because there’s some resentment, some self pity in your life that’s holding you back? You’re killing your joy? Is it some area where you’re just being disobedient? Listen, friends, obedience is so hard. But disobedience is impossible. And those are the only two alternatives. Go back. Come. It’s only hard at first.

Lastly, if Jesus Christ is God come to earth, my dear friends, we have to repent of our cynicism. There are people in your life that you’ve given up on. There are areas of your life that you’ve given up on. There are situations you’ve given up on. And you know why? Because you say I can’t be idealistic anymore. So you’ve gotten cynical. You spent part of your life in which you were idealistic. Yes, things can change and now you’re cynical. Nothing can change. Listen. You know the old Broadway hit *Man of La Mancha*?

It talks about an old man that goes berserk. And he thinks he’s a noble knight, Don Quixote. And he goes into an inn and he sees a prostitute, Aldonza. And he goes up to her and he says, my lady. And he treats her as royalty. And he gives her a new name. And he insists

that she's a wonderful, lovely princess. And she hates it. And she keeps coming back and she says. She says, I hate this. My mother left me in a ditch, naked, cold, too hungry to live. She wanted me to die there. My father was a regiment in for an hour. I don't even know which side. I know who I am. I'm nothing. Let go of me. Stop it. And yet he keeps it up. And in the end of the story, she acknowledges that she has been changed. And at one point she cries and she says, you sang songs to me. You spoke of a quest. You spoke of a bearing unbearable sorrow, marching into hell for a heavenly cause. And it's changed me. And she takes the new name and she realizes she's been transformed. But the whole point of the play is the reason that Don Quixote, the reason this guy can do this, is because he has opted for madness. And at a key place in the play, he gets up and he says, who's to say what madness is? Maddest of all to see life as it is and not as it ought to be. See, there's a concrete, a concrete slab between life as it is and as it ought to be. Between the real and the ideal. And Don Quixote says, if you're going to be an idealist, you've got to be mad. And that's what I'm going to do.

But Christians, my dear friends, you can't. You can't. You can't fall into that. Because a Christian knows the doctrine of the Incarnation. We must not and need not be either cynics or madmen. But instead, we know this, that the real and the ideal are no longer separated. Because the ideal became real. Because the myth became a fact. Because our great captain, Jesus Christ, has punched a hole in the roof of the world. And the ideal, his power, has come on into our lives. And you dare not sit back and be cynical about anything in your life.

There are Aldonzas around that you need to treat as royalty. Until you see them transformed. Because you know they are, and because you know what's in store for them. You don't have to be mad. Not only that, like Aldonza, you may here today feel like gutter grime. But he gives you a new name. And the power of the ideal is in history. It's been loosed and it can come into your life. Our captain has opened a hole in the pitiless walls of the world and says, come in with me. I came back for you. Now let's go. Come to him. The real. The ideal. The ideal became real and it's transforming it into its likeness.

Let's pray. Our Father. Now we end by asking in this time, as we take the offering, as we listen to the music, we pray that you would enable us to offer to you ourselves.

Some of us need to meet you for the first time. Some of us need to get rid of the barriers that are keeping us from really experiencing you, your love and your glory. Some of you, some of us, Father, have given up on areas of our lives because we think we're being realistic. When you, O Lord Jesus Christ, have broken through with all of the power of the other world, you revealed yourself to us and now you are enlisting us in your army. And anything is possible. Lord, forgive us. Help us to behold your glory.

We pray it in Jesus Christ's name. Amen.

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Let's look at it. John is giving us, in these few verses, verses 14 to 18, the great doctrine of the Incarnation. And the doctrine of the Incarnation in a nutshell, is that the Divine One, the One who is beyond all time and space, has come down into nature and taken upon himself a human nature, and actually and really become one of us and dwells with us. *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.* Now, why? You know, by the way, everybody tells preachers, people don't want doctrine, especially not people in New York City. Give them something that will inspire them, help them get through the week. Who needs a dusty old doctrine, especially one with such a long name, Incarnation. But I'm not going to insult you like that. Oh, no. Because I want you to know that there isn't anything more practical than this doctrine. This doctrine is your only hope.

Imagine for a moment somebody gives you a book. And it's a very weird book because on the one hand, there's passages of tremendous profundity and beauty in them, and they're fascinating. And yet the book just doesn't hold together. You just can't follow it. There's too many loose ends, there's too many inexplicable parts. And you read it and reread it, and you can't really make sense out of it. And then one day somebody comes along and says, guess what? There was a chapter missing. And here it is. And they give you the missing chapter, and it's the center of the whole book. And now when you read the chapter with that, I mean, the whole book with that chapter in it, not only does the chapter explain everything, all the inexplicable parts now start to get coherent. It explains all the themes, all the plot and the plot angles that you couldn't figure out before. But not only that, the missing chapter enables you to see all kinds of new meanings that were already in the book, but that you couldn't see before. And friends, listen. Now you read it with just joy, because now the profundity and the beauty is also coherent. And you say, this is wonderful. And you read it and you weep.

The radical claim of Christianity is that the doctrine of the Incarnation is the missing chapter, not only in human history, but in your own personal life history, your life, our human history is like that great and confusing book. And this is the chapter and this is the center of it all. And if you receive it, it begins to all make sense. And the beauty of it will pierce your heart like a sword. And if you reject it, you'll stay in darkness. What could be more practical than that?

Now look, the doctrine of the Incarnation, as John gives it here is really fairly simple. It's got two parts to it. First of all, John says the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God really became a man. Jesus Christ really came down and became one of us. But then why did he do it? Just for a show? No, John says there's a purpose to the Incarnation and that is so we might behold his glory. *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.* That's the two things.

And let's just look at them for a moment. First, he really came to earth. God really became man. So many of the novels and of the epics and the songs and the legends of the ages have a recurring myth in them, a recurring theme. It recurs with amazing regularity and it goes like, there's a great king or a great person in our life, and when we have him, everything is golden. But he leaves. And it looks like he'll never be back. And everything goes wrong when he leaves. And our country falls under evil influences. But in the nick of time, just before all hope is gone, he returns and he reveals himself to his followers and he gets an army together and he takes back his own.

I mean, that's the Robin Hood myth. That's the Arthurian myth in many ways. And all those legends, that's the heart of the Lord of the Rings, the famous and well-known modern epic. It's certainly the theme of, of just countless science fiction novels, but it's even there in the songs. You baby boomers, you remember The Youngbloods? Do you remember who they were? And they had this one song that went like this. It says, songs may come and songs may go. We will surely pass when the one who's left us here returns for us at last. We are but a moment's sunlight fading on the grass. The one who left us here, the one from another world, when will he come back for us? See, it keeps coming up in so many songs and epics. Why? The Bible has a reason.

The Bible gives an explanation. And it goes like this. The Bible says, because there really was a high king, and we all lived in his light and his glory and his warmth. But we decided to set ourselves up as our own kings. We decided to be our own masters. And in a sense, what we did when we did that, was we pulled our roots out of the only soil, the soil of his presence, the only soil which can really nourish the greatness that he put into us at the beginning. And so when we decided to be our own king, the king left. And when the king left, a darkness and a cold fell on the world and fell on our heart. And nature went haywire. And our own hearts just shriveled up and shrunk up so we could experience very little joy. And

we forgot who we were. But even as the king was leaving, he turned and he whispered a promise.

The Bible tells us all about this. You can see it. The promise is in Genesis 3:16. Look at it sometime. The king turns around and he whispers a promise, and he says, I'll be back. I'll be back. I'm going to come back and I'm going to do battle against the evil and against the cold and the darkness that you let in here. And I'm going to suffer and I'm going to be bruised, but I'm going to win. I'll be back for you. And then he left. And you see, that promise has been living consciously and unconsciously in us for years. Forever. And it's come down to us in countless myths and legends and epics.

And now John makes the announcement. John, chapter one, verse 18. And what's that announcement? The king has landed, and he's revealing himself to his followers, and he's getting an army together, and he's going to roll back the darkness. You know, the Word became flesh. The king has landed, and we beheld his glory. He's revealing himself to his followers, full of grace and truth. He's come here to roll back all the darkness.

Psalm 96 tells us that when he finally wins for good, the trees themselves will sing for joy and nature itself will explode with glory. But until then, whenever he takes a heart, there's singing and there's light and there's joy, and your amnesia lifts and your eyes clear up and you say, it's you. The myth has become a fact. The legend has stepped into history. The eternal has become reality.

Now, you know, that wonderful writer J. R. R. Tolkien, in one of his essays, puts it so perfectly. He says this writing like a writer, all right? He says the gospel is that the underlying reality and truth that all good stories glimpse and give you that joy when you read them or you hear them. The underlying joy and truth and reality that all good stories glimpse has actually broken into history. Jesus Christ, God become man, dying for our sins, rising triumphant over the graves. He says it's the one story that's the truth. It's the one myth that's the fact behind all the myths. It's come into history and it's so lodged at the root of our thinking and our hearts. Tolkien says that. He says, and I quote, "To reject it leads either to sadness or to wrath." It's the one story that's true. And if you reject it, you'll live all your life in despair. And you'll look at the other stories and read the other stories and go to the movies and go to the plays and get the joy, but it goes out because it's just a play. And down comes the curtain, and you're out in the darkness and it's gone. But the king has landed. The Word became flesh, and he's revealing himself to us. We beheld his glory, and he's getting an army together and he's going to roll back the darkness, receive him and roll. That's what John is saying.

So we've already come in a way to our second point. The Word became flesh, myth became a fact. The eternal became reality. The legend broke into history. So what? Why? What's the

purpose? And we've already touched on it. It's over here. Second points are always over here.

We beheld his glory. Actually, sometimes they're over there, aren't they? We beheld his glory. Now, the reason that none of us or very few of us here are dumbfounded by that statement is because we know so little about God. Anybody of the Jewish faith who had read this when John wrote it thousands of years ago, now, any Jewish believers or any Jewish people who are reading this would have immediately been absolutely thunderstruck by the claim *and we beheld his glory.* You know, we have really sentimentalized the presence of God. When we think about the presence of God, we think of something so cozy. We think of tea by the fire. You know, the presence of God, and right, Jack Frost nipping at your nose. That's not the way the Bible depicts the presence of God. And any Jewish people reading this must have been dumbfounded because they know that the presence of God is the most potent and dangerous substance, the most dangerous thing in the universe.

In Exodus chapter 19 and 20, when God comes down on Mount Sinai, he turns it into a raging inferno, and he says, don't get too close. My presence is on the mountain. And he's very concerned. He says, if you come forward too close or if you touch the mountain, my glory might break through and kill you. And in Exodus 33, when Moses said, I want to see your glory. I want to see you face to face, what did God say? He says, well, just cuddle up here, you know, just cozy on up, and I'll just open myself to you. No, he says, Moses, if you see my glory, it will kill you. Now, why?

A lot of people really hate that part of the Bible. Really hate that whole idea. Can't believe a God like that. But we're not talking about a God who's cranky or cantankerous. Is God like Sherman McCoy in *Bonfire of the Vanities*, who always takes a limo to work because he doesn't want to deal with the riffraff, you see, he just doesn't want us around? Is that the reason why the holiness of God is traumatic and fatal to us sinful human beings? No, not because he's cranky. It's because of who he is and who we are.

Still the best illustration, the best illustration, I still have to keep coming back to this one is the illustration of the solar system. Look, when you get a bunch of planets together, the only way that they can be a system and not a junkyard. The reason a bunch of planets can be a system is they all agree on having the same center. All of their centers are the same. That's why they're a system. That's why they can work together. That's why they're not colliding with each other. If you get a bunch of planets together who have different centers for their orbits, they destroy each other. You see? They mash each other.

All right, now look at God for a moment. He centers. He's the center of all things. He is the center. He is the solar. He's the source. And he makes everything turn on his own glory and goodness, or another way to put it, is all of his actions, all of his attitudes, everything turns

upon his glory and goodness. The only reason he does anything is because it's right, because it's true, because it's good, because it's holy. So, you see, everything turns upon his goodness and his righteousness and his truth.

All right, now look at you. What is your center? What do you orbit around? Or better yet, put it this way. What do all of your decisions turn upon? What do all of your actions turn upon? What really controls them? Is it truth? Is it righteousness? And if we're honest, we'll say, well, we'll take it into consideration if something's true. We'll take it into consideration if it's righteous. But what really is the thing that all of our actions and desires turn upon is our happiness. That's the bottom line. That's the center. That's what everything turns on. Does this fulfill me? Does this please me? Does this give me joy and honor? Does this give me comfort?

Well, when you get God and man together, what happens? It's like getting planets together. They don't have the same center. There's a cataclysm. And so when God and man ever gets together, there's immediately the sensation of tremendous tension. Because his center, everything turns around and turns upon holiness and truth and righteousness. But in our case, everything turns upon comfort, fulfillment, and our own joy. And so when we get together, there's this tremendous trauma. There's this tremendous antipathy.

Now, I don't believe, if you know yourself, that I'm talking about anything very abstract. You know it personally. Whenever we get close to God, I just mean not close to whatever or any kind of description, but whenever you start to hear the real God of the Bible described, whenever you start to draw close and really deal with him as he reveals himself to be in the Bible, you don't like him. If you really allow yourself to act through your instincts to see what's really down there, talking from your own center, you start to feel. You start to say things like this. You growl and you say, why did you let this happen? Why did this go this way and this go this way? If you're in charge, why did you let that happen in my life? And you're kind of surprised at your own bitterness. And you feel profoundly guilty, and you turn around and you get out. You leave. You're uncomfortable. Why? Because you see two different centers. Him, everything, everything he does devolves and turns on holiness and righteousness and truth. And everything we really are concerned about is what makes me happy, what pleases me, what is my own comfort, what fulfills me. And just like Adam, when he got near God, had to run and dive into the leaves. We find ourselves running away too. We're scared of him, we're afraid of him. We're guilty, we're angry. Yet underneath the fear, at a deeper level than the fear, there's this desire for his beauty. There's this desire to be near him. Like Moses. We're saying, I'm afraid of you, but show me your glory. And that is the missing chapter. This is the thing that explains all the contradictions of our city, explains all the contradictions of our lives. Why there's so much greatness and so much depravity at the same time. Why? Why is human society such a contradiction? Because there it is. This

is the human condition. We can't live with him and we can't live without him. We're running toward him and we're running away from him.

At the same time, we're whiplash back and forth between this deep need for God and this absolute fear and a revulsion. Why do you think we go back and forth the way we do? Why do you think you got the approach avoidance thing you've always had with religion? Why? Why do you think? Because on the one hand, we're struggling to get near him. On the other hand, we're struggling to get away from him at the same time. If you don't understand that, if you don't understand that, your whole life will make no sense. It's the missing chapter. If you don't understand that, the world and history make no sense, it's the missing chapter. And yet John then has the audacity to say yes, in spite of the fact that glory of God, the holiness and presence of God is something fatal and traumatic to human beings. Now in Jesus Christ, we behold his glory.

How could that be? How could that be? How could it be that the thing that was denied to Moses comes to us? How could it be that the raw presence and power that turned a mountain range into a raging inferno is now in our hearts and is all a burning joy and strength? How could that be? How could we have overcome this approach avoidance problem? We were running toward him and running back, away from him at the same time.

And the answer is, it's right here in the doctrine of the Incarnation. Jesus Christ is the God-Man. You see, the wages of our sin, the punishment for trying to be our own king, is death. For Jesus to pay that, he had to be a real man, a real human being had to pay that. Not an angel, not a demiurge, not some kind of apparition, but a real human being. But on the other hand, he not only had to be man, he had to be God, because He was God. His death and his blood had infinite value. It can pay for anything. It can pay for all of us. That's why In Acts chapter 20, we're told the church is. We're told the church is something that God purchased with his own blood. And what is the blood of God worth? What is the value of the blood of God? Infinite. It's anything. And therefore, God is actually able to cover our sins. And therefore, he's able to come into our life with his presence. So, it's no longer a hostile and a fatal thing. And he can melt us and change us and turn us toward him. And that's the reason why this unbelievable privilege belongs to anybody who approaches God, through Jesus Christ, we beheld his glory. The vision of God is the most exciting and the most satisfying experience possible.

The Bible tells us that on the final day we'll see him. And the minute we see him, that will inflict in us a joy and a glory that will never go out. It will transform us utterly. And yet even here on earth, when we receive Christ as Savior by faith in a partial way, we still can come into his presence. We still can sense his presence. We still can see his glory. And even in a faith partial way, not the literal final way at the end of time, but even in a faith partial way, that's an astounding and transforming experience. That's why in First Peter 1:8, Peter says

to Christians he's writing to, he says, "Though you do not see him with the eye, yet you love him. And believing you rejoice with joy, unutterable and big with glory."

Did you hear that? You don't see him literally, but you love him. This is something that's available in Jesus. And believing, you rejoice with joy, unutterable and big with glory, it changes anybody who has that experience. What made Paul the way he was? What gave him the courage to be beaten and stoned and flogged and to keep on going back? What gave him the wisdom and skill? He says this slight, momentary affliction. Slight. That's really. That's one of the big jokes of the Bible; this slight momentary affliction. What makes it slight doesn't feel slight, does it, friends? But it is the way Paul looks at it. This slight momentary affliction is being outweighed by a far greater weight of glory. He's seen it. He's changed.

There's an old puritan that wrote this, John Flavelle, he says, and listen, "All good things lie in the vision of God. Just as all rivers come from and are in the ocean." Why are your emotions and minds unsatisfied by all the things you have here?

You bring a great ship into a narrow channel and she can't sail, but she runs aground. But give her sea room and depth and she sails like the wind. And so it is here all that delights you on earth can never satisfy you. The comforts you have here are only drops inflaming and not satisfying the appetites of the soul. But the lamb will lead you to fountains of living water. You know what he's saying? He's not talking about anything esoteric. You know what he's talking about? The joy. When you first fell in love, the first time you thought, now I get the joy. Or maybe when you first got married, now I get the joy. Or when you finally got into the career, the field that you wanted to, you broke in, now I get the joy.

And you know what? It never came through. Why not? Because you mistook the river for the ocean. Because you mistook. These things are just little drops that inflame your thirst but cannot possibly fulfill it. And you will destroy your relationships. If you think, now I get the joy, a lot of you listen. Some of you may not be married because he's got to be perfect. Why? Because that's the only I got to get the joy. That way you'll destroy him or her. If you try to say, there you're mistaking the river for the ocean. You'll destroy your marriage. You'll destroy your career.

You know, it's so odd, is there was this commercial for a psychiatric hospital. And in the commercial, it was a TV commercial, and it showed a man coming home to all of his beautiful house and his children and his wife being very depressed. And it shows him being depressed. And then it asks this question. Do you come home to all the things you've ever wanted and feel you had nothing? Do you come home to all the things you've ever wanted and still it's not enough? They say you need psychiatric help. The Bible says you're finally seeing things as they really are. The commercial says you're going insane. The Bible says you're finally going sane. You know, of course, all the things you've ever wanted aren't

enough. There's enough people out here, I'm sure, that have finally figured that out. I don't suggest that you check into the hospital. Yet you're seeing things as they are. Of course, those things aren't enough. They're the river, they're drops.

This is the joy; *we beheld his glory*. Now, look, if it's true that myth became fact, if it's true, the legend broke into history. If it's true that God became man and now, we behold his glory. Let me just close by saying nobody in this room can possibly walk out the same.

If you say, right now, I want this truth in my life, it's the missing chapter in my life. I want to start to live as if it's true. If it is true, then it should affect you like this. First of all, if Jesus Christ is king, some of you need to meet him. Have you met the king? Has he revealed himself to you? Are you in the army that he's raising? The purpose, this chapter tells us the purpose of Christianity is to show you that God is not an abstraction or somebody to be followed in a general way. He is someone to be beheld. This truth tells us that he's a person to be beheld. It has to be.

You know, people say, oh, you know, the reason there aren't a lot of Christians around New York City. New York is big, and it's jaded and it's cynical and it's debauched and it's sophisticated. I know a city that was a lot worse. It was called Rome. More debauched, more jaded, more cynical, more violent. And Christianity swept through that place. People were getting converted so fast, faster than they could throw them to the lions, they kept on getting converted. What could have possibly swept through a city like that? And of course, the same thing could sweep through this city if it's seen to be what it is. Christianity is not a set of mythical principles. I'm not talking when I say, have you met the King? I'm not saying, do you say your prayers? Do you go to church? Are you a moral person? Have you met him? Christianity is a person to meet, to receive, to be beheld. That's what this is saying. Have you met him? Have you received him?

Are you really a Christian? Don't tell me. Well, I say my prayers. I'm a pretty good person. You know, if you've met somebody, don't hold on to your life. One writer said, the main principle of hell is this. The one principle of hell is I am my own. And if you hold onto yourself, in the end, you'll be utterly and completely alone. You've got to give yourself to him and you've got to say, I've been seeing you, O Jesus Christ, as a teacher, as a model, as an example, or as a kind of mythological figure. And now I see you as someone who entered history to be my deliverer and my king. I receive you as that. You got to know him.

Secondly, if Jesus Christ is the king come to earth, if he's really God, come, man. Let me say something to Christian brothers and sisters. My dear friends, do you know what the Bible is saying? The Bible is saying that you can see his glory. When I read you that verse, 1st Peter 1:8, where Peter says to the Christians, he assumes this. He says, well, you've never seen him with your naked eye, but you love him and you rejoice every day with joy,

unutterable and big with glory. Now, do you? Do you really know him? When you pray, when you get near him, does his love become real to you?

Does his passion become real to you? Do you feel his support when you read about him? Do you find that the spirit of God comes and makes the ideas about him big and majestic, big with glory? Do you look at his cross and you see, do you see all of his attributes shining there in a harmonious way? Do you say, the cross, how could God hate, sin and love me at the same time? The cross. And it just electrifies you and builds you up. Does that happen?

“Well,” you say. Some of you say, “it’s been a long time since I felt like that.” There’s a place where Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist minister, says. He says, “You know, there have been times in which when I was praying the gloom and the glory came in so hard, I had to say, please stop. And tell God, you’ve got to stop, because I think I’m going to die.” And I read that sort of thing and I’ll be very happy to confess to you now, I know shamelessly little of that. What about you? Will you admit it to yourself? I’m not admitting it to you. I’m not asking you to admit nearly as much. Just admit it to yourself. It’s your life. It’s available to you.

“Well,” you say, “Spurgeon, those people, they were great saints of old.” They were availing themselves of exactly what you have available to you. And that is a God who wants to be beheld. Look at everything he’s done to come near. Look how far he’s come to come near. What do you have to do? I call you to do this.

Whatever there is between you and him, whatever hedge is there, whatever fence is there whatever is keeping you from having that knowledge of his presence and the sense of his glory, you’ve got to tear it down. What is it? Are you just too busy? Are you so distracted you don’t have time to behold him? Is it because there’s some resentment, some self pity in your life that’s holding you back? You’re killing your joy? Is it some area where you’re just being disobedient? Listen, friends, obedience is so hard. But disobedience is impossible. And those are the only two alternatives. Go back. Come. It’s only hard at first.

Lastly, if Jesus Christ is God come to earth, my dear friends, we have to repent of our cynicism. There are people in your life that you’ve given up on. There are areas of your life that you’ve given up on. There are situations you’ve given up on. And you know why? Because you say I can’t be idealistic anymore. So you’ve gotten cynical. You spent part of your life in which you were idealistic. Yes, things can change and now you’re cynical. Nothing can change. Listen. You know the old Broadway hit *Man of La Mancha*?

It talks about an old man that goes berserk. And he thinks he’s a noble knight, Don Quixote. And he goes into an inn and he sees a prostitute, Aldonza. And he goes up to her and he says, my lady. And he treats her as royalty. And he gives her a new name. And he insists

that she's a wonderful, lovely princess. And she hates it. And she keeps coming back and she says. She says, I hate this. My mother left me in a ditch, naked, cold, too hungry to live. She wanted me to die there. My father was a regiment in for an hour. I don't even know which side. I know who I am. I'm nothing. Let go of me. Stop it. And yet he keeps it up. And in the end of the story, she acknowledges that she has been changed. And at one point she cries and she says, you sang songs to me. You spoke of a quest. You spoke of a bearing unbearable sorrow, marching into hell for a heavenly cause. And it's changed me. And she takes the new name and she realizes she's been transformed. But the whole point of the play is the reason that Don Quixote, the reason this guy can do this, is because he has opted for madness. And at a key place in the play, he gets up and he says, who's to say what madness is? Maddest of all to see life as it is and not as it ought to be. See, there's a concrete, a concrete slab between life as it is and as it ought to be. Between the real and the ideal. And Don Quixote says, if you're going to be an idealist, you've got to be mad. And that's what I'm going to do.

But Christians, my dear friends, you can't. You can't. You can't fall into that. Because a Christian knows the doctrine of the Incarnation. We must not and need not be either cynics or madmen. But instead, we know this, that the real and the ideal are no longer separated. Because the ideal became real. Because the myth became a fact. Because our great captain, Jesus Christ, has punched a hole in the roof of the world. And the ideal, his power, has come on into our lives. And you dare not sit back and be cynical about anything in your life.

There are Aldonzas around that you need to treat as royalty. Until you see them transformed. Because you know they are, and because you know what's in store for them. You don't have to be mad. Not only that, like Aldonza, you may here today feel like gutter grime. But he gives you a new name. And the power of the ideal is in history. It's been loosed and it can come into your life. Our captain has opened a hole in the pitiless walls of the world and says, come in with me. I came back for you. Now let's go. Come to him. The real. The ideal. The ideal became real and it's transforming it into its likeness.

Let's pray. Our Father. Now we end by asking in this time, as we take the offering, as we listen to the music, we pray that you would enable us to offer to you ourselves.

Some of us need to meet you for the first time. Some of us need to get rid of the barriers that are keeping us from really experiencing you, your love and your glory. Some of you, some of us, Father, have given up on areas of our lives because we think we're being realistic. When you, O Lord Jesus Christ, have broken through with all of the power of the other world, you revealed yourself to us and now you are enlisting us in your army. And anything is possible. Lord, forgive us. Help us to behold your glory.

We pray it in Jesus Christ's name. Amen.