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John 1:1-18
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The Word Became Flesh

The Nicene Creed which we professed earlier was adopted in 325AD at the Council of Nicaea. It was written in response to a heresy promoted by a local preacher named Arius who believed that Jesus was a created being and not fully God. He also held that only God the Father could be God, lest we would make two gods of the one. So the creed was developed to hold both Jesus' humanity and divinity in tension with each other. They aren't so much to be solved or explained, as they are to be believed by faith.

Watch out for those heretical preachers! They can steer us astray. But then if what they preach results in clarifying documents like the Nicene Creed which still stands true some seventeen centuries later, then maybe a little heresy from time to time is good for our faith. Just kidding. (Ha, ha.)

The scripture we are feasting on today is the beginning of John's Gospel. It was written some sixty years after the life of Jesus by John, one of Jesus' earliest and closest disciples. A fisherman by trade, along with his brother James, John wrote his Gospel unlike the other three synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John approached his eye witness account very differently and includes much of Jesus' theology and philosophy.

As we listen to it, we should notice several of the themes mentioned in the Nicene Creed. Some scholars call it the Prologue to John's Gospel that sets the stage for the life and ministry of Jesus. Others believed that since it sounds so different than rest of the gospels that it might be a poem or a hymn sung by early Christians. That doesn't sound so surprising to me since we often sing our faith and theology in worship.

Join me as we hear this opening to John's Gospel 1:1-18.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was with God in the beginning. **3** Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4** In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. **8** He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. **10** He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. **11** He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. **12** Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— **13** children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

15 (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, “This is the one I spoke about when I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’”) **16** Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. **17** For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

This morning I want to talk about three main themes we see present in this opening of John’s Gospel. Jesus the Creator. Jesus the Revealer. Jesus the Redeemer. And then we’ll ask what is God saying to us today.

John tells us that Jesus is the Creator.

He begins, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. And through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”

Who is the Word? Jesus or Yeshua. In Hebrew, his name means “He saves.”

John is very clear that Jesus, The Word, and God are all the same. Even though they are distinct persons of the Trinity, they can’t be separated one from the other. They just are.

Notice how John’s opening sounds very similar to the beginning of Genesis. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said...” [there is God’s Word] and everything was created.¹

The Apostle Paul carried on this notion in his Letter to the Colossians that Jesus himself was not just present at creation but the Creator of everything. He wrote, “Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were made: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,

¹ Genesis 1:1-3a

whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”²

Even the Nicene Creed some two hundred and fifty years later states, “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from True God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.”

It’s not that God the Father existed first and then created Jesus. No, our Christian faith holds that they have always coexisted in perfect harmony as God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Next we see that Jesus is the Creator and Sustainer of all things.

Even the very atoms of this pulpit are held together, sustained, by Jesus. Now that might be a stretch for our scientific minds to grasp. We might rationalize by saying, “No, it is held together by atomic forces of attraction.” Well who do we think created those atoms to attract like that? Jesus did. And if he created them to attract, he could also cause them to repel in an instant.

As the Word, Jesus was not only present at creation but was the active agent through whom all things came into being. This profound truth reveals that Jesus is not a created being, but the eternal God who brought everything into existence.

The next thing that John tells us is that Jesus is the Revealer. What does that mean?

Again Paul says, “Jesus is the image of the invisible God.”

John says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”

The Greek for made his dwelling among us comes from the root word *skenoō*. It literally means to pitch a tent, encamp, or reside with. The imagery comes from the Old Testament Tent of Meeting where Moses would go and meet with God. I love how Eugene Peterson interpreted this verse in his *Message*. He wrote, “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” Just like the person who just moved in next door to us.

One commentator wrote, “Like ourselves, [Jesus] hungered, thirsted, ate, drank, slept, was wearied, felt pain, wept, rejoiced, marveled, and was moved to anger and compassion...He prayed, read the Scriptures, suffered being tempted, and submitted His will to the will of God the Father...he really suffered and shed his blood, died, was really buried, really rose again, and really ascended into heaven.”³

Jesus was human in every way, and yet he was also God.

² Colossians 1:15-17

³ J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of John* (Abbotsford, WI: Life Sentencing Publishing, 2019), 8.

Notice how John also says, “We have seen Jesus’ glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

There is a story in Old Testament Book of Exodus when Moses was meeting with God and demanded to see God’s glory. God allowed him to see the backside of his glory as God passed by, but not his face. Because no-one could see God’s face and live.⁴

But on the contrary, John says that we have seen God’s glory, because we’ve seen Jesus’ glory.

Paul says that when we see Jesus, we see God who is invisible.

In talking with his disciples just before his crucifixion, Jesus said that he was going away and would come back to take them with him soon. This is when he made the claim, “If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said, ‘Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.’

Jesus answered, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”⁵

So when we see Jesus, we see God the Father. Where do we see Jesus? In his Word.

The writer of Hebrews states, “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”⁶

Moses couldn’t see God. If he did, it would have been so overwhelming that he would have died.

We can see God by seeing Jesus. And when we really “see” Jesus by believing in him, we live. Do we see how Jesus changed everything with regards to our relationship with God? Jesus makes it personal. That’s why he could say, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” This was not a statement about who is in or out of the kingdom. It was invitation to encounter the living God.

Jesus came to reveal the unseen God to us. Just as words reveal unseen thoughts, Jesus, the Word, makes the invisible God visible to us. He is the perfect representation of the Father, full of grace and truth. Through His life, teachings, and actions, Jesus showed us who God is and what God is like.

And finally, John tells us that Jesus is our Redeemer.

Now through Moses’ encounter with God at the Tent of Meeting, we know that he received the Law which provided rules with how we should live and worship. What we discovered however, was that laws don’t give life. They bring

⁴ Exodus 33:12-23

⁵ John 14:6-9

⁶ Hebrews 1:3

death. Rules only show us how imperfect we are and how much we needed a different way to salvation.

When our kids were younger, we had rules that they needed to follow. Right? As they got older, we relaxed many of those rules. We wanted them to be able to decide for themselves what was good or bad. Now that meant that they then had the freedom to choose how they would live or what kind of person they would become.

Unfortunately, that means that they would make mistakes figuring that out. And the consequences of some of those bad choices are much more severe than whether or not they picked up their toys. Right? But parents, we've got to let them decide their path and who they will become...and trust that what we planted in them as children will bear fruit...with God's help.

Jesus ushers in a different kind of law than a bunch of does and don'ts. His rule of life is through grace and truth. Yes, there is still a mark that we aim for. But Jesus knows that because we are human and imperfect, we fall short time and time again. That's where grace comes in. Grace, through the gift of forgiveness, acknowledges our shortcomings, and then gives us opportunity to try again. And instead of having a bunch of written rules to follow, Jesus through the gift of his Holy Spirit, writes those rules on our hearts instead.

One commentator wrote, "The light which men got from Moses and the law was at best only starlight compared to the noonday [sun which Jesus provides]."⁷

This is why we can say that Jesus is our Redeemer. As fully human, Jesus can sympathize with our weakness as he was tempted in every way as we are...but he was without sin.⁸ As fully God, he was able to deal with God for us on equal terms and offer himself as the perfect sacrifice for the penalty of sin.

So what does this mean for us today?

We can trust Jesus as the Creator and Sustainer of all things to hold things together when our world is falling apart.

We can have confidence, because we have a High Priest in Jesus who advocates for us before God the Father, who invites us to come right to His throne.

We can have peace knowing that even though we aren't perfect, Jesus, who is, still loves and accepts us as we are. So we can stop living by the Law and trying to please God or earn God's favor.

We can really know God. Read through the Gospel of John with us up until Easter. Pay attention to what Jesus says and does. When we see Jesus kindness, compassion, forgiveness, and grace. That is what God the Father is like.

⁷ J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of John* (Abbotsford, WI: Life Sentencing Publishing, 2019), 12.

⁸ Hebrews 4:15

And not only can we know God, but we can be included in his family through faith.

John writes, “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

We can witness to this truth. It’s not up to us to convince people that we are right. We just share who we are, what we know, and what we have experienced, and then the Holy Spirit will take over to change hearts and minds.

And finally, we can trust the Holy Spirit to work in us so that we become more like Jesus.

Early Church father Irenaeus of the 2nd century said, “The Word of God, Jesus Christ, on account of his great love for humankind, became what we are in order to make us what he is himself.”⁹

So may we put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ who alone is the author and perfecter of our faith. May we believe that when we see Jesus, we see God. And may we live into the grace and truth that Jesus will complete what he started in us, in his time and in his way.¹⁰

Amen.

⁹ Saint Irenaeus in *Adversus haereses*, V. Christianity Today, Vol. 36, no. 15

¹⁰ Philippians 1:6