

## Sermon- Revelation through Incarnation

Scripture: John 1:14-18

Sunday, October 25, 2015

Today we are going to look at the concluding part of the introduction to the Gospel of John. The introduction began with telling us that God is Logos, or the Ultimate Word of God who is also God and existed even before there was such a thing as the passage of time. This is completely beyond human capacity to imagine because if we have to think a single thought, it is only possible because one process in the brain triggers the next in the passage of time. The next aspect of Logos that was revealed to us was that that the Logos created the whole universe from nothing. Again an idea that we humans have no other reference point in our existence to understand. Now think about this, if we human beings had no ability to understand God at all, we would not be able to relate to God and God's purpose for creating us would not be fulfilled. So last week in the Prologue we saw the very first witness John the Baptist was one of those special people who God gave a unique capacity to recognize the Messiah and point the world to him. Today in the last part of this introduction to John, verses 14-18 is going to build on this idea of how God gave people the capacity to recognize and understand God as a result of the Divine act of inserting Himself within creation. So let's how all of this works.

Our text today begins with these words- The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. Is there anything at all in the realm of human experience that helps us relate to the idea of God dwelling among us? Yes there is. You see the Greek word for dwelling can be literally be translated as “tented”. So Jesus’ coming was like God coming and pitching a tent in our midst. Now people who were familiar with the Old Testament would be able to see an amazing parallel. Remember when God liberated the Hebrew people from Egypt and brought them out into the Sinai desert. At that time he did not just let them wander around aimlessly by themselves. He actually tented with them. In fact the tent that was reserved for God was called the Tent of Meeting. And only Moses, Aaron and his sons were permitted to enter this Tent to meet with God. And God appeared to the people in the form of a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day and he actually moved with them to lead the way. And everything that happened in those days was witnessed by Moses who wrote these things and passed it down through the generations. Now the evangelist is doing what Moses did in a way. So he along with the first witness testify to these things saying “we have seen His glory”. Now this word “glory” commentator CH Dodd refers to as “God’s presence and power”. In other words, when God came to town, His power is on display and the evangelist and Baptist were both witnesses of it. In the Jewish tradition you needed the testimony of two people to establish a fact in court and so the writer is co-opting the Baptist when he says “we”. You see even though the Baptist would have been dead by the time of the writing of this

book, the fact is an individual may die but their witness to Jesus Christ can never die. So the evangelist is signaling to the reader, as you get ready to read this Gospel be prepared to learn about the Son of God who tented among his people and displayed his presence and power.

Now the world will ask this question, What kind of Son of God? To that the evangelist gives a very precise answer but uncomfortable answer. The One and Only Son of God. Now that makes our pluralistic world squirm. But the uniqueness of Jesus is one of the hard truths being presented to the world in this book. In fact the prologue ends with an emphatic declaration, “No one has seen God. Not a single human being. Only the unique Son of God, who is himself God and is in the closest relationship possible with the Father. Only this unique Son has revealed God to the world. Not only that, but the unique Son is not only unique in identity, he reveals the unique character of God as both grace and truth. Now what is this grace and truth that the writer is talking about? Let’s start with grace. The meaning being portrayed here is the free dissemination of God’s goodwill to the world that the world has done nothing to deserve. Now if you are asking, What is the role grace place in the functioning of the world, well... Grace is important because if God did not grant his unmerited favor towards his creation Noah’s flood would not be the last flood to take place, because sin did not get eliminated with the flood. If the punishment of every sin was to be borne at the source of the sin, there would be no human alive. Not the prologue is very clear that Jesus Christ came to reveal

and even greater measure of grace than was already given to the world. And to really appreciate the work of Christ we have to look at the grace of God that was previously given. Now if you look at verse 17 that previous grace that was given seems to point to the Law that came through Moses. Now you will say, how can the Law that came through Moses be considered grace even remotely. Well, this requires a little explanation so hang in there with me. When Moses gave the law to Israel at Mount Sinai, the purpose was to express to the nation of Israel what God's standard was. Now this is really a big deal when you think about it. Up to this point, the people of Israel were just a bunch of slaves at the mercy of the Pharaoh. Now God is coming to these people and saying, I am going to give you a standard to live by, that is beyond anything the world has known. In fact I am going to share with you my own standard. So you see giving a bunch of slaves a standard to live by from God himself was a tremendous act of unmerited favor. God chose to give the Hebrew people his law and not others, simply because he was fulfilling a promise he made to their ancestor Abraham, centuries ago. But there is a problem with this manifestation of grace as it applied to the nation of Israel. The moment you tell people what they should and should not do they really want to do the opposite of that. As Apostle Paul observes, the law has the reverse effect of making people sin more. And the consequence of sin is death. Now this is the problem with the world up to this point. It was not possible for God to reveal his expectations to human beings with free will without there being willful disobedience. You see the

dilemma here, if God never revealed himself, people would never know what God is like or what His will is. But if he reveals his will, there is a violation of it that merits a permanent cutting off of the relationship between God and humankind. So even through the giving of the Law through Moses was an act of grace, another level of grace needed to be revealed to the world. This was what Jesus Christ did. The work of Jesus Christ revealed the unmerited favor of God to the world in a way the world had never experienced before. And so the evangelist describes Jesus as being full of grace.

Now Jesus was full of truth as well. What does evangelist mean here? When you and I hear the word “truth”, the thing that usually comes to mind is a “fact or proposition” like the United States was founded in 1776 or that when the sky is clear under normal circumstances, the sky is blue. So as a creator, Jesus I am sure was full of facts about creation, beautiful facts, complex facts, even difficult and inconvenient facts. But when you look at the Greek for the word translated truth, you get the word, “aletheias”. And aletheias communicates a steadiness, a reliability which also has the meaning faithfulness. This is one of those places where when you look at different translations you get very different words and it can get a bit confusing. The NLT is one of the few translations that gets the word right and translates “aletheias” says faithfulness. But the problem with a sentence like “Jesus was full of faithfulness” is that that is not a typical phrase used. People don't speak like that. In our world we make distinctions between

faithful and unfaithful people, but we never say someone is full of faithfulness? This is very central to understanding the person of Jesus so I am going to explore the world of ideas being communicated here. To do that you have to first permit me to address a different question. And the question we need to start with is a philosophical one, “If God is all powerful, and God is so gracious and even forgiving as the Bible claims him to be, then why cannot God just forgive sin by saying, go, your sin is forgiven?” Why did Jesus have to die on the cross? Here is why. Because God is full of “aletheias” .

Remember we said that “aletheias” communicates this unchanging, reality hugging, perfectly steadfast character of God. Now because God’s character also zero tolerance for the unholy, how is it possible for God to have fellowship with sinful beings? Also justice is as much part of God’s character as grace and truth and faithfulness. So how can God’s perfect Holiness and justice look at sin and say because I am a forgiving God I am going to remove any consequences to sin. God’s character does not permit him to do it. In other words, yes, God can do all things, but God’s very nature of being true to his Word and acting purely according to the definition of what is good, causes him to impose self-limitations. And arbitrarily dismissing sin is not part of the aletheias or “faithful to His own qualities” character of God.

Now let’s look at the issue of forgiveness from the human side of things. You see when human beings sinned they had to be driven out of the close fellowship with God. Now the Bible declares that in the sinful state human beings, are only capable of making

negative choices. Now you might say, “that is an extreme view, because I know so many who are such good people”. The problem with human goodness is that even obviously good things like helping others for example come with questionable intentions. Human goodness, is not goodness at less.

**Is 64:6 declares clearly, all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.**

When you were to look at the fallen condition of the world Rom 3:10-11 declares a very harsh fact,

**“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.**

So what we have established so far is that human beings in our fallen state don’t have the inherent capacity to turn to the goodness of God. But what about the unfallen state. Even in the unfallen state the only example we have is of Adam and Eve and they fell into sin very quickly. So if humans are always going to sin whether our nature dictates it or not, then how can God ever expect to have fellowship with a human being with free will? This is where God has turned up the light of his revelation in Jesus Christ. You see in Jesus Christ we also see a new revelation to us about human beings. You see in Jesus Christ the Bible says is the only human being who ever lived who never committed a sin. How so we know that, because even though as we saw earlier, there is no one who is sinless, if you turn to 1 Peter 2:22 you see Jesus being described as one who, “WHO

COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH". So Jesus Christ reveals through his example something that we never knew about Adam. You see we have already said that sin is universal in the fallen world. But what about human nature before the first sin was ever committed? You see the problem is even in the sinless state, Adam and Eve did not remain in the pure state for too long. So it was never clear if Adam ever had the potential as a human with free will to not sin. But Jesus who Apostle Paul calls the New Adam reveals the true potential for a human being to be perfectly aligned to the will of God. Jesus Christ proved that Adam did have the capacity to not sin, because Jesus was human like Adam in every way. But Jesus also revealed something about the rest of humanity. What did living a perfectly sinless life among God's chosen people get him? It got him of course the most cruel death. So what we see because of the treatment given to Christ that human kind is completely slave to our sin nature without even the capacity to recognize God. But Jesus also reveals a third truth. Jesus Christ reveals God's intense love for humanity without compromising His dislike for sin. You see God does not ignore sin because that is not the nature of God. God does not ignore sin but deals with it. So you Christ's work on the cross gave human beings an insight into human capacity to not sin, but Jesus Christ also gives us the capacity and motivation to follow in Christ's footsteps as well. Every aspect of this Christ's life is the revelation of the very true and faithful character of God. That is why the evangelist declares Christ to be full of faithfulness.

In fact through the incarnation, Jesus Christ reveals God as being full is full of grace and faithfulness.

This concludes the introduction to the book of John. We saw a string of themes introduced. We saw the indescribable aspects of God. We also saw that this indescribable God was incarnated into the world according to the testimony of reliable witnesses. And God in Jesus Christ was full of grace and faithfulness. It is the story of this Jesus Christ and how he transforms the world that we are going to explore through the Gospel of John. I hope you will invite your friends and journey through John together. Let us pray.