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John 1:1-18

The Word and Son of God, the Light and Life of Men

I hope you all had a wonderful time celebrating Christmas yesterday, as my family and I did. I hope you all had a blessed time with family and friends, enjoyed good food, and had the privilege to give gifts in love and to receive gifts as others showed you love. But most of all, I hope you were celebrating the greatest gift ever given: Jesus Christ! That's what Christmas is all about: celebrating the fact that *God gave us Himself*, by sending God the Son down to earth, to be born as a little baby, to be the God-Man, to come and take away our sins that we might be reconciled to God through faith and become children of God! That's what we're celebrating - that the love, life, and light of God, even God Himself, has come down into the muck mire of our sin-sick world! We're celebrating that light has finally shown in the darkness of this blind, broken world! We're celebrating that God has come down to us in the birth of Jesus Christ, making salvation possible for sinners such as us! We're celebrating that the glory, grace, and truth of God has been perfectly revealed to us in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. That's the beautiful, wonderful good news of Christmas!

Now, perhaps you're wondering, "What in the world does "incarnation" mean?" It simply refers to the Biblical teaching that Jesus Christ, being fully God, also became fully man, being born as a human baby, remaining fully God and fully man at the same time. That's the wonder of the birth of Christ; that's what makes it so special, why we celebrate it year after year, even 2,000 years later! So it's well-worth stopping and thinking about the doctrine of the incarnation; or, to put it differently, what it means that Jesus is the God-Man, that God stepped down into this world and assumed humanity! When Christ was born, it *changed everything*. Without the incarnation of Christ, with God being born as a human being in the person of Jesus Christ, there is no gospel, no salvation possible for you and me. The fact that God became Man in Christ - the fact that Jesus is the God-Man - shows us the glory and grace of God; it shows us how much God loves us, that He gave Himself to us; and it shows us that salvation is only possible for us through believing in Christ, that we might become children of God in Him!

That's the beauty of Christmas! That's the wonder of the birth of Christ! And that's exactly what **John 1:1-18** shows us. This passage is a prologue, and introduction, to the rest of

the book of John. IN these masterful verses, John shows us who Jesus is and why He came. He tells us the Christmas story. But it's very different from the way the Christmas story is told in the other Gospels. Mark doesn't tell us about Christ's origin story at all; he jumps straight to the action, beginning with John the Baptist. Matthew and Luke, however, *do* tell us the Christmas story. They tell us of the events leading up to and surrounding Jesus's birth. But they also go back further. They tell us the history of Jesus's human family, tracing the lineage back to David, the great King, to Abraham, the head of God's covenant people Israel, and even to Adam, the first person ever made.

But here in the beginning of the book of John, he doesn't tell us about the events of Jesus's birth. Nor does he tell us about his human lineage. He goes back even further, back to eternity past, back to *before the world was even Created*. But don't be mistaken, this is still the Christmas story, just from a different angle. In this passage, John is pulling back the curtain and showing us the glorious realities going on behind the scenes in the birth of Christ. He tells us about where Jesus came from - bring God Himself; then, he tells us about how Jesus came down to us, becoming human; and finally, this passage tells us *why* Jesus became man, and why it's so important for us that he did. That's what I want us to see from this passage today.

So let's begin with...

I. The Eternal Word of God: Jesus is Fully God - (VV. 1-4)

The Gospel of John begins with the exact same words that the entire Bible begins with, Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning." And that's exactly what John wants us to think of. He starts by drawing our attention not to the birth of Jesus, but back to the *very beginning*, before anything else existed, before history began, before Creation. He wants us to travel back to the dawn of reality as we know, back to the beginning of time. And there, before anything else existed, he tells us, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This a powerfully profound, theologically charged sentence. So let's unpack it together.

First, we need to identify who "the Word" is. The rest of the chapter makes very clear that this "Word" is Jesus Christ. THis Word is identified as a person, also called the "light" in verses 4-8. As we'll see in a little bit, in verse 14, the "Word" became flesh, and is identified as "Jesus Christ" (v.17). But before that happens, we're told, in verses one and two, that in the beginning the Word "was with GOd, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." So, next, we can ask, why is Jesus called the Word? Words and speech are meant to *communicate* and

reveal knowledge, ideas, and truth to us. All throughout the Bible, the Word of God comes to reveal God, to reveal His glory, grace, and redemption, and to reveal His power. And we see this most clearly in Creation, which happens *through God's spoken word*. IN Genesis 1, God created the world through speaking. He said, "Let there be light!" and there it was! ANd that's exactly what John wants us to think of.

We see this in verse 3: "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made." This Word of God is the agent of Creation. God spoke, and through speaking, created everything out of nothing. And here we are told that, when God created everything through His Word, that word was Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God! All things were made *through Christ!* Verse 4 continues, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." God the Son is the Word of Creation, the source of all life. All life comes from, through, by, and for Him! As we heard read from Col. 1 earlier, "For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him" (Col. 1:16).

Everything that exists came into being *through* the creative act of the Word; nothing exists apart from having been made by GOD, through the Word of God, Christ. THis divides everything in existence into two categories: God the Creator on one side, and on the other, everything else. The "Word" that was with God in the beginning and "was" at the exact same moment God the Creator. Therefore, He (Jesus) is in the "God the Creator" category. He created everything that was created; He couldn't have created himself, that would be a logical contradiction. Therefore, Christ, the Word, is *uncreated*; He is the Creator God. The Word of God, God the Son, is eternal, and has neither beginning or end; He has always been and always will be, for He is fully God! That's clearly John's point here!

But now let's come back to the first first again. If Jesus is the Word, what does it mean that he "was with God" and also "was God" in the beginning? What exactly does that mean? If we just had half of that statement, "the Word was God" or just "the Word was with God," it wouldn't give us any pause. But how can he *be* God while also being *with* God? If I told you, "Last weekend, I was with my brother," everyone would know exactly what I mean; no problem but. But if I said, "Last weekend, I was with Jeff, and I *was* Jeff," well, now the story has taken a strange turn, hasn't it? That sentence wouldn't make sense; there's no way I could *be* Jeff and be *with* Jeff at the same time!

So how can the Word *be God* and *be with God* at the same time? It's telling us that the Word and God are both the same and distinct, at the same time. They are both God, the one God Jesus, even before he was born as a man, even before anything was created, existed *as God*. He is identified as God.

This rules out the possibility that Jesus is simply "a" god. No, there is only one God. The Bible makes this very clear. For example, Deut. 6:4 says, "Hear O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one." There is only one God. Even in the beginning, before anything else was Created, the Word *was* God. Jesus is fully God, *one with* the Creator God of all things, the God of the Old Testament. Jesus is the Word; Jesus is not a second god; He is God.

Yet, at the same time, there is a *distinction* made here. The Word was *with* God in the beginning. This can only be explained by the doctrine of the Trinity: One God, Three Persons. God is ONE; there is only one GOD. YET God eternally exists as *three persons*: God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And this passage makes very clear that Jesus is fully God, the eternal Word of God; or, it also says, the eternal *Son* of God, the "only Son from the Father," as verse 14 says, while verse 18 says he is also "the only GOD, who is at the Father's side." There is one God, yet God eternally exists as three persons, who are distinct yet inseparable. That's the only way to make sense of what the Bible tells us, in passages like this one and others. And the Church has historically called this the doctrine of the Trinity.

Now, some people scoff at this idea, that God can be Three Persons in One God, calling it logically impossible. After all, I can't be *with* Jeff and *be* friend Jeff at the same time, right? But here's the thing: *God isn't a human being like us!* He is not a finite, created being; we are! We can't assume that his nature works the same as ours! Nor can we cry foul when we can't quite grasp the nature of God! After all, why should we expect God to fit neatly into our own categories of how we think everything works? We're finite, limited creatures; each of us has only been around a handful or two of decades at the most! God is the unlimited, eternal, all-powerful Creator of all things! He exists outside of Time and is not bound and finite like we are! He always has been and always will be! God is transcendent and glorious, far greater and grander than anything we could ever imagine! Why in the world would we expect him to be like us? In fact, when the glorious God reveals Himself to us, we should *expect* that who He is would boggle our minds! We should *expect* not to be able to fully comprehend it! We should *expect* that the very nature of God would be beyond our complete comprehension, leaving us in awe and

wonder at his majestic glory! The fact that God is Trinity, that He is three and One, and that God the Son is perfectly and fully God, one with the Father, very God of very God - this should lead us to *worship*.

Jesus is fully God; He has been and always will be God. We should never doubt this. Jesus is one with the Father; Jesus is the Creator God, worthy of all worship and praise! And this is wonderful news, because this means that when Jesus was born, God came down to Earth to us. Which leads us to point number 2...

II. The Word Became Flesh: Jesus Became the God-Man (VV. 5-9, 14-15)

The light of God has shone forth in the darkness of our sin-stained world because God Himself as stepped down into the darkness by becoming a human; that is, Jesus Christ, the eternal Word and Son of God, the light and life of men, came down to us by being born as a little baby, becoming the God-Man.

John begins telling us this in verses 5-9, making the transition from “in the beginning” to the coming of Christ: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.”

Obviously, the “light” is a person, coming into the world. But we’re first told about a “John” who *isn’t* the light. THE John mentioned here isn’t the John who wrote the book, but a different one, John the Baptist, a prophet sent from God to prepare the way for Christ to come into the world, bearing witness to Him. Verse 15 comes back to this point, saying, “John bore witness about him, and cried out, ‘This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’” John was bearing witness to Jesus, proclaiming that He is indeed greater, that he came first, because He is God! He is the “light” who has come into the world!

Verse 9 continues: “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.” Verse 14 gives us more detail about how this happens: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Jesus is the eternal Word who became flesh; the “light” has come into the world because God the Son was born as a baby, assuming a human nature. Jesus Christ is the God-Man,

fully God and fully man. And this means that the full glory of God is perfectly revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, so that we might know His glorious “grace and truth.” This is why John uses the words “Word” of God and “light” of men and the world: words communicate, and light reveals and exposes the truth. And the beautiful thing about the incarnation - the beautiful thing about Christmas, that God the Son became a man - is that Christ perfectly reveals the glory of God to us. And He did so by coming to *dwell* among us. THis word is literally “to pitch a tent,” to “tabernacle” among us. The tabernacle was a the tent in which God’s glory dwelled among Israel, and later was turned into the Temple in Jerusalem. It pictured GOD’s presence among His people - but there was still a distance; close, but at arms length. But what we get with Christ is even better! He came to dwell *as one of us, a human being!*

On Christmas day, two millennia ago, when the baby boy Jesus was born, God Himself, God the Son, was stepping down into darkness, stepping down into this world, becoming a human being, taking on flesh, just like ours! THE light came down into darkness! God came down to be with us! The Creator Himself became part of His Creation! When Jesus was born, he became *fully human*. And he has not ceased to be human, even after his death on the cross and resurrection. Jesus is a man, with a real, flesh and blood humanity. But when he was born, he did not cease to be GOd. Nor did he become some kind of hybrid, half-God, half-man. No, he remained fully God and also fully man. He is the *God-Man*, fully God and fully man. When Christ was born, he was, like any other baby, completely vulnerable and helpless in his humanity, being dependant upon his mother Mary to care for him, clothe him, and feed him. And yet, at the exact same time, he was also the God who created Mary, who knit her together in her own mother’s womb. While Mary held baby Jesus, Jesus was also sovereignly upholding, and holding the whole universe together, in His divine nature!

THis means that Jesus perfectly reveals the glory of GOd in His person. As Col. 1:15 says, “He is the image of the invisible God.” Or, as John 1:18 says, at the end of this passage: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” God did not send someone else to us; He came down to us Himself. The glory of God is revealed to us in Christ, that we might know Him! And what do we see when we behold the glory of Christ in the incarnation? We see that He is “full of grace and truth.” In other words, Christ came down to display the incredible grace of God towards this rebellious world full of sinners like you and me.

Which brings us to our final point...

III. The Light of the World: Jesus Came to Bring the Grace of Salvation to Everyone Who Believes (VV. 10-13, 16-18)

This chapter begins with the beginning of time, the dawn of creation. The first four verses told us that Christ, the Word of God, was there in the beginning, and through him everything was made, that he is the “life” and “light” of mankind! But then, verse 5 says, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” So then, we have to ask, what “darkness” is this verse talking about? I think it’s talking about the blinding darkness of *sin*. In the beginning, God created all things good, and created us to know, love, and obey Him, living in perfect harmony. But we rebelled against the perfectly good God, our Creator. And when we did so, we broke creation and brought death into the world. Every single one of us is born a sinner; we are spiritually blind to the truth, blind to the “light” of God’s glory; every one of us has rebelled against God, and everytime we sin, we choose the wickedness of darkness over the light. This is why we do not all know the truth, and why many reject the truth of God’s existence, goodness, or His word - because we’re all born spiritually blind and need to have the eyes of our hearts opened. This is why evil exists in the world - because evil is birthed in every human heart. This is why creation itself is broken, why there are famines, plagues and pandemics, and natural disasters. This is why we grow old, get sick, waste away, and eventually all die - because we’re all stained and broken by sin. And this is why we all deserve eternity in Hell, facing GOD’s wrath. And this is why we are in desperate need of GOD’s grace and salvation.

And thankfully, that is exactly what Christ came to reveal! Verse 5 proclaims that the “darkness has not overcome” the light. The light shines forth bright in the darkness. Ever since the first day of rebellion in the Garden of Eden, God has continued to reveal his glory and grace to sinful humanity; God has continued to love the world - - even though the world is broken, full of darkness, and full of wicked sinners! But this doesn’t mean that God condones our sin or ignores it; it means He revealed a story of redemption, to bring about *grace and salvation!* We see this story of redemption unfold throughout the Old Testament, as GOD makes His grace known to His people. And He does this most clearly through the coming of Jesus Christ, “light” of GOD, the very “Word” of GOD, who stepped down into the darkness, becoming flesh.

We see this in vv.16-17: “For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” This isn’t

saying that the Law of Moses was not gracious. It's not saying these things are opposites, as if there is no "grace" in Moses and no "law" in Christ. To conclude this would be to say that there was no "truth" in the Law of MOses! And that cannot be - the Law of Moses came from God. And it was a gracious gift to GOd's people. But the Law was of grace and truth specifically because it was *God's revelation of Himself and His plan of redemption to us*; it always *pointed towards the grace of the gospel of Christ!* John is saying that Jesus Christ *fulfills* the Law of Moses, fulfilling the "grace and truth" promised by God in the OT, bringing about the *full revelation of grace and truth in the gospel.*

The grace of Christ is greater than the Law of Moses, because the Law of Moses convicts us of our sin and our inability to be good enough. No matter who you are, you're a sinner, and you're not good enough for God, and you've haven't been a decent enough person to go to Heaven, and no matter what you do, you never will be good enough. That's what the light of God reveals to us: our sin. But it also reveals much more. You it, God shows us our *need* for greater grace - our need for the grace of salvation in the gospel of Christ Jesus. And Christ came into the World, even took on flesh, to live a perfect, righteous life *in our place* - the perfect life you and I could never live! He never sinned. Yet He went to the cross and bore God's wrath against our sin, and died in our place, as a perfect sacrifice. And then he rose again on the third day! The cross was *always* the goal of the incarnation! Easter was always the goal of Christmas! As verse 29 will say, Jesus came to be "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

When Jesus was born and came into this world, He fulfilled God's promises of salvation; He came to redeem and save His people! And yet, He was largely rejected, even by Israel, God's Old Covenant people. We see this in verses 10-11: "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." If we don't receive Christ by faith, then we don't receive the grace of salvation and eternal life.

But, *anyone who does trust in Christ alone will be saved!* At the heart of this passage, we see the glorious news of the gospel, in verses 12-13: "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of many, but of God." To believe in the name of Christ is not just to say, "I believe God exists." Even the devil does that! No, clearly not saving faith. Saving faith is to truly believe that Jesus is the life and light of men - that eternal life is in Him

alone! That He perfectly reveals the glory and grace and truth of God! That in Christ is an abundance of grace that will never run out! To truly trust, with all your heart, that God loves you, so much that He gave Himself to you! That God so loved you, in all your sin and brokenness, in all your faults and flaws and failures - that God loves you so much that He stepped down into darkness, came to be with you, came to save you! The beauty of the incarnation, the beautiful story of Christmas, is the story of *God loving sinners so much that He came after us!* He pursued us, even by coming into darkness - even to the point of dying in our place to save us from our sins!

When we believe this good news and trust in Christ's grace for your salvation, Christ gives us "the right to become children of God." When we become believers, we are *spiritually born again*. This is not of flesh and blood or human will - we cannot save ourselves! Salvation is the work of God, from beginning to end; this is purely by His grace! God is the one that saves! God is the one that changes our hearts, that does everything necessary to save us! In other words, it is a *gift*; the gift of God Himself, Jesus Christ; the gift to be adopted into God's own family as His beloved children; the gift of eternal life and salvation! This is a free gift of grace! If you're trusting in Christ alone this morning, then *this gift is yours!* Simply rest in the wonderful gift of God in the incarnation: when Christ was born, God gave Himself to you, to draw you to Himself as His child forever! That's the story of Christmas, the greatest ever give; simply rest in God's gift of grace in Christ Jesus! Let us remember and believe just how much God loves us! Just how much God's glory, grace, and truth are truly revealed in Christ for us! If we truly believe that, then let us worship and obey Him with our whole hearts, walking not in the darkness, but in the light.

In a few moments, we're going to come to the table of Communion, as we publicly proclaim our faith in this glorious gospel of Christ. If you're a believer this morning, trusting in Christ alone for salvation, and are a member in good standing of an Evangelical church, then we invite you to come to the Table with us this morning.

But if that doesn't describe you, then there's a *different* way for you to respond. Simply trust in Christ alone for your salvation, receiving His free gift of grace through faith in Him; then, make your faith public by being baptized and joining a gospel-preaching church. If you have any questions about this, I would *love* to speak with you.

Let us pray.