

This evening we will be focusing on the idea in John 1:14-18 that the Word became flesh to make God known. Both verses 14 and 18 express this idea. Verse 14 says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” The disciples saw the glory of the Word made flesh and that is related to the idea that one of the reasons that God became a man was to make himself known. This is expressed explicitly in verse 18. “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

At Christmas time we celebrate the birth of Jesus. We celebrate the wonderful truth that the Word became flesh which means that the eternal Son of God took upon himself a human nature so that he was born as the God-man, Jesus Christ – fully God and fully man in one person. We celebrate the fact that the Son of God became a human being so that as both God and man he could save us from our sins. He had to be a man to save us and he had to be God to save us. There are a number of different perspectives on this in the NT and we are going to look at one of those perspectives this evening as John introduces it in the verses that I just mentioned. I say that John introduces it in these verses because in the rest of his gospel he demonstrates how Jesus as the Word made flesh made God known. And so, to understand what John is talking about when he tells us that the Word became flesh to make God known we will need to look at some of the verses in his gospel that explain this.

We begin with a few background thoughts. The first is that God wants to be known by human beings. In his book, *The Mission of God*, Christopher Wright sums up the mission of God in these words, “YHWH alone is the one true living God who made himself known in Israel and who wills to be known to the ends of the earth....” (p. 71). God wills to be known. That is the clear teaching of Scripture. Jeremiah 9:24 quotes God as saying, “[L]et him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.” Jeremiah 31:34, which describes the new covenant that God will make with his people, promises “[T]hey shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.” And Isaiah in 11:9 in a prophecy concerning the end times says that “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” These verses show God wants people to know him. This is one way of biblically understanding God’s whole plan of salvation. God’s goal in his plan of salvation is that the earth will one day be filled with people who know him. And Jesus as the Word who became flesh is at the heart of that.

So, this knowledge of God is another way of speaking about salvation. Those who are saved know God and those who are not saved do not know God. We see this in John 1:14 where John says of the disciples, “we have seen his glory.” This is in contrast to those whom John mentioned earlier when he said that “the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.” Those who are saved, see the glory of God and those who are not saved do not know God. They do not see the glory of God. They do not have a relationship with God. The knowledge of God in the Bible is the knowledge of knowing a person. It is much more than knowing

about God. It is knowing God through a relationship with him. Knowing God involves both knowing about God, but also knowing him in personal relationship.

And that knowledge is something that we need as human beings to experience the fullness of life as God designed us as people made in his image. This longing was expressed by Moses when he asked God to show him his glory. We are made to find great joy and satisfaction in growing in our knowledge of God. This is behind Paul's exhortation in Philippians 4 to rejoice in the Lord. Peter writes in 2 Peter 1:2, "May grace and peace be multiplied to you **in** the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." And in 2 Peter 3:18 he urges us, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus and Saviour Jesus Christ."

So it is very important to God that people know him. His goal is to have the whole earth filled with the knowledge of his glory. And it is at the very heart of the joy and satisfaction of being saved people. Indeed, it is one of the ways of thinking about what it means to be saved. A very important text for our topic this evening is John 17:3 where Jesus says to his Father, "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

This shows the relevance and practical importance of our topic this evening which is that the Word became flesh to make God known. If we are believers, knowing God is very precious to us. It is precious to us and it is an amazing reflection on God that he has gone to great lengths to make himself known. And the greatest of those lengths was to send his Son into the world to become the God-man Jesus Christ in order to make God known. Even before his incarnation, as the eternal Word of God, the eternal Son of God was the person of the Godhead who made God known. But this passage is teaching us that by becoming flesh, the Word was able to make God known in a much greater way. Jesus as the God-man is the pinnacle of God's self-revelation. The Word became flesh to reveal the glory of God in a greater way than it had ever been revealed before.

This is an awesome idea. This is a staggering idea. Think of the glory of God in the creation. Think of the glory of God in the vastness of the universe. Think of the glory of God in his mighty works done on behalf of Israel. Think of his love for Israel. Think of his patience with her. His justice, but also his longsuffering.

And think of what human beings are. We are creatures of God. We are created beings. Jesus made us. And somehow, by becoming a human being, it was possible for him make God known in ways that go beyond making God known apart from becoming a human being. Hebrews 1:3 says of the Word become flesh, "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature." It is absolutely staggering that God is able to make himself known in a greater way through becoming united to a human being as the God-man Jesus than he was every able to do before the Word became flesh.

Now a huge part of this is that through being the God-man Jesus made God known as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We see how Jesus revealed the Father already in John 1:14. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father...." The God-man Jesus is a

revelation of the Son of God and as a Son he has to have a Father. And so, through the Word becoming flesh God has been made known as the Father and the Son.

God was not known as the Father before the eternal Son of God became a human being. It is true that sometimes the OT refers to God as being like a father, but it does not reveal God as the eternal Father of the eternal Son. In the God-man Jesus, the disciples saw the glory of the God-man as the only Son from the Father. By seeing Jesus as the Son of God, the disciples also saw God as Father and Son. But even more profoundly, by seeing the Son they also saw the Father. Remember what Jesus said in John 14:9, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." The reason for that, Jesus goes on to say, in 14:10 is "I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" and "the Father dwells in me."

So, if we know Jesus as the Son of God we also know the Father. It is through the God-man Jesus that we know God the Father. Jesus reveals God the Father to us by revealing himself as the Son, by telling us about the Father, but because he is in the Father and the Father is in him so that to see him is to see the Father.

Whatever it means exactly that Jesus is in the Father and that the Father is in Jesus, it is clear that Jesus as the Word becomes flesh reveals God the Father. That means more than that God is like a father. It means that God is eternally the Father and the Son. It means that God the Father is eternally and essentially God the Father. He is not just like a father. He is the Father.

And it is because God is eternally the Father that it is possible for us to be his children. And that idea is close at hand here in John 1. As we saw this morning from John 1:12-13, Jesus gives those who receive him the right to become children of God. We can have this kind of relationship with God because God is eternally the Father of his Son. This is an exhilarating truth. Jesus reveals God, not just as like a father; he is the Father in his eternal essence. And that means that as believers in Jesus we are not like the children of God, but we really and truly are children of God.

And what is so wonderful about that is the being a father is about loving and caring for his children. Because of sin, human fathers do not always love their children as they ought, but God as the Father always loves his children. Jesus the Son reveals God as Father and the great characteristic of the Father is love.

We see this love especially in that the Father sent his Son into the world to save his people from their sins. The Word who became Flesh – the incarnate Son of God – the God-man Jesus is not only the Son of God, he is the Son of God sent into the world by his Father. Jesus as the God-man not only reveals God as Father by coming among us as the Son of the Father, but he is also the Son who was sent into the world motivated by the love of the Father.

John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." And many, many times in John's gospel, Jesus refers to the fact that the Father has sent him into the world. By being the Son who was sent, Jesus reveals the Father as the one who sent his

only and beloved Son. And that is the ultimate expression of love. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son.” 1 John 4:8–9, “<sup>8</sup>Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup>In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.” The love of God being made manifest means the love of God being made known and that love was made known by the Father sending his Son into the world so that we might live through him.

So, Word who became flesh reveals the Father as the one who sent his only Son into the world that we might live through him and that reveals God as love. When we think of the Word becoming flesh or the eternal Son of God becoming the God-man, we are thinking of him as the Son who was sent by the Father in love for our salvation. So Jesus makes his Father known by being the God-man who was sent by his Father to save us from our sins.

Jesus also reveals God the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the only upon whom the Spirit descended and remained and as the one “who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” (John 1:33) And in John 3:33, John the Baptist speaks of Jesus as the one who “gives the Spirit without measure.” The living water that Jesus gives is the Holy Spirit. Jesus has life in himself and the Spirit is the one who gives life in John 6:63. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and the Spirit is the Spirit of truth. In John 15:26 says to his disciples, “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.”

Jesus makes God known by revealing the Holy Spirit. He baptizes with the Holy Spirit. He gives the Spirit as living water to those who believe in him. He sends the Spirit to be with his disciples after Jesus ascends into heaven. He speaks of the Holy Spirit as the one who gives the new birth.

It is interesting that the Holy Spirit is revealed as fully God, but he is not as prominent in the Scriptures as the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit bears witness about Jesus according to John 15:26. And in John 16:14 Jesus says, “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” One of the great tasks of the Holy Spirit is to shine the light on Jesus – to glorify Jesus. And so while the Holy Spirit is equally God with the Father and the Son, there is more focus in the Bible on the Father and the Son and that is certainly the case in John.

So we are celebrating the birth of Jesus by considering that one of the reasons that the eternal Son of God became the God-man Jesus was to make God known. And we have seen how he has made God known as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is huge. It is common for us to think of Trinity doctrine as abstract and incomprehensible, but when we actually think of what the Father means to us and what Jesus means to us and what the Holy Spirit means to us – it is reason to celebrate the fact that it is through the incarnation – through the fact that Son of God was born as the God-man Jesus that we know God in a much deeper way than the saints knew him in the OT period. Just think of how precious it is to know God as our Father who loved us so much that he gave his Son for that we might have life in him. Just think of how Jesus came to earth – that the eternal Son of God humbled himself to permanently become the God-man so that we might be set free from

our sins and brought into a much deeper knowledge of God. Think of how through his life and teaching we come to know the Holy Spirit who dwells in us – who gives the new birth – who works in our hearts to show us the glory of Jesus.

We will now consider a little more about this subject from a slightly different perspective. We are dwelling on the truth that John teaches in these verses that the Word became flesh to make God known. Let's look again at verse 18. "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side he has made him known." Part of the point here is that in the God-man Jesus we see God.

In that foundational story in the book of Exodus where Moses asks to see God's glory, God makes the point which is echoed through the rest of the OT that no one can see God and live. But one of the great points of the Word becoming flesh is that in Jesus we do see God and live. By the eternal Son of God becoming the God-man, the glory of God became visible in the divine-human person of Jesus in a way that human beings could see that glory and live. That is one of the points of verse 14 – "The Word became flesh ... and we have seen his glory, glory as the only Son of the Father." Believers can now see the glory of God by seeing the Son as the divine-human being and live.

And that is not because the glory of God is somewhat muted by being manifested in a human being. The great point the NT makes about the eternal Son of God becoming flesh is that we see the glory of God more clearly in the divine-human Jesus than the glory of God in the OT which no one could see and live. In John 17:6 Jesus says to his Father, "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world." The knowledge of God that we receive through the Word becoming flesh is greater than any glory that the saints of the OT were not able to see and live and yet it does not kill those who see it.

What is going on here? The answer has to do with the cross. The cross is the pinnacle of the revelation of the glory of God and it was on the cross where Jesus most clearly revealed the glory of God. In John's gospel the term "hour" refers to the hour of Jesus' death on the cross. Early on in John's gospel, 2:4, Jesus says that his hour had not yet come. Then in John 12:23 Jesus says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." And what does he say next? 12:24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Then we have verse 12:27-28. Jesus is speaking. "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father glorify your name." Jesus is speaking about his death. For this purpose I have come to this hour. The Word became flesh to make God known. The Word became flesh to die. The Word became flesh to glorify God. It is in the death of Christ that God is most fully known and glorified.

Let me quote Thomas Schreiner from his NT Theology. "Jesus' hour represents the time when he will be glorified (John 12:23). His death is clearly in view, since he immediately spoke of a grain of wheat dying. He refused to ask the Father to deliver him from the hour of death, since his death was the purpose and even

“the capstone” of his coming (John 12:27-28), and so he asked the Father to glorify his name. Jesus had already glorified the Father by the way he lived, but he glorified it supremely in the cross.”

And now listen to this! Still quoting from Schreiner. “According to John, Jesus’ death represents not his humiliation but rather his glorification ..., for it represents his undying love for his disciples. What is humiliating in human eyes is beautiful in the eyes of God, for the self-giving and atoning love of Jesus displays the character of God.” (p. 284).

The Word became flesh in order to make God known. It is an unfathomably glorious truth that by becoming the God-man Jesus could reveal the glory of God in a way far beyond God “not-in-the-flesh” could reveal the glory of God. And the reason is that God “not-in-the-flesh” cannot give his life for sinners. God “not-in-the-flesh” cannot die. God “not in the flesh” cannot be in the form of a servant. There is something of the heart of God that cannot be demonstrated in any other way than through the eternal Son of God becoming the God-man so that he could be a servant – so that he could give his life for sinners. This is one of the amazing truths of the incarnation. It make it possible for God to reveal his glory through suffering and sacrifice and dying.

There is one more thing to notice one about John 1:18. “No one has ever seen God; the only God who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” The phrase “who is at the Father’s side” is literally “who is in the bosom of the Father.”

Bosom refers to the chest when a loved one is hugged. It can also refer to the posture of putting one’s arm around a loved one and pulling him close. Think of snuggling with a grand-child – or bosom buddies with their arms around each other. So, the idea of Jesus in the bosom of his Father is an image of the tender love between the Father and the Son. That was true of the relationship between the Father and the Son before the Son became the God-man Jesus. But it continued to be true of the relationship between the Father and Jesus.

So John here brings together the eternal love between the Father and the Son and making God known. “No one has ever seen God; the only God who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.” John highlights the fact that the one who has made God known is the one who has lived eternally in the love of his Father. I remind you that this is an experiential knowing. The profound truth here is that Jesus actually brings us into the love that he has shared with the Father from eternity. To know God as Jesus reveals him is to know experientially the love that the Father and the Son have shared from eternity.

Listen to how Jesus expresses this in his prayer to his Father in John 17:26. Jesus says to his Father, “I have made know to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

By making the Father known, Jesus brings us into the experience of the same love with which the Father has loved his Son from eternity. Jesus made the Father known – “that the love with which you have loved me may be in them....”

In their book on called *The Incarnation of God*, John Clark and Marcus Johnson write, “The Son came to make his Father’s love known among us, and the Father sent his Son so that we would know and experience that love.”

We have only scratched the surface of this topic. The Word became flesh to make God known. There are many more aspects to this than I have dealt with in this sermon. But what we have covered is certainly consistent with John’s emphasis. Jesus came to make know the Father has the one who had loved him from eternity and who willed to make that same love known experientially to all who would receive Jesus and believe in him.

If you have received Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, Jesus came as the God-man so that you might know that love.