

Guest Preacher - Rev. Gordon Matheson

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Preacher: Rev. Gordon Matheson

- [0 : 00] Would you turn, please, in your Bibles back to John's Gospel? We're going to look at this passage this morning that we've read.
- Let's read verse 14 again, although it's not a text as such.
- But verse 14, it says, 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.
- Let's just for a moment bow our heads in prayer before we study the Word. Heavenly Father, as we come just now to submit our lives beneath Your Word, we pray, Lord, for an insight to Your intention.
- Every act of communication carries the danger of being misunderstood because the speaker does not express well or because the hearers do not hear well.
- [1 : 24] And so we pray today that we would understand what's going on here, that this isn't merely me giving my thoughts. We're looking today to hear from God Himself speaking into our lives.
- And we know this happens because of the wonder of the work that the Holy Spirit does, opening hearts, unlocking lips, and granting wisdom and clarity to us.
- And so, Father, for all of our feebleness, for all of our weakness, may You today be at work in power and in strength.
- And we ask and pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. John's Gospel is absolutely fantastic.
- They say the best writers are people who can understand a subject matter and communicate it in the simplest of terms.
- [2 : 33] And that alone, in fact, takes a degree of genius to be able to do this. And John is writing about God, the greatest subject of all.
- And yet, when he writes, he writes in the simplest of language and often expresses the most profound of ideas.
- He says himself towards the end of the book, if you were to go to John 20, verse 31, he says there, these things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in His name.
- And so these are words that are meant to bring knowledge to us, but more than that, they're meant to bring life to us. And that is God's ultimate purpose in what is written before us.
- And yet, one of the strange things about the Bible is that it's also, along with being God's communication towards us, it's also written in a human hand.
- [3 : 48] And it's written with a sort of human imprint, as it were, on everything that we read. And John's Gospel is just like that. John was minister.
- He was an apostle called by Jesus, but he spent a good portion of his later life ministering in the church in Ephesus. And the church in Ephesus is one of these ones we know quite well, because we read about it in the Book of Acts.

We've got Paul's letters to it. We know that Timothy, when Paul wrote, certainly 1 Timothy, Timothy was stationed in Ephesus as minister for a stage. And John, we know, was also there.

We know Ephesus was the subject for some of the letters in the Book of Revelation that are addressed to the churches. There's a letter addressed to the church in Ephesus there as well.

And so, the context in Ephesus is really interesting when you come to look at John's Gospel. In Ephesus, around about 350 years before Christ, there was a Greek philosopher called Heraclitus.

[4 : 52] And Heraclitus, he's not a household name today. He's not somebody that we think, Oh, yeah, Heraclitus, I know all about him. You know, he jumped out of Bath and said, Eureka. No, that wasn't Heraclitus.

It wasn't Pythagoras either. He's not somebody who came up with mathematical formulas. But he did have this idea that the world that he saw was at the same time constantly changing, but also highly ordered.

And these are really important ideas. He's the one who actually first said that strange expression, You can never step into the same river twice. The river is constantly changing.

The water is flowing through it. And you can never step back into it. It's always changed. The constant flow of time means there's always change in our lives.

And yet, although things are constantly changing, Heraclitus had this idea that things are equally predictable. So you can do things the same way and get the same results.

[5 : 59] So although things are constantly changing, there's predictability as well. There's order. And for Heraclitus, the way he thought about that, that idea of change yet orderliness, was that he thought underneath everything that is going on, there must be something that's bringing order.

And Heraclitus didn't know what to call that. It was a new idea for him. It was a new idea in Greek philosophy. And so he called that the Logos.

That's the same word that John used when he started writing his gospel, having been minister in Ephesus, where that philosophical idea was relatively well known in that context.

He writes and says, in the beginning was the Logos. And the Logos was with God and the Logos was God.

It's the same word, literally, that we translate, the word we translate as word is the Greek word Logos. And in John's context, the Logos is that idea that there's something bringing order out of the chaos that we see around us.

[7 : 32] That, in fact, the world would be highly disorganized if it wasn't for the Logos. And so, writing, you know, maybe 70 years after the birth of Jesus, John, one of Christ's disciples, living in Ephesus, having been one of Jesus' closest friends, now, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, begins to write his record of the work of Jesus by saying, in the beginning was the Logos.

What John is asserting is that the Logos is not an unknowable force. the reason the entire universe is ordered, the reason that today we can do science, the reason that today we can understand that things are predictable.

You know, like, you know, my wife and daughter flew to Glasgow this week. You know, Colin, my wee boy, was really worried. He's like, how does the plane stay in the sky, Daddy? And I was like, well, I don't fully understand it.

I think it's to do with air pressure on wings. It's the same as birds flying. But it's predictable. The Wright brothers, when they first flew, they did it because it was predictable.

They knew they could make this happen. They understood the science. There's a predictability in the world that means our computers still normally work. It means that there's a predictability to our cars that when you turn on the ignition, the car is going to spark to life.

[9 : 11] There's a predictability about when you press the button on your heating system at home, it's going to come on if it's been well-serviced and maintained. All of that predictability is not just a sort of insignificant thing.

John's asserting here that that predictability in the world is written in because there is a God behind it all. And he says that is the Logos.

And Jesus is none other than this Logos. And so the people in Ephesus, they would have not found this an unusual idea. But what they would have thought was that if there was an orderliness in the world at all, it was unknowable, it's just a sort of force that's out there, much in fact like a lot of people in our day do.

They think that's just the way the universe is. That's just the way the world is. That there's no real knowability behind the actions of the universe and the cosmos.

There's no knowability behind the predictability of everything. There's no knowability. They're just forces at work and we are powerless in the face of them, but they're just forces.

[10 : 24] They're not personal. We can't know them. And so we should just live our lives as we want. And John is saying exactly the opposite. He's saying these, what we think of perhaps as just vague forces, became flesh.

We've got three C's today to think about. The first of them begins, the first C begins with I, it's incarnation. If you think about the carnation, the enfleshing of something. Jesus, the Logos, or God of the Logos, becomes flesh and dwells among us.

So we'll think about the incarnation today. Second C is creation. There is a creative work going on that has a purpose.

And then thirdly, there's a communication taking place. So incarnation, creation, and communication, my three C's with a little bit of cheating on the first one.

First of all, then, to think about the incarnation, some people today think about God much the same way as Heraclitus. thought about the Logos. People might say, if there is a God at all, He is completely unknowable.

[11 : 40] He is far away from us. He is detached from us. And we are like ants scurrying around at His feet. There is no way we can possibly know Him.

He is so vast. We are so tiny. How can we possibly know God? And John tells us that there is a solution to that. There is a solution to this. In verse 14, John says, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

He became incarnate. It's from the Latin. The word that we use in incarnation is from the Latin word, caro, for flesh or meat. It's a bit like fjol in Gaelic.

It's the same idea. And literally, we believe that God took on a flesh and blood body like ours.

So when we think about Jesus today, this is one of the things that sets us apart from some of the sects that I was talking about. We believe in a literal incarnation of Jesus. That the person of Jesus was not a mannequin.

[12 : 48] He was not somebody that just looked human. He was human. There's a long Christian tradition of this that we very often take for granted.

But we could not know God unless He chose to make Himself known to us by working among us, by walking among us, by living among us.

We sometimes think that about famous people on TV. You know, there's almost when you meet someone famous, you often kind of think it was a very strange experience because the person you've met, you actually have this idea in your head of who they are and what they're like.

And it's very often detached from the reality of what the person is really like. It seems they're different. That's because often the idea is different to the reality.

And so if you've never actually met God, if you're someone today who's here in this church, but you've never actually met God yourself, you've never come into personal contact with Him, it's possible that that's still the way you think, that even if God could be known personally, He's apart from us, He's different to us, He's away from us.

[14 : 08] And yet, He's not only a God that we can know a little bit about, He's not a God that we can kind of hear things about Him.

He is a God that we can know for ourselves. It's like with celebrity.

You can learn, and I know plenty of people do, they want to know all about celebrities. What are the Kardashians doing? What's their latest trends?

What are the latest diets that they're into? What's the fashion trends that they're setting? What are the relationship things that they're setting? How do they influence how we think about a lot of things in our world?

And you can know lots of things about them and about their opinions, but unless they actually come and live next door to you, you'd never really know them themselves. You'd never know the person.

[15 : 09] You'd never get to know the person. All you ever see is a projection and something about them, news of them. And that's what's happened in the incarnation. God, who is, on the face of it, created this world, perhaps, and stands at a distance, you might think, from it, has actually got involved.

He's come in person, and he's walked among us and experienced life among us and shown us himself, made himself known to us in order for us, as John says, in order that we may believe, in order that we may respond with faith.

faith. And that's why Jesus came, so that God could be known, and so that we, therefore, could believe, so that we could place our faith in him, that we could know him and rely on him and come to a place of trust in him.

The way the Bible talks about this, another picture that the Bible uses to get this idea over is the idea of a tent. He didn't just have a temple in our midst and then another temple of his own far away from us.

This is what the ancient world thought about, temples. The temples were like two ends of a phone system. You would go into the temple on earth and from the temple on earth, you could send messages to the temple, whatever the gods were, and there the gods would hear you.

[16 : 53] But the gods weren't actually in the temple. The temple was a communication stream to them. But the Bible says God didn't do this with us.

He came and he pitched his tent among us. He came to live among us, to experience life among us.

us. And there's all sorts of implications of that. But the chief one is that he's knowable. And so today God is no longer remote.

He has shared in our experiences, he has come close to us so that we can come to him with confidence. So if it's times of sorrow, God is not so remote from human experience that he can't enter into understanding what your sorrow feels like.

If it's disappointment, if it's pain, if it's feelings of abandonment, if it's disappointment, if it's betrayal, whatever it might be, these experiences of the human life are not remote from our God.

[18 : 14] And so we can come to him. We can come to him with confidence, knowing that he'll understand and that he'll receive us and not reject us.

So that's the first thing, the incarnation. God has become flesh. Second, see, is that there's an act of creation has been going on as well.

And again, in that early context, Heraclitus had certainly conveyed the idea that the logos brings order. And what John is doing here is he's taking that idea and filling it with, I think, a far greater degree of significance.

Because the logos is not just exerting order in what is. The logos creates all things. And you can't miss the reference, I suppose, when you read John's Gospel.

If you're at all familiar with the Old Testament, you can't miss the immediate connection. John says, in the beginning was the Word. And in the Bible, the very first line is, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

[19 : 24] And John's very deliberately, very simply, simple language, but a really profound idea, connecting the beginning of his gospel to the beginning of the Bible. And saying that Jesus, who is the subject of his gospel, is the one who is there at the beginning.

So in the beginning was the Word. That same Word is there in the beginning with God as part of God who is involved in the act of creation. So in the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the word, the eternal logos, is there right at the beginning as well.

The story of creation is actually a story of the work of Jesus. It's the story of the work of God the Son. And John is launching then into a statement about creation.

He goes in in verse 3 where he kind of fills out what he means by this and says, all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. Jesus, whom we can know because of the incarnation, the logos, is involved in creation.

He's not merely a created being that then God uses to create everything else. He's not a tool that God has formed. That's the way Mormons and I think Jehovah's Witnesses think about Jesus as well.

[20 : 49] Like he's the first of the created beings that God uses to then create everything else. That's just not the way the Bible speaks about Jesus at all. Remember, God's purpose in this book, in this gospel, it's there in John 20, verse 31, these things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you may have life in his name.

So when we think about Jesus, we think about someone, John wants us to think about someone who is bringing creation, who's bringing life into existence and into experience for people like us.

And then that's what John says in verse 4, in him was life. that Jesus is the one who brings, the Logos is the one who brings life to us.

And he goes on, I mean, when I say John uses very simple language to explain profound ideas, he goes on as this paragraph continues to explain something of what that means.

And when you go down to verses 12 and 13, you see there Jesus is the one who we have not received, but those who do believe in him, he gave the right to become children of God, who are born, made alive, not because of blood or because of the will of the flesh or because of the will of man, but by God.

[22 : 22] Like Jesus is exercising divine power to bring life into people like us. that's incredible when you stop and try to unpack that and think through the implications of what that means.

I mean, the Bible is pretty clear on this. We are dead in our trespasses and sins. There's a Pauline theological idea, but Paul writes and says we are dead in our trespasses and sins. We are spiritually dead.

So that means that we can't begin to move towards God in our own strength. It's not as if we get under power a little bit under our own steam and kind of change our direction towards God and then God sort of sends us a rescue line to bring us the rest of the way.

That's not how our salvation works. Our salvation is rooted firmly and entirely in the fact that this dead person, Gordon Matheson, has the life and the power of God at work in him, bringing him to life and lifting him, therefore, out of death and transferring him to a kingdom of life.

A state change has happened. And that's what works out in the lives of God's people through the eternal Logos.

[23 : 49] That Jesus has the power of life because he is the author of life, because he is the one who brings all life forward.

When you come to Christ, when you hear the call of Jesus, and you begin to think that's worth responding to, that's the work of the Holy Spirit already happening.

The Spirit is already studying within you the power of life to respond. and we spring then to everlasting life, rooted and connected to Jesus.

That's where our fruitfulness comes from. And so for us today, the Logos becoming flesh isn't just an interesting idea that Jesus is someone that we can know and understand and love because he knows us and experiences life like ours.

I mean, having a high priest who has experienced life like us, that makes him authentic. We can rely on him. We can trust in him. We can bring our prayers to him.

[25 : 01] But more so, he makes it possible for us to be born again, to be born of God. It makes us possible to have the conversation that Jesus has with Nicodemus, to say, you must be born again.

to go to John 3 and to see what lies underneath that. That God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

This is where our hope is found. The Logos, who became flesh, brings light and life into the experience of people who live in darkness and death.

He's not remote from us. He's not uninvolved in our salvation. He's not detached from the experiences we have. He is the means of that salvation.

In fact, there is no salvation to be found anywhere else. And that assertion is made right there in the beginning. There is no other hope outside Jesus.

[26 : 14] that's why Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. He is the only one who can bring life into us.

Because he is the only one who has the power to create life. He creates it from nothing in creation. And he creates it from nothing in our salvation as well.

life. And that's done through his flesh. The creation of life and renewal and salvation in us, he doesn't just do it by the word of his power, he earns it.

Through his death. It's through his death that he takes away our sin and guilt. It's through his death that he takes away the death that we deserve and gives us life with him in his resurrection.

So there is incarnation, there's creation. The last C is simply communication. I'm not going to linger on this at all just now actually. I'm going to come back to this tonight. But I want to leave this with you as a thought hanging.

[27 : 26] There is a communication going on. The word speaks. The word conveys something. It communicates something. The word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

Why? So that we could see something. That's what John says. He came and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory.

Glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth. So then John bears witness about him. John the apostle now bears witness about him as well.

Because Jesus himself is bearing witness about something or to something. He's showing us something. He wants us to see something. And what he wants us to see is actually the character of God.

He wants us to see what God is like so that we will believe in him. And so he says we have seen his glory. I mean that's what Jesus is doing today.

[28 : 34] It's what he's continuing to do through the Holy Spirit every time we open our Bibles. It's what he's doing in fact every time we look at creation as well. Because creation, the heavens declare the glory of the Lord.

And Jesus is the one who is engaged in all of this. It's his creation. Everything we see, that's the whole point of existence. It's so that everything is pointing us to see the glory of God.

And so I want to finish with that today and ask you what do you see? When you see Jesus, when you read about him, when you hear a bit about him, snippets even, what do you see?

Do you see, sadly, the wrong thing? So as I was praying at the beginning, in all acts of communication, the speaker can be speaking clearly, but the hearer might not hear clearly.

So are you hearing the wrong thing? Is it possible that when we think about Jesus communicating to us, we think, oh, well, he's communicating a distant, far away, alien, foreign God who's unknowable to me?

[29 : 43] Or do we think, no, this is God who I can know, God who I can see, God who I can almost touch because he's real. is he creating life in you?

Or do you think it's like he's still a part? Maybe you're saying, yes, he did create the world, yes, he, you know, maybe God did make all things, but I can't see him doing anything in my life, I can't see him making anything new in me.

Or do you think, no, his acts of creation are still happening now and he can create life in dead people like us, that he can change us.

Because he's involved in communication, he wants to hear from you. He wants to hear you ask. And so today, I would encourage you to ask for this enfleshed, creative God to speak to you and reveal himself.

Let's pray then. to God just now. Heavenly Father, we give you praise and thanks that today you are a God who is communicating, you are a God who is reaching out to us.

[31 : 04] You want us to know you, you want us to understand you, you want us to have a grasp on who you are. And we thank you that you've done that through your son coming into this world and living among us. We thank you that he came to bring life to dead people like us.

And I pray today that that would be our greatest desire, that we would know the life of God in our own experience, that we would know the light and the life of Christ given to us, that we would no longer walk in darkness, but that we would be children of the living God.

May we today therefore hear what you are saying to us. May we respond with faith and we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing in conclusion with a couple of verses in Psalm 139.

And we're going to sing in the Scottish Psalter version, page 433 in the Blue Book. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing verses 17 and 18.

[32 : 14] How precious also are thy thoughts, O gracious God to me! And in their sum, how passing great and numberless they be! If I could count them than the sand, they more a number be.

What time soever I awake, I ever am with thee. It's a simple thought that the psalm expresses that God's thoughts are so precious. His communication, what God is saying to us, the word that God is speaking to us, the logos of God, is so precious.

And we could never really fathom the fullness of it all. We'll never get the measure of it. Thankfully, as we sing these words, we have the hope of an eternity to explore that.

There is an eternity of communication behind God. He's not going to run out of things to show us or to speak to us out of his character. And his grace. So let's sing these two verses to his praise.

How precious also are thy thoughts, O gracious God to me! O gracious God to me!

[33 : 36] How precious of our God and members of our world vlogs for us! How mighty I be! How curious am I there!

How precious do you come to the ████████ leave? How precious do you come to the valley of the shadow within your sight? They never sign What I'm so rare Now the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and always. Amen.

Amen.