

Guest Preacher - Rev. Gordon Matheson

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Preacher: Rev. Gordon Matheson

- [0 : 0 0] Would you turn, please, in your Bibles back to the passage that we've read in John's Gospel. I want to continue this evening where we are kind of looking this morning.
- This idea that Jesus, as the Word, the Logos, made flesh and living among us, is not only involved in this great work of creation that includes bringing new life to His people, but is also communicating truth from God.
- So let's bow our heads and pray before we study the Word. Heavenly Father, we thank You that tonight we have time to draw aside for a short while to consider the words of the truth of the Scriptures.
- We are, O Lord, people who need desperately to hear Your voice. We are like sheep lost in a wilderness.
- We need to hear the voice of God calling us to safety and calling us home. We need communication from You. And so we pray that tonight, as we think about what Jesus has done and who Jesus is, that we would see some clarity of that communication brought to us, that we would understand and have clarity, that we would have certainty, in fact, on which to build our lives.
- [1 : 3 3] And so we pray that tonight we would hear Your voice and that You would bless us pursuing it. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So just very briefly to recap what we thought about this morning, we saw that the idea that John launches with in his gospel is this idea from philosophy of there being a logos, a unifying order of some sort that's brought into the cosmos.
- And John says that's not an impersonal force. John says this is a person we can know. And we know that Jesus is this great unifying principle in which the whole of our experience and the whole cosmos exists.
- And we know that's the case because Jesus was incarnated. He was God made flesh to come and live among us. And through the incarnation, we have this idea that Jesus then becomes knowable, that God becomes knowable because we have seen Him, because we have met with Him in the life of the person of Jesus.
- And so everything that we read about in the Gospels is so foundational to the Christian faith because these things are recorded carefully by eyewitnesses or taking eyewitness accounts of the person of Jesus written down, recorded for us so that we will believe, so that we will have faith and a deepening trust and experience of God in our lives.
- We know as well that the Word is not just a sort of force that's generally at work in some way, but it does specific things. And one of that specific things, the crucial thing is that the Word was creating.
- [3 : 2 0] The eternal Logos was involved in creation right at the beginning. So when God spoke and said, let there be light, that divine speech is corresponded here to the light that Jesus shines into the darkness of human lives.
- And that's an idea that Paul has here. We know it's an idea that John has here, but Paul builds on in 2 Corinthians 4, for example, as well, where he talks about the light shining into the darkness, but that so often we love the darkness rather.

And when God says, let there be light, it's as if we are coming from death to life out of the darkness that is there. And so Jesus, we know then, is, as he says himself in John's Gospel, recorded for us, the light of the world.

So new life comes, new birth comes through the creative power of Jesus to bring salvation to us. The third thing, though, that I mentioned this morning was to do with the communication that is happening.

The Word dwells among us. The Word brings creation into our lives. It brings life into our lives. And really, the point of this or the mechanism for all of this is that Jesus is communicating.

[4 : 43] He creates life by the power of his speech. The same as God creates all things by the divine speech in Genesis 1, Jesus brings life by speaking into us.

And we know him because he is revealing to us, showing us, telling us about his Father. So we know God because Jesus reveals God to us.

And so what I want to think about tonight, rather, is just this idea of communication that's happening. And I suppose I'm not going to try and cheat tonight the same way. I've got three B's.

It is a bright communication. It is a better communication. And it is a blessed communication. It's a bright communication, first of all, because what is communicated is this thing that is called glory.

If you look at verse 14, 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.

[5 : 52] Now this goes back, again, I think there's so much of John 1 that relates back to Genesis chapter 1. And if you remember back in Genesis, when God created the heavens and the earth, the first thing that God created was light.

And that's a really fascinating idea because he didn't create the sun. He created light. And it's a really strange thing, in fact, when you think about physics.

I just say this as a little aside. It's just a thought that I have sometimes. when physicists and astronomers are gazing out into the depths of space and it's huge, it's vast, there is a thing out there in the cosmos that is called cosmic background radiation.

And physicists, they believe that it's the leftover noise almost from the Big Bang. But I've often wondered myself, you know, when you think about the way God created all things, if that cosmic background radiation, is that not perhaps an echo of the light that was created on day one of creation?

But regardless, God didn't create the sun. Sometimes we get really hung up on this and say, well, what was the intermediate thing that God created instead of the sun in order to regulate day and night in the beginning of creation?

[7 : 21] It doesn't matter because I think the answer to that is surely that God himself is present. The Spirit of God had hovered over the face of the waters. And so if there's any radiance or light, it's, I would suggest, perhaps the manifestation of God's brilliance.

And the reason I say that is because where God manifests himself in the Old Testament, there is a radiance there. When the Israelites are leaving Egypt, there's a pillar of cloud that guides the people.

But that pillar of cloud, it's not just a kind of, it's not like a, like a cyclone or a twister. It's not like a storm of darkness. It's something that's filled with radiance so that at night when they look at the pillar of cloud, it's glowing.

There's a light emanating from it, a brilliance of it. And it's there protecting the children of Israel when they cross the Red Sea. When they arrive at Mount Sinai, again, it's a terrifying experience for them because the cloud engulfs Mount Sinai.

And the whole mountain is covered with lightnings and flashing light. And the brilliance of God's presence descending on the mountain is there as well.

[8 : 42] When Moses goes up onto the mountain then to spend time with God and he comes back to the children of Israel, his face has kind of become irradiated. I remember, you know, these days we tend to have mobile phones and digital alarm clocks and things so we can see the light in them.

It used to be the case if you had something that had a slightly, very mildly radioactive paint in it, that if you shone a bright light on it it would absorb some of the photons from that light and it would become, when you took it and put it into a dark place, it would radiate some of that light.

And so your clock at night would shine with the hours and the time on it. And Moses' face is a bit like that when he comes down from Mount Sinai. He's radiating the glory of God because he's been in the presence of God and it's as if he's absorbed some of that and he's now radiating it back.

It's interesting, that's perhaps what's going to happen to us, the new heavens and the new earth. Jesus prays in John 17 and says, Father, I would that they whom you have given me be with me to see me as I am.

And one day we'll see Jesus in his glory, his radiance and we'll reflect it. That we'll be transformed by the glory of Jesus immediately present right there before us.

[9 : 57] The brilliance of God that then inhabits the space between the cherubim on the mercy seat. The gold-covered lid that was put on top of the Ark of the Covenant that's sprinkled in blood on the Day of Atonement.

That is the throne of God among his people in the tabernacle and in the temple. And it's there that God resides, that when the high priest goes in on the Day of Atonement, what he goes into is the presence of God and the radiance of God has filled that place.

The dedication of the temple, similarly, when Solomon's temple is dedicated, the people rejoice because the radiance, the brilliance of God fills the temple. There's also the radiance, the glory of God that's present in a few other places as well.

When Elijah is taken home, fire from heaven comes. All of that suggests the Jews had a very clear sense of the connection between the brilliance of God and his glory.

A glory that was visible, that was seen. And so now, when Jesus comes in the flesh, he comes revealing glory.

[11 : 22] What Jesus reveals is bright. It's wonderful to look at and see. Now, there's only one place where that really happens during the earthly ministry of Jesus.

We call it the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus goes up on a mountaintop, takes Peter, James, and John with him. When they're up on the mountaintop and the disciples are there, they see with them Moses and Elijah come and speak.

The law and the prophets combine come and speak with him, converse with him. And his face, he's transfigured before them. His glory is revealed. But that's not what John draws attention to here.

He says, we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. When Jesus appeared, he wasn't walking around for 30-odd years shining like the sun.

He wasn't walking around as, you know, sometimes art from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance would suggest with a sort of glowing halo around his head and therefore everyone would have thought, ah yes, there's God because he's radiant and glowing.

[12 : 31] He reveals his glory not in how he looks. Isaiah says it, he has no form or comeliness that we desire him. Instead, he reveals glory in what he does, what he communicates, what he shows us.

And what Jesus is showing us is the character of his Father. his Father's ways are visible in the things Jesus does and the ways Jesus deals with people.

And the phrase that John uses is this word full of grace and truth. That's an Old Testament. I know it's written in Greek and we read it in English in our Bibles, but it's an Old Testament idea, it's a Hebrew idea.

Two words from the Old Testament that were always translated the same way in the Greek version of the Old Testament scriptures in the Septuagint. The words were the loving kindness of God, the chesed of God, his covenant love for his people.

And the other word in Hebrew was a muth, the faithfulness, the truthfulness of God, the reliability of God. And when John says Jesus came and we've seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth, what he means is when we saw Jesus in his ministry, when Jesus called us, when we worked with him, when we walked with him, when we learned from him, when we were with him for these three years, what we saw was the character of God, the grace of God revealed.

[14 : 13] What we saw, the brilliance, the radiance that we saw coming from Jesus was the faithfulness that we have come to expect biblically of what God is like.

And for us today, we need to remember that that's what we are communicating. I mean, partly that's what's being communicated to us and every time we open our Bibles and every time we come to church and hear God's Word preached.

What we want to hear and what we want to see is something of the glory of Jesus. I hope that's what you long for. I hope when you're coming to church on a Sunday, you want to see Jesus worthy of worship, that God is worthy of your praise.

I expect it is. But also, we should remember if we're in the business of making Jesus known, then that's what we need to show as well.

that we show the radiance of Jesus in the gracious way in which we act and deal with people. We show the radiance of Jesus in the faithfulness, the reliability, the trustworthiness of our words.

[15 : 35] And when we make a promise, we keep it. It may be the most basic level of understanding that. That we're true to what we say. That we're true friends.

That we're true brothers. That we care deliberately for people and we stick with them through hard times. That when we minister, we don't give up.

But that we show grace in how we act. The character that Jesus showed was then one of grace. You could taste God's grace in how Jesus lived.

His love for the unlovable was palpable. You could touch it. And His faithfulness is great.

He will never forsake you. He will never abandon you. He will never let you go. And that tonight is what we cling to. Oswald Chambers, he wrote and said, faith is deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time.

[16 : 49] And that's where we are tonight with faith. We look to Jesus and even when we don't understand what God is doing in our lives, when we don't understand God's purposes in the illness that comes, the infirmity that comes, we say still, your grace is visible.

That is what we know and hold to. So there is a brilliance, a brightness in the communication that Jesus brings. He also brings better communication.

And this is one of these things that John, I think, is really trying to build on what we could say is almost previous communication.

God has already spoken. John doesn't deny that. I mean, sometimes people think that way. They say, well, you know, Jesus is coming and he's so different to what the Old Testament says.

It's almost as if they're two different gods. There's a God of the Old Testament who's vicious and nasty and there's Jesus, God in the New Testament who's lovely and kind. And I would much rather the lovely, kind God of the New Testament and forget and do away with the God of the Old.

[17 : 59] And what Jesus comes with is not a different communication. He comes with a better communication. And it's an important point to grasp. It is better.

Verse 16 and 17, if we just read them again together. From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses.

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. So, the old communication, the previous communication, the pre-existing communication, John describes it as the law which came through Moses.

And there's an awful lot going on here and doctrinally and theologically there's an awful lot to unpack and I don't want to get bogged down too much in that.

But what I want to say just simply is quite coincidentally I suppose in a way is that the way John is speaking here he's not saying that what came before is now irrelevant but just that Jesus is something fuller.

[19 : 14] And if you're stuck in the Old Testament and if you go back in time and you imagine you live in the Old Testament, you live before Christ came then actually you're limited in what you know.

I mean there's a lot of Old Testament. There's a lot of words. There's a lot of chapters. There's a lot of books. There's a lot of prophecies. There's a lot of Psalms. There's a lot of wisdom. There's a lot of law.

It's there in its fullness. And the New Testament is much more comparatively shorter character. But what we read in the New Testament is much more clear on the character of God.

And the reason for that is because the Old Testament there's a limit. A limit because the person of God himself is not incarnated, living among us, and bringing new life to his people.

He's not there present communicating. It's always through intermediaries. There's prophets who come with words. There's a revelation of the law given to Moses.

[20 : 22] It's something written down. It's not imprinted on a character. In fact, that's one of the blessings of the New Covenant that is given to the church in the Old Testament.

We're told that when the New Covenant comes, the law will be written on our hearts. We'll be given new hearts that have an imprint of God's law on them. And that's because of the creative life that Jesus brings.

And so the Old Testament is always going to be limited. It's not enough. We need the fullness of what Jesus brings in terms of that better communication.

Now, that doesn't mean you do away with the Old Testament law. It just doesn't. The Old Testament law, it's given graciously. It's given in three layers, I think, as well. There's a most fundamental layer of the Old Testament law is that it's given as a moral law.

It's given to tell us what's imprinted on human hearts, what it means to be an image bearer of God. It means that we don't murder. We don't commit adultery.

[21 : 32] We don't lie. Equally, we don't work and function well without rest on the Sabbath. We don't function well by having multitudes of gods.

We don't function well by blaspheming. And there's a lot that's wrong with human society because so much of this has been lost. But the moral law is still there as a basic imprint of what's good for humanity.

And then above that, there's this other level where just the good of society generally is kind of expressed in the civil law that was given to the Israelites. There's rules that govern how things happen day to day that set for them safe boundaries for how they should live.

Things that are necessary for community to function. And the law does that. It gives rules for how you treat the defenseless, the destitute, the asylum seeker, the widow, the poor, older people.

All of that's graciously revealed in the law. There's rules around things like slavery. Not to say slavery is okay, but to say slavery is going to happen.

[22 : 48] We live in a world where exploitation happens because people are sinful. And it needs to be curtailed. It's almost as sometimes I think the Bible is saying there's almost a best case scenario.

We need to strive for that to improve on things. But in all of this the Bible is graciously laying out a law that if we approach it on a basis of first principles it tells us what is good for society.

And it shows us a little bit of the character of God because God cares about the poor. He cares about the destitute. He delights in showing mercy to people who are without it.

It's when Jesus comes that we see that in full. And the reason we can say that is because the third layer of the law is also the ceremonial layer. There's a lot in the Old Testament law that simply says things are very seriously wrong and they need to be dealt with by very serious things.

Animals have to be sacrificed and blood has to be shed. And as Hebrews tells us all that blood doesn't take away sin. It merely points to Jesus.

[23 : 58] And so when Jesus comes it's inherently better. That's why we can say the law was given through Moses. That's good.

Grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. The fullness of God's revelation.

The pinnacle of it. The very best that God has to say to us has now come in the person of Jesus. And I think I mentioned it this morning in passing that's never going to end.

God has many good things to continue to say. He has good things to continue to teach us, to reveal to us, to say to us, and for all the ages of eternity ahead.

If we are in Christ, then that communication will continue. He's going to continue to speak.

[25 : 05] He's going to continue to reveal himself and lavish his grace and his faithfulness upon his people. I mean, something is better as here.

I was thinking, I was trying to work out if there was a good way of illustrating this, and illustration's important. And it occurs to me actually that illustration is the way to think about it.

My kids like building Lego sets. And so they open up the bags of Lego that they come in and they tear them open and they're like, Dad, how do I build this?

And I say, well, there's the instructions as well. You know, it's not just a bunch of Lego pieces that's in a bag. And so they open up the instructions. And sometimes the instructions are relatively clear.

In fact, often they are. But sometimes they get confused and they say, Dad, where exactly does this bit go? Or sometimes they don't and they put it in the wrong place and then they get further on and they say, Dad, I've done something wrong, I need to rebuild it. The illustration isn't perfect.

[26 : 24] It needs the kind of vision of what the finalized thing is going to look like. And when you have it and you finish it, and you look at the instruction book, you think, wow, this thing is built, it's finished.

The illustration, it's helpful, it's nice to have the picture, but the final article, the last thing is really good. It's maybe the same with the royal wedding, if you remember, the last big royal spectacle, or the coronation.

you can see it on a screen, but actually being present, being brought inside to be part of it is much, much better.

And that's, I think, where we are with what John's saying in the beginning of his gospel. Jesus communicates better. We've got the chance to see the fullness of God in Jesus.

Jesus. And so, this wonderful, bright communication that has been revealed to us, it's not merely a hope for the future, it's something that we have got now, that's communicated to us in full now.

[27 : 38] And I wonder if that's how we view our mission. Because that's where we are tonight as ambassadors of Christ.

we have a responsibility to make good the fullness of the communication that Jesus has given us. And sometimes we get that wrong as Christians.

We get it wrong in our communities, we get it wrong in our lives, we get it wrong with other people, because all we do sometimes is judge. We're very quick to tell people when things are wrong.

We're very quick to see what's wrong in our nation, in our public life. We're very quick to see what's wrong in our communities and what's wrong in so many different areas of life.

We're quick to point out what's wrong in individuals and find fault. But what Jesus offers us is a better communication.

[28 : 42] an opportunity there for us to show grace into these big questions that affect us. When we think about politics or when we think about our communities and what they need, when we think about what's happening around us, when we think about what's happening and going wrong in our families, we have an opportunity to show the fullness of the wisdom and the grace of God, bringing Christ into these situations, bringing true reconciliation, bringing truth.

The last though point is that we also bring, or we're brought rather, blessed communication. By blessed what I mean is really God himself, the blessed one, communicates himself to us.

John, he's already hinted at this in the divine character of the word. Back in verse 1, he says the word was God, the word was with God. But as you go on in this passage, you see in verse 14, part of this coming out very fully, the word became flesh, dwelt among us, we've seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth.

And it's even more explicit in verse 18, no one has ever seen God, but the only God, it's a strange construction in Greek, actually. The only God who is at the father's side has made him known.

And what John's pointing to there very specifically is the divine character of God is being communicated to us. Jesus claims to be God.

[30 : 26] It's not something that was put on him. And sometimes people say that, you know, they say, well, you know, Jesus was never claimed to be God. His disciples just said he was. And everything's nonsense.

Or maybe Muslims, they would say Muslims believe that Jesus was not God and Jesus never claimed to be God. Muslims would say Jesus only ever claimed to be a prophet, like Muhammad. He's not God.

Or Jehovah's Witnesses today, or Mormons, wherever else. Jesus is not God. But Jesus claims to be God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God.

God. What that means is that we're no longer playing a guessing game. Tonight, we're not guessing what God is like anymore.

The Greeks had to do that all the time. The Romans did it all the time. They're constantly questioning, they're wondering, are the gods for us, or are they against us? Are the gods on our side, do we have to appease them?

[31 : 27] Are the gods for us, do we have to thank them? What do we have to do to keep the gods on our side? Are they going to be capricious? One day, are they going to send rain that grows our crops, and the next day they're going to send floods that wipes everything out?

Is that because we've annoyed them in some way? What have we done wrong? In fact, the whole ancient world is full of that, that uncertainty.

Where do the gods stand in relation to us? Literally everywhere is a guessing game. And into this chaos comes Christianity, comes the claims of the Bible, that we can know that tonight you can have assurance.

You can know. And that's a profound thing. The uncertainty is gone. We have certainty because, as John says in verse 18, God has come from God to tell us.

God has come from Himself. God has come from the triune essence of God, the Trinity. A member of that Trinity has come, the second person of the Godhead, we could say.

[32 : 41] He has come to show us and assure us of who God is and what He is like. And we have, excuse me, we have His grace, His love for the unlovable, and His truth, His faithfulness to fall back on and to rely on.

And so tonight, there is no more guessing with our God. There's no room tonight for uncertainty. There is room instead for confidence so that we can hear what John says.

So John the Baptist says, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We can agree with John. We can say our Amen to John because of the faithfulness of Jesus.

John hadn't seen how that was going to happen. You remember, in fact, as the story of John's Gospel goes on, John the Baptist has doubts. Are you the Christ or are we waiting for another? It's not what he expected.

But we have the end of the story. We have the story of the cross. We have the story of the resurrection. We have the story of the ascension. We know how the story ends. And John, ultimately, in the end, John's given revelation.

[34 : 06] He's given the future. And that's written for us. And so tonight, we don't have to have uncertainty. We can agree with John the Baptist. We can say, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And that tonight, for us, is an invitation to a place of great immeasurable confidence. Because, remembering that quote that I had from Oswald Chambers, faith is deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time.

You might not know what he's doing in your life right this minute. You might be uncertain. You might be thinking to yourself, I don't know why this chaos has engulfed me.

It might be cancer. It might be sudden unemployment. It might be the loss of friends or family. It might be people you know going through really hard times.

Sometimes it's because the church isn't the way you want it to be. And you think it's very frustrating. God will be the Lord. And yet into this we have a truth.

[35 : 21] Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This Word who was made flesh and came and dwelt among us and who shows us the glory and the character of the Father, He is doing what He said He would do.

He is faithful to His promise and tonight He invites us to trust in Him. These things are written that you may believe.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. Give thanks that He came.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we bow before You this evening. We thank You that Jesus came, that God came into this world and has rescued us, has brought us salvation.

We thank You for the character that He showed, the way in which He lived, because it shows us Your character. It shows us the character of God, the grace and the faithfulness of a living God.

[36 : 36] And we pray, therefore, that we would have boldness in how we live for You. Help us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

We're going to conclude our worship singing in Psalm 96a. So this is in Sing Psalms, page 126 of the Blue Book, page 126.

We're going to sing from the beginning through to verse 9 to God's praise.

So five stanzas. We'll sing a new song to the Lord, sing praises to His name, and His salvation day by day. Let all the earth proclaim. His glory and His mighty deeds to every land declare, how great and awesome is the Lord, with whom no gods compare.

I will stand to sing to God's praise. O sing a new song to the Lord, sing praises to His name, and His salvation.

[38 : 01] day by day, let all the earth proclaim.

His glory and His fight He deeds to every land declare, how great and awesome is the Lord, with Him no gods compare.

For other gods are wood and stone, the Lord made heaven's height.

O power and majesty are His, He dwells in glorious light.

all nations to the Lord us cry, the glory now is due.

[39 : 39] Glory and strength us cry to God embrace His name on you.

Enter His course with joy and bring an offering with you.

worship the Lord in holy fear, all earth before Him bow.

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.