

The Word became Flesh

John 1:1-14

Christmas Service, 20 December 2020, Covenant Waterfall

Read

Pray

Introduction

I think we can all agree that 2020 has been a tough year! If we had to think back to this time last year, none of us would have guessed that our world was about to be turned upside down. The virus itself and the response to the virus have been drastic. People we know have got sick. The lockdown has caused irreparable economic damage. People we know have lost their jobs. Most of us have lost income. We've lost some of our freedoms. Governments all across the world are seizing upon this crisis and becoming increasingly tyrannical over us, the citizens. Churches too have been hit hard. Let's not forget that we were forced by our government to close for over two months. And after that, been subject to various regulations on how we are to worship the Lord.

And now we are coming into the second wave – tragically more people getting sick, more deaths. And with this - those horrid restrictions are going to return. Perhaps some of us will not be able to celebrate Christmas together because of the virus. It's really easy in times like these to become increasingly hopeless and discouraged.

The question you may be asking yourself in the midst of this is, 'why have things got so bad?' Perhaps you think that the way to make sense of this is karma. We're getting what we deserve. We've been bad people – polluted the planet, started wars, exploited the vulnerable. So the solution then must be for us all to try harder, to be better people, be more loving and kind. And then all will be well?

But is this really the answer? At first glance it seems appealing. Who wouldn't want to strive to be a better person. Yet the more you think about it, it seems like a whole lot of work, and a heavy burden to bear.

The Root of the Problem

If we really want to understand the root of the problem in the world, we must go back to the first few chapters of the Bible, Genesis 1-3. Here we read that, **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."** (Gen 1:1). He created everything to be good, and the crowning glory of his creation was mankind – which he called **"very good"** (Gen 1:31). The first humans, our ancestors Adam and Eve, lived in a paradise called the Garden of Eden. There they had everything they needed. They enjoyed a perfect relationship with each other, and with God himself. In fact, he dwelt among them in the Garden, walking with them in the cool of day (Gen 3:8) – perfect communion with God.

Yet that perfection didn't last too long. Instead of obeying God's Word to them, they listened to the words of the serpent – in doing so rebelled against God – rebelled against their Creator. From that point on all mankind was plunged into sin. Separated from God, alienated from him. Special communion with God gone. Separation between God and man.

Result? Rest of OT – and all of human history – tragedy – destruction and death. Reason for the problem, reason the world is in the mess that it is – tyranny, oppression, corruption, death, sickness. Closer to home - mess in our own lives – broken relationships, our issues - sin. All result of the fall.

But God didn't leave us in our mess. Right after Adam and Eve fell into sin, God made a promise in Genesis 3:15 - That one day he would send a seed of the woman, a descendant of Eve, to crush the head of the serpent. One-day God would send Someone – a Messiah - to come and destroy the power of sin, make peace again between God and his people and dwell among us again – he our God and we his people.

The rest of the OT looks forward to that day through various glimpses. One of them in particular – Tabernacle. Because God could no longer dwell with his people in the Garden – sin destroyed the relationship, God instead dwelt in a tent, called the Tabernacle. Place where God's glory dwelt – yet still separated from his people Israel. No one except the high

priest could enter the Tabernacle, and only after they had performed a series of animal sacrifices in order to atone for their sins and the sins of the people of Israel. Just a shadow of something much greater to come.

Fullness of time

Eventually, in the providence of God, that something greater did come. Galatians 4:4 continues: **“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman...”** That promised seed of the woman, the Messiah, sent by God to crush the head of the serpent had now come! And his name was Jesus.

The first chapter of Matthew’s Gospel describes his coming, the first Christmas in more detail (vv.18-25):

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Here we see the profound mystery of Christmas: God himself came down to us, to save us from our sins – to sort out the problem in which we find ourselves. Jesus’ name is Immanuel, meaning ‘God with us.’ He left the glories of heaven, to enter a virgin’s womb, taking on flesh and was born as a baby in a dirty manger in Bethlehem.

In Christmas we see the heart of the gospel: not that we have to reach up to God, trying harder and being better – but that God came down to us in grace, and became man, and

meets us in our sin and mess and saves us from our sins. Romans 5:8, **“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”**

What a profound mystery! How are we to truly grasp this? The Apostle John reflects on the truth of Christmas in the first chapter of his gospel. Here he zooms out of Jesus’ birth in a manger in Bethlehem and provides us with the bigger picture of who exactly this Jesus is...

Six Christmas Truths about Jesus

1. Jesus is Eternal, vv.1-2

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God.”

Jesus did not come into existence 2000 years ago in a stable in Bethlehem. Jesus was in the beginning with God before anything was created. Before there was anything – Jesus was – incredible! Ponder that...

“In the beginning” – deliberate connection to Genesis 1:1, **“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”** The Word was there with God in the beginning when he created the universe. Claim here – Jesus existed before time – he is pre-existent, uncreated, he was when there was nothing. Jesus in Jn 8:58, **“Before Abraham was, I Am”** – he was with God before time, he has always existed, he’s eternal.

2. Jesus is God Himself

Not only has Jesus always existed, but John writes in verse 1 that **“the Word was God.”** Not one of many religious options, one of many ways to God – *no* – he *is* God himself! Nor is he some lesser divinely created being. Some believe before God created the world, he created Jesus out of time. Arius, a presbyter in the church in the 2nd century, “There was a time when the Son was not.” Condemned as a heretic. Yet this heresy still rears itself – JW’s believe this, they change this verse in their bibles, “the Word was a god.” No – the Word was God. Jesus is fully God, uncreated, eternal, with God right from the beginning! There was never a time the Word was not.

3. Jesus is the Word of God

Why is Jesus called the Word, (Greek = Logos) of God? In Genesis 1, God spoke his Word and the universe came into being. God's Word creates. God's Word achieves things, it is alive and active. What God says will always come into being. Jesus is the Word of God. The same word which brought the universe into being, is Jesus himself. He is the One who creates something from nothing. He brings life by the power of his word. He keeps his promises in his Word, always accomplishing that which he has said he will do.

4. Jesus is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, vv.3

"All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Incredible truth here – everything was created through Jesus. Shows that he is God – only God creates something from nothing. There is nothing that does not depend on Jesus for existence. Colossians 1:16, **"For by him all things were created..."** He holds all things together – entire universe. Points to common grace – things don't fall apart in this world only because Jesus is holding them together. The fact that we have rains, sunshine, provision, food is only because Jesus holds all things together which were created through himself.

5. Jesus is True Life and Light, vv.4-5

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Jesus is true life. As all things were created through Jesus, this means that he is the origin of all life – he is God – true life only comes from God. Life in every sense of the word. That we are alive and breathing now is only because Jesus gave us this life. "Life" here and now – abundant, spiritual life – forgiveness of our sins, Holy Spirit's continuous work of sanctification in our lives, knowing that we're loved by our Father who has adopted us as his sons, knowing that nothing can separate us from God's love, able to enter God's presence freely because of what Jesus has done for us, freedom not to be a slave to sin, to live life as God intended, able to love others generously because God loved us first.

Also life as in eternal life – everlasting life with God in the new creation, the promise and assurance that when we die, we will be raised with Christ, we'll always be his, resurrection life, being raised up in our new resurrection bodies, living forever in God's presence.

Jesus' life is our light – in him was life and the life was the light of men. What does this mean? Life and light? Life can only exist with light. Plants can't grow in the dark; we can't live without light. So Jesus' life is our light – in his life, by his Spirit that's within us, we have light in our lives. In Christ, we're no longer in the darkness, fumbling around in our sin, making stupid and destructive choices. Alive in Christ, we're in the light and are able to live the way God intended – in his will, according to his Word – the best way possible – abundant life.

Jesus calls himself the "Light of the world" – later in John 8:12. Anyone who follows him will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life – great news!

⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Wonderful Christmas declaration: announcing that Jesus' arrival into the world – the true light has stepped down into the darkness of the world. He has come – his light *shines* (present tense) in the darkness. Not just at that moment 2000 years ago when he was born in a manger, instead his light continues to shine to this day (doesn't say "light has shone"). Nature of light is that darkness flees when it shines. Jesus' light shines in this world and nothing can put it out, "darkness has not overcome it."

Great news for us – we're on the winning side. Even when it seems like darkness is overtaking us – and it has certainly seemed that way during this year – the ravages of sinful world: sickness, suffering, brokenness, loss, evil, struggles with sin, broken relationships, whatever it may be – we can know this truth that ultimately the light will overcome this present darkness – that's the promise here – darkness will never win. In fact, the light is already shining and darkness is fleeing. We can trust in God's goodness that he is working out all things for his good. Jesus' light is still shining in our dark world and the darkness will never overcome it.

6. Jesus is the Word who became flesh and dwells with us, v.14

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, full of grace and truth.

High point to which John has been working – the Word became flesh – the Incarnation of Christ – the very point of Christmas. He's shown us in vv.1-2 that the Word is God, now he says that this same Word became flesh. Mystery of the Incarnation - Jesus is both fully God and fully man. Truth here – God has not remained distant, cold and out of reach from us. It's not up to us to try and work up our way to him through our good works and trying to be better people. Instead he has come down to us – completely identified with us, made like us in every respect, except for sin. He has sought us out and done everything necessary to restore us to himself.

Verse 14 also says Jesus “dwelt with us” - Greek here = pitched a tent, literally “tabernacled” with us. Same Gk word used in the Gk OT for the Tabernacle in Israel. Then – God's glory limited to an earthly tent, access restricted to high priests – only enter after having made animal sacrifices for their sins and the sins of God's people (sin separates us from God).

Here – Jesus is God's true tabernacle. Tent in the OT just a glimpse pointing to the real and better thing in Christ. No longer will God's glory be housed in tents and Temples, but now in Christ, his glory is revealed in Jesus himself. God comes to dwell in all his glory once again with his people as he did back in the Garden of Eden. In Christ, we are restored to perfect communion with God, who dwells now with us by his Spirit.

So what?

Why was it so important that the Eternal Word of God became flesh? Hebrews 2:17 tells us, **“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”**

The only way God could sort out the root of the problem of the world – sin – the root of our problem, was to send Jesus to earth as one of us, as flesh and bones. Whether or not we realise it, sin has touched us in every way. Externally – problems we experience in the world. Internally – bent to rebellion against God. On our own, we are not right with God. Romans

3:11 says that, **“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.”** As a result, we deserve his judgement of death and eternal punishment in hell.

But because of God’s great grace and mercy, he sent Jesus to face that punishment that we deserved – death on a cross - as a flesh and blood substitute – to make propitiation for our sins – instead of us. He came to save his people from their sins (Mt 1:21). The Word became flesh in order to take the punishment that all flesh – you and I – deserve.

Tragedy is that despite God’s amazing offer of grace in Christ, many find it foolishness and reject it. John 1:11 – **“he came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”**

Friends, don’t harden your hearts to the Lord! Outside of Christ there is no salvation, no real hope and no life. Only the promise of wrath and judgement.

Instead repent and receive Christ and believe in his name. Verse 12 goes on to say, **“But those who did receive him, who have believed in him – he gave the right to become children of God.”**

Here is the good news of Christmas: Christ and all his benefits are a free gift of grace to be received by faith.

In Christ – the hopelessness of this dark year turns to hope, as he is the light who shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. Yes – still experience tragedies, but God gives us hope through Christ in the midst of those tragedies.

In Christ – your self-righteous, sinful tendencies to work your way up to God in heaven, to try to be better, to earn your salvation – is all futile. Instead, he has come down from heaven in grace, Word made flesh, and done everything necessary to restore you to him – he died on the cross and rose again, forgiven your sins, cleansed your conscience, and has given you the right to become children of God – call him Abba Father.

Receive Jesus, trust in him – the eternal Word of God, God himself, our Creator and sustainer, and our life and light. By faith he dwells (tabernacles) with us now by his Spirit.

Now – see God’s glory in glimpses – see in part and know in part (1 Cor 13:12). But one day, he will dwell with us in all his glory, see him face to face, new creation, paradise restored.

Revelation 21:3-4:

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place (tabernacle) of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.”

He will be our God and we will be his people, dwelling forever in his presence.

Amen