

The Supremacy of Jesus

“Jesus, the Supreme Revelation of God”

Passages: John 1:14–18

Hebrews 1:1–3

This is the second sermon in a series entitled, “**The Supremacy of Jesus**”. As I said last week, these 5 sermons are designed to set the stage for our Missions Month starting on September 30th. After all, Missions month is a time when we hear from a variety of missionaries and evangelists...people who are trying to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all sorts of different cultures and social situations.

But before we hear from them, **we need to be convinced that the work they do is worth supporting!** We need to be utterly convinced that the missionary work of telling people about Jesus is vitally important! We need to be convinced that Jesus is so important and so special that it’s worth disturbing people (who may be quite happy the way they are) by encouraging them to turn to Christ!

With this goal in mind, **let’s pray.**

In today’s passage from John 1, we come to (what I would call) “the defining verse” of John’s Gospel... the verse that undergirds John’s entire message. Take a look at verse 14. **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”**

As we saw last week, in the opening verses of John’s Gospel, he intentionally laid out the cosmic nature of Jesus’ identity by describing Him as the powerful, creative and eternally dynamic “Word of God” ...the very Word that created the Universe and holds it together! John makes it clear that Jesus is the organising principle behind all things, the source of all wisdom and knowledge and information. We also saw that this same Jesus is the One who brings **life** and **light** to the human race.

As we said, it is this understanding of Jesus which makes Him extremely relevant to all people, regardless of the culture in which they live or the religion that they grew up believing. **If Jesus is our Creator and the source of our ongoing existence, then He is indeed relevant to every creature!**

But if you think that concept was hard to grasp, today's passage is even more incredible! John tells us that, 2000 years ago, this Word of God (the Word that created the universe and continues to hold the world together) took the unexpected step of **becoming a human being**. Furthermore, John tells us that he saw Him with his own eyes-- "**We have seen his glory!**"

Now, it's clear that this idea of the Word becoming flesh (what we call the "Incarnation" or enfleshment of God) is important to John. In fact, it's so important that he repeats this same claim in his other epistles. In 1 John 1, John opens his letter with direct reference to his physical contact with the Incarnate God: "**That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched —this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us."**

John wants us to realise that the Incarnation was not an illusion; the Word that became flesh was neither an angel nor a phantom! No, here was a man that John had physically seen, heard and touched! Here was a man that ate and slept, who grew tired and got hungry...a man who experienced all human emotions! Here was a man that John followed and lived with for three years!

Why is John so adamant about this? John wants to make it totally clear that **if you want to connect with God**...if you want to be personally in tune with the same Word of God that created the universe and gave light and life to humankind, **you need to turn to Jesus Christ**, the carpenter from Nazareth who is the Incarnation of God!

Of course, by saying that Jesus is God in human form, John is parting company with every religious thought about God that had gone before him. In every other religion of the world, **the idea**

that God would take on flesh ('In-carnation') is a **seriously blasphemous idea!** And yet, it is this idea that has become the central tenet of the Christian faith...the tenet on which the whole Christian faith hangs and by which it defines itself as unique amongst world's religions and philosophies.

You see, the other world religions (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism) tend to embrace an essentially dualistic view of soul and the body. The human body (our flesh) is considered a prison-house in which the soul is shackled and in need of liberation. Particularly for Islam and Buddhism, the whole point of religion is to help a person get rid of (or overcome) the passions of the flesh and to finally get to paradise (or nirvana) where the soul will be freed from the sinful flesh.

But this is not true for Christianity! Listen again to John-- **The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us!** Whereas for other religions, "flesh" (sarx) is an un-spiritual thing, the God of Christianity takes that flesh upon Himself! And by taking on flesh, God declares that our human flesh is not an evil thing; it is not something from which we need to escape. Rather, our flesh is good... as long as it is under the controlling influence of God's Spirit. This is exactly what we see in Jesus—a man of flesh and blood who lived human life to the full because He was fully in synch with the Spirit. He lived in the flesh in the way that God designed us all to live! The flesh is not evil when God is in the driver's seat.

Just three weeks ago, I was talking to a Muslim cab-driver about this very topic as he drove me to the airport! It was almost the end of Ramadan, and he was telling me how excited he was to be coming to the end of the fast. When I asked him why Muslims had to fast, he replied that it was important for them to rid themselves of fleshly desires so that Allah might be more pleased with them. The point is that God is pure Spirit, while man is fleshly—there's a huge chasm between us. In Islam, God will never come down to us because that would be "shirk"—

identifying God with sinful flesh. The only way forward is for human beings to try to escape the flesh and, in their own strength, try to get closer to God.

When I replied that, as Christians we don't have to fast, He was astonished. "Why not?", he asked. I told him God was already pleased with me! I knew this because God had come down to us and become a man in Jesus Christ! Of course, that was the end of our conversation! He couldn't accept this idea—it was impossible for God to associate Himself with our flesh!

Now, do you see where we are headed, here? This doctrine of the Incarnation makes Christianity so different! Indeed, it makes the Christian faith seem incredibly bizarre to the rest of the world. "God became a man??? Are you kidding???" And yet, the Apostle John was so convinced that the Incarnation of God is central to the Christian faith that he went on to say in his epistle that "**Every spirit which confesses that Jesus came in the flesh is of God...**" while every spirit that **denies** the truth of the Incarnation is "**the antichrist!**" ... an enemy of the Gospel!

Why is the Incarnation so important to John? I think we can summarise John's argument in today's passage with one word—**Revelation**. You see, the underlying question that John wants to address is, "How is it possible for finite, earth-bound human beings to ever get to know a God who is invisible and totally beyond our human senses?" John responds by saying that the only way for us to know the invisible God is for God to "come down" and become like us! For, no matter how hard human beings try to know God and get close to God... we can fast, we can meditate, we can pray for 10 hours a day... our physical limitations (as well as the limitations of our sinful heart) will always make it impossible for us to "ascend" into heaven! Our eyes will never be pure enough to see God!

That's why it is totally up to God to reveal Himself to us. Only when He comes down to us and reveals Himself to us will we ever

be truly able to know Him. And this is John's main point: God became a man...he took on our flesh and blood... in order to make Himself known to humankind! Listen to what John says in verse 18: **"No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."** It was surely this truth that prompted Jesus to say to Philip, **"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father"** --John 14:9).

But there's more in this passage from John's Gospel than the idea that **Jesus is supreme revelation of God**. Although that is clearly foremost in John's mind, it soon becomes clear that John is also hinting at another aspect of revelation: Namely, that in Jesus Christ, **God is also revealing what perfect humanity looks like!** You see, in Jesus, we see God living life on earth as a man, in the way that He originally designed for all human beings to live. In Jesus, we see how good and holy life really is when lived under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. **Our flesh is not evil**...it's not something from which we must escape! Rather, in Jesus, we see that human flesh (when controlled by the Spirit) has full potential for goodness, godly service and righteousness. When the fruit of the Spirit flows in human flesh, we see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control! The union of God and human flesh becomes an instrument for good within God's good creation.

And so, ultimately, what God reveals in Jesus is that He and human flesh are not at all incompatible—flesh and Spirit are not naturally at odds with each other. Rather, they were originally designed to be fused together in each of us. This is what the union of God and man in Jesus Christ reveals to us—that this union between God and human flesh in Jesus is not only possible, but it is the ultimate definition of what it means to be fully human...fully alive!

This is the only idea that makes sense of verses 16 and 17. In verse 16, John says to his readers: **"From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another."** The

key word here is “receive”. When God became a man in Jesus Christ, it was entirely from God towards us. He came down from heaven in an expression of pure grace, making the move to engage with fallen humanity and to take on our flesh. He came to us, and all we can do is **receive** “**from the fullness of His grace**”!

Furthermore, Jesus declares that, by virtue of His incarnation, we are now participants in the grace of God, not because we have somehow ascended closer to Him but because He has descended to us. For this reason, all we can do is **receive** “**one blessing after another**” that flows from the perfect union of God and man in Jesus Christ! In the end, these are redemptive statements which speak about the lifting up of fallen humanity in the only “true human”, Jesus Christ!

It’s with this idea in mind that John goes on to briefly mention the Law of Moses. Look at verse 17. Now, it’s clear that the law was good in that it slowed down the spread of sin and corruption. However, it was never intended to achieve a restoration of the union between God and humanity since it puts all the emphasis on human effort—“**Thou shalt not!**” And so, John writes; ¹⁷ **For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.**” Only when Jesus came down from heaven could the union between God and humankind be finally possible and the restoration of fallen humankind begin! God’s grace and truth now flow freely to us because Jesus came down from heaven and became the true human being. He is the only one who can reconnect us to God in our human flesh!

Now, let me reassure you that, although this way of understanding John’s Gospel may sound new to you, it is the way the ancient Church Fathers understood it! So, let me finish by quoting the words of Athanasius who wrote about this truth in the 4th century, in a treatise called “On the Incarnation”.

“...we are corrupted and need to be restored to the grace of God’s image, and no one can renew but he who created. What was needed then? The Word of God, who at the beginning made all out of nothing. Only he could restore the corruptible to incorruption... The Word visits the earth, where he has always been present, and sees its evil condition. He takes a human body, born of a pure virgin in whose womb he makes human flesh his own, in which to reveal himself.”

Of course, Athanasius immediately goes on to talk about the cross...which we will talk about next week.

Nevertheless, the point is clear: Jesus is **the Supreme Revelation of God** and of **Restored Humanity**. And that’s why we need to tell the world about Jesus...and to generously support missionaries and evangelists who do likewise!

Let’s pray.