



MEEKNESS AND MAJESTY

Reflections on John 1-12

SERIES: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

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John 1-12

28th Message

Gary Vanderet

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As we come to the end of chapter 12 of John's gospel, and the conclusion of his account of Jesus' public ministry, we will celebrate the Lord's Table together this morning. Let us take this opportunity to reflect on our Lord's life and ministry, and focus our thoughts and affections on his work in our behalf.

A needy pastor who was asking for help wrote the following in a letter:

I want to know God. I want to love him. I want (as J.I. Packer speaks of it) to know the reality of the presence of Jesus Christ through the mediatorial work of His Holy Spirit. Yet I do not seem to want it enough, for I stand at the edge and merely look with longing. As someone said, the world is ablaze with God's glory, and only those with eyes to see take off their shoes. The rest sit around and pluck blackberries. I am, at present, a dissatisfied blackberry plucker, but I do not know how to take off my shoes. Help me, please, at least to untie them!

I know how this man felt because I, too, struggle with debris in my mind and hardness in my heart.

A. W. Tozer wrote, "God is a person who can be known in an increasing degree of intimacy if we prepare our hearts for the wonder of it." Wonder, of course, is a prerequisite to worship. When we lose our sense of wonder, we lose much of the dynamic that brings us to our knees. Has this been true in your experience? Have the pain and the pressures of life chipped away at the wonder of your worship? Perhaps it was the pain of separation or divorce; the pain of serious physical problems; the pain of your crumbled dreams; the pain of habits you have tried to conquer but failed; the loneliness and difficulty of raising children as a single parent; the pressure of surviving economically here in this valley.

In his presentation of the life and ministry of Jesus, John has revealed the wonder of our Lord's person in all his glory. Someone has said, "Christianity, in its purest form, is nothing more than seeing Jesus." That is why Jesus came — to be seen. And this is what John has been helping us do.

Have you truly seen Jesus? As we have studied together over the weeks and months our Lord's encounters with various individuals, perhaps a word he said found a receptive place in your heart. His word touched your grieving spirit, and you caught a glimpse of him, the one who spoke with such authority and loved with such humility.

According to the gospel accounts, those who saw Jesus were never the same again.

The Samaritan woman ran back into town, crying in wonder and amazement, "Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"

Thomas confessed, "My Lord and my God."

Peter said of him, "We were eyewitnesses to his majesty."

John said, simply, "We beheld his glory."

I want to return to the prologue to John's gospel this morning and leave you with just one verse:

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

In Jesus, all the splendor of heaven was revealed in a human body. For a brief period the doors to the throne room were thrown open and God came near. His majesty was made visible. Heaven touched earth and, because of this, earth finally can know heaven.

"*The Word became flesh...*" John is speaking of the Word of God, the Word that created the earth, that spoke everything into existence. God's powerful self-expression, which is manifestly evident in revelation and salvation, that Word (*davar Yehovah*), "became flesh." It was not a word that can be erased off a page, but a Word that mankind can encounter in flesh. It was a Word that speaks our language — without an accent.

"*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...*" Literally, he "tabernacled" (pitched his tent) among us. This term calls to mind the tabernacle where God met with his people, in the wilderness, before the temple was built. The tabernacle was the dwelling place of God. It was the place of revelation, the place of worship. But the tabernacle was merely a shadow, a picture of something greater. In Jesus, however, the reality had appeared. In a much fuller sense, God in his living Word had come to dwell among his people.

What caught John's attention was the utter glory that he saw inside that tent. Have you ever walked through a campground at night and seen the tent lights shining through the fabric, glowing in the darkness? That is what John saw in Jesus: a glory inside, his *havod*. The word glory also takes us back to the book of Exodus.

When the tabernacle was completed, Moses said that “a cloud covered the tabernacle and the glory of the Lord filled the place.” The glory that shone in that tabernacle, veiled in the mysterious cloud, was but a foreshadowing of the all-excelling glory that blazed in the incarnate Word. But its glory was partial, unfulfilled, sporadic. In Jesus, however, we see the ultimate place of God’s dwelling, the final tabernacle. Here God’s glory was manifested.

“...and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only Son of the Father who is full of grace and truth.” The English language is found wanting here, because these words, grace and truth, *aletheia* and *charis*, are used to translate the two great Hebrew words, *hesed* and *emet*, the two words which most truly reveal the character of God in the OT. *Hesed* speaks of the covenant love of God for his people; *emet* speaks of truth in the sense of faithfulness. These characteristics are the manifestation of his glory.

In Exodus, Moses pleaded with God, “Show me your glory.” The LORD replied,

“I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”

God’s glory is supremely his goodness.

So, as Moses stood on Mt. Sinai,

...the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”

The glory revealed to Moses when the Lord passed in front of him, proclaiming his name, displaying his divine goodness, characterized by grace and truth, was the same glory that John and his friends saw in the Word that became flesh. That was how John knew that Jesus was God: he saw in him the same attributes that were true of the Father — he was full of grace and truth.

All through the OT, God is revealed as a God who is full of lovingkindness, loyal love, and faithfulness. The word *hesed* is perhaps the most significant word in the OT. There it is translated 13 different ways. The word is so rich, so replete with meaning, we cannot find an English equivalent for it. Bruce Waltke, a noted OT authority, once explained *hesed* to me in this way: “It has three ideas. First of all, it means that two people have a relationship. They are bound together. Secondly, it means that one party in that relationship is in a desperate situation. He has broken the relationship and cannot save himself. But the other party can. And the third idea is that the stronger party, out of mercy, out of loyalty, out of love, saves that person.” That is *hesed*. That is grace.

And John says the reason we know that God himself came among us was that we can behold his glory in his Son. He is filled with the Father’s own attributes, *hesed* and *emet*.

We have seen this grace demonstrated throughout John’s gospel.

We beheld it in the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus loved her. He saw her just as she was, yet he wasn’t put off by her. Everyone else had either rejected her or tried to use her. But not Jesus. He patiently sat on the edge of the well and led her from a basic understanding of a thirst for water, to a much more profound awareness that her real thirst was not for a man, but for God himself. And the Lord had come to meet that need. He found her!

We saw it in our Lord’s discovering of a lonely man who had been sick for 38 years. This helpless individual was lying with scores of others by the Pool of Bethesda, suffering from a sickness resulting from his own sin. He didn’t even know who Jesus was, and once he discovered his identity, he reported him to the authorities. This man was so fatigued and emotionally defeated he couldn’t even risk saying, “Yes, I want to be well.” Yet the grace of God was good enough and strong enough to find him and heal him.

We saw it in the story of the woman caught in adultery. The Pharisees thought they had trapped Jesus. They were sure he would let her go. But instead, he completely upheld the law of Moses, uttering the famous words, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” The only sinless One, he who could throw stones with impunity, refused to cast a stone. As her accusers put down their stones on the dusty street and slinked away, the woman surely expected a sermon from Jesus. But what she heard instead were words of grace, “Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.” God has no desire to throw stones. Judgment is his “unusual task.” He longs to save. And Jesus is the incarnation of that longing. He is the answer to God’s bad reputation. This woman’s moment of deepest shame instead became her moment of greatest glory.

We saw his grace in other miracles; in his feeding the hungry multitude; in his restoration of sight to the man born blind; in the raising of Lazarus.

The Eternal God fleshed out his life here on planet earth in the person of his Son. That is why John said that no one but the only Son has seen God at any time. Jesus has made God known. He has explained him. And he has made it known that God has a father’s heart. God is a Father. When we come to him through Jesus Christ, what we find is a loving Father. A Father’s arms surround us. A Father’s wisdom guides our way. A Father’s power protects and guards us.

This gospel was the instrument that opened my eyes and brought me life. In January of 1970, I was a fearful, insecure 19-year-old sophomore at Long Beach State Uni-

versity. Outwardly I portrayed an aura of confidence. I seemed to have the ability to handle things, but inside I had a deep sense of uncertainty and apprehension.

My Dad died when I was 11 months old, and in her loneliness my Mom became an alcoholic. Those years obviously took a toll on my emotional stability. I remember telling my high school counselor that I wanted to be a coach, but his response was, "Don't plan on that. You will never even graduate from college." I started dating a Christian girl, and she gave me a New Testament to read. I distinctly remember Philip's request, in John 14, when he asked Jesus, "Show us the Father." Philip had put my deepest desire into words. All my life I had wanted a father: someone to trust, someone to care for me, someone to give me direction. I would even go to my friend's house in the evening to do my homework because his Dad was always at home. Jesus' response to Philip was the word of life to me: "He who has seen me has seen the Father."

Though I still had unanswered questions about God I had discovered the one thing I needed to know: the eternal God is exactly like his Son. And when you have seen the Son, you have seen the Father.

What you most urgently want to know about God has been made known, because at one point the eternal God stepped center stage into history and took off the wraps and said, "Behold!" Those who see with the eyes of faith, and believe, are born into life, the life of the ages, the life that is forever.

Earlier in this service we prayed for Art David, who is lying seriously ill in hospital, suffering from cancer. Before we come to the Table of the Lord together, I have asked Brad Gallien, Art's son-in-law, to share with us how the Word of life became flesh in his life.

Brad Gallien: One of the things I most look forward to as a Christian is hearing how God works to bring each us into a relationship with him. It never ceases to amaze me how perfectly and individually he brings our circumstances and our histories to the point of acknowledging him.

My journey really began when I was 10. That year my father died. When we turned to our church for counsel and support, we were turned away. My father was an atheist, and my mother's marrying him evidently disqualified us from our priest's attention. Needless to say, this incident did little to draw me near to God. As I grew up, I developed a very self-sufficient attitude and was quite successful as a student. I figured Christianity was all fine and well for people who needed it, but I could take care of myself.

My self-sufficiency took me well into college, where in my last year I met a girl, and fell in love. We had a very "typical" college relationship (sexually active). As our relationship progressed, it became clear that it was

not with the approval of Lisa's parents. They were both Christians, and they made it clear they felt our lifestyle was wrong. So, when the time came to meet Connie and Art, it was not without some hesitation, if not fear and trepidation. I fully expected to be clobbered over the head on arrival, but instead was greeted with disarming love and acceptance. They both made it perfectly clear that biblically and spiritually, my lifestyle was contributing to Lisa's spiritual death. Yet as they spoke of the basis of their beliefs, they shared with compassion and grace about God's love for me. This love took me totally off guard. I remember thinking to myself that there was no way I could have shown that kind of love under the circumstances. So much for my highly regarded self-sufficiency.

After this encounter, I was able to attend PBC a couple of times. I was very impressed with the teaching at the church — people not only reading their Bible, but analyzing it and applying it to real life. Just about then, my Master's program began in Hawaii, and off I went. Lisa and I had decided that our relationship was worth preserving, and there ensued a wonderful string of love letters and telephone calls. Except I was not the only one vying for Lisa's heart. God was calling her back to himself and challenging her lifestyle.

One visit, not long after I left for Hawaii, we were talking about the whole issue of "unequal yoking" in marriage. From my perspective, this was not an issue. After all, my father was an atheist and my mom a Catholic, and I turned out okay. So what was the big deal? I remember asking her at one point in the conversation, "When does Christianity stop being a set of rules, and start being something worth living for?" This was the kind of line that evangelists dream about, and one which God took swift advantage of for his second dose of truth. Lisa proceeded, much to her surprise, to lay out the entire gospel to me — that Jesus died for our sins, not to condemn us to a life of guilt, but rather to reconcile us to God the Father. Lisa spoke God's truth clearly and plainly, and even though it was hard to hear, I knew it to be truth. I often refer to this incident as the "toilet flush," because in a matter of a couple of minutes, years of misconceptions about Christianity, and carefully erected walls between God and me, were washed away. But God was not quite finished.

After Lisa returned from that trip, she fully recommitted her life to Christ. As part of this, she ended our relationship. I remember receiving the letter and reading it, thinking to myself, "the woman I love has just ended our relationship. I should be really angry." But no matter how hard I tried, I could not bring myself to anger. I knew she was doing the right thing. Once again it was God's truth, spoken through her parents, Connie and Art, that rang loud and clear in the letter. They had challenged Lisa that if she really loved me, what she would want most was for me to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. Lisa's obedience to this truth

was the ultimate example of the kind of faith I lacked, yet wanted.

By "coincidence" I had purchased tickets to come home just two days after I received the letter. That weekend I accompanied Connie, Art and Lisa to PBC. Steve Zeisler taught on sexual purity in Sunday School, and Brian Morgan on God's fatherly love from the pulpit — two topics that could not have been more accurately targeted at my heart. Later that day, while sitting on Connie's sofa, with all of this truth now laid before me, I accepted Christ into my heart.

When I look back on this journey, it strikes me that God never hid his truth from me, or in any way softened its impact. Rather, he simply delivered it full of grace and love. It was that love — Connie's love, Art's love, Lisa's love, and most of all, God's love — that made a difference in my life and brought me to my knees before my Lord and Savior.

Giving this testimony today, though, is really difficult for me because Art, who is now my father-in-law, is battling cancer and appears to be losing. So once again, I am losing a father. But this time, I have God the Father to petition. And I praise God that I have an opportunity to turn to him for the comfort and grace needed to make it through this latest truth.

What a powerful illustration of the effect of grace and truth on a life! May it fill your heart with wonder for our magnificent Savior. And then, may your heart become become filled with compassion for those who hurt, those for whom his glory was so freely poured out.

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