



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 1:14-18

“The Word of God in History among the Believers”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are studying the gospel according to John, and our Scripture reading this morning is the third of the sections of the prologue, the opening 18 verses which form a kind of preface to the gospel. And beginning with verse 14 and continuing through verse 18 is the passage for our reading for this morning. The apostle has already said in the opening verse of this preface, “In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.” And so, he has spoken about the word before history and then in the creation and then in his treatment of the ministry of John the Baptist and his reception among his own people. He spoke of the word in history and among the Jewish people. And now in this last section he will speak of the word in history and particularly among believers. The fourteenth verse begins,

“And the word became flesh. (That word “flesh” is simply a shortened form for human nature.) 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. John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’” For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. (These words incidentally are probably not the words of John the Baptist, but of John the Apostle.) For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.”

I'm not too happy with that rendering there, “Were realized through Jesus Christ.” I rather think that the simpler form, “The law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” is a bit better. And then the eighteenth verse concludes the reading, “No man has seen God at any time. The only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.”

Now let me just say a word since it will save us saying anything about it in the message that follows. Some of you have the Authorized Version before you and perhaps even other versions that have “The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father.” This New American Standard Bible edition that I am reading this morning has “The only begotten God.” The reason for this of course is that the ancient manuscripts of the New Testament text vary among themselves at a number of places by the science of textual criticism we are able to generally arrive at the correct reading at particular places with a reasonable degree of certainty, particularly since there are really more manuscripts of the New Testament of age than there are of any ancient writing and furthermore there is a much shorter time between the time of the writing of the documents, the *autographa*, and the times of the copies than in the case of any other ancient writing as well. We do not have the originals of any ancient writing, but we are much better situated with respect to the New Testament than we are with any other ancient writing. A remarkable fact and testimony simply to the fact that the early Christians considered the copies of the New Testament to be significant and important and therefore they were preserved in a much better way, but there are differences of reading in them.

The names for deity and the very common terms like Son, God, Spirit were often abbreviated in ancient manuscripts. They had to be written by hand. They couldn't be copied by Xerox machines, and so the result was that there was a good bit of abbreviation, and occasionally in little words, they looked very much alike. The word for “Son” is the word υἱός

[*huios*]. It ends with a sigma. The word for “God” is θεός [*theos*]. As you can tell it ends in the same way with an “omicron” and a “sigma.” When those words were abbreviated they were simply two letters, usually a line placed above it to indicate an abbreviation and the only difference between the two was in the first letter. So it was easy for a scribe copying, maybe dreaming a little bit here and there as we often do copying a word twice. They did that sometimes they skipped a line because one line ended in the same word that another line did down here. Your eye looked at the first line, you wrote something and then when you looked back again at the text you skipped a couple of lines because the same word occurred a couple of lines before or later on. So, the common errors in copying were made and it’s possible that here an early scribe having before him “Only begotten Son,” mistook it for “Only begotten God,” or having “Only begotten God” before him he mistook it for “Only begotten Son.” It’s possible that there was, and this did occur, there were intentional variations. A scribe writing and copying may think that the scribe before him made an obvious error, and then he would change the reading.

Now it is possible to explain this reading in such a way that both of these are preferred readings. For example, it’s possible to reason well John wrote, “The only begotten Son” because that is the common term which he uses elsewhere, “Only begotten Son.” And so therefore it’s likely that he wrote that. A scribe seeing, “Only begotten God” before him might reason well surely he meant, “Only begotten Son because he uses that expression elsewhere and so he would intentionally change it to the simpler reading which was the common one that John used. On the other hand, it’s also possible to explain “Only begotten God” as originating in this way that is it’s the more difficult reading. It’s the more unusual one. It’s probably to be preferred and the other is an intentional correction of it. So, one may look at it and say, “Well John would have written, ‘Only begotten Son’ because that’s the

familiar term for him.” That’s probably to be preferred or others may say, “No the other is to be preferred because it’s the more unusual one and a scribe would have corrected it to ‘Only begotten Son’.” Fortunately in this case it really doesn't make a whole lot of difference because “The only begotten Son” of the eternal God is obviously God himself because he possesses the nature of deity.

But, on the other hand, if “Only begotten God” is the reading, then of course, it’s a very striking direct statement of the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. The translators of this version have chosen “Only begotten God” thinking that’s the more difficult reading and can explain the origin of the other reading. Now, how did you like that lecture in textual criticism? [Laughter] I'm sure you followed along, but this is the kind of things that a textual critic might be concerned about when he sees manuscripts before him that have different readings. We shouldn't be disturbed about it. It’s a perfectly normal thing. And by the practice of principles of textual criticism, its possible for us in almost all of their cases to arrive at reasonable assurance of the reading of the text, the same thing cannot be said for Plato, cannot be said for Euripides, cannot be said for the Latin authors either. We are extremely fortunate in having the preservation of the New Testament text that we do have. May the Lord bless this reading and explanation and lesson in textual criticism. Let’s bow in a moment of prayer.

[prayer removed from audio]

[Message] Our subject this morning in the exposition of the Gospel of John is “The Word in History and among Believers.” And we are turning again to the prologue of the Gospel according John, that propaganda document written so the apostle says, “That men might

believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that in believing they might have life through his name.”

There is a very lovely story that Wilbert White, who was for many years associated with Biblical Seminary in New York, used to tell about a young man who could come to accept the general views of Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer, and others of his day and who regarded himself as a spiritual agnostic. One day however he made up his mind that he would fairly examine the strongest presentation of Christian truth that he could find and he was advised that he should study the Gospel of John. He read it through from beginning to end taking it simply as a book without examining the outside evidence of its genuineness and other matters relating to it, but when he read it through, Mr. White said that he said, “The one of whom this book tells us either the Savior of the world or he ought to be.” Because of what the book had told him of Jesus Christ, he was ready to heed the call of our Lord. “If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink,” and he did and was converted, and Mr. White said is now presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ to others.

With the paragraph that we study this morning we come to one of the important features of the ministry of this one who said, “If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink.” He never really could say that I guess if the incarnation had not taken place and that is the subject that we are to discuss today.

The incarnation of the Lord Jesus is a term that refers to his assumption of human nature. He, the divine second person of the Trinity at a point in time, assumed human nature. It’s one of the ultimately mysterious facts of the Christian faith, mysterious in the sense that we cannot fully understand it. The Apostle Paul says, “Great is the mystery of godliness. He was manifest in the flesh.” So it’s one of those things that we could never fully understand. Luther was certainly right when he said, “We need new tongues to properly set forth the

incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ.” So, it’s not surprising that when expositors come to a passage like this they would love to have someone else possibly an angel or one of the apostles themselves give the exposition for that morning.

The incarnation however is one of the supremely important teachings of the word because through the incarnation the Son is now able to die as the writer of that wonderful book on Old Testament theology the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it in the second chapter in the fourteenth verse of his work, “Since then the children share in flesh and blood he himself likewise also partook of the same that through death he might render powerless him who had the power of death. That is the devil.” That of course could not be done if Jesus Christ had not assumed human nature. We would not have a great merciful and faithful high priest if the incarnation had not taken place. This same author says, “We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”

And the Apostle Peter tells us in his first epistle that we would not have an example to emulate if the Lord Jesus Christ had not been incarnated. In the twenty-first verse of the second chapter of his first epistle, Peter writes, “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example for you to follow in his steps.” There are many other reasons why the incarnation is important but these are sufficient to underline the fact that it is one of the important doctrines of the word of God, and this is one of the important statements of it. In fact this opening statement in the fourteenth verse where we have the incarnation of the word who was with God and was God, this opening statement contains a clause which Leon Morris calls, “One short shattering expression in which John unveils the very idea that is at the heart of Christianity”: “And the word became flesh,” he who was with God, according to verse 1 is now with us by the assumption of human nature.

Now John has just talked about the new spiritual creation. Above he spoke about the old physical creation. He said in verse 3, “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” And then in verses 12 and 13 he speaks about being born, “Not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,” the new creation, the new spiritual creation. And he would like to point out that the first creation did not come into existence except through the mediation of the word of God and the new spiritual creation, the new birth of every one of us who are believers does not come into existence apart from the mediation of the same word of God. “The word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth and of his fullness, we have all received,” John will say.

What does it mean when Scripture says, “The word became flesh?” Perhaps we can clarify it by saying a few of the things that it does not mean. It does not mean a form of transubstantiation. It does not mean to suggest that he who was God is no longer God but is now man. The word did not cease to be God when the word became flesh. Just as water which becomes wine does not cease to be the liquid water, but now has a new capacity. So in the case of the Son of God when the word became flesh, we are not to think that deity was forgotten, that deity was laid aside in the ultimate sense, but the same one who was the divine Son is now the divine Son with an additional nature, a human nature. It does not mean an alteration in the nature of the Trinity. One might think that there could be some kind of alternation when we read the word, the second person became flesh. Does that mean that we no longer have a Trinity, but a Duality, Father and Spirit in the divine Trinity? No, the Trinity is still one God subsisting in three persons, but the middle person of the Trinity, the second person is now God-man, not simply God the Son but God-man, and God-man forever. I must confess that’s one of the things that has greatly impressed me since I became a Christian

and began to study things like this. To think that the second person of the Trinity who dwelt with the Father throughout the ages of eternity past, who had no beginning as the second person of the Trinity at a point in time took to himself an additional nature became God-man and will for now on be God-man. No change immutable in his divine essence, but now God-man forever, wedded himself to human nature to be forever God-man. It is really something that is ultimately amazing and beyond our comprehension. The aim of it—the redemption of the people of God—is of course the great purpose of God in the accomplishment of the incarnation.

What is then meant by “The word became flesh” is that there is a modification in the existence of the Trinity. There is a new form of existence of the second person, not a new existence, the same eternal person, but a new form of existence, now not simply as the second person, but as the God-man forevermore. “The word became flesh,” not God and man, not God in a man, but the God-man, one person, two natures, one divine person, two natures, as in the symbol of Chalcedon, one person undivided with the natures unconfounded.

The early Christian church wrestled considerably with this and wrestled with it for really centuries. It’s not surprising. It’s something that is significant. It’s something that is difficult. It’s something of course that from the satanic side of things, it was something that Satan would be very anxious to have confused so that ultimately we should be worshiping no more than another human being, and thus Christianity would sink away and become simply one of the ancient religions of the past, but the early Christian church guided by the Holy Spirit through the centuries discuss this over and over again and finally at the council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. came together and agreed upon a symbol which has guided the Christian church through the centuries since that time. Listen to what they said, “We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son,

our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood, to be acknowledged in two natures and then four famous adverbs in the Greek text ἀσυγχύτως [*asygchytōs*], ἀτρέπτως [*atreptōs*], ἀδιαίρετως [*adiairetōs*], ἀχωρίστως [*achōristōs*], which mean nothing of course to those who don't know Greek, but these four adverbs, extremely important to be acknowledged in two natures. Now here are the four adverbs, “inconfusedly,” “unchangeably,” “indivisibly,” “inseparably,” “inconfusedly,” “unchangeably,” “indivisibly,” “inseparably,” and the symbol goes on to say, “the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, (of the divine and the human,) but rather the property of each one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, (our Lord was not two persons, one person) but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.” Well, “The word became flesh.” The second person of the Trinity took an additional nature to himself. This of course was ultimately for the sake of the redemption, for he must as a man come and die for men, but he must also be the divine person in order that his sacrifice may have infinite merit, sufficient to cover all the sins of sinners.

The Trinity has puzzled people, and of course the nature of the Son of God has puzzled people, and I don't hope to be able to tell you now the whole Christian church has puzzled over this. It's a mystery, but now I'll explain it to you. Such would be of course conceded arrogance to start with, and then untrue, secondly. But perhaps we can illustrate it a bit in this way and show you something of the importance of it. A man can have two forms of consciousness while at the same time having only one form of self-consciousness. I can feel cold with my body, at the same time that I am praying to God with my mind. These two forms of conscious experience are diverse and distinct from one another. I don't pray with my

body and I don't feel cold with my mind, yet this doubleness and distinctness in the consciousness does not destroy the unity of my self-consciousness. Even though I have these two consciousnesses of cold and of prayer I am still one person.

So with the Lord Jesus Christ, as a theanthropic person, a divine-human person, he was constituted of a divine nature and a human nature. The divine nature had its own form of experiences, like mind in the human individual, and like body in the human individual. The experiences of the divine nature were like the mind; the experiences of his human nature were comparable or illustrated by the experiences of the human body. The experiences of the divine nature were diverse from those of the human nature, but yet at the same time there was one subject ego of both experiences. Our Lord Jesus Christ's life exhibits the evidences of the presence of divine nature and human nature, but one single person.

It's illustrated for example, when the Lord Jesus was by the well at Samaria and the woman was there. It says that he was tired and thirsty. Now that was an experience that arose out of his human nature. He was conscious of thirst, and he was conscious of weariness. But he was also conscious at the same time that he was the eternal and only begotten Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. Now this is proved by the words that he speaks to the woman of Samaria. He said to her in the midst of his conversation with her, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. I that speak unto Thee am the Messiah.” So at the same time he felt fatigue and thirst in his body, he was conscious in his divine nature that he was the eternal second person of the Trinity. The first mentioned consciousness of fatigue came from his human nature; the consciousness that he was the divine Son of God comes from his divine nature. If he had not had the human nature he couldn't have had the former consciousness, and if he had not had his divine nature he could not have

been assured of the fact that he was the second person of the Trinity. Because he had both natures in one person, he could have both of these experiences.

Now the reason for this is a very practical one. He must be the divine person in order that his redemptive work may have that infinite value about which I was speaking, but he also must have a human nature not simply to become our substitute but also in order that he may understand and experience the experiences of genuine humanity. He can be our great high priest and understand the things that we experience because he is truly one of us. He possesses a true and genuine humanity apart from sin. And therefore he knows the trials and struggles of the will of God. He himself had to make decisions with reference to the will of God.

Now he never made anything but the right decision, but he knew the struggles of doing the will of God. He did not have to struggle from within because of the presence of sin within but from without, from the world and from Satan -- he had the essential experiences of the testings to depart from the will of God. All sin ultimately involves the temptation to depart from the will of God. It doesn't make any difference whether it comes from within or from without. It's the same essential thing. And the Lord has felt all of that, and furthermore he's felt more than you have ever felt it. Because you see when temptation becomes strong, you fall out. You fail. You do not know the real strength of temptation. You do not know the real difficulty of temptation because you have already fallen out and have sinned before the testing has become intense, but our Lord has known temptation to its most intense nature. And then he has overcome. And because he has known it to its most intense degree he's able to enter into the experience of anyone who is experiencing temptation and because he also has overcome he knows as our great high priest how to overcome. And when we turn to him and rely upon him he promises us that he will preserve us through the temptations and trials of the human experience that lies before us. This is one of the most practical of all of the doctrines of

the word of God, “And the word became flesh.” I want to say, “Hallelujah!” The word, the one who was with God who was God has come to be with us and knows us and knows our experiences and has the strength to deliver us.

Now John says, “He came and dwelt among us,” tabernacled among us. Of course he thinks about the ancient tabernacle which God told Moses to build because he said to Moses, “I want to dwell with you, Israel.” So the tabernacle was the place where God dwelt. Well when the Lord Jesus Christ was here the tabernacle was the Lord Jesus Christ and his body. There God dwelt in our midst. He tabernacled there. In the Old Testament the sacrifices were made at the tabernacle. In the tabernacle of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ the ultimate sacrifice was made on Calvary’s cross. At the tabernacle worship was offered to God. Through the Lord Jesus Christ the only genuine worship today is offered. By him we offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually. All worship and praise and thanksgiving can only come to God through the mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. So “The word was made flesh and tabernacled among us,” the tabernacle of God.

Now John attests this by saying, “And we beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth.” He in effect says the sight of him was the place or the point of departure for faith. We beheld his glory and it’s defined as the glory of the only begotten of the Father. Now that does not mean that Jesus Christ was born. He was begotten as a Son, but so far as his divine essence was concerned he possesses the essence of deity, eternally divine. So, the glory of the only born. This word strictly speaking comes from a word not to be born, but one simply to become. And in fact, “Only begotten” means simply “unique.”

For example, Isaac is said to be an only begotten son but Abraham had other sons, but he had no son like Isaac. Isaac was the unique son. That’s the meaning of this expression,

“The glory as of the only Son,” only begotten, but only begotten in the sense of unique, the unique Son.

Now if someone were to say well explain to me an eternal Son, I'd reply like Augustine. He said, “Show me and explain to me an eternal Father and I will show to you and explain to you an eternal Son.” We cannot explain this. The Scriptures set this forth as something revealed from God. He is an eternal Son, and John says, “We have beheld him.” That glory is defined as, “Full of grace and truth.”

Now up above he said that in him was life and the life was the light of men. These words parallel life and light, grace and truth. The life is found in grace, and the light is the light of truth. And when we read through this gospel these are two words we should keep in mind. For in the grace of which he was full we can see his mighty signs which he preformed, and in the truth of which John speaks we can see the words that he will speak, but finally of course full of grace and truth reaches it culmination in the cross of Calvary, for there we have the greatest exposition and the greatest manifestation of the grace of God and the truth of God. The grace of God in the mighty work of redemption accomplished there. Later in this very gospel when God records his words, “It is finished.” At that point we have the greatest manifestation of the grace of God in the grace of an eternal redemption, and we have the greatest manifestation of the truth of God there in that in order for redemption to be accomplished the second person of the Trinity must come and die under the judgment of God, revealing God as a God who does punish sin, whose law must be upheld, and therefore a substitute must die for the people of God. There we see all of the attributes of God displayed in all of their beauty. The attributes of justice and righteousness and holiness and the attributes of grace and mercy and loving kindness, nothing is more significant for the

revelation of God than the cross of Jesus Christ. John says, “We beheld his glory, glory as of a unique Son of a Father, full of grace and truth.”

Now that of course is a magnificent statement and need some confirmation so John confirms it, corroborates it. This is proof the words that follow that he is an only born Son, a unique Son, and he introduces first of all the confirmation from the Baptist who was the ambassador of the only begotten Son. He says, “the John the Baptist bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me’.” So, John who was older than the Lord Jesus Christ says actually he was before me. That’s a remarkable statement because in ancient times priority of origin usually meant superiority, but John says, “No in this case it does not.” He’s the one of whom I said, the one coming after me is preferred before me because he was before me. So he understands that before Abraham came into existence I, the Lord Jesus Christ, am. He’s the infinite. John is finite. He’s the eternal. John is temporal. He’s the light of the world. John is simply a burning and shining lamp as later on we shall read.

Furthermore this is confirmed by the experiences of the apostles. John the Apostle says in verse 16, “For of his fullness we have all received and grace for grace.” What too, with John the Baptist testify to the fullness of grace and truth that existed in the Lord Jesus Christ? We’ve drawn upon his inexhaustible resources of grace and truth, the perfect redemption and the perfect revelation and we can speak of them as our own experience.

Now of course in order that the divine fullness might belong to us it was necessary that the word become flesh. The incarnation must also be crowned by sacrifice or to use the later words of John the Apostle, “The alabaster box had to be broken in order that the ointment might fill the house,” or “The coarse-spun sack of Christ’s humanity had to be cut asunder in order that the wealth that was stored in it might be poured into our hands.” God

came near to us in the life of Jesus of Nazareth but he only becomes ours through the death of Jesus of Nazareth. The incarnation was needed in order that we might be able to say as John, “We have beheld his glory,” but the crucifixion is needed in order to make possible the more wondrous prerogative and the more wondrous statement of his fullness have all we received. So it isn't enough for Jesus to come. He must die. It isn't enough for us to be able to say, “We have seen the Lord Jesus Christ.” He must die and we must have come to him and have received of him in order to be able to say we know something of this wonderful grace of God found in him. We know the forgiveness of sins. We know the experience of daily communion with him. We know that he can take care of our needs for he has done that.

“Of his fullness have we all received, and grace for grace.” I like that last expression, “And grace instead of grace,” literally, it has been translated, “Grace in exchange for grace,” or “Grace following grace.” “Grace upon grace,” it has been translated. It means something like that experience that we often have when we go out into our gardens or what is supposed to be our gardens, and we go out and we see a plant that needs water. And so we get the hose or we get our watering can and we fill it with water and we come over to the plant and we pour water on it, but of course if you pour water on a plant frequently if you don't pour it real slowly the plant cannot absorb it and so you will pour some water on and you will wait, and then after the water has sunk into the ground you will pour some more on, until finally you have watered the plant. Yesterday I did that with some plants that needed water. So I took the hose, watered them, turned it off of them for a while, then turned it back, turned it off, turned it back, probably six or eight times in order that there might be an absorption of sufficient water. Well John is saying something like that, “Of his fullness have all we received and grace upon grace.” Our experiences are the experience of the reception of grace, constant grace, grace after grace.

When I was going through theological seminary Dr. Chafer used to like to point to this text in connection with the text in Colossians 2:9 where the Apostle Paul says, “In him (that is in Christ) dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” And Dr. Chafer didn't know Greek but he knew a lot of the Greek words that were used in the New Testament. He had heard other Bible teachers speak about them, and he loved to speak about the Greek term, *πλήρωμα* [*plērōma*]. He put the accent on the wrong syllable, but nevertheless he got over his point. He knew that *πλήρωμα* [*plērōma*] meant “fullness.” And he said, “Look men, all the fullness, all the *πλήρωμα* [*plērōma*] of the Godhead dwells bodily in the Lord Jesus Christ, in bodily fashion.” And furthermore he said, “We have been filled full in him as Paul says.” Then he would say, “Turn over to John chapter 1.” And we'd turn over to John chapter 1. And he would say, “Now notice the sixteenth verse, ‘For of his fullness,’ that's the same word, *πλήρωμα* [*plērōma*]. ‘Of his fullness have all we received.’” In other words, the one in whom was all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily fashion is the one of whom John says, “Of his fullness have all we received.” We have limitless resources in the Lord Jesus Christ, a magnificent text to be sure.

Furthermore John says what I'm saying to you about the fullness of grace and truth being found in Jesus Christ is confirmed by the nature of the law. “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” I won't talk about the contrast here that we could speak of in some detail about how Moses was a mediator of the law, but grace and truth really has come into existence through the Son. I want to point you to a statement that Johnny Calvin made. Now Johnny Calvin was a pretty good interpreter of three or four centuries ago, writing back in the sixteenth century, Johnny said, “The very fact that the apostle draws an antithesis between the law given through Moses and grace and truth

which came through Jesus Christ is an evidence that the law lacked both of these things, grace and truth.”

Now it is occasionally said by some who love the law a little too much that in the Law of Moses the grace of God is found. The love to say that because they like to put Christians under the law, not really understanding what Peter meant when he said, “The law was a burden which neither we nor our Fathers were able to bear. They would like to put us back under the law. Some like to put us back under the law. Some like to put us under the Ten Commandments for salvation. Others like to put us under the Ten Commandments for sanctification. John says, “The law came through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Now one might say well it was gracious of God to give the Law of Moses to Israel, and of course that is true. It was gracious of God to give the law because it’s by the law that we come to understand our sin, and that’s a great grace from God to reveal to us our sin through the agency of the law. I won’t debate that. But so far as the law itself is concerned, there is no grace and there is no ultimate truth, the truth of redemption in it. The law was preparation for redemption. Grace and truth the provision of redemption came through Jesus Christ.

Now let me hasten to say there was grace and truth in the Old Testament, but not in the Law of Moses. Furthermore there is through the law the means by which we are brought to conviction concerning our sin. But in the grace of Jesus Christ there is remission for our sins. The law commands and demands; Jesus Christ offers and gives. And in the Old Testament when men were saved they were saved through the redeemer who was to come. After all it says, “In him was life and the life was the light of men.” Even in ancient days, men were not saved however through the Mosaic law. Grace and truth has come through Jesus Christ and salvation is only through him. It is no more useful to tell men about the law as a

means of salvation or a means of sanctification than to say to a lame man at the foot of a mountain, “Why don't you climb up on top of the mountain where the air is fresh?” He is a lame man. He cannot possibly do it. What he needs is for someone to take him there.

Men are not perishing today because they don't know what they ought to do. Men are not bad because they have doubt as to what their duty is. The worst man in the world knows a great deal more of what he ought to do than the best man in the world is practicing. It's not for want of precepts that so many of us are going to destruction, it's because we don't understand our own sin and the way of salvation through that Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Lord who saves not the law. Selsius used to jeer at Christianity in the early days of the Christian faith. He jeered at Christ on the ground that, “Every reputable teacher normally attracted to him, the noble and wise people of his day, but this man, Jesus, attracted to him the down and outs, the scums of society.” And the church gave the devastating answer to him, “Yes, that's true. Thank God it's true. Only he does not leave them down and out. He does not leave them in their sin. He does not consider them so worthless as to have nothing to do with them as you do. But he takes them and makes them into the saints of God, transforming them.” That's what Christ does.

Finally in the last verse of the section John speaks of the revelation, the truth that has come from the coming of Christ, “No man has ever seen God at any time; the only begotten God,” we assume for the sake of our exposition that this reading is correct and that the other reading arose as an intentional modification to make it more Johannine, but the result is the same, “The only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him.” If the fullness of grace is seen in his cross, the fullness of revelation is also seen in the cross too. No man has ever seen God in his essence. That's the meaning.

This is possibly a picture of a father, like a Hebrew father, who has a son on his knee with his head on his breast. Ah what a wonderful experience for a father, takes his son, I'm sorry girls, it's just as great to have a girl, but in ancient days the Jewish fathers were responsible for teaching the son the things of the Lord, in order that they may teach their sons the things of the Lord. In those days the men were responsible for the spiritual development and growth of their families. That's the way it ought to be today, so they took their son's when they were three or four years old. They sat them on their knees. They put their heads on their breasts and they unfolded to them the things of the Old Testament and the revelation of God contained there.

John says, “Such a person as God no one has ever seen; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father.” Those that we take to our bosom are those to whom we explain the innermost feelings of our being, our will, our purpose, our desires, our ambitions, these are the things that mark out the Lord Jesus Christ from every other person. The Father and the Son share the most intimate facts of the eternal truth, and this only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has led him, the Father, forth into full revelation.

This is the term incidentally from which we get the word exegete, exegesis, explained him. So the Son is the exegete of the Father. It's by the Son that we know the nature of the Father. When we look at the Lord Jesus Christ we see God with a tear on his face. We see God with a little child whom he calls to himself. We see God standing by the grave of Lazarus with a cry of anger, and a groaning because of the effects of sin. We see God racing down the road because the prodigal is returning and falling upon his neck and kissing him. Jesus Christ's picture of God, this is the revelation of God found in the Son. We find God rejoicing in the great doctrine of election, as the Lord Jesus rejoices in election, that their names are written in heaven. All of these things are unfoldings of the heart of God.

This word incidentally was also used of the *mystagog* of the ancient cults who explained the secrets of the cults to the new members. So he is the revelation of the Father. He is the exegete of God. He is the *mystagog* of the things of God, or better still he's the one who has laid open the breast of God for us, the Lord Jesus Christ, full of grace, full of truth. I don't think there could be anything that could possibly be a greater incentive to the study, the prayerful study of the word of God than that.

Would you like to know God? Would you like to truly know God? Ponder this gospel. Spend time in it. Get down on your knees by your bed side. Read these words. Ask God to unfold the teaching to you. Ask him to give you the same experience that the apostles had, for you can have that experience as you read and ponder these words. You can be with our Lord as he walks the dusty roads of Palestine. You can be with him in the boat on the Sea of Galilee. You can be with him in Jerusalem. You can be with him in the experiences of life as you read and study this word of God. For it is in the Son of God, as set forth in Scripture, that you have the revelation of the Father, “Full of truth and also full of grace.” Let me close. Time's up. The game doesn't begin until 1:00 so relax men.

Did you notice that John says in verse 14, “We beheld his glory?” Did you notice that in verse 16 he says, “Of his grace or fullness we have all received?” And did you not notice that in verse 18 that it is implied that since he's the revelation of the Father we have seen him, “We beheld him, we have received of his fullness. We have seen the revelation of the Father in him.” That speaks of the necessity of appropriation of the things that are found in the Lord Jesus Christ. So to you who are perplexed, we offer him who is full of truth, who is able to explain the mysteries of life and the mysteries of your life to you. To the guilty, here is the one who is full of grace and who redeems, doing something the Law of Moses could never do, to all, a Savior who saves. Come to him. Put your trust in him, by the grace of God rest in

him for time and for eternity. May God in his wonderful sovereign grace bring you to the knowledge of yourself through the law and to the knowledge of the Son of God as the redeemer of your sins. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we are so thankful to Thee for these wonderful passages given us by the apostle who did behold his glory and who has spent the time to unfold to us the things that meant so much to him. We know something of the anguish that he must have felt when he wrote if we tried to say and describe all of the things that he said and did the world couldn't contain that books. O God by Thy wonderful grace call us to a deeper life of communion and fellowship with Thee through Christ. Enable us to have the experiences of the apostles though we have not seen him, but through the word of God and believing in him know the fellowship that they have known. O God if there are some here who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, give them no peace until they turn from their own good works to him who has accomplished the good work, the blood of the cross for the salvation of men. May Thy grace and Thy truth as well as Thy mercy go with us. For Jesus' sake, amen.