

## INTRODUCTION

Frank and Ethel had been married for many years. One morning, Frank was watching Ethel cook breakfast. Suddenly he said, "Be careful!" Ethel jumped back from the stove and said, "What's wrong?"

Ed said, "Don't get too close to the burner!" She looked at him oddly and kept cooking. He said, "You'd better stir those eggs, or they'll stick to the pan!" This time Ethel just glared at him and went back to cooking. Ed said, "Salt the eggs! Don't forget to salt the eggs!"

Ethel turned around and pointed the spatula at Frank and said, "What's wrong with you?"

Frank smiled and said, "Oh, I just wanted you to know what it's like when I'm driving the car and you're in the passenger seat!"

Frank is braver than I am. It's like the man who was talking about how he and his wife had just taken a twelve-hour trip in the car. His friend asked, "Did you drive the whole way?" He said, "No. My wife did the driving. I just steered the car."

Well, over the next few months we're going to take a trip through the Gospel According to John. I'm calling it "Believe and Live." This is the fourth message in the series and we are finishing the prologue.

John 1:14-18 (CSB). "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John\* testified concerning him and exclaimed, "This was the one of whom I said, 'The one coming after me ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.'" Indeed, we have all received grace upon grace from his fullness, for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father's side—he has revealed him."

*\*John the Baptizer*

In this passage of scripture, we are introduced to three important attributes of God. We are going to talk about God's glory; God's grace; and God's goodness. In all three of these attributes of God, we see how Jesus revealed these. In each of these three qualities of God we will also discover a practical truth for our lives.

### 1. JESUS REVEALS GOD'S GLORY.

John 1:14 says, "We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father." When I say the word "glory" what comes to your mind? The definition of the English word "glory" means "high renown or honor." We use the words "fame and glory" together. We think of the world's celebrities, sports heroes, and politicians as having fame and glory. But in the

Bible the word "glory" means a brilliant shining light. We almost capture the idea when we speak of someone being in the spotlight.

In Jewish rabbinical literature there is a term they used to describe the presence of God. They called it the Shekinah or the Shekinah glory. As we have been reading through Exodus and Leviticus this year, we read about how Moses and Aaron build a tabernacle in the wilderness; a portable tent they used to worship God. It was called the tent of meeting. The glory of God shone on that place to show them that God's presence was dwelling in the Holy of Holies.

And when they offered the sacrifice, the glory of God would often flash down until it was so bright the people couldn't even look in that direction. The Bible says in Leviticus 9:23, "Moses and Aaron then entered the tent of meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people, and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Fire came from the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell facedown." (Leviticus 9:23-24 CSB)

When Jesus came into the world, He came bearing that divine Shekinah glory of God. On the night Jesus was born angels appeared to Shepherds in fields that are located exactly where our travel group stays every year. And the Bible says that "the glory of the Lord shone around them."

When Jesus ministered, He was revealing that same Shekinah glory of God. As we learned in our study of Hebrews last year, the Bible says, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word." (Hebrews 1:3 NIV)

This Shekinah glory of God was veiled by His human flesh. Charles Wesley wrote these amazing words in his Christian carol: "Veiled in flesh; the godhead see; Hail the incarnate deity."

Usually, the flesh of Jesus veiled this Shekinah glory, but there were specific occasions when this brilliant light flashed out from behind the veil of his flesh.

In fact, every time Jesus performed a miracle that's what happened: His Divine Shekinah glory flashed out in that instant. I love the story in Luke 8 when a huge crowd mobbed around Jesus. As he was jostled by the multitude, one single woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years snuck up in the crowd to just touch the edge of his garment.

This scene is depicted in a painting. I love biblical art, and there is a new church built on the shore of the Sea of Galilee over the town of Magdal, the home of Mary Magdalene. The artist Daniel Cariola has painted a fascinating scene. You can only see a lot of feet in sandals. But in the midst of those feet there is one hand of desperation reaching out. And at the point where she touches Jesus' robe, there's a tiny spark of energy.

At that moment Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" Peter said, "Lord, don't be silly, EVERYONE is touching you." Jesus said, "Someone did touch me. I know that power has gone out from me." (Luke 8:46 CSB)

In the same way, I believe at the point of every miracle Jesus performed, He just allowed that supernatural Shekinah glory to flash out.

So what really happened when the baby Jesus was born in Bethlehem was the God was taking on human flesh? We call it the incarnation. It's where God took on human flesh. That's what it is, but have you ever wondered WHY? Here's the reason for the Incarnation: God took on human flesh so He could die for me.

There is one main reason God needed a human body. That was so He could die for our sins. Someone has said that the Son of God became the Son of man so the children of Adam could become the children of God.

The brilliant Evangelical mind of C.S. Lewis describes the incarnation this way: Lying at your feet is your pet dog. Imagine for a moment, that your dog (and every dog) is in extreme danger. Some of us love dogs very much.

If it would help all the dogs in the world become like men, would you personally be willing to become a dog? Would you lay aside your human nature, leave your loved ones, your job, your hobbies, your art, literature, and music and choose instead of intimate communion with your beloved, the poor substitute of looking into your beloved's face and wagging your tail, unable to smile or speak?"

Wow, I wonder how many of us would be willing to do that for dog? Lewis concludes: Jesus Christ, by becoming a man, limited the thing that to Him was the most precious thing in the universe; his unhampered, unhindered communion with the Father."

At the incarnation, God took on human flesh so He could live among us, walk among us, and die for our sins.

## **2. JESUS REVEALS GOD'S GRACE.**

John 1:14,16 and 17 says, "...full of GRACE and truth...we have all received grace upon grace from his fullness, for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

As Christians, we love the word "grace." Amazing Grace is the most popular Christian song in the world. We name our churches Grace Baptist, or Grace Fellowship, or Grace Community. And the wonderful word "grace" appears over 200 times in the New Testament.

Now would anyone care to guess how many times "grace" appears in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? Any guesses? The answer is 5. Grace appears only 5 times in the four gospel accounts. It

never appears in Matthew or Mark. It appears once in Luke 2:40 where it says that the young Jesus grew in grace and knowledge. And the other four times are right here in our passage. Jesus was full of grace and truth—we have received grace upon grace and the law came by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

So, why does it appear so few times in the four gospel accounts? The answer is simple: Jesus was grace in the flesh. He didn't have to teach about grace, He was the embodiment of God's grace.

When Paul wrote a short letter to Titus, he described the ministry of Jesus in these terms: "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people." (Titus 2:11 NIV)

When Jesus appeared, God's grace appeared. And in verse sixteen it says that we have received grace upon grace. That carries with it the idea that God's grace keeps being poured out into our hearts.

How would you define grace? Some people take the five letters in grace to spell: God's Riches At Christ's Expense. I like that. But here's my definition of God's grace: God gives me what I need instead of what I deserve. Because I am a sinner, I deserve death and hell. But instead of what I deserve, God has given me forgiveness and eternal life.

Grace and mercy are two sides of the same coin. Mercy is God withholding the punishment I deserve and Grace is God giving me what I need instead of what I deserve.

If you've been around me very much, you know what when you ask me, "How are you doing?" I'm usually going to say, "Better than I deserve." I'm not trying to be cute or funny. I'm serious.

Some people are just the opposite, they go around with the attitude, "I deserve better than THIS." Whatever "this" may be at the moment.

Not me. Think about it. If you slept in a bed last night under the shelter of four walls and a roof, and if you ate three meals yesterday, and have running water and electricity, you are better off than 90% of the world's population. If you are able to worship God freely without fear of persecution or arrest like millions of Christians around the world, you and I are doing better than we deserve. Turn to your neighbor and say, "I'm doing better than I deserve."

As our scripture song for June says, "For you are saved by grace, through faith, and that is not from yourselves; it is God's gift."

You can't do anything to earn a gift, because if you earn it, it's not a gift, it's a payment. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23 CSB) God offers you His grace gift of eternal life, and eternal life is wrapped up in Jesus Christ. When you receive Jesus, you receive the gift of eternal life.

In verse sixteen, it says we have received grace upon grace. That means God's grace keeps on being poured into our lives. His grace is like the waves of the sea, it keeps on touching us, grace upon grace.

It reminds me of a story a pastor friend of mine in Tennessee. He told me about a lady in his church who was in her late eighties. She was living in a nursing home. Her body was weak, but her mind was still sharp. This pastor asked her if she had any regrets in her life. She said, "Pastor, I regret that I've never seen the ocean. I've never been out of Tennessee, and I've heard that the ocean is beautiful."

So, the pastor mentioned this to one of the retired deacons and they planned a trip. They went to the nursing home and loaded her in a van, and they drove 12 hours from Tennessee down to the Gulf of Mexico near Pensacola. Then, they lifted the lady's wheelchair out of that van in and took her to the top of a sand dune. It was one of those beautiful spring days when the water was blue and the sky was blue and you could hardly tell where the two met at the horizon.

The pastor said he looked at her as a big smile came onto her face. She began to weep and as the tears streamed down her wrinkled cheeks she turned to her pastor and said, "It is so good to find something that there is enough of."

As I think about God's grace, I feel like that dear lady. "It is so wonderful to find something that there is enough of." For us, and all the other sinners of the world, there is more than enough grace and more than enough mercy than we'll ever need.

### **3. JESUS REVEALS GOD'S GOODNESS.**

John 1:18 says, "No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father's side—he has revealed him." Jesus gives us a good picture of God. Once a lady, who wasn't very pretty, had some photos taken by a professional photographer. After checking the proofs she complained, "These pictures don't do me justice!" The photographer replied, "Ma'am, You don't need justice; you need mercy!"

But Jesus is a good picture of what God is like. Nobody had ever seen God before, so Jesus came to reveal God to us. Now the ultimate sin on the part of a human being is to try to BE God. That was Adam and Eve's problem back there in the Garden. The serpent said, "Eat this fruit, and you will be like God." So if the ultimate expression of evil is when man tries to be God, the ultimate expression of love and goodness is when God chooses to come down and become a man.

And Jesus revealed the nature of God to us. Jesus shows us that God is a loving, good God. The Psalmist wrote, "You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you." (Psalm 86:5 NIV)

The Bible says Jesus went about doing good. That's because that is God's nature. Once someone asked Jesus a question and said, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Before

Jesus answered the question, He asked a question himself. He said, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God." And then Jesus answered the question. He didn't say, "Don't call me good." He said, "You were right in calling me good because only God is good, and I am God."

So what's the application of God's goodness? My salvation doesn't depend on my goodness; it is because of God's goodness to sinners.

If you ask the average person on the street, "How do you get to heaven?" Most people will talk about doing good, or being good. But that's the problem: No person is good except God. We can never be good enough to satisfy God's demands. That's why we must trust His goodness.

We've talked about glory, grace, and goodness. There is one place in the Old Testament where God's glory, grace, and goodness come together.

In Exodus 33 Moses is on Mt. Sinai. The Bible says Moses was a friend of God. Moses and the Lord had become so close, that one day Moses said, "God I sure would like to see you." God said, "Well Moses, here's the point. Nobody can see my face and live. But I'll place you in a cleft in the side of the mountain and you can just see my afterglow. So Moses hid in the rocks and here's how the Bible describes what happened. Then Moses said, "Please, let me see your glory." He said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim the name 'the Lord' before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." But he added, "You cannot see my face, for humans cannot see me and live." (Exodus 33:18-20 CSB)

We see God's glory when we see His goodness. And His goodness is based on His gracious nature to show compassion on whomever He chooses. God is so glorious that no person can look on His face and live. That's why Jesus came, so when people looked at the deity of God veiled in a human flesh, they could see God and wouldn't die.

## **CONCLUSION**

If you've ever been to Maui, you can look across the beautiful water to see the island of Molokai, which is only 15 miles across from Kapalua. Today it is a tropical paradise, but in the 1800s it was nicknamed "Hell Island." In the 1860s there was an outbreak of leprosy that became an epidemic. The Hawaiian government rounded up every infected person and they were taken to Molokai. Because there was no harbor or pier, the lepers were thrown overboard near the shore and forced to swim. Some never made it to shore.

Supply ships occasionally brought crates, which were thrown overboard, and if the current was right, the supplies made it to shore. The lepers huddled together in crude shacks that they built. Hundreds of them were condemned to die with no hope.

In 1873, seven years after the colony began, a Catholic priest from Belgium, Father Damien, arrived to minister to the lepers. His friends told him he was a fool to go to Hell Island. But he heard the call of God and obeyed.

Father Damien had skills in carpentry and medicine, so he helped the lepers build houses, a church, a clinic, and coffins for those who died. He transformed the community from one of filth and crime into a community of love, respect, and laughter. Every resident of the colony converted to Christ under his preaching.

After a few years, he himself contracted leprosy, and the next Sunday he stood before his congregation and said, "We lepers, must trust God." When Father Damien arrived, he was a young, healthy 33-year-old man, with no sign of poor health. When he died at age 49, he looked much older than his years.

So what would compel a man to leave the safety and health of the mainland to travel many miles to a place of hopelessness? What would cause a man in perfect health to live among those who are full of disease and even contract their disease? The same questions could be asked of Jesus.

The sacrifice of Father Damien reminds us of Jesus. He left the safety and holiness of heaven to come to this moral garbage dump of sin and disease. Though Jesus was completely sinless, He took upon Himself all of our vile sin and shame.

You may thank God that you never suffered from leprosy on Molokai, but each one of us is infected with the deadly disease of sin. Jesus traveled from the safety and holiness of heaven to come into this moral garbage dump called earth to show us God's love. And in the process of showing God's love, this sinless man, who knew no sin became sin for us so that in Him we might become clean before God.

That's what happened at the cross. And in the words of the old hymn says, "Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan; oh, the grace that brought it down to man. Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span—at Calvary." Will you trust Him today?

## OUTLINE

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"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word." *Hebrews 1:3 NIV*

Incarnation: God took on human flesh so He could die for me.

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"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people." *Titus 2:11 NIV*

Grace: God gives me what I need instead of what I deserve.

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Goodness: My salvation doesn't depend on my goodness; it is because of God's goodness to sinners.

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Green Acres Baptist Church  
Tyler, Texas

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