THE WORD BECAME FLESH

John 1:14–18

Key Verse: 1:14

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Have you ever heard of the movie, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*? It’s a creepy science fiction movie where aliens invade the earth in pods. It speaks generally to a universal fear of alien invasion. The aliens are usually foreigners. Throughout history people have invaded other people’s territories, usually through war, and their purpose was to conquer and dominate. Since ancient times spies have also secretly invaded other countries. They dressed, acted, spoke and lived like the local people to collect information. There’s a famous TV show called *The Americans* about two Russian spies who act like an American married couple, but who’re really working for the Russian government. People are still afraid of terror cells planted in our country, people who fake like they’re Americans but whose real motive is to destroy us. In today’s passage we learn of another kind of “invasion.” God himself “invaded” our world when he came in the person of Jesus. But it wasn’t to steal from or take advantage of or dominate or hurt us in any way—it was to restore us to himself. As we think about today’s words may God open our hearts and speak to us personally.

So far in this Prologue to his Gospel John has been telling us that Jesus is the Eternal Creator God, the author and source of life. He’s the true light who still shines in this dark world. John also shows us the good example of the witness of John the Baptist, who points to Jesus to help us believe. He then tells us of the tragedy of how people, even his own people, refuse to believe in Jesus. But for those who do receive Jesus, regardless of who they are, God gives them the right to be called his children. They’re the new people of God, based not on their race but on faith in Jesus. Now, in the remainder of this Prologue John brings the focus back on Jesus, especially on his grace and truth. Let’s read verse 14. Let’s divide this verse into two parts, and think carefully about each one.

First, verse 14a says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” This is the first time the author has referred to Jesus as “the Word” since he did back in verses 1,2. The Word was with God in the beginning, and he *was* God. In verse 3 he says that through him all things were made. And yet now John says that this “Word” “became flesh.” What’s he trying to say? First of all, he’s telling us about the unique nature of Jesus. He’s saying Jesus is *fully God*, and at the same time, *fully human*. It’s so radical, and so hard to comprehend! In fact, it’s a mystery. How can God be God and at the same time be a human being? We can’t fully understand it, but it became a reality in the person of Jesus. When he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, God the Son took on human form in every way—everything except our sins.

Let’s think about that for a minute. *God* really became *human*? God is so immense, so great, so far above his creation, so much greater than even the greatest human beings. He exists in eternity. But *God* took on human *limits*? That’s a huge step *down*! As God, *he* should be *worshiped* and *served*, but *he* came to *serve*? When he became flesh, he set aside his throne, all his glory and power. He became helpless and insignificant. As God, he was rich beyond our imagination, but when he was born he became poor (2Co8:9). The words he “became flesh” mean he came to know hunger, thirst, tiredness, and pain. Throughout this Gospel the author John makes it a point to tell us these things about Jesus. The words he “became flesh” mean he became like us, fully human in every way (Heb2). But he didn’t come as a glorious human specimen. He went all the way to the *bottom*, to where *nobody* wants to go. “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him” (Isa53:2b). In fact, he “made himself nothing…humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Php2:7,8). It was the most radical act of humility ever. Once in a while we encounter a sort-of humble person, which seems like such a rarity, but there’s never been *anyone* as humble as *Jesus*.

Let’s read verse 14a again. Here the phrase “made his dwelling” is literally “tabernacle.” With this expression John is intentionally referring back to the Book of Exodus. In it, God came up with the idea of the tabernacle so that he could be among his sinful people. God is holy and glorious beyond comprehension, but he made a way to dwell among the Israelites. Built into this tabernacle was the concept of God’s atonement for his people’s sins. Exodus shows us that if the holy, glorious God actually dwelt among his sinful people without the proper atonement, he would break out in wrath and kill them all. But through atonement, which God himself created, he would make his dwelling, or tabernacle, among his people and dwell with them. The tabernacle foreshadowed the coming of Jesus, when God himself made a way to really dwell among us, not only during the earthly life of Jesus, but throughout all eternity in heaven.

The phrase “made his dwelling among us” also simply means that Jesus lived among sinful people. When he became human he didn’t separate himself. When people obtain power and wealth they love to enjoy being elite; they isolate and protect themselves from problem-filled people, who can be so burdensome. But Jesus didn’t insulate himself. He became one of us. He shared our hard lives. He worked with his hands. He “walked in our shoes.” Moreover, he bore with all our failings, weaknesses and sins quietly, without judging us. He became our Friend. He embraced us fully, just as we are. When he “made his dwelling among us,” it was so costly to him as God. Think about it. It must have been so humiliating, so frustrating, and demanded such immense patience from him to constantly be with failing sinners. It was also risky and dangerous. He was exposing himself to human abuse and rejection, which can be so intense.

What was he *doing*? God was not forcing *us* to fit into *his* mold; he was fitting *himself* into *our* mold. *Why*? It shows how much he values us, no matter who we are. He wants to fully understand us. He wants to relate to us closely, with no pretense, nothing to hide, no deception. He wants to have real fellowship with us. He knows full well we’re so sinful, but he really wants to save us. Ultimately it shows how much he loves us.

Some leaders fake being among their people, especially during elections. They try to talk like they understand common people’s problems and kiss their babies, but in their hearts they’re condescending and despise them. But leaders who truly live among their people win their trust and love. During one winter at Valley Forge, General George Washington chose to live among his starving and freezing soldiers, suffering and grieving together, and he won their hearts forever. Likewise, missionaries who choose to live among natives, mastering their language, eating their food, trying to understand everything about their culture, are most effective. They get the idea to live that way from Jesus. Jesus who became flesh and made his dwelling among us was the first missionary.

Let’s read verse 14a once more. These words tell us of God’s initiative. God loved us first, when we didn’t love him in return. Do you ever get tired of taking the initiative? Do you always have to speak to someone first? Or be the first to come up with the idea to give or show love? It gets old, doesn’t it? Think about it. God had been taking the initiative with sinful human beings from the beginning, and human beings kept on turning out so ungrateful and evil. But God never gave up. God is still reaching out to sinful people through Jesus, the Word who became flesh. God is still reaching out to sinners through his people, those who really know Jesus and follow him. But only when we remember how much God loved us first can we keep on loving first, like him.

Secondly, let’s read verse 14b. Let’s first think about the phrase: “We have seen his glory.” John suddenly says, “We.” It means the disciples; but it includes all believers of all time. When we believe in Jesus, we begin to see his glory (11:40; cf. 2:11). It’s like a secret revealed only to certain people. To “see his glory” means to see his unique greatness as God himself. His glory is that he’s the one and only Son who came from the Father. There’ve been many great people, and many great servants of God. But only *Jesus* is God’s Son, sent from the Father. However, John’s Gospel repeatedly tells us that Jesus’ greatest glory is seen in his death and resurrection (7:39; 11:4; 12:16,23; 13:31,32; 17:1). So what’s “his glory”? We would think it would mainly be his power as Almighty God. But in the death and resurrection of Jesus we can see God’s greatest glory, his greatest love for sinners. Once we “see his glory,” we can never be the same again. Everything looks different. In this world we see so much ugliness and evil. We all so badly need to see his glory.

Now let’s look at the last part of verse 14. It says that Jesus is “full of grace and truth.” Some people are full of pride and selfish ambition, full of themselves, full of lust or greed, lies and deception, fatalism and despair. But Jesus is “full” of grace and truth. Verse 16 again mentions “his fullness.” It’s like he’s spilling over with grace and truth. It’s repeated in verse 17. As we get closer to Jesus, we too become full of his grace and truth.

The author John contrasts the grace and truth of Jesus with the law of Moses. The law of Moses is described as “grace already given.” God in his grace gave us his law to help us know better who he is, what he’s like, what pleases him, and what sin is. The law of Moses ushered in the era of the first covenant. Even though it was God’s gracious revelation of himself, the law of Moses had a limitation. It couldn’t root out our problem of sin—it could only expose it. But the grace and truth of Jesus fulfilled the law and ushered in a new era. His grace and truth actually *cure* our chronic problem of sin. The law only controls people outwardly. Only the grace and truth of Jesus can really change people.

The grace and truth of Jesus are a major theme of John’s Gospel. It’s how Jesus relates to sinners. He begins with grace, then transitions to truth. His grace opens our hearts, then his truth touches our inner problems in order to heal them. Grace without truth is mushy. If we’re only full of grace, people can treat us like bozos. Truth without grace is bone-crushing. If we’re only full of truth, people will run away. We need both grace *and* truth. And we need to keep in mind that grace *leads to* truth. In John’s Gospel truth is a really big deal—the words “true” or “truth” are repeated 43 times. In today’s world, truth is no big deal. If truth benefits me, it matters; if not, it doesn’t matter. But God is the God of truth. He sent Jesus as the true light. He wants us to be true worshippers. His truth always reveals what’s hidden. It’s not about superficial things; it gets down to our deepest problems. It’s kind of like invasive surgery. It’s painful. But his truth helps us see our true selves. And as his truth comes in, his grace does also, to heal us. We need to open up and let the grace and truth of Jesus heal our souls.

Let’s read verse 14 once more. May God bless us to see the glory of Jesus through our study of John’s Gospel. May he fill us with his grace and truth.