The Gospel of John: *The Word Became Flesh*
John 1:14-18

As we return to our journey through John’s Gospel, we come to the conclusion of his “prologue” in John 1:14-18. Please stand and let us read the Word of God together.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me’”). For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

The outline for my message this morning consists of three subheadings: 1) two pictures of the incarnation; 2) another point of clarification; and finally 3) the Gospel and God’s nature.

I. Two pictures of the Incarnation
New Testament scholar John Stott writes:
The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. This statement is one of the most significant and memorable ever penned. Its implications are limitless. It has provided the church over the centuries with a key to understanding the mystery of Jesus Christ. It represents the heart and climax of the gospel. The remaining twenty and a half chapters will be spent unfolding its significance.

There is much for us to observe about the incarnation, but this morning I want to examine just two pictures of the incarnation that spring forth from the words that John writes here in vs. 14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory…” 1) The first picture is revealed in the Greek; and 2) is the parallel of Christ’s incarnation with the Jewish tabernacle.

Before I get to my observations, let us take a moment to remember the context. Remember that in week 2 of this series I presented both the Jewish and the Greek context regarding this term, *Logos*… which in English translates as “the Word.” Thanks to several well-known philosophers such as Heraclitus, Plato, Zeno, and Philo, the Greeks already intuited that the *Logos* of God was the “reason” that held everything together, though they imagined the *Logos* to be some kind of an impersonal force that was ultimately unknowable. Remember that the Jews were also inclined to associate the Word with God’s wisdom and creative power; and though they often personified God’s Word and Wisdom, their sense of *Logos* was also impersonal and mysterious to some degree.

Given this context, John chose to begin his gospel drawing upon this well-known concept in vs. 1 declaring, “In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God.” Now, after looking at the Logos over the past two weeks, we come to the end of the John’s prologue, and this is the last time that John will refer to Jesus as the Logos. As such, vs. 14 serves as the bookend to John 1:1. One scholar suggested that if we considered everything else as parenthetical, we might understand the entire prologue consisting of this short declaration: “In the beginning was the *Logos*, and the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God…and the *Logos* became flesh and dwelt among us.”
As I mentioned, the Logos was a familiar concept for both the Jews and the Greeks, but here in vs. 14, John declares a mystery that no one was prepared for, “And the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us…” This is new. Make no mistake: John is not borrowing ideas or imitating anyone in this proclamation. This revelation is new and shocking, particularly coming from a Jewish author. The Jews had no context to understand God, or God’s Word, “taking on flesh;” nor did the Greeks. So what does it mean that the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us?

The Greek words that John employs here tell the story, so let us now turn to…the Geek with the Greek.

The word “flesh” in the Greek is the word sarx. Sarx implies all the vulnerabilities that come with being a human being made of flesh on planet earth. Sarx can be bruised, beaten, cut, and destroyed. Sarx feels the cold and the heat. Sarx requires rest and nourishment. Nothing is more vulnerable and exposed than the sarx of a human being, and that is precisely why John used this term. The resulting picture, then, is mind-blowing: The Word, who was in the beginning with God…who was God…who was the active agent that accounts for all of creation…He is the very Word, the Logos of God, who condescends to take on flesh. The eternal One who has no needs, no vulnerabilities, and no weaknesses, “becomes” like us…as those who are weak and vulnerable in our flesh.

There is also significance in the verb used in this phrase, “the Word became flesh.” The Greek verb here, egeneto, that the ESV translates as “became,” comes from the root verb, ginomai, which means: born or produced, made or created, to come about. The tense of the verb is as important as the verb itself: egeneto is the third person, middle aorist of the verb ginomai. Let me geek out here for a moment and give you a quick lesson in Greek.

In the Greek language, there are three voices that are indicated by the spelling of a verb: active, passive, and middle. The active voice says of something done once and for all in the past (that is, in the aorist tense), “He did it once and for all.” The passive voice says, “It was done to him, once and for all.” The middle voice says, “He did it of his own will and/or for his own benefit, once and for all.”

So the picture here is that Jesus took on flesh, became flesh, was born as one with flesh…of His own choosing and for His own purpose…and the act was decisively final and irrevocable. In other words, when the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us, it was not something that the Logos had to endure or accommodate out of rote obedience to the Father…becoming flesh was His own choosing and for His own purpose. And, when the Logos became flesh, it was not a temporary action. We should not think Jesus temporarily “borrows” flesh or “indwells flesh” for a time, and then later returns to the state from which He came. The picture here is that, in the great wisdom of God, the Logos who was always with God and was God, took on flesh for the sake of redeeming God’s creation, and did so knowing His action was final and irreversible. Jesus will forever more be the God/Man.

Now, we should not think of the incarnation as a demotion, such that the Logos is now something “less than God.” Instead, we should understand the incarnation as the Logos remaining who He has always been (fully God), and yet assuming a new status (fully human). Now, I know that is hard to understand, and there are some who will argue, “If Jesus is God, He
can’t possibly be human. And if He is human, he cannot possibly be God.” To which our common sense must admit, “God is competent and able to accomplish that which we are not yet able to comprehend.”

That Jesus chose to become flesh for His own purpose and His own glory is reflected later in John 10:18 when Jesus states, “No one takes (my life) from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” That is exactly what the middle voice suggests here in John 1:14…the Word became flesh of His own accord. That Jesus remains the God/Man for all time is revealed at the resurrection and the days that followed. Remember that when Jesus is resurrected from the dead, He does not appear as a “ghost” or a “spirit.” Jesus is resurrected as one who has flesh…the scars are still in his hands, he eats food, he can be seen, touched, heard, and held. The Word continues to dwell as one who has flesh, just like us…but then so NOT like us. He is perfectly God, and He is perfectly Man. Once again, if that hurts your head, that’s a good sign. If the truth of God’s activity were so easily understood as to make perfect sense to imperfect humans, we should assume that imperfect humans are the source of that myth. But no human could come up with “the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us”…that had to come from God.

Church, the Word becoming flesh is the signature act of humility, service and sacrifice of the very same God who made us. So what do you think our God would have us do to humble ourselves and serve one another? We must follow His lead. Incarnational ministry means we enter into the state of those who are in need, and we become one of them. I heard of a church recently who successfully bribed hundreds of their church members to spend a night in a box in the parking lot so they could understand what that is like for a homeless person. Not long ago I went through an exercise called the “The Cost of Poverty” in which I assumed the identity of a young, unwed mother for a day. I left the exercise exhausted and deeply concerned for the plight of so many single mothers in our community. Many families in our church have opened up their hearts and their homes to foster and adopt children who are currently in the care of the state. Once again, this ministry is incarnational…it is a choice that is irrevocable, sacrificial, and loving for the sake of another. Let me ask you Church: how is God calling you to become incarnational in your ministry to others? How is God calling you to step out of your comfort zone and take on the skin of those who are struggling in your circle of influence? Make no mistake…Jesus modeled for us what He expects from us. As those who have been saved and filled with His Spirit, engaging in incarnational ministry is precisely what Jesus meant when He said in Luke 9:23, “If anyone would came after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.” Don’t leave here today without asking the Lord how He is calling you to be incarnational in your context.

OK, let’s look at one other powerful image that is embedded here within vs. 14…the parallel to the tabernacle that we find in the OT. Listen again to vs. 14 with the tabernacle in mind, “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Did you hear it?

When John writes, “…and dwelt among us…” John employs the Greek verb “skeinoo” which literally means, “to spread a tent.” Now, the verb very often means “to live or dwell,” but the Jews would have immediately appreciated the double meaning of this word, and particularly
when John follows it up with, “and we have seen his glory.” The image of a spread tent and the Shekinah glory of God immediately reminds us of the Tabernacle in the OT.

If you have ever read the Old Testament, you might recall that the Hebrew slaves were delivered from Egypt, at which point they become a nomadic people for many years as they make their way to the Promised Land, following the Cloud of God’s presence during the day and a pillar of fire at night, remember that? Moses is their leader, and along the way, God gives Moses His Law. The Hebrews carried the Law of God in an ark, and that is referred to as the Ark of the Covenant. And then God calls them to spread a large tent at each stop along the way, and He gives them very specific instructions how to set up the tent. That tent is referred to as “the tabernacle” or the “tent of meeting” and you can read about it in Exodus 26. The tabernacle was the place where God’s glory would descend…where people would come to meet with God, to pray, to make sacrifices, and even to make atonement.

So, when John writes, “And the Word became flesh and “pitched a tent” among us, and we have seen his glory…” those familiar with the tabernacle would have immediately recognized the parallel. One of the commentators that I read each week in preparation for my messages on John is a scholar by the name of Arthur Pink. Pink was a brilliant Christian thinker of the Reformed Tradition, though one who remained generally unappreciated until his death. In his commentary on John, Pink does a masterful, deep dive on the parallels between the “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” and the “tabernacle” of the Old Testament…of which I will only be able to summarize very quickly. But if this subject interests you, I encourage you to track down Pink’s commentary and read further.

Pink writes of “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us…”:

There is here a latent reference to the tabernacle of Israel in the wilderness. That tabernacle had a typical significance: it foreshadowed God the Son incarnate. Almost everything about the tabernacle adumbrated [foreshadowed or symbolized] the Word made flesh.

Pink lists ten instances where the “tabernacle” foreshadows what Christ fulfills.

1) The “tabernacle” was a temporary appointment. Pink is here comparing the tabernacle to the temple, and draws the parallel to Christ’s first appearance on earth as a humble, itinerant preacher who traveled as a nomad for a time; as compared to the second coming of Christ when Jesus will come in all of his glory and establish His reign once and for all in Jerusalem…like the temple. Thus, the tabernacle prepares us to meet God in a humble “tent” that moves from place to place, “constantly on the move—unwearied in the activity of His love” for a season. But the tabernacle is not the end of the story…the Temple is coming that will host the King of Kings!

2) The “tabernacle” was for use in the wilderness. Pink writes, “The wilderness strikingly foreshadowed the conditions amid which the eternal Word tabernacled among men at His first advent. The wilderness home of the tabernacle unmistakably foreshadowed the manger-cradle, the Nazarite-carpenter’s bench, the “nowhere” for the Son of Man to lay his head, and the borrowed tomb.” A God who dwells only in palaces among the privileged would be a God rendered unreachable and generally useless to the rest of us (most of us) who struggle to survive in the wilderness. The tabernacle prepared us for the One who joins us in the wilderness and understands our pains as humans on earth.
3) Outwardly the “tabernacle” was mean, humble, and unattractive in appearance. Pink observes that there was nothing in the externals of the old tent that was pleasing to the carnal eye. Unlike the temple, the exterior of the tabernacle was comprised of plain boards and skins. He writes, “The Divine majesty of our Lord was hidden beneath a veil of flesh.” As predicted by the prophet Isaiah, the unanointed eyes of an unbelieving world saw in Him “no beauty that they should desire Him.” Such is why John wrote last week in vs. 10-11, “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive Him.”

4) The tabernacle was God’s dwelling place. It was in the tabernacle, in the midst of the camp, that people would behold the Shekinah glory of God who dwelt within the holy of holies. Pink writes, “The holy of holies received its anti-typical fulfillment in the Person of the Holy One of God. ‘We beheld his glory’ is the language of the tabernacle type.” We will see Jesus displaying the glory of God throughout John’s Gospel.

5) The tabernacle was the place where God met with men. As I mentioned earlier, the tabernacle was often referred to as “the tent of meeting.” If an Israelite wanted to draw near to Jehovah, he had to come to the door of the tabernacle. God had told Moses, “And there I will meet with you, and I will commune with you.” Pink writes, “Christ is the meeting place between God and men. ‘No man cometh to the Father but by Him.’” As Paul writes, “There is but one mediator between God and men—the man Christ Jesus (I Timothy 2:5).”

6) The “tabernacle” was the center of Israel’s camp. Pink observes many scriptures that describe the tabernacle as the dwelling of God “in the midst of the camp,” and then writes, “How striking is this! The tabernacle was the great gathering center. As such it was a beautiful foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus. He is our great gathering-center. And His precious promise is that “wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matt. 18:20).”

7) The “tabernacle” was the place where the Law was preserved. As I mentioned earlier, the tabernacle held the “ark of the covenant,” the Law of God. In the same way, throughout His perfect life Jesus preserved in thought, word, and deed, the Law of God. When we consider the Sermon on the Mount, we see how Jesus “tabernacled the Law of God.” Nobody understood or preserved the Law of God better than Jesus, and He Himself states in Matthew 5:17-18, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”

8) The “tabernacle” was the place where sacrifice was made. Pink writes, “There it was that blood was shed and atonement was made for sin. So it was with the Lord Jesus. The Cross was the altar upon which God’s Lamb was slain, where His precious blood was shed, and where complete atonement was made for sin.” Can you see it church? Can you see how the Word became flesh and dwelt among us in such a way as to provide the sacrifice that our sins require…a sacrifice that we could never afford or accomplish? All of the Old Testament is pointing to the Lamb…we will unpack that further in a few weeks, but here we see how the tabernacle foreshadowed the sacrifice of the Word made flesh.
9) The “tabernacle” was the place where the priestly family was fed. We read in Lev. 6:16 and 26: And the rest of it Aaron and his sons shall eat...the priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. In a holy place it shall be eaten, the court of the tent of meeting.” Once again, the meal that satisfies the priests in the holy place points to Jesus, who offers Himself as “the bread of life” for those who have become “a royal priesthood” according to 1 Peter 2:5!

OK, last one...

10) The “tabernacle” was a place of worship. Is Jesus now our place of worship? Absolutely! As the writer of Hebrews proclaims (13:15), “Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to his name.” When Christ entered into the world to tabernacle among us, the Magi, when they met him, “…fell on their knees and worshipped Him.” When Jesus appears to His disciples after the resurrection, we read in Matthew 28:9, “And behold, Jesus met them…and they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped Him.” We find our place of worship in Jesus!

OK…that’s enough for now, but I hope you can see how powerfully the language of John’s words in John 1:14 call to mind so much rich imagery that is found in the tabernacle of the Old Testament. We should always look for Jesus in the OT and watch for how Jesus connects the dots back to the OT in His teaching.

II. Another clarification: Let us move to my second subheading which is “Another clarification.” Last week we saw how John the Apostle made a clarification about John the Baptist. In vs. 15, the Apostle makes yet another short insertion regarding John the Baptist: “John bore witness about him, and cried out, ‘This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’” I will unpack this in further detail next Sunday, but clearly John inserts this bit about the Baptist to help clarify that “the Word made flesh” is the fulfillment of prophecies, both ancient and recent. And again, John the Apostle is making sure that the reader understands that “the Word who became flesh” was NOT John the Baptist; instead, this is the One whom John the Baptist was declaring as his Superior: Jesus. Again, more on that next week.

III. God’s Nature and the Gospel

My final subheading is God’s Nature and the Gospel. Listen to vss. 14, 16-18: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

John states in no uncertain terms that when the Word became flesh, the glory of God moved into our neighborhood…God’s glory could be looked upon in flesh and blood. The glory of the Father was made manifest in the Beloved Son, and for the first time, the world got a front row seat as to God’s nature and God’s character.

Clearly there was a qualitative difference between what we could know about God prior to Christ, and what we learned about God’s nature once the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. John articulates the difference in what he writes in vs. 17, “For the law was given through
Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Let me unpack that for a minute, because here is where the Gospel reveals God’s character.

You see, the law that we received from God through Moses taught us about God’s holy standards, but it fell short of revealing who God is. The law convicted us of our sin, and the law made it clear that a sacrifice was required to atone for human sin. The only problem was, there was no sacrifice that we could offer to God that would repay the debt of our sin. Though God taught his people the practice of making sacrifices for atonement, we always knew that goats and lambs would never satisfy that debt…and that left us in a predicament.

John Stott sums up this predicament beautifully:
“Our sin and fallenness imply that we cannot save ourselves. Only God can save us. But conversely, since it is we who have sinned, the repairing of our relationship with God must come from our side, from within our human life. Thus only God can save us; only we should. Since no one save God can make satisfaction for our sins, and no one save man ought to make it, it is necessary for a God-man to make it.

Here is where we come to know the true nature of the Father through the incarnation of His Son. In Jesus, the Word made flesh, we come to know God not just as the Lawmaker, but as the One who is full of truth and grace. Not only is God the judge, but we learn in Jesus that God is also willing to become flesh, to enter into the world as the God-man in order to satisfy the sentence that we all deserve.

In Jesus Christ, who always spoke the truth…who fulfilled the law and prophets…in Jesus Christ who tabernacled amongst us…in the One who learned our language and dwelt among us…in the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world as only the God-Man could do…we discover God’s essential nature: truth and grace…grace upon grace. Apart from Jesus, we would have never known God’s true nature, “But He who is at the Father’s side; the only Son, has made Him known.” The Greek here literally means, “But He who is in the Father’s bosom…” The picture here is that God reached inside of himself and sent to us His very heart…His Beloved Son…it is the ultimate act of Love!

Truth and grace are repeated twice here to emphasize God’s nature as revealed in His Son, Jesus. Truth…and…Grace. In the end, what we need more than anything else is the unmerited grace of Jesus Christ crucified for the forgiveness of our sins. We are saved by grace, and we who are being saved receive grace upon grace. But you might note that the word grace will not be not mentioned again in this gospel. And it’s not because grace is unimportant: it’s because grace is impossible apart from the TRUTH about who Jesus is, what Jesus said, and what Jesus accomplished on our behalf. There is no GRACE without the TRUTH of God’s law and our acknowledgment of the unpayable debt that has been accrued due to our sin. Grace…real grace…is not general…it is specific. Real grace…the grace that saves…comes only through the God-Man who left heaven to rescue us. So the rest of this gospel will proclaim the truth of who Jesus is, what Jesus said, and what Jesus accomplished on our behalf…but the end is always that we will receive Him, believing in His name, that we might receive grace upon grace.

If you have never yielded to the truth about God’s law, our debt, and the terrible price that Jesus paid for you and for me that we might be forgiven and reconciled to God, and I urge you today…read the Gospel of John. Ask God to speak to you, to convict you of His truth and His
grace. Confess your sin, turn away from the path you are on, and place your faith in the Word made flesh. Call upon the name of Jesus that you might be forgiven and saved.

Church, the world needs the Word made flesh…the world needs truth and grace. It’s our job to lead them to Jesus.

Let us pray.