

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

Weekly Edition – January 27, 2017
Gospel According to St. John – Prologue – Part 4

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.

¹⁵ (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ Out of His fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is Himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made Him known.

Three Reflections on the Nature and Essence of God

First Consideration: God's Glory

- 1) Verse 14 of John's first chapter may well be the greatest single verse in the entire New Testament. Our study today will take us into three words that dominate John's thought and recur throughout his Gospel. Our first reflection leads us into the challenging and difficult terrain of contemplating and attempting to describe what is utterly beyond the human mind to grasp – God's glory.
- 2) God's glory is the magnificence of God's presence and Being – God's inexhaustible fullness from which radiates God's unrelenting love. "*No one has ever seen God*" except Jesus, "*God's one and only Son,*" yet God's glory manifests itself among men because God desires His glory to be known.
- 3) All of creation speaks-out God's glory as David says in Psalm 19: "¹ *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. ² Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. ³ They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. ⁴ Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.*" To contemplate the wonder of creation is to contemplate the glory of God who created it.
- 4) In the wilderness, when God led Israel out of Egypt, God's glory was visible in the fiery cloud that indwelt the Tabernacle. (Exodus 40:34-35) Later, God's glory would indwell the Temple in Jerusalem. (1 Kings 8:10-11)
- 5) It is this glory that John speaks to frequently in his Gospel when speaking of Jesus. John tells us that the life of Jesus Christ is a manifestation of God's glory. The glory of God the Son is veiled behind His humanity and becomes visible only when He manifests it through His miracles. (see John 2:11 and 11:40) Yet when we look upon Jesus, we behold God's glory. To experience the power and love of God in Jesus is to enter into and participate in a new glory.
- 6) John tells us that Jesus did not receive His glory from men (John 5:41). Jesus seeks not His own glory, but the glory of the Father who sent Him. (John 7:18) It is the Father who glorifies Him. (John 8:50) Martha would see the glory of God in the raising of her brother, Lazarus. (John 11:4) That miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead is for the glory of God, that the Son may be thereby glorified. (John 11:4) The glory that rested upon Jesus, that permeated Him, that radiated from Him, and shone brightly from Him is the glory of God visible in the flesh.
- 7) And yet, that glory is also uniquely His own glory. Nearing the end of His earthly journey, Jesus prayed that God would glorify Him with the glory He had before the world began. (John 17:5) Jesus does not shine with a borrowed radiance – but with His own.

The Gospel of St. John

Part I

- Prologue 1:1-14
- First Year 1:15 – 2:22
- Second Year 2:23 – 6:71
- Third Year 7:1 – 12:50

Part II

- The Last Discourse 13:1 – 17:26
- The Arrest and Trial 18:1 – 19:16
- Death and Resurrection 19:16 (b) – 21:25

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- 8) So what does John mean by all these references to God's glory? To answer we must look back to Holy Scripture in the writings of the Old Testament. The Israelites held as very dear the idea of the Shekinah – *that which dwells*. It is the essence of I AM WHO I AM.
- 9) When the Temple was dedicated the priests could not enter in to minister "*for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.*" (1 Kings 8:11) When Isaiah had his vision in the Temple he heard the angelic choir singing that "*the whole earth is full of His glory.*" (Isaiah 6:3) Ezekiel in his ecstasy saw "*the likeness of the glory of the LORD.*" God's Shekinah, the glory of the LORD, came at times when God was very close.
- 10) Finally, we read in Revelations that "²²*I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.*" (Revelation 21:22-23) This is the glory to which you and I can enter into abiding restful union with God in love.
- 11) On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus prayed for His disciples and for all who follow after them – even for you and I – saying, "*I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, ²¹that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. ²²I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are One— ²³I in them and You in Me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.*" (John 17:20-23)

Application: Through faith in Jesus Christ, you and I enter into the glory of God – into God's presence – God's in-dwelling in your life and in mine. What in me resists the glory of God? When have I tasted it?

Second Reflection: Full of Grace

- 1) Our second reflection invites us to enter into a deeper understanding of what it means that Jesus was full of grace. We use the word *grace* frequently, but what does it really mean?
- 2) The word *grace* has two basic ideas within it: First, *grace* has the idea of something completely undeserved. Permeating the word is the notion that we never could have earned or achieved the benefit of grace on our own. The benefit of *grace* was well beyond our grasp – so far removed from the realm of possibility as to be – well, impossible. Therefore, the word *grace* also embodies the notion of thankfulness which the favor calls out in return. To receive something which is utterly and completely undeserved and unmerited calls forth a sense of deep thankfulness.
- 3) The second basic idea contained in the word *grace* is this: it carries the notion of *beauty*. This second connotation of the word *grace* is really a New Testament phenomenon, meaning that the definition of the word *grace* did not so much change in New Testament language as it obtained its highest consecration – its meaning ennobled, glorified and exalted from the realm of man receiving an unmerited benefit from man to man receiving an unmerited benefit from God. Before Christ, the idea of unmerited favor of God toward man was simply inconceivable. It never entered the minds of the philosophers. Beauty is glorified in the favor of worthiness conferred upon the unworthy; of holiness conferred upon the sinful. God's grace is beautiful.
- 4) Aristotle, when defining *grace*, makes this very point. He said grace was conferred freely, with no expectation of return, finding its only motive in the bounty and free-heartedness of the giver. The Apostle Paul draws a sharp contrast between *grace* and *works*; they are directly antithetical – they mutually exclude one another. When we work for something, it is earned (or deserved.) But what we cannot obtain by our work, but receive anyway, is unmerited and unearned grace. Grace is undeserved, yet we receive it anyway!
- 5) Grace is not the same as mercy – but the two are closely linked. Aristotle held that mercy is "a certain grief at that which is seen to be evil, pernicious, wretched, and unworthy and which he in fear expected that he might suffer, certain of his due..." The notion is that one is in misery on account of one's own wretchedness, expecting fully to receive a just penalty and worthy suffering on account of one's sin.

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- 6) Yet the grace of God – His free grace and the corresponding gift of mercy in the forgiveness of sins, is extended to men. Man stands rightly guilty but that guilt is removed by God's grace. Man stands rightly miserable in his sinful state but that misery is removed by God's mercy. And the favor that God shows to man by His grace and mercy is beautiful – to contemplate it brings an element of pleasure that delights – as all things of beauty tickle and delight the beholder.
- 7) We see that for John Jesus is the embodiment of God's grace and mercy. "*God so loved the world with a pitying love (God's mercy) that He gave His only begotten Son (God's grace) that the world through Him might be saved.*" (John 3:16) And this is the cause of great joy and thankfulness.
- 8) Mankind did nothing to earn the benefit of Jesus Christ coming in the flesh to live and die as one of us and to unite us with God in love. So here, in John's prologue, he tells us that Jesus came full of grace – full of favor for all mankind in general, and for those who would believe on Him in particular – to shower us with unmerited and unearned favor – the Light and life of God shared freely from His treasury of love. It is a spontaneous favor – an act of love – done without obligation – done for us who do not, and in no manner can deserve it.

Application: The gift of grace is a fact. It is finished. Jesus has shed His grace upon you and me, even though we are undeserving and do not merit so lofty a gift of love. He has done this out of His fullness and love, and is in no manner compelled to do so. It is pure gift. Have I received this gift, or am I still trying in some way to earn it (though that is impossible!)? If I have not received it, am I willing to ask for it? Am I clinging to something in me – to something in my past – that haunts me such that I believe that I am not worthy to receive God's grace? Might I be open to the notion that God's favor is bigger and more powerful than my unworthiness?

Third Reflection: Full of Truth

- 1) John tells us right out of the gate that Jesus was full of *truth*. Jesus is the embodiment of truth. He said, "*I am the truth.*" (John 14:6) To see truth we must look at Jesus. Truth can be quite abstract – hard for simple minds to grasp. Jesus did not come to talk to men about God – He came to show us what God is like so that the simplest mind might know Him as intimately as the greatest philosopher.
- 2) Jesus is the communicator of truth. He told His disciples that if they continued with Him they would know the truth and the truth would set them free. (John 8:31) He told Pilate that His mission in this world was to testify to the truth. (John 18:37) When Jesus was taken up into heaven He left us His Spirit to guide us into the truth. (John 16:13)
- 3) Yet the truth can be resented. The Jews sought to kill Jesus because He told them the truth. (John 8:40) Men may shut their minds to the truth – but the truth remains. Truth does not depend on its hearers – we do not destroy the truth by refusing to listen to it.
- 4) And truth may be disbelieved. (John 8:45) On the one hand it may be disbelieved because it is too good to be true. On the other hand, it may be disbelieved because we are so riveted to half-truth or un-truth that we will not allow the whole truth to gain purchase in our minds. Half-truth is the enemy of the whole truth, and one of the Enemy's greatest weapons against the faithful.
- 5) Finally, truth is not something abstract – it is something that must be done. (John 3:21) To the Greek mind the notion was that truth was "*unhidden; unconcealed – truth will bear scrutiny and investigation, it is open to the light of day.*" Truth is something that must be known in the mind, accepted in the heart, and acted out in life. In other words, truth has legs and hands – truth makes a difference in the world. Truth does not fear the light; truth need not hide; truth need not fear being unconcealed. Jesus is truth. He embodies truth. He reveals truth. And truth cannot lie.

Application: John wrote in his first letter, "*If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in darkness we lie and do not live out the truth.*" Truth is to be "lived-out." How do I live out the truth? What does it mean to live out the truth? What does it mean to walk in darkness?