

The Limitless Flow of Grace – John 1:14-18

What would it take to convince you of the existence of God? How would your friends, family and work colleagues respond to that question? Would it take some spectacular vision or miracle – or perhaps it is needing the answer to a big ‘why?’. Throughout history we can broadly categorise the ‘proofs’ requested of God as ‘signs’ (if I can see God) and ‘wisdom’ (if I can understand God). John’s Gospel has been given to us to convince us Jesus is the Messiah – the one God has sent into the world to change and restore it, and in these first few verses John describes Jesus as the ‘Word’ – the answer and reason – and the ‘Light’ – the sign and visible evidence – of God. This is the one John is describing as coming to the Earth in Jesus Christ – through whom all things have been made, in whom all things hold together, for whom all things exist.

Consider God’s perspective on this. You have eternally existed in glory and love – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You create the universe that your glory and love might be shared over and over. Your creation is dazzling full of great wonder and beauty, of angels, galaxies, mountains, oceans, sea creatures, animals of all shapes and sizes – but you give extra value and worth to men and women, whom you make to be just like you. You are thrilled with what you’ve created – but have to endure the heartache of seeing your children reject you, deny you, despise you – the agony of seeing a malicious lie spread throughout the world that you are not good, not loving, not glorious. What would you do?

What ‘proof’ do you friends / family / colleagues ask or expect before accepting God?

How do these fit into the ‘sign’ and ‘wisdom’ proofs that we have seen here?

Read Acts John 1:1-18.

1. The Word Became Flesh (verse 14a)

The One through whom all things have been, in whom all things hold together, for whom all things exist - became flesh, became human. This is the most incredible condescension of all time - nothing compares to this, no other act of humility comes even close. There are no illustrations that can easily be used to capture the magnitude of Christ’s condescension without trivialising and therefore minimising the incarnation. He took upon Himself a body that is weak like ours, that hurts like ours, that smells like ours – a body which could die like ours. He took on human emotion like we have – which can experience betrayal – rejection, failure, temptation to sin! That’s what God chose to do. When you are feeling angry towards God it’s worth bearing this verse in mind, it’s worth remembering He made a decision to save this world by entering into it and wading through the foulest sewage to rescue us.

How often do you consider the incarnation of Christ? How does this act of God show His overwhelming love for us?

What cost are you willing to bear to show love to someone else? What humility might this require of you?

2. He Dwelt Among Us (verse 14b)

We have already seen from verse 1 how John deliberately draws our attention back to the Old Testament scriptures, mirroring Genesis 1 – now he does this again here, but the link is more subtle, however those early Greek speaking Christians who were amongst the first to receive this letter would have immediately noticed another parallel here – it is the word ‘dwelt’. The literal rendering would say this: ‘he tabernacled (he pitched his tent) among us’.

Read Exodus 40:34-35

The glory of God was so overwhelming that Moses was unable to dwell within it. This same glory entered into a baby, born in a stable, laid in a manger. This baby grew through adolescence into adulthood. The glory Moses encountered was unapproachable - stand back or you will die. This glory ‘veiled in flesh’ touched lepers, ate fish on the beach with his friends, played and talked with children. Prostitutes and tax collectors would bound up to him and encounter respect, love and mercy, would be changed by his touch. This is how God chose to change the world!

It was a glory ‘veiled in flesh’ and as such so many missed it – because he looked so ordinary, unimpressive, his appearance was like that of any other middle eastern man! This humility of Christ which is a source of incredible comfort to Christians – the One who sympathises - is a major obstacle to those who aren’t. Where an Old Testament scene of glory might be what is requested - it’s a glory that comes in tremendous humility.

How does the glory seen by Moses compare with the way we can see glory in Christ?

How can we be tempted to seek one sign of God’s glory over the other?

3. Law or Grace? (verses 16-17)

You might ask this question – what does God want from me? Moses - who got to see something of the full-blown earth shaking, thunderous glory of God - was given ‘law’. The 10 commandments - the description of a ‘perfect life’, the life none of us has even come close to. You might say: ‘I want to see the glory Moses got close to seeing’ - do you want the law of Moses too?

What have I got to do if I’m going to be ‘good with God’ if I’m going to have this ‘relationship you keep banging on about’ – the answer is found in verse 16 – receive ‘grace upon grace’ what’s that? Gift upon gift – charity upon charity – kindness upon kindness! What does God demand from you? Only that you would let Him shower you in His love – only that you would receive His gift, only that you would allow Jesus perfect life to be attributed to you. All you need is nothing, but most people don’t have it – ‘I don’t need God, I don’t need Christ, I’m doing just fine, my life will count on my own merits’. The Christian’s cry is this ‘nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling’ – Jesus has come to make God known, how He chose to accomplish this should blow our minds.

How can the offer of grace be such challenge? Why do we struggle to accept the free gift?

How is the Christian message of grace different to how the world expects to be ‘right with God’?