

I Want to See the Face of God!

I have good news. It turns out the bad news we've been hearing about marriage for the past 30 years is a myth. We've been told, for example, that 50% of all marriages end in divorce and that the divorce rate of churchgoers is as high as those outside the church. Isn't that right? And yet, according to a new study and book released by Shaunti Feldhahn and Tally Whitehead, two social researchers who have been conducting a scientific study of the subject for the past 8 years, it turns out that 72% of everyone who is married today is still married to their first spouse, and that even if you've been married before, the chances of your present marriage succeeding increases by 50% to if you attend church together. That's why their book is called The Good News About Marriage, because it means that getting married is one of the best decisions you can make in life!

Just think, for example, of what you gain when you get married. The Bible says that two become one, which means a second person is suddenly added to the equation with strengths you don't have and completing you in a way no friend ever could. For example, when I married Cheryl, I gained a person who is kinder and more sensitive than I with years of experience as a pastor's daughter, which I did not know I needed at the time, because I didn't plan on being a pastor way back then. But God had other plans for me and gave me the ideal wife not only to work beside me in ministry, but an expert money manager who's stretched every cent of the modest salary I've earned as a pastor, kept us out of debt, is the best mother our girls could have had, and is a beautiful companion who has added incredible joy to my life the past 44 years. I got the whole package when I married her.

Some of you are probably wondering where I'm going with this. After all, aren't we studying the Gospel of John? We are! That's why I'm emphasizing the benefits of marriage, for that's the picture the Bible paints of our relationship with Christ. It likens it to marriage calling Jesus our Heavenly Bridegroom, and we the Church His Bride. And the moment we're united to Him by faith, we instantly gain everything that was lacking in us. We share His glory, we receive His grace, and God fills our lives for the first time. These are the benefits John describes in our study for today—John 1:14-18—five verses that could change your life forever! And like every verse in this book, they're intended to accomplish John's purpose stated in John 20:31, "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Let's read the passage. Then we'll see what it means. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John (the Baptist) testified about

Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’” For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” Again, our question is: What are the benefits of meeting Jesus? The first answer is—

1. You Share His Glory.

The last two weeks our study has focused on the Word or *Logos*, which in Greek philosophy was the principle on which all of creation rests; to the Jew, on the other hand, it was the revelation of God contained in the Holy Scriptures, both of which are true in part. But here John reveals something new and surprising. **The Word is not an impersonal force or a writing; it is a Person**, the Eternal Son of God who, according to verse 14, “became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

To understand what this means, notice 3 key words with me. The first is “flesh” referring to the weakest part of our personality. This is the part of humanity of which Jesus warned, “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” Paul added, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing.” So how could God possibly become a man? As the Greeks said, the body is too corrupt and God is too holy for the two of them to come together. By the way, there are Christians today who believe the same thing, that Jesus couldn’t possibly have had the same kind of body as ours. He must have had a perfect body like Adam before he sinned. But that isn’t true. In order to take our place as our Savior and sympathize with us as our Great High Priest, Jesus had to be like us in every way—except one. He was without sin. I mention that because sometimes you’ll read in one of those books by someone who claims to have visited heaven that Jesus appeared to them as a bright light leading them through a long tunnel to heaven. That’s nonsense! John says the Word became flesh at which point Deity and humanity were forever fused together in One Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is now and forever will be fully God and fully man. His humanity never diminishes His Deity nor does His Deity ever overpower His humanity. He is now and forever 100% God and 100% man.

That means when you see Jesus in heaven, He’ll look like He looked when He appeared to His disciples following His resurrection. He’ll have a real human body that you can see and feel and hug—a body which is fully human and yet glorified and without sin—just like the bodies you and I will one day enjoy.

The second word to is “dwelt.” “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The word is *skenoō* which means “to pitch a tent or set up a tabernacle.” What

does that bring to mind? John is alluding to the Tabernacle in the wilderness where God first dwelt with His people. And yet, like many other objects and events in the Old Testament, the Tabernacle with all its offerings and furnishings was intended to be a picture of Christ to come who dwells, not in a tabernacle made by hands, but in a resurrected and glorified body. In fact, one of the things we learn when we study the Feast of Tabernacles is that most scholars agree that Jesus probably was not born on December 25, when most of the world celebrates His birth, because it is unlikely that the shepherds would have been out in the fields keeping watch over their sheep with snow on the ground. Instead, given the fact that John the Baptist was born 6 months before Jesus during the Feast of Passover, it's likely that He was born in October during the Feast of Tabernacles. Wouldn't that be fitting? For the Light of the World to be conceived at Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, and pitch His tent among us during the Feast of Tabernacles!

But the most profound word is **“glory.”** “We beheld His glory.” The first time His glory was seen was as a blazing fire called the *shekinah* glory, hovering over the Old Testament Tabernacle. *Shekinah* means “His presence,” which was so glorious that no one could enter the Tabernacle until it subsided. John says that was what he saw in Jesus. “We saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” The most obvious time was when he, Peter, and James were with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration. Suddenly His body was transformed before them, and “His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light,” so that they all fell down before Him in fear. In fact, it was so glorious that Peter was still talking about it 30 years later in his epistle to the churches. “For we did not follow cleverly devised tales,” he says, “when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of His majesty...when we were with Him on the holy mountain.”

Nor was it only on that occasion. It was something they witnessed on a every day. For example, on the next page Jesus will perform His first miracle by turning the water into wine, and John will say, “This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.” Nor was it only in His miracles that they saw His glory. They also saw it daily in His words, His wisdom, His teaching, and the brilliant manner in which He answered the perplexing questions that were perpetually asked of Him. To quote the temple guards who returned to the priests empty-handed, having failed to arrest Him as they were sent to do, “No man ever spoke like this man!”

But it was seen most of all in His kindness, compassion, and love. This week I read the story of an early pioneer in the treatment of catatonic schizophrenia, one of the most severe forms of mental illness. Day after day patients would lie curled

up in the fetal position on their beds, neither moving, speaking, or acknowledging anyone else existed, until a new doctor moved onto their ward. There he set up his cot and lived among them. Sometimes he'd even take off his jacket, crawl into bed, and gently wrap his arms around them. Often that one wordless expression of love was enough to bring them back to the world of the living. So in Christ, God moved into our world and dwelt among us, dying on a cross for our sins. "And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

And that can't help but change you! In Moses' case the skin of his face glowed with the glory of God after spending time in His presence, so that he had to put a veil over his face, so the people wouldn't be afraid of him. But in our case the change is even greater. The Bible says one day it's going to change us completely and forever. 1 John 3:2, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him just as He is." But we aren't to wait until then to change. If we love Him, we'll let His glory begin changing us right now. 2 Corinthians 3:18, "But we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." What do you get when you meet Jesus, then? You share His glory, a glory that He has shared with the Father since before time began.

2. You Receive His Grace.

Verse 14 continues, "And we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." He further adds in verse 16, "For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ."

Here we come to the most beautiful word in the New Testament—*charis*. In Modern Greek it means "charming." Know anyone like that—someone who's very charming? Know anyone like that—someone who's very charming? We have had many friends with that trait. Bob Dunlap, a former police officer who has now gone to be with Christ, was a very charming man. Whatever you needed - help in moving, help to finance a worthy project, or just a kind word or chuckle in a Bible study, Bob was ready to give it. That's why he was loved throughout our county - by believers and unbelievers alike. Bob was truly a charming man! That's the idea of this word, except John takes it to a new level. The word means "grace, favor, and undeserved kindness." Think, for example, of someone who's earned your anger, but instead of retaliating, you're kind to them. That's grace.

I can think of one time, for example, when I was very gracious. Our daughter Heidi was 6 years old at the time. She and Rebecca got up early, as was their habit to do. It was probably 6:30 o'clock in the morning and my day off. So I wanted to sleep in. But the girls knew it was OK to get up and watch something on TV, as long as it was the approved list. When all of a sudden, boom! We heard this loud crash from the family room. I ran to see what it was and there in the middle of the floor was our TV set with its head smashed in. Heidi was frantic, not knowing what to do. She just kept saying, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Daddy," sure she was going to get punished. She'd tried to turn the television set on its stand so they could see it better and accidentally knocked it onto the floor. But I couldn't punish her for that. Instead I hugged her and said, "Don't worry about it, Honey! You're more important to me than a TV set. I'm just glad you're OK." But she did worry because later in the day as we were riding in the car, she asked me, "How much is a new TV, Daddy—\$4?" That's how much she had in her piggy bank. "No," I said. "More like \$400. But you don't need to worry about that, Honey. It isn't your job to pay for things like that. It's my job as your daddy." At which point she snuggled up to me and said, "I love you, Daddy." And I said to her, "I love you, Heidi."

By the way, you know the only thing I regret looking back on that? That I wasn't gracious in a thousand other ways was well. Because that's the greatest gift you can give another person and the best way to show them that Christ is real. For it's in Him, John says that grace and truth have been "realized." That doesn't mean there wasn't grace in the Old Testament. There had to be or no one would have been saved. But "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord," as did Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and all the other Old Testament saints. But the most prominent thing about the law was its unflinching judgment and warnings of death. Whereas Jesus is "full of grace and truth...and of His fullness," John adds, "We have all received." Isn't that true? Wasn't He gracious to you long before you loved Him as you do today? Oh, now you know to ask Him and trust Him for your daily bread. But He has always been good to you, every single day of your life! Amen?

Notice how much grace is available to you! John says: "Of His fullness we have all received;" which means it's infinite, for according to Colossians 2:9, "In Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form," so that whatever belongs to the Father, belongs to Him, for He and the Father are One. Furthermore, John says what we get is "**grace upon grace**" meaning the supply is unending. You ask for grace in time of need, He gives it to you, and more grace instantly fills the vacuum like the widow's oil in the days of Elisha that kept flowing as long as she had vessels to hold it. It's grace after grace after grace without end. Which is why the Lord could say to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you," and why He urges us to come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. "His love has

no limits. His grace has no measure. His power no boundary known unto men, for out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth and giveth and giveth again.”

Notice one more thing before we move on. Notice that He is full of both grace and truth. Why does John mention that? Because you can't have one without the other! To receive His saving grace, you have to believe the truth about Him—that He is the eternal Son of God who was in the beginning with God and shares the very essence of God with the Father. For as gracious as He is, He can't give you His saving grace **unless** you're willing to believe the truth about Him! But once you do, amazingly gracious things happen to you. As we learned last week, whoever receives Him, to them He gives the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, which means all your sins—past, present, and future—are forgiven forever, your name is written in heaven, and an everlasting home is reserved for you in God's kingdom. Talk about grace. That's the summit of grace! How it all works, no one fully understands. But that it works, I know for sure because it's happened to me, and that's something no one can take away from me. So if you've never asked before, ask Jesus to give you the faith to believe in Him today, and His promise is, “He who comes to Me, I will never, no never cast out.” (John 6:37) You share His glory. You receive His grace, and—

3. You See God the Father.

Verse 18 continues, “No one has seen God at any time.” That phrase is emphatic. “No one has ever, at any time seen God.” But is that true? Moses, for example, saw the afterglow of God's glory as He passed by, but he didn't see His face. In fact, there's some question as to whether or not the face of God the Father can ever be seen. For, as Jesus said to the woman at the well, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” 1 Timothy 6:16 adds, He “alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.” Does that mean, then, that you and I will never see God? No. John clarifies it here. He says, “No one has seen God at any time,” but then he immediately adds, **“The only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.”**

Phillip worried about this too. Having heard Jesus say, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by Me,” he begged, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us!” To which Jesus replied, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?” To see Jesus, then, is to gaze upon the face of God and behold the most glorious sight human eyes can see.

But you say, “I don’t understand! How can Jesus reveal God to us?” Let me give you two reasons: 1) He is the Son of God who is forever “in the bosom of the Father.” That’s a Hebrew expression referring to a son who is especially close to and loved by his father. Think of Isaac, the son of Abraham, whom he loved with all his heart. By the way, the same phrase is later used of John, Jesus’ closest friend who leaned upon his bosom at the Last Supper, simply calling himself “the disciple Jesus loved.” But here it’s used of Jesus of whom the Father announced two times from heaven (first at His baptism and later on the Mount of Transfiguration), “This is My Son the Beloved One, in whom I am well pleased,” because everything Jesus did and said was a perfect reflection of who His Father is and was.

But even more important is the second reason John gives. He is “**the only begotten God** who is in the bosom of the Father.” You may notice in the margin of your Bible that some of the more recent manuscripts read, “Only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father.” And if they’re correct, that no poses no problem for us, for in Hebrew thought, a son shared his father’s attributes, meaning that just as God the Father is all-powerful, eternal, all-knowing, and every-present, so is Jesus the Son, for He and the Father are and forever have been two Persons sharing the One Divine Essence. And if you don’t like that explanation, don’t let it bother you because what the oldest and most reliable manuscripts say is “only begotten God—“the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father.” For just as bird begets bird, lion begets lion, and man begets man, what God begets is God. So that Paul can say without hesitation, “He is the image of the invisible God,” and “in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form!” So that when you see the face of Jesus one day, what you’ll be gazing at will be the face of God, the most glorious sight human eyes can see, and that will change you immediately and forever!

So let me ask you as I draw this study to a close, would you like to share God’s glory, be a recipient of His grace, and gaze upon His glorious face? Then meet Jesus, the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father. How? You don’t get it by believing harder or doing lots of good works. It comes to you as a gift of His grace. “For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God not works, lest anyone should boast.” So stop trying and start trusting. Call out to Him in helpless childlike faith. Little children are helpless to care for themselves, aren’t they? So are you when it comes to God’s glory and grace. So call out to Him with me right now in helpless childlike faith, and His promise is: “Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”