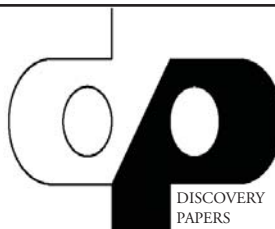




INTRODUCING GRACE



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John 1:6-18
2nd Message
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How many people here have had the experience of introducing someone important to you to your parents?

Maybe it was a girlfriend or boyfriend. Maybe it was a fiancée. Maybe it was a friend from school or a co-worker. Introducing people to our parents can be stressful. What are they going to think of each other? Will they have stuff to talk about? What if they can't stand each other?

Introducing people who don't know each other is tricky, but it's also incredibly important. You begin a relationship. You become the bridge that connects two individuals together. And when it goes really well, the relationship continues even when you're gone. That's when you know everything has worked.

This morning is the second week of what will be a ten month journey through the Gospel of John that we are calling *Signs of Life*. We've identified several themes that John uses in this book to help us grasp the life that Jesus offers. This week, we're continuing to look at this grand cosmic idea of the Logos, or what most translations refer to as "the Word."

Last week we talked about what this Logos refers to. I suggested that the Greek word is a rich and powerful word that has layers of meanings in Greek philosophy and Jewish theology. It basically refers to that cosmic entity that almost every culture has an awareness of but struggles to name. It is "that thing that's out there." I called it "the other."

But the author of this gospel takes that innate idea and develops it. He tells us that it is actually a who. He tells us that it is responsible for creating the world. He tells us that it is the source of life. Then he brings it home by saying that this Logos—this light—is active in the world today.

Today we're looking at the second part of what is usually referred to as John's prologue. We'll look at John 1:6-18. And what we're going to find in this passage is a more detailed description of who this "other" is. What we'll see John doing is really similar to what you've done before when you introduced someone to your parents. This section shows John making some introductions. He wants to connect two individuals. He wants to begin a very important relationship.

But this isn't just any introduction. Although John's

book is about Jesus, we're going to find out that it's not Jesus that John is introducing. It's someone else. In fact, this section has a chain of three individuals that take part in a progressive introduction.

First, the author of the book, John the apostle, introduces us to another John: John the Baptist. That person introduces us to Jesus. And then in turn, Jesus introduces us to God. John the Baptist introduces us to Jesus who introduces us to God the Father.

What we'll notice as we follow this path of introductions is that this is for our sake: we are being introduced to God. But it is also a model for us. We are being shown how to make this introduction for others and we are being invited to take part in the process.

One of the great things about the way that John writes is that he creates more of a spiral than a straight line. It makes his ideas loop around us until we really grasp them. But John is a better writer than I am a preacher. So for our purposes, we're going to try to straighten our John's loop.

To do that, we'll read the whole passage: John 1:6-18. Then we're going to follow these characters that take part in this grand introduction. John the Baptist. Jesus. And finally, God himself.

John 1:6-18:

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And 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. ¹⁵(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.’”) ¹⁶For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

And so we have this progressive introduction. It begins with a man sent from God to witness about the light and ends with that light, Jesus Christ, who has finally been named, making God known. John the Baptist to Jesus Christ the light to God the Father. Let’s see how the author John moves from one to the other and draws us into this grand process of the most important introduction you’ll ever be a part of.

Be a Witness

There was a man . . . sent from God . . . He came as a witness.

Last week we learned about the Logos. We saw how the Logos caused all things to “come to be.” The Logos caused existence. But when this section begins, we immediately get a sharp distinction between the Logos and this first man that we are introduced to. The Greek of verse 6 literally reads, “There came to be a man.” Whereas the Logos caused all things to come to be, this man was the recipient of that process. He came to be.

The author is trying to make it very clear that this man we’re talking about is not the Logos. He is something different. This man was a witness to the light, but he definitely was not the light himself. As we are being introduced to John the Baptist, the author goes to great lengths to make sure we understand that John the Baptist isn’t the Christ.

We’ll talk more about that next week as we really look deeply into this character.

For now, the author doesn’t just say who John the Baptist wasn’t. He also tells us who he is. That’s important. If John the Baptist is going to introduce us to someone else, we need to know who it is that we’re talking to at first. He is described as a “witness.” He came as a “witness to the light.”

The way the language is used here is really interesting. There is a word in Greek that is used to describe a person who has seen something. That’s the way we usually talk about a witness. A witness is a person who saw something that he or she can tell others about. But that’s not the

word used here. Here the word that is used is usually translated “testimony.” That’s usually the content that a witness describes. The witness is the person. The testimony is what he or she says.

But this verse uses the word for “testimony” to describe John the Baptist. It’s as if the author is saying that John the Baptist is himself the message. It isn’t just his words that introduce people to Jesus. It’s his whole life. He is the testimony about the light.

What’s great about John the Baptist is that he knew who he was. He was a witness. His whole life demonstrated who Jesus was. That was his entire purpose. He was there to introduce Jesus. He understood his role in the process.

Let’s say that you work for a certain company. Let’s say that your boss has made it clear that she is hiring for more positions. Let’s say that a friend of yours needs a job and is qualified for these positions. You know what to do.

You introduce them. You have one goal. Get your friend a job. You don’t expect your friend and your boss to start dating and get married. You don’t want them to bond over their shared interest in hang-gliding. You want your friend to get this job. So you introduce them. “Hello boss, this is my friend. He needs a job.”

That’s John the Baptist. That’s the summary of his life. He came for one reason: to bear witness about the light, so that we might believe through him. And by believing, have life. His entire mission in life was to introduce Jesus.

You might ask why Jesus needed to be introduced. If Jesus is the Logos—if he was before—if he created everything—then why does he need to be introduced? Why doesn’t he just show up? Why doesn’t he just make himself known?

To start with, it’s not Jesus that needs the introduction. It’s us. When you introduce your friend to your boss, it’s not because your boss needs candidates. She’s probably flooded with resumes. It’s because you want your friend to get this job. John the Baptist introduces people to the Logos not because the Logos needs followers but because people need life. And this light is the source of life.

But more importantly, witnesses are incredibly important to the culture that Jesus lived in. The Old Testament talks a lot about witnesses. There are strict requirements for what kinds of witnesses are allowed to figure out what really happened in any given situation, especially when there is a dispute or a crime is committed.

It’s not even that different in our time. Even with cameras, voice recorders, DNA testing, and fingerprinting,

court cases are often decided on the basis of their witnesses.

A witness is the key to knowing the truth.

And so John the Baptist comes as a witness so that people can know the truth about Jesus. Later in this gospel, Jesus says to his followers that they too will be witnesses of what they have seen. The same is true for us. As we read about this man who came as a witness to the light, we can be challenged with the invitation to be a witness ourselves. We can be a witness.

This language is really intentional. Notice that I'm not suggesting you do anything in particular. I'm suggesting that you think of your identity in a certain way.

John the Baptist came as a witness. His life, his being, his identity was all a testimony about Jesus the Messiah who was coming to bring life to the world. And he did certain things because he was a witness with a particular calling in a particular age to a particular people. His identity caused him to act in certain ways.

And if we think about ourselves as witnesses, that identity will certainly cause us to act in certain ways as well. But I don't know what those ways are for you. I'm not encouraging you to "witness" in the way that term is used within many Christian circles. We tend to use that word as a verb to refer to the act of verbally explaining that Jesus died for our sins to someone who doesn't believe that.

But being a witness is so much more than that. It might include that, but it's so much more. It's how you understand your life and your role in the world. Your life is a testimony to who God is and how he works in the world. You are a witness. In that sense, it doesn't make sense to try to "be a witness" because we already are. If we have faith in Jesus, we are witnesses to that experience. That is already our identity. But understanding it can allow it to shape the decisions we make and the interactions we have.

Here's the cool thing. Our text says that John the Baptist came as a witness to the light. But what is light? Light is simply something that reveals something else. That's what we'll find out next. John the Baptist didn't even introduce people to God. He simply introduced them to the light who revealed who God was. Perhaps being a witness is simpler than we think.

So John came as a witness and we can follow in his example. Let's think some about what it is we have experienced. Let's think about Jesus as the light.

Open the Windows

The true light... was coming into the world... The Word

became flesh ... the world did not know him ... His own people did not receive him ... The Word became Flesh.

John the Baptist came as a witness to the light. Now we hear about the light. And the first thing we hear about it is that it was coming into the world.

John the apostle thought the world was really important. This is the Greek word, "kosmos." It isn't used to talk about the planet as an object, but to talk about the community that lives on this planet. It's also important to realize that John doesn't use it like the apostle Paul does. "The world" doesn't refer to sin or sinful people. It's everyone. All of us. It's what God created and where Jesus came to.

John uses this word 78 times in his gospel. He uses it another 23 times in the small book of 1 John. That's over half of the times it's used in the entire New Testament. John cares about this idea of the world. This whole prologue is really about two characters: the Logos and the world. It's the story of how they met.

But it's not exactly a romantic comedy. As the apostle describes it, "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him."

There's a TV show that is popular right now called "Undercover Boss." The premise is that one of the executives or the CEO of a company will go undercover as an entry level employee in his or her own company. They will be trained and do the job and interact with other employees at that level. What often happens is the boss gets a whole new feel for what the company is like. Candid comments from other employees and the real experience of what it's like to work in the company gives him or her a whole new perspective.

But that situation is not normal. It's unusual. These employees are working next to the boss that might own their company. And they don't know who it is. To them that person is just another entry level worker.

That creates a tension that is fascinating to watch. That's why the show is popular. And that's the tension that the author of this book is describing. Jesus the Logos, who is the source of existence, comes to earth and nobody recognizes him.

But it gets worse.

Not only did people not recognize him, but they rejected him. Verse 11, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." Not only did they not recognize him, but they rejected him. His own people rejected him.

Have you experienced this? I know I have. People that

you thought should welcome you, but don't. Your own people exclude you and reject you. It's a terrible place to be. It's disorienting. And if you're like me, it makes you want to run away. To forget those people. That's what is remarkable about Jesus. He doesn't turn away.

In fact, he does the opposite. He knows that he will be rejected, but he goes to incredible lengths to come into this world. It's all captured by that beautiful phrase: "the Word became flesh."

We can't wrap our minds around this one. The Word. Logos. Tao. Other. We already heard that it was coming into the world. We already heard that the Logos came to his people. But now we find out how and it is shocking. We would expect the Logos to come into this world in power. In radiance. In beauty. We would expect the otherness of the Logos to come through when he came into this world.

But that's not how it worked. Now we start to understand why people didn't recognize the Logos and perhaps even why they rejected him. Because the Logos came in disguise. The Logos didn't come as a Logos. The Logos became flesh.

Here again we have the same word, "came to be." The Logos "came to be" as flesh.

There are so many reasons why this is a bad idea. It waters down the truth of who God is. It's offensive. How can God become flesh and get dirty? People will be confused. They'll think less of God. Or they'll think too highly of humanity. Not to mention that it's ridiculous to want to do this. Why give up heaven for earth?

But that's how it happened. The Word became flesh. The light came into the world.

The Word became flesh to make something known. The light came to reveal something. Just as John the Baptist was a testimony to the truth, the light of Jesus shows us something.

The image that I think of is one of opening the windows. Opening windows lets the light in. It creates space for light to enter. So if we have a role to play in Jesus coming into the world, one way we do it is to open the windows.

We have an impressive morning routine in my house. This year it has gotten much more complicated now that we have two different schools that we need to get to. We have a schedule that starts at 6:30 am and everyone knows what they are supposed to do and when they are supposed to do it so that we can all make it where we need to be on time. My wife is a genius at stuff like this and most mornings it runs very smoothly.

One of the tasks every morning is to open the curtains and raise the blinds. At night, we want it dark so that we can sleep. But during the day, we want to let the light into the house. I like that moment. The blinds are open and our house fills with light. Light is good. Light shows us what is there.

It would take a lot of light bulbs to light my bedroom as well as the sunlight that comes through the window does. It would be a lot of work installing and powering and maintaining those light bulbs. It is so much easier to open the windows.

We sometimes have a tendency to make things more complicated than they need to be. We believe God is real. We believe God is at work in the world. We believe that people need God and they are lost without him. We believe that Jesus is the light. All we need to do is let the light in. We need to let what is true be seen and known.

That's true in our lives. It's true in the lives of people around us. Light reveals the truth. The truth leads us to God. Sometimes people desperately want the light but they are afraid of what they might see. Sometimes they actively resist the light because they don't want to see the truth. Sometimes people have just forgotten that light is there.

Opening the windows will look different for different people. Some people need the windows opened on their pain. They are hiding it out of shame, guilt, or fear. We can help them to see it, acknowledge it, and face it. Light often reveals pain.

Others need the windows opened on their needs. They are alone and needy but are trying to hide it. We can find those needs and help to meet them.

Others need the windows opened on their confusion. They are just going through life not really understanding what they are doing or why they are doing it. We can ask gentle questions and help them toward a peace.

But opening windows on pain and needs and confusion is scary. There's a reason why those windows are closed. There's a lot of fear about what we'll find when the light comes into the room. That's where our passage reaches its grand conclusion. John the Baptist has introduced us to Jesus. Jesus is the light that reveals the truth. And at the end of the passage, we find out what that truth is.

Experience Grace

No has ever seen God ... grace and truth came through Jesus Christ ... He has made him known.

John's gospel is all about Jesus. But even Jesus isn't all

about Jesus. Jesus didn't come so that we can know him. Jesus came so that we can know God. Jesus came to reveal the Father.

There is a lot said about God in these verses, but everything reaches its climax with two big words. Grace and Truth. Twice John says that Jesus brings grace and peace. The second half of verse 17 reads, "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." The next verse says that Jesus makes God known. So if grace and truth came through Jesus to make God known, then this is what Jesus makes known about God. He is grace and truth.

God the father is the grace and truth that came through Jesus.

I've sometimes heard these terms referred to in a kind of yin-yang relationship. Some people suggest that grace refers to mercy and forgiveness and love. Truth is kind of the other side of the coin. Truth is what you are supposed to do, how you're supposed to live, what requirements God has for us, the fine print. They suggest that Jesus does something remarkable by combining those elements: the love and the requirements, caring but strict.

I do think Jesus combines those two things in a remarkable way, but I don't think that's what this verse is referring to. The way John uses these words they aren't opposed to each other at all. He isn't referring to being soft and forgiving but also being strict and having high standards.

What John is saying is that Jesus became flesh so that he could be a window into who God is. When you look through that window, you see grace and truth. Truth is the nature of God. Grace is the personality of God. Truth is the nature of God. That means that God is what is true. The simplest way to say this is to just say, "God is."

In the Old Testament, when Moses asked God for a name to refer to him by, God said, "Tell them I AM sent you." Moses probably scratched his head and walked away a bit confused. What kind of a name is "I AM"? Well, it's a name for something that is truth. God is. He exists. He is truth. He is the standard by which all things are measured.

When my first child turned about two years old, she would ask me all sorts of questions about the world. Sometimes I would answer them and she would decide that I was wrong. I was so surprised because I couldn't figure out what other source of information she was drawing on to conclude that I was wrong. It wasn't as if she had access to Wikipedia or Google.

This is what doesn't happen with God. It's not just that we don't have access to anything higher than God, but there isn't anything higher. He is truth. He is the definition

of what is.

That's why it doesn't make sense to call God unfair. That would require a standard of justice above God that he doesn't live up to. But there isn't anything about God. God is the standard of justice.

For John to say that truth came through Jesus is to say that Jesus reveals what truly is. Jesus makes known what is. When you think about Jesus in those terms, it makes sense that John would constantly use the metaphor of light to refer to him. Jesus is the light. God is the room. Jesus reveals what is. God is what is. Jesus, the light, comes into the room and shows us what is there.

So what's there? If truth is the nature of God, then what is God like? That's where grace fits in. If truth is the nature of God, then grace is the personality of God. The light of Jesus reveals that God is grace.

Grace is probably one of the most commonly used words in Christian circles. It is at the core of the Christian gospel. However, it is sometimes a bit misunderstood. The most common definition I've heard of grace is "unmerited favor." People will say that grace is the fact that God shows goodwill toward us, even though we don't deserve it.

First of all, let me say that God does show good will toward us and we don't deserve it. We have done nothing to earn God's favor. That is clear.

But the word for "grace" doesn't actually imply anything about whether we deserve favor or not. The Greek word being used here is "charis." And that word means simply favor or goodwill. Sometimes it was used for favor that was earned. Sometimes it was used for favor that wasn't earned. It simply means that someone wants your best. They want good for you, not evil.

This is important because I sometimes worry that Christians can't say that God has favor on people without, in the same breath, reminding people that they don't deserve it. We say "God loves you," but we have to immediately add "even though you don't deserve it."

I don't deserve the favor of my wife. I've done plenty to not deserve her favor. But every time she says, "I love you", she doesn't add "even though you don't deserve it." That wouldn't be very kind.

Sometimes we just need to know that God shows us his favor. That he wants good for us. That he is on our side.

Let me say again that I'm not suggesting we deserve God's favor. The Scriptures are clear that God's favor is a gift given to us apart from anything we've done. I'm

simply saying that the word “grace” doesn’t include that idea. It simply refers to God’s favor without any reference to whether we deserve it or not.

And grace doesn’t refer to a weak, anything-goes type of favor. Favor is compatible with justice and discipline and even anger. Wanting good for someone means that you are angry when they or someone else makes choices that bring about evil. To say that God looks upon his creation with favor is not to say that he is never angry with it. In fact, it is to say that he is angry with it when it is right to be angry. When favor insists on it.

What it means is the basic orientation of God toward his creation is good will. He wants the best for it.

The nature of God is that He is what is true. The personality of God is that he looks upon this world, this kosmos, with favor.

Do you believe that? I’m always amazed that one of the most basic things about God is one of the things that takes us the longest to really believe. In reality, it’s a journey for all of us. It’s so hard to really believe that God looks upon us with favor. That he wants the best for us. It’s so hard to live with grace.

But that’s the end of the line for us. John the Baptist has introduced us to Jesus, the light. The light has revealed something. The light has shown us what we couldn’t fully see any other way. The light has shown us God. And when we see God, we see grace. So our final encouragement is simply to see God. And when we see God, we experience grace.

Grace is really the key.

Grace is the key to coming to Jesus and believing in him so that you can experience life. You have to believe that God wants the best for you. You have to believe in grace, in God’s favor toward you. There’s no way you’ll come to Jesus if you don’t believe in grace.

Grace is the key to living life as a Christian. Let’s face it: life is hard. There are so many difficulties we face. Sickness, failure, broken relationships, accidents, our own disappointment, and restlessness. How do we get by in this world. We can only do so by the grace of God. This is why grace permeates every page of the New Testament. It’s why Peter tells his readers in 1 Peter 5:12 to “stand firm in it.” Our lives have to be grounded by the favor of God. That’s the key.

And finally, grace is the key to following the pattern that John the apostle has given to us. Grace is the key to living like John the Baptist. Our lives can’t be a witness if we haven’t experienced grace. We can’t open the windows to let the light in if we are afraid of the truth. But when we experience grace, when we are grounded in the favor of God, then truth is not a threat. The truth is hopeful. The truth is good news.

When you experience grace, your life becomes a testimony to what we’ve seen here: grace is the basic personality of God. God is. And God is grace.

Conclusion

Introductions are important.

It’s not as if God needs someone to introduce him to the world. He made it after all. But he chooses it as much for our sake as for his. He reveals himself slowly, gently, and through the lives of other people.

In the second half of John’s prologue, he completes this cosmic introduction to who Jesus is. Jesus is the Logos. He is the Word that was before creation. But he is not the point. Jesus himself serves something else. Someone else. Jesus came so that God could be known. That’s his ultimate purpose.

We’ve seen John the Baptist introduce us to Jesus. And we’ve seen Jesus introduce us to God. Let your life be a witness like John the Baptist. Open the windows to the light so that the truth may be known. And be glad that when the truth is known, what is true is that God is for his creation. God is on its side. He favors the world. God is grace.

And so let me complete this introduction. Grace of God, meet the people of PBC. People of PBC, meet the grace of God. The rest is up to us.