

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (11-12-1994 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

The Word Became Flesh

John1v1-14

Introduction

John 1v14 is a very well known text, often preached on, very suitable for Christmas season. William Barclay described it as “the greatest single verse in the Bible”. We have four simple questions to put to the text.

Why did John call Jesus the Word?

No doubt who is referred to here – Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour. Many words describe Him in the New Testament. Here, and in 1 John and in Revelation, Jesus is described as “The Word”. Very suitable. Words are important. Could not communicate without words. We learn news through words in paper or on TV. Reveal whatever we are thinking through words. So, God wants to get in touch and make Himself known – through His Word. But there is more to “The Word” than this.

John had problem of communication to first readers. He was writing for people very different from us – different culture, language, ideas. Need to go back if we want to grasp his purpose. Two lots of readers at that time – Jews and Greeks. John wanted one term which they both used to help him explain meaning of Christ. Like a good teacher, he takes his listeners from the known to the unknown. The one term which they both used was “Word” λογος.

The Greeks talked about the Word, and the Jews talked about the Word. To the Greeks, the Word of God was God’s mind, by which He made and controlled the world, tides, seasons, day and night, thinking and reasoning, right and wrong. λογος was their word for God’s mind controlling the world and every man, guiding and directing all.

The Jews also spoke about the word. To them God’s Word was not just sound made with tongue, but powerful and strong, active and alive. By the Word, God made the world - **And God said...** (Genesis 1). Then God’s word came to the prophets, giving them message about Himself and His people. **The Word of the Lord came to me** (Jeremiah 1:4), **The Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the prophet** (Ezekiel 1:3).

Many other Old Testament verses come to mind. **His word runs swiftly** (Psalm 147:15), **My word will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it** (Isaiah 55:11), **Is not my word like fire and like a hammer?** (Jeremiah 23:29). So to Jews who knew the Old Testament “the word” was means whereby God made the world, speaks to men, carries out His purposes.

So first readers of John’s Gospel came alive when they read it, bells began to ring, interest was soon raised. They knew so much about the word, and now John was

going to tell them more, and lead them to understand importance of Jesus by this familiar term.

### What does John tell his readers about the Word?

John takes his readers into unknown territory. Would have made them gasp. They knew the term “word”, and knew God had made the world by His Word, and spoke to men by His Word, but now John was speaking of things they could never have guessed if lived 1000 years. He tells them that the Word was a member of the Godhead, that long before Creation the Word existed and was alive. There was never a time that He was not with God the Father, in loving communion, face to face. Had closest intimacy with the Father. Then he adds **He was God** (not “a god”, as Jehovah’s Witnesses would say).

The Word and the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, made up the Godhead. Same nature, substance, and one being. He was not an angel or half-god, but just as much as the Father is God, so is the Son, or the “Word”, and so is the Holy Spirit. One God in three persons. The Word was God’s co-worker, for through Him the world was made and He gave life and light to men.

Then John takes this one step further – this Eternal Word who was with the Father from the beginning took a stupendous step. John’s readers who believed in the word would have been astonished to know He was God, and even more astonished to know that He took flesh, took on our humanity. Continuing to be God, He took on our humanity, He became man. He tabernacled – He pitched His tent on earth among men for 33 years.

This was John’s great claim. That the Eternal Word, member of the Godhead, co-worker with the Father in Creation, entered the world, became man, in fact became a member of the Jewish nation. He continued as God, retained divine attributes, though not always used them, and took our human nature. Jesus Christ – the God Man. One person with divine and human natures. So we see Him performing miracles, leading sinless life, making claims which no man would ever make, rising from dead. Yet at the well-side, he was weary from the heat of the noonday sun, thirsty, weeping at Lazarus’s tomb, when His side was pierced, blood and water poured out.

What an enormous stoop. What unimaginable condescension. What amazing mystery.

*“Amazing love, how can it be  
That thou my God shouldst die for me”*

In the person of Christ, time and eternity meet. God and man are united. Perfect mediator. In His person and His death the bridge was made between God and man. Through Him God reaches down to man. Man in contact with God. Through the Incarnation, God came down into this scene. He shares our lot, he enters our daily lives.

People have tried to illustrate this as being like kings or princes disguising themselves, wearing ordinary clothes, to try and experience what it means to be an ordinary subject. Or like the widow of the Bible translator murdered by the Auca Indians, going to live among the murdering tribe, learning their language, eating their

food, living in their palm leaf huts, to bring them the Gospel. These illustrations help, but throw only a dim light on the theme. It is beyond words to describe fully, and beyond our minds to comprehend perfectly. It is a mystery, wonder, marvel, mercy.

John rushes in with his testimony **And we have seen His glory**, the glory of God becoming flesh, seen with very eyes, **full of grace and truth**.

What does John say the Word was like when He was on earth?

**Full of grace and truth.** Full of grace to those who deserved nothing. Full of truth to those whose lives were in spiritual darkness.

In the life of Jesus we see that grace in action so often. To the self-righteous and moral theologian, Nicodemus, Jesus tells him he needs new birth. Immoral woman, so despised she came to well at noontide to avoid lash of tongues of other women – He offered her satisfying living water which would bring eternal life. Crowds who came and thronged Him, He fed them, cared for them, promised them He would never cast them out. See His grace in cleansing leper, giving sight to blind, wholeness to cripple, raising Lazarus from dead. Above all, His grace in being Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Then He was also full of truth. Sit at His feet and listen to His claims and teaching. He explains who God is, what He requires of us, how sins can be forgiven, how lives can be changed, how future can be made secure, gives guidance for tangled business of living in this difficult world. As we grope among shadows, He makes things clear. As we come to crossroads in life, He shows us the way to go.

Listen to disciples who were asked if they were going to leave Him – **To whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life** (John 6:68). Listen to the verdict of Jewish officials – **no man ever spoke like this man** (John 7:46). Throughout His life, day after day, place after place, to people of every sort, the Word who became flesh and pitched His tent among us – full of grace and full of truth. And so He continues today.

But what has all this to do with us?

If Jesus Christ is the Word, member of Godhead, became flesh, full of grace and truth, certain things follow.

Let no man wonder if there is a God. Not left to guesses and hopes and maybes. God's initiative. Made Himself known. Shown us Himself. We know for certain there is a God, what He is like, how we can know Him. Jesus has taught us and also shown us. John's response – Look at Jesus. To see Him is to see God.

Let no man imagine that his spiritual need and danger is a small one. Our need is so great that it required no less than God's Eternal Son to take flesh and die on the Cross. If less drastic or costly step would have sufficed – He would have taken it. If the Incarnation and Atonement were necessary, our sin must be damning, and our danger very great.

Let no man doubt that God loves him. In every life, certain harsh facts of experiences challenge all we have ever believed. But the Incarnation and Cross shout aloud “God is love”, therefore how can any present experience be outside God’s loving purpose for life? A Baptist minister who was struck known by illness, which threatened his ministry and life, was in excruciating pain for a long time. In the midst of his turmoil he was able to say, “If Christ loved me, a sinner, enough to die for me, then even this dread experience is not outside His loving purpose.”

Let no man doubt that Christ can meet our need. Some may feel they have sinned too badly, been rejected too often, that their life is too big a mess and a sham. God is full of grace and also full of power. God, who could take human flesh and go to the Cross and make atonement, can meet everyone’s need. Christ is the strong foundation stone and immovable rock, able to deal with every man’s situation.

Let no man claim he does not know what God wants him to do, how he should live and please God. **Come to me. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me** (Matthew 11:29).

*“Jesus, my shepherd, Saviour, friend,  
My prophet, priest and king.  
My Lord, my life, my way, my end.  
Accept the praise I bring”*

When the heart submits, Jesus reigns, and when Jesus reigns there is peace.