

The Power of Seeing God as He Truly Is

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Bible Text: John 1:14-18
Preached on: Sunday, January 9, 2022

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John 1. We're going to be there again this morning for the last time, but we've been in this passage a couple of weeks starting back on December 26 and then last Sunday as well. I do want to say thank you just to the body of Christ, all of you brothers and sisters and how much you've ministered to our family this week and, Ted, thank you and Jim for doing the music that you did from the funeral. I shared at the funeral that my aunt Kim was really more like a big sister because she was closer in age to me than to my mom, and circumstances of her life meant that we were really going to spend a lot of time together. And so Patty and I were very close to her and I think in some ways mom was more like a mom to her, even especially since their mother died. So it was a more impactful than sometimes, it's always impactful to lose a loved one and an uncle or an aunt but this felt even more profound than normal. Anyway, so thank you so much for your ministry to us, your kindness, the meals that have been brought, the meal on Thursday, and just the love, outpouring of love. Thank you so much. It's good to be a part of the body of Christ, to have the family of God to walk through life with and the challenges and the difficulties, and the Lord is so good and he shows his goodness to us in his love for us through the love of one another. So thank you for loving us and showing us the love of the Lord in these days.

The message this morning, the title is "The Power of Seeing God as He Truly Is." The power of seeing God as he truly is. When you think about new year, future, the older you get, the more room you have to compare and think about where things are as opposed to where they were. I've had some conversations recently and in my own thinking about our family discussions, conversations with people this week about the direction of the world, encroaching darkness, division, discord, moral confusion, deepening spiritual blindness, very discouraging, really just look at the world. Things do not look good. They look very bad. But what are Christians to do in times like this? What can we do? As the psalmist says in Psalm 11, when the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? Interesting, the psalmist, though that's not our passage this morning, but you can look at it in Psalm 11, he says basically the Lord is in his holy temple, and so what the righteous can do is to see God as he truly is and that's actually the most impactful thing that you can do this year, is to cultivate a more accurate view of God in your life, that if you see the Lord as he truly is, it will change the way you live and you will be light. God is light. When you see the Lord, you become like him.

It's been observed and actually this actually biblical too, we become what we worship, and if you worship God rightly you become like him. It's interesting, there's one passage, this happens a number of times but this is one example, Psalm 115 and Psalm 135, there's like four or five verses that are identical in those two Psalms and basically it says this, it talks about the idols that men worship. They have mouths but they don't speak. They have hands but they cannot do anything. They have feet but they cannot walk. Those who worship them become like them. If you worship idols, you become like the idol you worship. You worship that which cannot speak, that which cannot walk, that which cannot do anything, you become like that. You worship God rightly, you become like him.

A. W. Tozer, a wonderful man of God from the mid 20th century, he says this, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God." Pure worship, you entertain high thoughts of God. Base, that is, low worship, you entertain low thoughts of God.

So what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us for this reason, the gravest question before the church is always God himself. It's not what's happening out there. The most important question is God himself and how you and I see him. The most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. It's not what a man says or does, I mean, it's important, that's important but the most important thing is what he believes about God at the moment he's doing it or saying it.

Listen to this. "We tend by a sacred law of the soul," this is so profound, Tozer says this, "We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God." He says, "This is true not only of the individual Christian but of the company of Christians that composes the church." Always the most revealing thing about the church is her idea of God. Like an invisible law of the soul, secret law of the soul, we move toward our mental image of God. If we see God as he truly is, we will become like him. If we see God as he is not, we will become like that which we mistakenly believe about God.

So the most important thing is to see God rightly. What comes into your mind when you think of God? How do you see the Lord? Do you see him as, and there are many things that are true of God, but do you see him merely or mostly as an exalted ruler that is detached and disinterested in you? Do you see him as an easily angered father and try to live your life kind of in fear of arousing his anger? How you see God is going to impact how you live, what you become. The passage before us presents to us a picture of the reality of who God is. John 1:14-18 is one of the high-water marks in all of Scripture to clearly present to us a vision of what God is like.

What is God like? Look with me at John 1, we're going to read verses 14 to 18. I'm going to skip over verse 15 just because it is an intentional parenthesis by John that's important in the argument of the whole first chapter, basically he's saying, "Listen, be clear," he's writing to a mostly Jewish audience, "be clear, John the Baptist had an exalted view of

Jesus." But I'm going to skip that verse because it interrupts the flow, the logical flow of verses 14 to 18, and I want you to hear it in the logical flow. Verse 14,

14 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... 16 For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17 For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, [He has made Him known,] He has explained Him.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we come to You thankful that You are a God who has not kept silent, You have not left us to wonder at what You're like, You've given us Your word, You've spoken with clarity through the prophets all throughout the centuries and as this text tells us, You have spoken supremely in the living Word, the eternal Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. We say, Lord, speak to us now, Your servants are listening. Show us who you are. May we worship You rightly and truly and may we magnify You in lives that are marked by a right knowledge of You. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay, so the power of seeing God as he truly is, the question is how do you see God and how you see God will determine how you live. It will determine what is most important about how you live. Even if you do the right things but you don't see God the right way, they won't have the power, but if you see God rightly, you will make a difference in the world. You will make a difference to everyone you come in contact with. It doesn't mean they're going to be saved but it means God is going to be glorified and his truth is going forth and many will be saved.

I'm going to organize our time this morning around three points and the first is just the main argument, the main argument of this passage, verses 14 to 18. The main point really that he's saying here is this: God who cannot be seen by human eyes has become visible. That's what he's saying. No man, in verse 18, has seen God at any time. In fact, the Greek is emphatic. It says it like this, "God, who no man has seen ever, the only begotten God has made him known." The only begotten God has literally exegeted him. That's the Greek word transliterated exegeted, like you exegete a passage, it means to lead out the meaning, it means to bring out from that which is hidden out into the open.

He says God is invisible and yet now he's become visible in the person and work of Jesus Christ. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. If you want to know what God, if you want to see God, look at Jesus. That's what he's saying. If you want to see God as he truly is, look at Jesus. That is his argument in this passage and what he says is that God, when you look at Jesus, you see that God is full of grace and truth. That's a key concept we're going to look at and unpack this morning. The fullness of God and the fullness of Christ, grace and truth. The glory of God that John says he saw consists in this, that Jesus was full of grace and truth, and what we're going to see is he is basically

saying that God is supremely and indescribably good. God is good beyond your wildest imagination.

You see, there's been a propaganda campaign, that's a part of human life, isn't it, propaganda, but the oldest propaganda campaign, the most significant propaganda campaign began in the garden of Eden and it was begun by the serpent, and his propaganda, his lies presented as truth were to slander God. He called into question the goodness of God and he flat out denied the goodness of God. He blasphemed God and that has been his purpose throughout all history. Remember when he said, "Has God said?" Then he says, "Has God said you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?" He's actually presenting to Eve in Genesis 3, "Hasn't God said you can't eat from any of these trees?" That lying serpent knew that he had said only one but he present, introduces to her mind the idea that the God that has made you is the kind of being that would put all of these trees before you and tell you not to eat of a single one. He's the kind of a God who forbids everything good. And she says, "No, He said that we can't eat of the one tree in the center of the garden, can't eat it or touch it or we will die." And he says, "You surely shall not die." He contradicts the word of God. He contradicts the truthfulness of God. He contradicts the goodness of God and he says this, "No, you won't die if you eat from that tree, in fact, God doesn't want you to eat from that tree because He knows if you eat from that tree, you will become like Him, you will know good and evil and you will be all that you could ever hope to be if you would eat from that tree. You see, God doesn't want you to become all that you could be. God is holding you back, He's holding you down, He's suppressing you, He is not good." That is the lie. That is the lie that defines all of human history. And when Adam and Eve sinned, that lie took root in the human heart, that lie became introduced to the bloodstream of humanity, the thought process, the affections, everything in us doubts the goodness of God, the essence of sin, to exalt self, and to doubt God, to want to be in the place of God but to think God is not good, God doesn't know best.

And even for the Christian who comes to the Lord, whose heart is open, who is born again, now they have a new heart, now they understand that God is good yet they still wrestle with the old nature. They still live in a world where the propaganda campaign is relentless, telling you you cannot trust God, you cannot trust God, and those lies find a familiar resonance in your own sinful heart. And so the Christian life is a battle to believe the truth about God. You can't believe the truth about God until you're born again and so our evangelism, we're telling people God is good, come to Jesus, and the most compelling way we can show them God is good according to John is to say look at Jesus.

So the argument of this passage is God who cannot be seen with human eyes has become visible, and what has become visible is the fullness of grace and truth. This concept grace and truth is so important. Now that's the main argument. The second point is the beauty of God's goodness in the old covenant. The beauty of God's goodness in the old covenant. There are some people who misunderstand this and misinterpret this and they believe that there's more of a dichotomy being driven here than is accurate. When they read 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." And they see, they

mistakenly think that God is contrasting the old and new covenant in a way that says the old covenant, there was no grace and truth, the new covenant, now we have grace and truth. Hear this clearly: that is not what is being said. It's something profound that is being said but this is what is being said: grace and truth were beautifully evident in the old covenant, but now that Jesus has come, grace and truth have been elevated to such a level that it seems as if there was no grace and truth by comparison. But listen, there was grace and truth in the old covenant. That's how Abraham was saved, and Moses was saved, and David was saved. Grace and truth have always been there because God is grace and truth. But in Jesus Christ, the fullness has now been realized. The shadow has become substance and now that the substance has come, the glory of that is so much greater than what was under the old administration that it seems by comparison. But if you mistakenly think that the law, there was no grace and truth in the law, you are in danger of really submarining your sanctification. The law is good and holy. There's nothing bad in the law. It is wonderful. It's a gift. It shows us our need of Christ. It shows us our barrenness of soul.

When God gave the law, he also gave the sacrificial system, "Do this and live, and when you don't do this, kill the animal because there must be a sacrifice so that I can accept you." The Passover lamb, grace, grace, grace. But when Jesus came, the fullness of grace was magnified, the clarity with which we saw it became so much more brilliant that it seems as if, and John does say, when he says, in fact, it's interesting when he says in verse 16, "For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace," let me explain this. Grace upon grace, I think that's not a good translation. Most translations have something like that. The NIV also misses it by saying "one blessing upon another." What's literally in the Greek is "grace in the place of grace." The preposition is not the normal Greek preposition for "upon," it's actually the preposition we would transliterate "anti, a-n-t-i," that can sometimes be translated "grace against grace" but that's not what the meaning here and most time "anti" doesn't mean even that. It can mean "against," but it can also mean "in the place of." What he's saying is, "For of His fullness we have all received and grace in the place of grace." And then when he explains that in verse 17, "For the Law was given through Moses," that is, we had grace in the law but now we have received grace in the place of grace. A fuller grace has come but connected to that grace.

So grace upon grace, grace in the place of grace, the grace that we had in the law has now been magnified in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and Paul actually is really, I mean, I'm sorry, John. Most books are by Paul, I just by default I say Paul is the author. Forgive me for that. John, the apostle, as he is thinking about this and trying to explain the glory of what seeing Jesus and being with Jesus, what it was like, he understands his readers, Jewish background, he's aiming primarily at Jews though the gospel has wider implications but he's thinking in terms, the way he quotes the Old Testament, the way he refers. When I preached through John a few years back, I made this argument, I think his primary focus was Jewish people who needed to believe in Christ but obviously it's for all people too.

But he assumes that they understand things and he's making a clear allusion here. When he says no one has seen God at any time, that resonated in the mind of every person that had grown up in the synagogue and had been taught the Jewish faith. It resonated with a multitude of Old Testament passages. You can't see God and live, that's the one he's mainly aiming at and we're going to look at the second in Exodus 33, but it also, you may as you read through Judges, for instance, you come to Judges 6, Gideon encounters the angel of the Lord and when the angel of the Lord has left he says, "I saw the Lord and I'm still alive." Manoah, the father of Samson, in Judges 13 he says the same thing. He and his wife encounter the angel of the Lord and when the angel of the Lord leaves, he says, "We're going to be dead," and his wife says, "No, surely not. We gave a sacrifice." So you know, he expected to die. You can't see the Lord and live. Genesis 32, Jacob when he wrestles with God, he calls the place Peniel, the face of God, and he says this, "For I saw God and I live."

It's impossible for man to see God, in fact, turn to Exodus 33 because I think this is actually the passage that John wants his readers to think about. Grace in the place of grace, he wants them to think about the grace of the former measure in the former covenant, and he wants them to think about this first. Exodus 33:18, now remember he said verse 18 of John 1, no man has seen God at any time. Moses asked to see God. Verse 18, Exodus 33, "Then Moses said, 'I pray You, show me Your glory!' And He said, 'I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.' But He said," listen to this, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" That's the Lord speaking directly to Moses. "You cannot see My face and live." Then verse 21, "Then the LORD said, 'Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.'" So Moses saw the back of God's glory and he heard, what's important was not what he saw but what he heard as the Lord passed by the next day in Exodus 34. Verse 5, "The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD." Verse 6, "Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed," this is what he heard, "'The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.' Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship."

He wants us to see and think about this passage and I said this last time back to John 1, the reason I'm convinced this is what he had in his mind, I think what he has in his mind when he says full of grace and truth, I think he's thinking about this passage. I think he's thinking about lovingkindness and truth in this passage, and I think he knows his readers that are schooled in the Scriptures will be thinking the exact same thing. Lovingkindness and truth, the word, the Hebrew word here "chesed" is a word which is not easily translatable into Greek or English and he, I think he chose the word "charis" because he

was translating from Hebrew into Greek, he chose the word "charis/grace" as the best word he could use for that. So grace and truth is lovingkindness and truth, or you may see it says, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger," and the key is, "abounding," you see full of, overflowing with, what? The next two things, "lovingkindness and truth."

So when he is thinking about this, he's saying no one has seen God at any time, Moses didn't even see God fully, he saw the back parts and he knows a good Jew remembers this is one of the high-water marks of the Old Testament, one of the key passages, and what Moses saw was superseded by what he heard. This is the character of God, he is a God who abounds in lovingkindness and truth. He overflows with lovingkindness and truth. Other translations say love and truth, steadfast love and truth or faithfulness, the word here "chesed," the Hebrew word "chesed," it was a key word in the book of Ruth if you were here when we studied Ruth. It's one of the most important words in all of Scripture. It speaks about the character of God and this is what chesed is, chesed is when one person sees another person in misery or distress, one person sees another person in misery or distress and the heart is moved, the attitude and affections of the heart are moved with a desire to alleviate the misery and distress. And it's not just an attitude, it's attitude that results in action. It's an earnest desire to alleviate suffering and distress. What this is saying about God is that at the very core of his being is the desire to help those in distress, to help those in misery, even those in self-inflicted misery of sin. That is God's basic leading characteristic that he is so good and so kind that he's always ready to receive sinners. That doesn't mean he receives sinners and leaves them the way they are. No, he does not. No, he does not. But you don't change yourself to get to his love. You can't reform yourself to get to him. You come to him and say, "Have mercy on me the sinner," and then he gives you a new heart and he changes you.

But it is his disposition and do you hear, listen what he said, look at what he says about God and, listen, what's even amazing about this is the context, the context of when the Lord revealed himself like this. Exodus 34 comes after an extraordinary passage, painful passage to read. I mean, when you're reading Exodus and you read about the giving of the law, you read about the deliverance from Egypt, you read about the Red Sea, all the plagues, look at what God did to deliver them from slavery, look at God's glory made known to his people, how wonderful, and then he gives them his law and he takes them to Sinai and he's going to give them the temple, the tabernacle system, the sacrificial system so that he can dwell in their presence, he's going to be with them and lead them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He gives them the law in Exodus 20. Moses goes up on the mountain, gets the law, 10 Commandments, comes down, gives them to the people. They say, "We will do this. We commit to do this." They'd just seen all of God's glory. God's given them, you know, manna out of heaven. He's given them water out of the rock. He's delivered them from slavery. He's showing his glory on the mountain so they were terrified when they saw it. Moses comes down, gives them the 10 Commandments and they say, "Yes, we'll do it." Moses said, "I've got to go back and get some more instructions." And he goes back and he's gone for 40 days and 40 nights on the mountain with the Lord and the Lord continues to give him the law, and while he is gone, after all of that, after they said to the 10 Commandments, "We will do them," and

look what God said, "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, any kind of likeness and bow down to it." What do they do immediately? They make an idol and they bow down to it.

You're reading and if you're reading it and you're thinking as you're reading, you're like, "What in the world? How can this be?" They start worshiping, now they're trying to worship Yahweh with a golden calf. They're not trying to worship a golden calf. They're trying to worship the true God with a golden calf. That's what idolatry is at its essence and it becomes other things, you worship whatever you want to worship, but it starts off with worshiping God through something else and it turns into an ungodly, wicked, sexual, just travesty. The people are cavorting and committing all kinds of wicked sins as they were supposedly worshiping. Now you think about that. God who has just delivered them, who is holy, holy, holy, sees this on the mountain. He knows what's happening. Moses and him are talking and Moses has no idea what's going on. Moses is all caught up in the glory of God and God tells him in Exodus 32, "Okay, Moses, you need to back away from the people. I'm going to destroy them." Moses is like, "What?" "They have, they've basically gone to, they've already abandoned Me, they've turned away from Me. I'm going to destroy them. I'm going to make of you a great nation."

Now it's so cool that God does this because God does not intend to destroy the people because if he did he would be undermining his promise. He would destroy his promise to bring the Savior from the line of Judah because if he killed everybody else who deserved to be killed, it would only be Moses left, then you wouldn't be able to have a Savior from the line of Judah. So the Lord never intended to do this but he's telling Moses that he is because that's what he should do, and Moses then intercedes and says, "Lord, You can't do that. What will the nations around us think if You led us out into the wilderness and You kill all the people? Have mercy on us." And God, of course, says, "Yes, I will have mercy on you. Now you need to go down and take care of the people." And he goes down to take care of the people and when Moses comes down from the mountaintop, he finds the people engaged in this ungodly wickedness going on right in front of his eyes, everybody just sinning. He says, he cries out because of the holiness of God, "Who is with me?" And some of the Levites rush toward him and he says, "Get a sword and start killing people." And they start killing people, and I'm sure they're going for the most notorious sinners as they go but they kill 3,000 people with the sword.

Now you think about that, what that says about God, the holiness of God, the fearfulness of God. But if you're reading your Bible carefully, it's like that's pretty awesome that he only killed 3,000 but in the light of that, after this the Lord has another conversation with Moses and says, "Listen, Moses, I'm not going to go up with you. I'm going to send My angel. I'm not going to go with you." And Moses said, "Lord, if You don't go, we're not going to go. We want You. We don't want the blessings of Canaan, we want You." Moses has a heart for God and God, of course, intended to go on up with them. So he's having this dialog to show us his heart, his compassion, and right after that, Moses said, "Show me Your glory." I mean, it's just hours since all of that transpired and God actually says he smote the people. We don't know what kind of plague he put but apparently he killed some more people with the plague because of his holiness and, again, sinful people

looking at this sit and accuse God of wrongdoing and I know, listen, when you read your Bible carefully, you will find things that trouble you because God's holiness is so much greater than we understand and our sinfulness is so much worse than we understand. We often find ourselves with things that don't compute and when you find that, just stay in the word, stay humble, and ask the Lord. Take it to him, "Help me understand." I've learned to do that through the years and I always find that God's way is perfect.

So anyway, all that has happened and now the Lord says, "I'll show you My glory but you can only see the back part of Me." And what he sees is not as important as what he hears and what he hears, "This is who I am. They try to worship Me with a calf and you saw My holiness break forth, but this is who I am."

"The LORD, the LORD God," it doesn't say holy and wrathful. He does have holiness, he is wrathful. Yes, he will punish but what does he lead with? "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate." That should be enough but, "and gracious," well, surely that's enough. Let's go on, "slow to anger," he's slow to anger, "abounding," it's like you have a mountaintop of this description of God and you're going up like this, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and then you get to the top of the mountain, abounding, overflowing with chesed, "lovingkindness and truth," or faithfulness. This is what John is thinking about and this is what he's telling us to think about, "Listen, Jesus is full of grace and truth in a way that blows away even what we saw in the old covenant. But listen, what you saw in the old covenant blows away everything we could have imagined in the first place." God is overflowing with chesed and faithfulness, "truth" could be translated "faithfulness," same idea, "firmness, reliability."

Chesed, a heart that sees misery, remember that's what it means, a heart that sees misery and distress and is moved with an urgency to alleviate the suffering, and not just sentimentalism. No, it starts there, God's heart is compassion, his heart is concern, earnest desire to alleviate suffering but it translates into action. He's abounding with lovingkindness or grace and truth.

Then come down the second side of the mountain and you could see that lovingkindness is the most important thing because he repeats the word, "who keeps lovingkindness for thousands." The only word repeated twice in the passage. "Who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin." I love that. He forgives all sin. Anytime God says something like that in triads, threefold, it's always emphasizing the totality. He forgives iniquity, transgression and sin. Everything that you do against him, he forgives. That's his nature. Now think about that, all of those positive things, compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and truth, keeping lovingkindness, that's the sixth thing he says but it's the same, forgiving, seven things that are his grace and his goodness and his kindness before he says who "will by no means leave the guilty unpunished."

Do you see that? What is God like? That's what he's like. That was glorious and what John is saying is that now that Jesus has come, we walked with him, we saw him live his life, the invisible God of grace and truth, the invisible God of chesed and emet, of lovingkindness and faithfulness has become visible. We now see it and it's such a

dramatic difference it's as if we had never seen it before. The third point is actually now the surpassing excellency of God's goodness in the new covenant in Christ. You could say the surpassing excellency of God's goodness in Christ. The beauty of God's goodness in the old covenant but the surpassing excellency of God's goodness in Christ. Now we see it in a much greater, clearer way than ever before.

So he's saying, "Listen, we watched the enfleshment of God and we watched God walk around the dusty trails of Palestine, Israel, and we watched Him encounter people in misery and distress and this is what we saw, an overflowing of chesed, an overflowing of kindness, an overflowing of grace." These are all words you could use to translate "chesed" accurately: love, kindness, mercy, grace. The important thing is it flows from God because of who he is, nothing in the object that calls it out other than the misery of the person. There's nothing good that calls out chesed. Chesed flows from the heart of the one who shows chesed, grace and truth.

"We saw Jesus and this is what we saw. We saw God in flesh and what we saw was absolute astounding, indescribable goodness. We saw the the lie that Satan has told is the filthiest, blackest, vilest lie ever uttered, ever imagined. To say that God is not good, we know He is good. We have seen His goodness on full display in the person of His Son, and you can see His goodness on full display when you read the pages of Scripture with an open heart. You will see He is completely good and His goodness far excels, surpasses even the goodness in the old covenant, but it blows away anything we could have ever hope for or imagined." I mean he walked through the pages of John's gospel and this is what he's basically saying. "Look," he says, "listen," he tells you about the miracle of the changing of the water into wine but think of it more than just a miracle that testifies that he's the Messiah, think of it as this is what God is like. This is what God is like and what the miracle of the changing of the water into wine is basically there's a wedding and they run out of wine, which is a terrible thing, it's like a, you know, a humiliation for the father of the bride that he's run out of wine. And Jesus is approached by his mother and says, "Hey, they need wine." He says, "What am I to do? I'm not yet to reveal Myself." And she says to the people, "Whatever He tells you, do it." And Jesus discerns this is the time for him to do a miracle, checks with the Father, I'm sure, and he does the miracle, and what he does is he changes water into wine and he changes, like it's an abundance of wine. I can't remember, I did the math when we were going through John. It's something like 400-500 bottles of wine. It's six giant water pots, you know, like 30 gallons each or something.

Anyway I can't remember but it's so much more than they needed. The generosity of God. Now wine in the Bible is that which gladdens the heart. You're not to drink it until you become drunk. No, but wine is not forbidden in Scripture and when you look at how wine is used in the Old Testament, look at Isaiah 25, the Messiah will bring in an era of wine, that is, he will bring in joy, and what does that say about God? God when he looks at misery, he longs to give you joy. He longs to give you unspeakable joy, or like Peter says in 1 Peter 1, joy inexpressible and full of glory.

That's what God is like. That's what Jesus did. He sees misery and his heart is moved to bring joy. He wants his people to be happy. It doesn't mean he does what you want. No, it doesn't mean that as a Christian, and you know if you've been a Christian for long, he does not do what you want, and if you think he does and you're going to become a Christian because of that, forget it. Don't come on those terms. Don't come on such cheap stupid terms. He knows best. He will give you what is best. It is his nature to make his people joyful.

That's what he's saying in John 2. The next sign, he heals a nobleman's child from a distance. He sees disease and his heart is moved to heal, to restore. He sees deformity, his heart is moved to restore. He wants us to have fullness. "I came that they might have life and have it abundantly," he says later in this gospel. That's his heart and his joy and his healing and his restoration are available to everyone. John 4, Jesus is heading north to Galilee and he goes through Samaria intentionally, he takes the way through Samaria and he comes to the village of Sychar and he is thirsty, tired, and he sits down at a well, his disciples go to get food, they're all hungry, they're thirsty. Jesus sits there, a Samaritan woman comes to the well and Jesus engages her in conversation. She is astonished that he's talking to her. She recognizes immediately he's a Jew and she knows that Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

Now there's actually good reason for that, in fact, that's something that if you were paying attention in Nehemiah when we were preaching through Nehemiah, you would understand that because they were not to intermarry with Samaritans. They weren't to hang around Samaritans and become like them because Samaritans are idolaters. The Samaritans were people that were basically imported by the Assyrians after the northern kingdom is destroyed in 722 BC, southern kingdom hung around until 586, 130 some years later. The northern kingdom is destroyed in 722 BC, the Assyrian emperor sends in basically colonists. He wants to wreck things. He exports the Jews from the northern kingdom and he imports all kinds of ungodly idolaters from other places. There are some Jews left behind and there's an amalgamation of the Jewish faith and all this idolatry, and they are basically foolish, sinful people, spiritually completely in the dark, morally, yeah, depraved. And that's why Nehemiah, remember Nehemiah got bent out of shape when they start intermarrying because you can't compromise your faith. It's about spiritual intermarriage, it's not about actual just physical line. It's about spiritual differences.

But the Samaritans were, I mean, and they were arrogant too. They actually believed, they built their own temple, by the way, some time in the 5th century, probably contemporaneous to Nehemiah's, the end of his ministry, Ezra's ministry. They build a temple on Mount Gerizim and say, "This is the true temple." They claim that they have the true temple, the temple they rebuilt down in Jerusalem is not the true temple. This was a blasphemous act. If you don't think so, read 1 Kings 11 and 12 and see how God feels about making extra temples.

So God hated that. It was wicked. It was something analogous to what the Jews were doing when they worshiped that idol, that golden calf. So this woman and she is messed up in her theology, she asks him about the whole thing about, "Where do we worship?"

But even more than that, she's a spiritually immoral woman. She has been married five times. She doesn't volunteer that information. Jesus says to her, she says, "I perceive You're a prophet. When will the Messiah come?" He says, "I am He. I am," literally in the Greek. And she wants to know more about him and he says, "Why don't you go and get your husband and bring him to Me." He says that because he knows her moral character. She says, "I have no husband." He says, "Truly you've spoken rightly. You have no husband, in reality you've had five husbands and the man that you're now living with is not your husband." So she's living with a sixth man. Her life has been characterized by immorality. Her life has been characterized by relational brokenness. She is a Samaritan. She is miserable and Jesus took the time to have a one-on-one counseling conversation with this person.

Do you see the heart of God? What is God like? He's the kind of God that stops to have a conversation to save, he goes looking for a Samaritan adulteress to save her. That's the kind of God he is. He has a one-on-one conversation. He doesn't just save the filthiest sinner like her. I mean, you have a lot of those in the New Testament, he saves a lot of them like that, Mary Magdalene, an immoral woman possessed by seven demons. Do you remember the woman, we don't know her name, who washed his feet with her tears and anointed his head with perfume at the home of Simon the Pharisee, and Simon the Pharisee says, "If He were a prophet, He would know what kind of woman this is." He knows she's a prostitute, she's an ungodly wicked woman and here she is crying at the feet of Jesus, washing his feet with her tears, and Simon the Pharisee says, "You don't know what kind of woman that is." He's thinking that in his heart and Jesus then asked him that questions, "Who loves more, one who is forgiven a certain low amount of money or one that is forgiven a lot?" He says, "She's been forgiven a lot, that's why she loves more."

You see, people came to him, there was an approachability about when God showed up and came in flesh, people that were filthy sinners felt like they could come to him. They felt welcome. Now listen, when they came they didn't stay the way they were. He didn't welcome and people, there are people mixed up on this, listen, this means that you and I if we're going to see God as he is, we're going to become more like him. There will be a welcoming about us to sinners but it won't be a welcome that affirms them in their sin. It will be a welcome that invites them to Jesus, to transformation. That's what they found in him. They found that God is a God who receives the filthiest sinner into his presence, that there's nothing that you have to do to clean up your life, you just come to him and you rest in him, you trust in him, you give yourself to him, you unite yourself to him, you unite yourself to him and you will not be the same, you will not remain the same. Sure, you'll still battle with sin but you won't be the same.

So you see that, that's what's happening in John's gospel but he doesn't just save the filthiest sinners and John's gospel tells us about his conversation with Nicodemus, he saves those who are religiously righteous. He allows Nicodemus that time, all that time to talk to Nicodemus and we find out later Nicodemus doesn't have a clue, remember? Nicodemus is the teacher of Israel, that's what Jesus says about him, "You're the teacher of Israel and you don't understand these things?" He was like a renowned Pharisee and

the Pharisees were thought to be good, we have to remember that. When you read the New Testament, they were thought to be heroes, not the enemy. Jesus exposes them as the enemy but the common people thought they were, "Man, these are the spiritual giants." So the spiritual giant, Nicodemus, comes to Jesus and says, "Hey, we know You're from God. No one could do the miracles You do unless God were with Him." And Jesus basically says, "Listen, you need to be born again." Nicodemus can't understand it. "How can I be born again when I'm old?" "You don't understand these things? You haven't read your Bible, have you read your Bible, Nicodemus? Don't you understand that you have to have a new heart? Don't you understand that you have to have new life, that you cannot inherit the kingdom of God without a transformation of heart?"

Nicodemus didn't understand but Jesus keeps on talking to him and he goes back and he explains, "Do you remember about the serpent in the wilderness that Moses lifted up? Everyone who looks to the Son of Man when He is lifted up will be saved." And we're left without knowing what happened to Nicodemus. John then in verse 16, I think in chapter 3, transitions now to talking and expounding upon what Jesus said to Nicodemus. I think Nicodemus has left and now John is just telling us more about who Jesus is. We find Nicodemus at the end after Jesus' crucifixion, Nicodemus is arranging for Jesus' burial. Nicodemus is a follower of Jesus Christ. You see, even those who think they're righteous and that is their wickedness, they think they're righteous. What a terrible, awful, wickedness that is. Jesus still receives you. God is still good and says, "Come to Me. Come to Me with your self-righteousness that you can't let go of. Come to Me and I will make you Mine."

That's the generosity of God. He overflows, he abounds with grace and truth. He overflows and abounds with chesed. He sees us in our self-inflicted misery and his heart is moved and disposed to heal and to restore any who will come to him. And it's interesting, the Old Testament word for "godly, godly ones," the main word used "to be godly" is the word "chasid." Chesed in English would be transliterated c-h-e-s-e-d, chesed, lovingkindness, steadfast love, love, mercy, grace, all those things, that's the word chesed. Chasid is c-h-a-s-i-d. It is used to speak of people, the godly. What does godly really mean in English. It means those who are like God. The people that are like God are the people who will have chasid, that is, they have received chesed and therefore because they've received chesed, they demonstrate chesed, because they've received mercy and they're aware of how much they need mercy and they're basking in the wonder of God's goodness to them, when unbelievers are around them, when wicked people are around them, there is a heart disposition to receive sinners. Isn't that convicting? That's what we're supposed to be like and the reason we're not is because we're not meditating on the chesed we continually receive from God. Every day you and I need to be receiving his lovingkindness, that is, looking at our misery, looking at our self-inflicted distress and crying out to him for mercy and marveling that he is a God who abounds and overflows in mercy, and the more that you, and listen, the Christian life really should be like this.

I've used this illustration before but it's so helpful I'm going to use it again. Jerry Bridges says it's like the Christian life, the growth in grace is like turning up a light, a dimmer switch on your life and you first get saved and it's like the light comes on. Now there's

juice to that light and the light comes on but it's pretty dim, but you can now see there's a mess in the room and you start cleaning up what you can see. You're like, "Oh, there's some stuff on the floor," and you pick it up and you clean that up over here and you clean that off. Then as you do that, the Lord in his grace turns up the dimmer switch and you become, the light's a little brighter now and you see, "Oh, there's some stuff I didn't even see over here and there's stuff right here." And you clean that up and the light becomes a little brighter and then you see, "This is some really stuff here I didn't even know this was a stain," and you start working on that and on and on it goes, and what happens is as you grow in holiness, you are always indignant about your own sinfulness but you are actually becoming more like God every year. You're becoming more like God by union with Christ, by resting in him, trusting in him, receiving his chesed, and yet you're constantly aware because now what happens is you grow in grace and you become aware now of, "Boy, the evil of the motives of my heart, I didn't ever understand before." Haven't you had that experience, you're like, "I never saw this and now that I see it, I cannot believe I'm like this. I've always been like this." That's the dimmer switch being turned up and you see how evil you are and you see God's chesed overflowing to you.

So if we really grow in grace as we ought to, if we live to be 95 years old, we should be the most humble at 95. You'll be the most holy and the most humble. You'll be more like Jesus than you've ever been and you will be more indignant about the remaining sin that you have. You will hate it and you will see your need of Christ all the more. That's the way to heaven. That's the way to holiness and when we live like that, that's the way to change the world. We're seeing who God is continually, we're drinking and basking in the wonder of who he is and it changes the way we relate to other people and so that even if the world continues to go darker and deeper and darker and deeper, we know God. We know he's on the throne. The one who is lovingkindness, abounding in lovingkindness and truth, and whatever he does in the world, we know him. And you can know him. That will make a difference in your life and that will make a difference in your circle this year. May God help us to do that.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for Your glory and the glory that You've made known in Your word, supremely for the glory You've made known in Your Son. Lord Jesus, You are so much more wonderful than we could ever have hoped or dreamed or imagined and we confess, Lord, we far too often are distracted and not looking at You, not seeing ourselves in our need of You and not running to You and not basking in the wonder of Your lovingkindness and so we become hardened and sensitive, unwelcoming to sinners. Have mercy on us, Lord. We thank You that it's Your delight to show mercy to sinners, it shows Your glory. Thank You for having mercy on us. We pray for those that are here today that have wrestled with thinking that You're good enough to trust You, Lord. Help them, break their hearts and even now may they call upon You, Lord Jesus. Just unite their hearts to You, "Yes, I believe You, Lord Jesus. I believe that You are able to save me." And give themselves to You. And Lord, for those of us who belong to You already, may we keep giving ourselves to You every day of our lives until that day when we see You face-to-face. We pray in Your name. Amen.