**2nd August 2020**

**Sermon Transcript**

**Preacher: Mary Ackers**

As many of you know, last week we looked at Proverbs chapter 2 and discussed the connection between wisdom and integrity. As Solomon expressed in his writings, wisdom comes from fearing the Lord and devoting ourselves to Him. When we grow in knowing God, we grow in wisdom, and become people of integrity – people whose inner lives and outer lives are in agreement.

Now, I don’t know about you, but often I feel that Knowing God is an impossible task and indeed, it probably is. And as a recovering perfectionist, I can tell you that personally, I’m not very good at attempting tasks that I know are difficult or impossible to achieve. Some people might feel like, “well, why bother?” But for me, it’s more along the lines of, “where do I even start? How do I even *attempt* to know God if I know that I will never get close to truly knowing him?” It all gets a bit confusing and overwhelming.

This rather elusive goal of knowing God becomes a little easier when we look to the Bible, as it’s such a rich resource for learning about God and the things he has done in the world. However, even with this information, the gap between what we understand and what and who God is can still seem so large. Where do we turn to help fill in the gaps of our knowledge?

A wonderful and helpful passage, in this regard, is the beginning of the Gospel of John. For those of you who have been in church for a while, it will likely be quite familiar, but for some of you it might be quite new. As I read through this passage this morning, I pray that God will help the new feel familiar and understandable, and the old feel fresh and vibrant once again.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

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

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

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

While this entire passage is important, I really want to focus in on the first and last paragraphs for our purpose today. In this first section of the passage we find a powerful statement about the Word and God, and their relationship to each other. Much of the language of this passage echoes the words of Moses that we read in the opening chapter of the Old Testament, in the book of Genesis. “In the beginning…” is a phrase loaded with meaning, and it locates us with the dark and formless void before the earth existed – it takes us back beyond our time and our history to a place and time where only God exists. In this time, there was the Word, and the Word was both *with* God, but the Word also *was* God. Who is this Word?

It’s important not to rush over this phrase, even if we already know who the author is talking about. What we translate as ‘Word’ is *logos* in the original Greek, and here indicates both *thought* and *speech* – that is, both the idea behind the Word and the Word that was spoken and made manifest. This Word is the revealer and interpreter of the hidden being of God; the visible image of the invisible God. This Word is Jesus. When we get stuck not knowing how to know God, the author tells us here that the place we begin to know God is the person of Jesus.

The author goes on to tell us that this Word – this Jesus – was present with God when he created the earth, and through Jesus all things were made. He was both present and participating in the creation. Through this we can begin to understand that Jesus has a vested interest in God’s creation because he was and is part of that creation.

In Jesus is life – the light of men; The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it. Some translations read *cannot* overcome it. Others still talk about the darkness being unable to *comprehend* or understand the light. What the author is trying to get across to us is the unshakeable, uncorruptible nature of Jesus and the light and life he brings. Despite all the arsenal the darkness has, it has never and will never be able to eclipse the light. When we find ourselves in dark places, this is a fact we can rely on – especially those times when we feel overwhelmed by darkness, uncertainty, and chaos. Jesus, the life and light of humanity, is victorious over darkness. When we seek wisdom from God, when we know him through Jesus, we shine the light of wisdom and truth into the dark places. We step into the light and we are empowered by it.

As we move through this passage, we read about John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus with the people of Israel. He was not the light or the Word, but he told the people to expect the Word and be ready. Still, when Jesus came, not every one was ready, and many didn’t accept Jesus or his teachings. This is a sad reality that we still experience today – and many of us will experience rejection because there are people that won’t receive *us* because we carry Jesus with us. This is important to consider, but I won’t deal too much with that today except to say that as we grow in wisdom and in knowing God, we will also grow in our ability to be people of integrity in these instances.

In the final section of the passage, we begin to drill down on how it is that we can really get to know God through Jesus. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory. Jesus became a human being and made a home with us so that we could see the glory of God. The word ‘dwelt’ also means ‘to fix one’s tabernacle’ and this is a deliberate reference, on the author’s part, to the tabernacle of the people of Israel. This was the place (in the old Testament) where God came to be present with his people, to be in communion and community with them, and now the author here is saying that Jesus came to fulfil the same purpose – to be that communion of God with his people. Jesus is the person through whom we can begin to know God more fully.

Through Jesus we see the glory of God, full of grace and truth. This is grace upon grace; one measure upon another. Grace was bestowed once through the law of Moses, and another measure of grace has been bestowed through Jesus; grace upon grace. One aspect of this grace is that we can begin to know God – to understand his character and who he is for us. The law was a grace of its own, showing who God is and who he desired his people to be as they represented him on earth. But the law gave us an incomplete picture of God. Jesus is able to more fully represent God; through Him we really begin to know God because he is the Word of God. Jesus has been with God since the beginning and is with him still today. As we read in the final part of this passage, no one has ever seen god, *yet* the only God who remains at the Father’s side, *He* has made him known.

I love the way Henry Halley summarises this passage; “Jesus is called GOD and CREATOR and THE WORD… Jesus was God’s expression of Himself to humankind… [the Word] makes clear the meaning and destiny of human existence… The Creator came to his creatures in the form of one of them to give them an idea of the kind of being He is.” The way to knowing God is through Jesus, who shows us God in a way we can truly understand.

To finish, I want to read this passage again, but from the Message translation. As I read this, I found it brought some of the key ideas to life in a unique way. I pray that as we read together, God will shine light on the kind of being he is for each of us:

*The Word was first,
the Word present to God,
    God present to the Word.
The Word was God,
    in readiness for God from day one.*

*Everything was created through him;
    nothing—not one thing!—
    came into being without him.
What came into existence was Life,
    and the Life was Light to live by.
The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness;
    the darkness couldn’t put it out.*

*There once was a man, his name John, sent by God to point out the way to the Life-Light. He came to show everyone where to look, who to believe in. John was not himself the Light; he was there to show the way to the Light.*

*The Life-Light was the real thing:
    Every person entering Life
    he brings into Light.
He was in the world,
    the world was there through him,
    and yet the world didn’t even notice.
He came to his own people,
    but they didn’t want him.
But whoever did want him,
    who believed he was who he claimed
    and would do what he said,
He made to be their true selves,
    their child-of-God selves.
These are the God-begotten,
    not blood-begotten,
    not flesh-begotten,
    not sex-begotten.*

*The Word became flesh and blood,
    and moved into the neighborhood.
We saw the glory with our own eyes,
    the one-of-a-kind glory,
    like Father, like Son,
Generous inside and out,
    true from start to finish.*

*John pointed him out and called, “This is the One! The One I told you was coming after me but in fact was ahead of me. He has always been ahead of me, has always had the first word.”*

*We all live off his generous bounty,
        gift after gift after gift.
    We got the basics from Moses,
        and then this exuberant giving and receiving,
    This endless knowing and understanding—
        all this came through Jesus, the Messiah.
    No one has ever seen God,
        not so much as a glimpse.
    This one-of-a-kind God-Expression,
        who exists at the very heart of the Father,
        has made him plain as day.*