

Video: What does God look like? What does God look like? It is a question that has been debated endlessly down through the centuries. And even today, many people have their own ideas of who God is and what he is like.

But we need more certainty than that. If we are to put our faith in God, depend on him for salvation and commit ourselves to following his will – then we need something more certain than our, or someone else’s, imagination. We need to know for sure what God is like.

The amazing news is, that as John declared in the second part of the remarkable introduction to his gospel, we can have that certainty. Because of Jesus, we can know for sure who God is and what he is like. And even more crucially, because of Jesus, we can also know God personally in our lives.

John 1:6-18: “There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹ The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’” ¹⁶ From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”

1. Revelation

We all find it much easier to trust in what we can see for ourselves. In a world where people tell lies, stretch the truth, seek to deceive and manipulate others for their own advantage, we’re all cautious about believing every claim that is made. And so people often say that “Seeing is believing.”

We’re like the disciple Thomas who said to the other disciples when they told him about the resurrection of Jesus, “**Unless I see... I will not believe it.**” John 20:25

But the problem is, when it comes to God, “**No-one has ever seen God.**” John 1:18. Up to the time of Jesus’ birth nobody had stood before the Almighty God and seen the full revelation of who he is and what he is like.

Yes there had been glimpses of who God is. God had revealed himself to the people of Israel through creation, the law, visions and dreams, through his prophets and through his acts of deliverance. But these were all partial revelations.

And this limited knowledge left space for people to make up their own ideas and concepts of who God is. I’m sure we’re all heard people say, “I think God is like this...” or “I don’t think God would ever do this...” as if we are the ones creating God in our image.

a) Final and Full

But Jesus came to change all of that. No longer would we have to accept a partial revelation from God or the imaginations of others. Now we can see God for ourselves because “**God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.**” John 1:18

This verse again states the full deity of Christ. He is God the One and Only. And that is why, as the Word of God, Jesus is the final and full revelation of God. Later on in this gospel, Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father. In reply, Jesus said, “**Anyone who has seen me as seen the Father.**” John 14:9

As we read through this gospel, looking at what Jesus did and listening to what Jesus said, we will be seeing God! This is what God looks like. This is what God says. This is what God does. He is exactly like Jesus.

Jesus came to reveal the full reality of who God is and what he is like. So because of Jesus, we don’t need to wonder in the dark anymore. We don’t need to be confused by all the different creative ideas and fanciful imaginations about God. We can just look at Jesus. And not just so we can know about God – but so that we will know him personally in our lives!

2. Preparation

This revelation of Christ started with a ministry of preparation. “There came a man... his name was John.” John 1:6 This isn’t John the author of the gospel. Instead, this is the man we usually call, John the Baptist. That’s because part of his ministry was to call people to be baptised in water to declare their repentance from their sins. But here the apostle John emphasised different aspects of his ministry.

a) John the Baptist’s Commission

First of all there is John’s commission. He was a man, “who was sent from God.” John 1:6. John the Baptist did not speak on his own authority. He did not share his own ideas or follow his own agenda. Instead, he was simply obeying God’s call on his life.

And we’ll see in this gospel, that Jesus emphasised the same thing in his own ministry. God-honouring ministry is always done in obedience to God’s call!

b) John the Baptist’s Mission

Secondly, there is John’s mission. “He came as a witness to testify concerning that light.” John 1:7 As we’ll see next week, John’s ministry was to witness to, to testify to the reality of who Jesus is. His role was to point people to Jesus!

And this is a key theme in this gospel. The word witness here, is the Greek word from which we get the word martyr. It occurs as a noun and a verb over 40 times in this gospel alone, often translated testimony or testify!

And our role too is to testify to those around us of the reality of Christ. Jesus said in Acts 1:8: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

c) John the Baptist’s Goal

But did you notice John’s goal in this Christ-centred ministry? “So that through him all men might believe.” John 1:7 John did not preach to entertain or amuse. He did not even preach simply to educate and inform. Instead, like the apostle John, he preached about Jesus so that people would put their faith in Jesus, and through that faith, they would be saved.

d) John the Baptist’s humility

And as John did this, he expressed amazing humility. He said about Jesus, “He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.” John 1:15

John was older than Jesus and started his ministry before Jesus. But He knew that Jesus was greater than he was. And so John did not try to attract people to follow him. Instead, he sought to point people to Jesus: “He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.” John 1:8

John the Baptist, as we’ll see in more detail in the next couple is a great example to us of what it means to be a member of God’s kingdom – it is to respond to God’s call to point people to Jesus, so that they can put their faith in him.

3. Incarnation

That is because only Jesus is the Christ. Only Jesus is the true light of the world. Only Jesus can save. And that’s because of the unique identity of Jesus.

Last week we read that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:1. He is the eternal Son of God, equal with the Father and the Spirit, our Creator and Sustainer, our Lord and our God.

a) God And Man

And yet, John 1:14 says: “The Word became flesh.” This is the incredible news of the incarnation. The Holy One became flesh. God became human. The Creator became part of his creation. The all powerful, all knowing, all present One became fully wrapped up in the frailty and weakness of a tiny, vulnerable body.

As much as it blows our minds, John wants us to come to the realisation that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man.

b) God With Us

And so God has come to be with us. He “...made his dwelling among us.” John 1:14 This is another really important truth in this gospel. This phrase literally means that he tabernacled among us.

In the Old Testament, God directed the people of Israel to make a special tent, the Tabernacle, as the place where he would dwell with them and meet with them **“Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.”** Exodus 25:8

Later on, this Tabernacle was replaced by the Temple, built by Solomon. **“I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell for ever.”** 1 Kings 8:13 This was the place where God met with his people and lived among them.

But this temple was one of limited access. Some people could come closer than others, but ultimately nobody could stay in the innermost parts of this temple. Nobody come into God’s intimate presence.

But as the Word made flesh, Jesus came close to us, to be our Immanuel, our God with us. He came to be our Tabernacle, our Temple. In John 2:19, he pointed to this reality when he said, **“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”**

People misunderstood him to be talking about the temple building of stone that they were standing in. However Jesus was talking about the reality of his body as the temple of God, the place where God dwells and meets with his people.

4. Rejection

Of course, his body would be destroyed because most people would reject this truth.

a) Didn’t Recognise Him

“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him.” John 1:10 When most people saw Jesus, they did not accept his true identity. They didn’t see him as their Creator. They did not realise that he was Almighty God.

That’s because in appearance, Jesus didn’t look like anything special. Isaiah wrote about this in Isaiah 53:2: **“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”**

b) Didn’t Receive Him

That was the case, even for the people of Israel. For centuries they had been waiting for their Messiah to come. And yet, John 1:11 says that, **“He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”**

Right throughout this gospel, we will see this refusal of the people of Israel to receive Jesus for a whole host of reasons. They rejected him:

- Because of where he was from.
- Because of his challenge to their religious systems and traditions.
- Because of his refusal to conform to their idea of what the Messiah should do.
- Because of his exclusive claims.
- Because of his confrontation of their sin.
- Because of his threat to their position.

And this will culminate in their cries to **“Crucify! Crucify!”** John 19:6

It is so important for us to see this, because Jesus will tell us that this is going to happen to everyone who follows him. **“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.”** John 15:18. To follow Jesus involves following him in the way of rejection, ridicule, persecution and suffering.

5. Salvation

But of course, it also involves amazing blessings. Because Jesus did not reject the world that rejected him, but willingly laid down his life on a cross for this world, we who accept him can receive the most amazing gift of salvation.

a) A New Gift

John said that **“The law was given through Moses.”** John 1:17 This was an amazing gift to the people of Israel. It gave them limited revelation of who God is and limited access to him presence through the temple and the sacrificial system.

But it was powerless to really set people free from sin and bring them into a secure relationship with God. Because of our sinful nature, nobody could keep the law, and so under the law, ultimately we all stood condemned. Paul wrote: **“Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”** Romans 3:20

But when Jesus came, he brought something new. **“Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”** John 1:17 Jesus came to bring the full revelation of God’s truth and the full riches of God’s grace to a lost and dying world.

b) A New Offer

And through this grace, a new offer is made: **“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name.”** John 1:12

The law was given to the nation of Israel, but the offer of Jesus is made to everyone and anyone, whatever their race, or background, or history, or reputation. We will see in this gospel that this offer is both for respectable Pharisees as well as outcast Samaritans.

All we need to do to receive this grace and truth is to receive Jesus, to believe in his name, to accept him as the Son of God, who love us and gave himself for us on the cross to pay for our sins. The gospel is that **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** Romans 10:13

c) A New Status

And when we believe in Christ, we receive a new status. **“He gave the right to become children of God.”** John 1:12

Because of our sin and rebellion against God, we were God’s enemies, separated from him and outside of his kingdom. But if we put our faith in Christ, then our status will be instantly changed. We’ll be adopted as God’s children, accepted into his family, welcomed into the intimacy of his house, so that we can live with him forever. Jesus said, **“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”** John 14:23

Jesus did not just come to be God dwelling with us for the 33 years of his life on earth. Instead, he came so that we could have God dwelling with us all now and forever. Ultimately, our hope is that as Jesus said, **“In my Father’s house are many rooms... I am going to prepare a place for you.”** John 14:2

d) A New Birth

And we can have confidence in this, because this change of status is not the result of our efforts – rather it is the supernatural work of God. We are **“children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”** John 1:13

We’ll see the truth of this new birth stated in more detail in chapter 3, but this is the means of our salvation. It is not something we inherit from our parents. It is not a reward for good living. Rather it is the free gift that God gives because of his amazing grace.

6. Confirmation

And this is what the apostle John had experienced. This wasn’t some theoretical idea for John. This wasn’t something that he had just learned about in a theology class. This is something that John had personally experienced for himself.

He had been an eye-witness of the amazing revelation of the Word who became flesh. He wrote: **“We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** John 1:14

And he had received this wonderful salvation. **“From the fulness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.”** John 1:16 John, along with all those who have received Jesus, have like waves on a shore, been blessed by grace upon grace.

And he wrote his gospel, so that all of us can also experience this for ourselves. He wrote so that **“You may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”** John 20:31

Conclusion

So this is the great news of this gospel. The Word has become flesh and made his dwelling among us. So we can see the reality of who God is, and through faith in Jesus, we can know the certainty of being a child of God and the security of having eternal life with God.

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