

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The Word's Superiority John 1:15-16 Part 1

Our spiritual growth is inextricably bound up with our view of Christ. Once we get away from a one-dimensional picture of Christ and see more and more of His fullness, our spiritual lives cannot help but be positively impacted.

Hopefully most of you remember the story of Lucy that I shared with you at the beginning of our study of the Gospel of John. Each time that Lucy would meet Aslan, the symbol of Christ, in C.S. Lewis's "*Chronicles of Narnia*" he would always seem to be getting bigger. Was he getting bigger, No! He just seemed to be getting bigger because Lucy was gaining a greater understanding of his fullness.

I would hope that as we continue our march through the introduction of the Gospel of John, that we will also be gaining a greater understanding of the fullness of Christ. And I would hope and pray that this greater understanding of Christ's fullness will lead us to an even more spiritually dynamic life than we are already experiencing.

Throughout the introduction, John has been detailing for us reasons why the Word, or in other words Christ, is qualified to reveal God to man. Every time John has added another reason to his list, our understanding of Christ's fullness has increased.

This weekend we will add one last thing to John's list of reasons. What we learn about the superiority of the Word to certain prophets in John 1:15-18 makes Jesus qualified to reveal God to man.

Let me read for you these last few verses of the introduction, **(15) "John bore witness of Him, and cried out saying, 'This was He of whom I said, "He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me. (16)**

"For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. (17) For the Law came through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. (18) No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.""

I would hope that as we consider this very last reason that John gives us for considering the Word as qualified to reveal God to man, that once again Jesus might become a little bit bigger in our eyes. I would hope that as we consider the superiority of the Word over other prophets listed in John 1:15-18 that we will be helped to see a little bit more of the fullness of Christ and that our spiritual growth will be fueled. Who is the first prophet to whom Christ is compared?

The Word is superior to John the Baptist (John 1:15). Let us read **John 1:15 "John bore witness of Him, and cried out, saying, 'This was He of whom I said, "He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.""**

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The Apostle John in John 1:15 introduces to us the testimony of John the Baptist in order to support the doctrine of the *incarnation* outlined for us in John 1:14. Let us read this verse, "**And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory.**" This is an incredible statement. Not everyone of course believes this statement but we certainly could not include John the Baptist as one of those who did not believe. We know this because of John the Baptist's personal testimony recorded for us by the Apostle in **John 1:15** which is the testimony that we have just read.

John's testimony consists of three phrases (1) "He who comes after me" is the first phrase; (2) "has a higher rank than I" is the second phrase and the third phrase is (3) "for He existed before me."

The first two phrases of John 1:15 presented an *enigma* to those living in the time of Christ. How can someone who is younger be superior to someone who is older? How does someone, who was born after John the Baptist chronologically, have a higher standing than John the Baptist? You might be a little confused at this point because 21st century Americans have little appreciation in regard to this way of thinking. But those living in biblical times would clearly understand what I have just said.

In antiquity it was widely held that chronological *priority* meant superiority. People really thought that their fathers were wiser than they. In other words, those that were older were considered superior to those who were younger. There was therefore a conscious deferring that would take place when younger people were in the presence of older people.

Verse 15 therefore begins with an enigma. How can someone who is younger, such as Christ be considered superior to someone who was older, such as John the Baptist? John the Baptist solved the enigma by acknowledging the *pre-existence* of Christ in the last phrase in John 1:15 (cf. Micah 5:2).

Let us read the last phrase, "**for He existed before me.**" What is John the Baptist in essence saying? He in essence is saying that "My successor, the one born after me is my predecessor."

John the Baptist's explanation of how Christ could be superior to him though Christ was born after him supports the doctrine of the incarnation spelled out for us in **John 1:14** and that is why the apostle John introduces this testimony in **John 1:15**.

This might be surprising to some that John the Baptist would view Christ in this way but he, as a prophet of God, was not saying anything more than what earlier prophets had said. Listen to **Micah 5:2**, "**But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.**"

Was John the Baptist an important person in biblical history? The answer, is absolutely, but Christ according to John the Baptist's own testimony was far superior. John the Baptist viewed Christ as far superior because he, unlike so many others, truly believed that Jesus was the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

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We are now ready to go on to **verse 16**. Let us read this verse, "**For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.**" John 1:16 shares with us the *benefit* that comes to those who by faith are able to behold the glory of the incarnate Christ described in John 1:14. Most people in the world did not see Jesus clearly. They just saw Him as a man. They were unable to see Him as the infinite God-Man who was offering them the gift of salvation. In other words, they were unable to see His glory.

Fortunately, this was not true of everyone. There were some who did see Him clearly. What did the Apostle John say about Himself and certain other eyewitnesses in **John 1:14**? He says, "**and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.**"

Those who by faith are able to see the glory of the incarnate Word, who are able to see Him as full of grace and truth, will share in His fullness. Isn't this what the Apostle John in essence is telling us when we combine what he said in **John 1:14** with what he said in **John 1:16**.

John is telling us that there is a benefit to seeing Christ clearly and responding accordingly. And what is that benefit? We will share in His fullness.

If you are here this weekend and you have by faith beheld the glory of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. If you have responded to that glory in the same way as John and the other eyewitnesses responded to that glory. Then you will also share in the fullness of the glory of Christ, in other words you will also share in the same benefit that they enjoyed.

To share in His fullness simply means that we are participating in the *salvation* that could only be secured through the grace and truth that belong to Christ.

Though the Apostle John in **verse 14** has chosen to describe the glory of the only begotten from the Father in terms of grace and truth, which are both absolutely necessary attributes in order to provide for our salvation, John chooses to emphasize simply one those attributes in **verse 16**.

Let us read this verse once again, "**For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.**"

The main idea of grace (CHARIS) is that of bestowing a gift upon one who does not *deserve* it. Who among us today has a need for grace? The answer is simple, everyone today has a need for grace!

If we as sinners got what we deserved, we would be forever damned. Because of this it is absolutely necessary that we somehow find a way to receive what we do not deserve. This is why the teaching of **Ephesians 2:8-9** that we are saved by grace through faith is so thrilling to our ears.

If we were people who saw ourselves as being able to stand before God on the basis of our own personal righteousness, we would not have a whole lot of interest in Christ. Our interest would rather be much more focused on this world and the things of this world.

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But if however we have come to the point in our lives where we see ourselves as sinners, hopelessly lost and hell-bound, then we will be far more inclined to get caught up in the wonder of the glory of Christ who is full of grace and truth. We will get caught up in the wonder of His glory in much the same way as John and the other eyewitnesses got caught up in the wonder of His glory. Believing that in participating in His fullness that we would finally be able to immersed in His saving grace.

Will we be shortchanged when we come to Christ in faith and behold His glory, the glory of the only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth? Absolutely not! We see this in the last part of **verse 16** when he adds the phrase "**and grace upon grace.**"

When John adds the phrase "and grace upon grace" at the end of verse 16 he is explaining the experience of those who have by faith received of Christ's fullness. And one thing is very clear they are not simply sprinkled with grace, or dipped in grace, they are immersed in His grace.

The preposition "upon" denotes exchange. It literally means, "grace instead of grace." As the days come and go a new supply takes the place of the grace already bestowed.

The grace available in Christ is like a river flowing constantly, overflowing its banks with super-abounding grace. It is not like the LA River which is only flowing when there is a storm. It is much more like the King's River, powerful and constant. But even this image is inadequate to convey the supply of grace that is available to us as one who by faith has received from His fullness.

Hopefully there is not a single person here this weekend who does not see the value of that kind of super-abounding, overflowing grace that is pictured for us in the phrase, "and grace upon grace."

Listen to the following words I found in a commentary written by Lenski, "Grace is a treasure to which none others can be compared. Carry together all the treasures of earth, and all together they will not balance what lies in the one word grace. Grace is the blood-red mark which cancels the handwriting against us; the star of hope which sends its rays into this earth-life darkened by sin; the ladder which leads us upward; the immovable pillar which shall stand, though hills and mountains pass away, and shall support the covenant of the peace; the staff to which we can cling in our weakness; the guide who leads us safely through sorrow and death into the open portals of eternal blessedness."

Do you want grace to abound in your life? Do you want God's undeserved favor to carry you through the heartaches and struggles of this life into the presence of God and into eternal fellowship with the Lamb of God? It begins by seeing the superiority of Christ just as John the Baptist saw the superiority of Christ? It begins with us seeing Jesus as the Word who was with God and who was God, who chose to become flesh and dwell among us giving us the opportunity to view His glory, the glory of the only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth.

Have you *chosen* to behold by faith the glory of the only begotten from the Father and received from His fullness grace upon grace?

CONCLUSION

If you have then you should be well prepared to enter into the next part of our service. This weekend we will be commemorating the death of Christ.

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