



Sunday, May 24, 2020

Clifford Baptist Church, Amherst, Virginia
Rev. Dr. Michael R. Fitzgerald, Senior Pastor

(Transcription from the Morning Service that was Streamed Live)

Sermon: “Seeing and Knowing God”

Scripture: **John 1:10-18 (King James Version)**

Those who came to worship today in the sanctuary belonged to the alphabet group of last names “I – P.” In observance of the Memorial Day weekend, military decorations were displayed in memory of those who sacrificed their lives for our country and for our freedom. Deacon Glen Mabry opened with prayer, and there was special music “Living Waters” sung by Courtney Turner, Nathan Williams, Carrie Hill, Lynnette Ferro, and Naomi Giles.

Today we continue our study of the Gospel of John and as we open God’s word, we know He will speak to us through it. Let’s have a moment of prayer: Our Father, our God, thank You for these moments of worship together. Thank You for the beautiful music and prayers from this place and for singing together. I pray we’re all joined together in that spirit of worship—whether here in the sanctuary, in the parking lot listening to an FM signal, or in our homes via media, You’re joining us together with the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even though we’re separated out in the world, we’re joined together as we worship this day. Bless us with that sense of togetherness, Lord. Bless us to be the church even in changing conditions of our society. Help us to know we’re still witnesses—we still have a message and a ministry. Nothing will take us away from doing the ministry that You’ve given to us. Bless us today as we open Your word. We love You and thank You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

We’re taking our first steps through the Book of John. If you’re visiting with us, we’re on a long journey through this gospel in your New Testament. This book, of course, was written by the disciple John. Most of the twelve disciples died a martyr’s death while they were young men. But God allowed John the apostle to live in to his latter years of life. John came to realize he needed, under the inspiration of God, to pen the biography of the Lord Jesus Christ. He joins Matthew, Mark, and Luke as all four of these men penned the biography of the Lord Jesus through their eyes, minds, and hearts. The Lord God led every pen of the writer and that is certainly true for John the disciple. He writes this gospel very late in his life between 80-90 AD; it’s probably the last gospel to be written. John’s intention for this gospel was for it to be a witnessing tool. If you remember in John 20, he says I’m writing this so you might believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We want to use this sermon series as a witnessing tool to bring any person to Jesus who needs Him.

In the first two sermons, we studied the prologue of this gospel, the opening statement, John 1:1-18. It’s been called the “gospel in miniature.” If every Bible on earth was lost, any person could come to Christ as Lord and Savior through these eighteen verses. If you memorize any longer passage of Scripture, this would be a great beginning. These eighteen verses are enough of the word of God to lead any person to the Lord, and we have studied verses 1-9 up to this point.

Today, we’ll finish this prologue and study verses 10-18. Let’s hear how John continues to describe the life of Jesus the Christ. “He was in the world and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the

Father) full of grace and truth. John (this is John the Baptist) bare witness of him and cried saying, This was he of whom I spake. He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” May God add his blessing to the reading of this precious portion of His word.

To me, verse 10 is one of the saddest in all the Bible—“He was in the world and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not...” Throughout the Bible, especially here, it’s pointed out that Jesus Christ is eternal in nature. Jesus does not have a starting point—yes, He had a birth in Bethlehem but He existed long, long eons before Bethlehem ever came. Jesus in essence never really had a “birth date” because He has existed within the Godhead for all eternity past and He will for all eternity future. Jesus has always been; He was here during the creation. He was a part of the creative process. He is described as the “Son of God” but we also need to reverse that title to “God, the Son” eternal in nature. God has eternally been; He has no beginning—that is a true description of Jesus the Son.

Do you remember when Moses met God at the burning bush in Exodus 3? Moses is out doing his common shepherding duties; he’s eighty years old, getting close to “Social Security” and ready to retire. He’s looking forward to the rocking chair, to leaving his sheep, rest and not do much of anything else—then God appears! God comes in the form of a burning bush; it’s not consumed but the voice of God comes through it and calls Moses to a new purpose, direction, and way of life. God commissioned Moses to go to Egypt and be His spokesman to Pharaoh saying “let my people go” by bringing them out of slavery and captivity. If you remember as Moses speaks to God in the burning bush, he does something quite unusual in my mind. He begins to question God. All of us question Him from time to time. But when you’re with Him at the burning bush, it’s kind of unusual to question Him but Moses did. In Exodus 3:13 he says, God, if I go to the people of Israel in Egypt and say to them God Almighty has sent me to be your deliverer and to get you out of this slavery you’ve been in for centuries, they’re going to ask me a question: What is your God’s name? So, God, I’m asking you the question: What is your name? And God says tell them “I Am That I Am.” That name expresses the eternality of God—I am, I have always been, I always will be. In fact, if you were to boil the Hebrew down into English it comes out as four letters—JHWH. It’s called the “tetragrammiton” and we pronounce it “Yahweh.” The name of God that God gave to Moses at the bush. That name “I Am That I Am” expresses God’s eternal nature. There was never a moment when God came into existence; He has always been. He is the eternal “I Am.” I Am alive, I Am past, I Am present, I Am future, I Am the creator, I Am in control. Understand this—at the very base level, Jesus is the I Am.

As we go through the Gospel of John, we’ll study seven “I Am” statements of Jesus as He expresses Himself as part of the Godhead, part of the eternality of God. In John 1:10, John says Jesus made the world—you see that in the second phrase of verse 10. Jesus was on the level of creator. He was part of the Godhead when the universe was spoken into existence—remember, God simply spoke and it came to be. That’s called creation “ex nihilo”—out of nothingness comes creation. Jesus was there, and although we have a rough birth date of Jesus coming into the world as a human baby in Bethlehem, He merely stepped out of His eternal nature to come to us to take on flesh to become incarnate. As I’ve said before, many religions of the world acknowledge Jesus—that He’s a prophet, a spokesman, a witness of God in some way. But the Bible says no, He’s not a prophet, not a spokesman, but He Is God. He’s eternal, the God of glory. He laid aside His power and His presence in heaven to come to us. Friends, this is important! This is the theology the Bible stands on, that so many people have yet to grasp. I want us to understand it as John explains it to us by the inspiration of God.

As we see in this tenth verse of John 1, God the creator is physically walking amongst His creation. He’s stepped out of glory and taken on flesh and in flesh and bone is walking in the midst of creation. He knows every rock has an identity

because He created it. He knows every flower; He knows the color of the bud before it blooms because He created it. He knows the wings of an eagle, the roll of the sea—He knows it all! And on the Sea of Galilee, He can control it all! The sea was raging, and He said be quiet, be still and it became like a tabletop. While Jesus Christ intimately knew His creation, I remind you of this. As He walked the soil of this earth, He knew every person who passed Him. He knew every man or woman, boy or girl who walked by Him on those dusty roads. He knew their name, their heart, if they were carrying a load of guilt or burden of sin on their shoulders. He knew them through and through; He knew their talent and potential. But what John 1:10 says while Jesus intimately knew His creation and every person who walked by and continues to know us today, He was a stranger to those who walked by Him. While He knew every soul, the world knew Him not. The world had not come to Him. The Creator is walking in the middle of His handiwork, but He's a stranger in His own land—a stranger in the midst of His own creation. The creation does not recognize the Creator. Sadder still, His own family of kinship, the Jews, Israel don't know Him as Savior, Messiah. Here we are two thousand years later and they have yet to know Him as Savior.

A little later in John 7:5, Scripture says not even His own physical brothers knew Him. As He grew up in the home of Joseph and Mary, He had brothers He played with, ate with, and slept with and this verse says not even His own biological brothers knew Him. Thankfully we know by evidence from the Book of James some brothers came to Him. But there was a time when His own family didn't know Him and "received Him not." In our world today, friends, as we see this description from two thousand years ago it is still true. There are so many who don't know Him. He knows every one of us intimately—whoever you are, wherever you've been, whatever you've carried in your life—He knows you and me through and through, cell by cell. John 1:11 says He came to His own, His own creation and family and they rejected Him. They failed to recognize Him; they would not receive Him. They were too busy to take the time to know Him—this is still true today.

Here's the victory, where the good news comes as the turning point. For every person who opens his or eyes and sees Jesus as Savior and comes to Him and says Lord I believe You are the Son of God, I believe You are God the Son and I want You to be **my** God and be **my** Savior and I want to walk with You and have this relationship with You; I don't want a religion. I want to recognize You; I have seen Your cross. I know there's an empty grave, and I accept you as my Lord and Savior—for every one who believes on His name according to verse 12, we become sons and daughters of God Himself! We become His own—born into the Kingdom of God and blessed with eternal life and an eternal home. We're also blessed with an eternal purpose that begins right now in our lives as a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. If you did not hear the sermon about John the Baptist last week, "witness" is a key word in this gospel. He was the witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. John, the gospel writer, "ties the bow" on the end of this book by saying not only was John the Baptist but so are you believer, so am I believer. We are witnesses of this Savior and we carry it into the world as the church and as the outreach arm of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why we're here and what we are to do!

Look at John 1:13 which talks about saved people—those who believe on His name. "Which were born, not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." How did you and I get saved—if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus? How did we come to the saving relationship with Jesus the Christ? How did we pass from sin to forgiveness? How did we make the transition from death to eternal life? How did we pass from hell to heaven? How did that happen—to come to this eternal relationship with Jesus? Let's begin in the "negative" as John does here. John says our relationship did not come from blood lineage, kin to someone already a believer in God. I have two children but my son and daughter could never come to Jesus Christ because their daddy was a preacher! You don't follow anyone on their coattails getting into heaven. You make that decision one by one; each of us has to make a personal choice. John says you don't come by lineage; you don't come by kinship from someone who is "godly." It takes a decision. Our relationship of salvation does not come by work or will of the flesh. We did not work enough to produce the good works

to earn our way into heaven; it cannot be done. You can't give enough money to the church or to ministry to pay your way into heaven. I don't care if you're a "trillionaire" like Bill Gates—there's not enough money to pay your way into heaven! You can't ethically live the life that will get you there—no matter how good you and I think we are, it's not good enough. Being a son or daughter of God is beyond our ability to merit it or pay, work hard, or be good enough to get there. John says our salvation did not and could not come by the will of man or by any action of man or woman. It is totally an act of grace and love coming from God as we believe on Jesus as our Lord and Savior. That is **the** one way to forgiveness, purpose, and heaven.

Look at verse 14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth." John says we're forgiven and saved when we look upon Jesus, the Word, the Son of God, and see His cross and His empty tomb and we accept His grace and truth. Let me reverse those words and start with truth. What is the truth Jesus reveals to us? Every person is hopelessly lost in sin—that's the truth Jesus teaches us. We all need a Savior. There's no such thing as good sinners, bad sinners—sin is sin is sin! All of us are lost; there's no division of murderers, petty thieves, or little white liars. We're all sinners. Period. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. A lot of the world does not want to hear this truth. In the Town of Amherst I saw a bumper sticker—God put me behind this car several times to say this is what you're facing, pastor—"I was born the first time good enough." Many in the world would not understand this saying that I don't need a second birth; that I don't need Jesus. I was born good the first time. That's exactly what the Scripture is teaching—no, we all need a second birth and a Savior because we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. Listen to Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?" God can know it, and God does know it! All of us have a heart and by definition of the word of God and through the prophet Jeremiah, all of us have a wicked heart and have sin in us. That's the raw truth of God—grace and truth; there's the truth. We all need a Savior because we all sin.

Then we come to the second word, grace. Jesus teaches us that no matter who you are or how deep your sea of sin is, how far you feel you're away from God, He says my grace is sufficient to save you. You have never gotten so far from Me that I can't reach you. You've not gotten so far away that I don't have a road paved back to Me. That's our promise from our Savior: I'm ready to receive you—I want you as my daughter, my son. I have the grace sufficient to forgive you, save you, and bring you back to Me so I can give you eternal life. Somehow, God alone can bundle up this mountain of my sin—things I've said, thought, and done—He can pull it all together. Through Jesus' power expressed through the cross and the empty tomb, He can bind this pile of sin, pick it up, and cast it away farther from the east is from the west in forgiving me and you. Whoever you are, you're not away from Jesus' forgiveness if you come to Him. My friends, that's grace. Grace that's not simply available to a certain color of people, a certain kind of people, or certain people who just attain a small level of sin—no, grace covers us all. The truth is we're sinners but the God of grace will save us if we come to Him through Jesus His Son. Undeserved, unfathomable, unexplainable love comes to us through this God of grace.

John 1:15-16 says John the Baptist was the witness who told us Jesus was coming. From the moment Jesus was born in Bethlehem to when He walked out of the grave, the earthly journey of Jesus—we saw the grace, the love, the face of God in Jesus the Christ. When Jesus took the children in His arms, we see God. When Jesus forgave the sinning woman, we see God. When He healed the sick, we see God. When He gave sight to the blind, we see God. We see the fullness of grace at the old rugged cross. Friends, I want you to know—this is our "photo album" of what God looks like. In this we see the picture of Jesus. When we read Jesus' words, it's what God speaks like. That's why you need to keep this book close by; don't just put it under your pillow and by osmosis learn the word of God. You need to read it; it needs to become part of our hearts and lives. Seeing Jesus here shows us what God is like. When He says to Nicodemus "be born again," we hear God. When Jesus says I'm the shepherd of the sheep, we understand God's heart. When Jesus says

“Lazarus, come forth!” we understand God’s power over death. When He says “It is finished” from the cross, we understand the depth of His love. So John’s point in these verses today is when you see and hear Jesus, you’re directly seeing and hearing God. He makes God known to us so we understand. This is crucial for all of us to hear—it’s the simplest, plainest word of the Bible. If you do not know Jesus, you cannot know God. It’s the raw truth of Scripture; Jesus teaches us that. John’s gospel teaches us that. For Buddha, Islam, Jehovah’s Witnesses—I want you to know this is absolute truth coming from the heart, mind, and mouth of God. If you don’t know Jesus, you can’t know God. There’s no other way to God the Father than through Jesus the Son. He is the way, the truth, and the life. John nails that huge point right here and over and over again in his gospel, you’ll hear it.

As you hear this sermon today, can you say I do know Jesus as my Savior. I’m not asking if you’re in church; if you’re good; if you’re a minor sinner; how ethical you are; if you’ve ever stolen—I’m not asking any of that. I’m asking do you know K N O W Jesus in a relationship as your Savior? Can you say I’ve felt the love of God poured on my heart? Can you say today I have full forgiveness? Can you say today I have a purpose for living—I know what God wants me to do with my life; He’s given me purpose. Can we say today I am sure of heaven—I have no doubt of my eternal home. Can you say today I am sold out and surrendered to the One who came for me—Jesus the Son, God the Son. I’m surrendered to Him as my Savior. Everything about my life belongs to Him. Believer, can you say that to Him? The raw truth is that is what He expects from us. As He gives us His grace, He wants the totality of our life. If you can say that, praise God!

But listen, friends, if you’ve never said that I want to bring you to Him today. This is the most important moment in this service—for that one who’s lost, who’s hell-bound—this is eternal good news. Congregation, I want you to pray for this invitation: I want to introduce you to Jesus; He is God. He is Love, and He holds in His hands and in His heart the ability to forgive you and adopt you as son or daughter who belongs to the Kingdom of God for all eternity. Listen to John 1:12 again “But as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of god, even to them that believe on his name.” He wants every person as His son or daughter. But you need to believe on His name and name Him as your Savior. Come to Him because the raw truth of the Scripture is you need Him; I need him, too. I came to the moment when I knew I needed Him and gave my life to Him. I’m praying and begging you to do the same today. Don’t put it off; don’t wait until you’re better or a Bible scholar—do it now. Just as you are, come to Jesus as Savior. He wants you, and He can save you. This moment He can promise you heaven if you simply come to Him and say Lord Jesus, I believe. Will you come today? He’s waiting. Church, God bless you! God bless His message to us that we serve the Son of God and God the Son.

Let’s pray together: Our Father, our God thank You for these verses of the Gospel of John. Lord, thank You that no man has ever seen God according to verse 18 but when we see Jesus, we see God. Amazingly, we have the literal album of His life in our Bibles right here on our laps today. I pray today, Lord, that we’ll come to know You in a deeper relationship day by day. Thank you for this day of worship, Lord, however we’ve worshipped together. Bless us as we worship the Son of God, God the Son, Jesus Christ. Because in Him, and Him alone, is life eternal. Bless that one who needs You as Savior today. I pray he or she can come just as they are, and You’ll receive them in Jesus’ name. Amen.