



Series: For God So Loved...

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Text: John 1:14-18

Title: Seeing & Receiving is Believing

MPS - The only way to see God is to receive grace, and the only way to receive Jesus is to believe that Jesus is God.

Good morning, Mercy family! SOMETHING ABOUT PROMO SUNDAY, AUDREY, BEING WITH THE CHURCH, ETC.

One of my fondest family memories growing up was Friday night movie and pizza time. We'd go down to the local Family Video store, pick out a VHS, or DVD if we were feeling fancy, and grab a couple pizzas from our favorite parlor and head back to the house and enjoy a good time. Great memories!

I don't know if you like to watch movies or not, but after I met my wife Meredith, I was glad that she also shared the same love for a good movie. And, you know, some movies are just better meant for the big screen. You know what I mean? Personally, I prefer the theater for most action-packed movies.

Well, if you're like Meredith, one of your favorite parts of going to the movies is watching the trailers. Are you like that?

I mean this girl LOVES the trailers so much! We're usually at the movie theater 15 minutes early just to ensure we don't miss them, which is a stark contrast to most other engagements! And trailers have come a long way over the years.

Mere and I saw this trailer the other day for this new movie called "The Beast". Have you heard of this movie yet? Basically, here's the idea - Actor, Idris Elba, plays a dad who takes his two daughters on a trip to Africa where they embark on a tour of the beautiful game land when they're confronted with an abnormally behaving lion unlike any lion their guide has ever encountered. This lion seems to be hunting them! Well, as you can imagine from the name of this movie, this lion is A BEAST! I haven't seen the film, but after watching this trailer with Meredith, she looked at me and said, "Well, we basically just saw that movie." You know that feeling? When a trailer basically gives away the whole plot.

I wasn't a film major, but the idea of what a trailer is supposed to do seems pretty simple to me. If you make a good trailer, you create hype and excitement for the upcoming release of the full-length movie. The producers are giving you just enough of the story to get you hooked. If they give you too much, you might lose interest. If they don't give you enough, you might make a different selection for your Friday pizza and entertainment.



And our passage today isn't much different than a movie trailer.

We're going to be picking back up in John chapter 1 and covering verses 14 through 18.

Now remember, the first 18 verses of the book of John serve as a prologue to the whole book. Verses 1-18 serve as a bit of a trailer to the whole story. The author, John, inserts just enough to hook us. Just enough to introduce what's about to follow. This prologue is strategically placed, powerfully composed, and richly themed. As a matter of fact, several key themes like light, life, witness, glory, truth and others are introduced in these short 18 verses of scripture.¹ But the major and likely most significant part of this prologue is the depiction of how the Son of God, the Messiah, the Word, God Himself came into the story of history. The Creator and Author of this world, enters into the context of what's happened up to this point in time, transforming forevermore God's love story of redemption and reconciliation. It really is a truly beautiful passage with truths deep enough to literally CHANGE YOUR LIFE. And that's my hope for this sermon, that's our

¹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 110–111.

hope for this series. This is why we entitled it “For God so loved” because we want you to experience, whether afresh or for the first time ever, the deep love of God for you and we hope that this experience will change your life. Here at Mercy, *we expect God to change a life today*. And I expect God to show up in this passage to me and to you and to change our lives as a result.

Let me tell you where we're going for the next little bit. I've entitled this sermon: “Seeing & Receiving is Believing”

And here's my desire today:

- First, I want to walk through the passage and make a few observations along the way
 - This text is beautiful, and I think God has some work to do in me and you today through this Word.
- Second, I hope to show you that the “The only way to see God is to receive grace, and the only way to receive grace is to believe that Jesus is God.”



So, with that in mind, let's pray and ask God together to meet us.

Prayer -

Let's get into the text. Picking up in chapter 1, verse 14

14 The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the father, full of grace and truth.

Wow! There's a lot in here. So, let's break this down sentence by sentence.

First, *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*

We learned a couple weeks ago that when John refers to the Word here is referring to Jesus. Even though Jesus' name hasn't been mentioned yet, we know from the greater context that John is talking about him. And John's already told us that the Word *was* God, *is* God. So, John is saying that God became flesh. God became human. This simple sentence is describing the wonderful and deep doctrine of the incarnation- "God

incorporated in flesh."² We, as the church, celebrate the incarnation every year at Christmas remembering the coming of God into the story to change and transform forevermore the world through the person and work of Jesus.

Church don't miss this! God became human flesh. This single truth changes everything about our faith. Don't be mistaken, God didn't set aside any of his "Godness" to become a human. He didn't become ½ God ½ man like in the tales of Greek demi-gods. He was fully God and fully man. This is miraculous! This is wonderful! And sometimes I think we hear this so much in church, that we miss its significance. So, you're going to hear me slow down a few times today to focus on this. I'm doing that because THIS IS SO IMPORTANT and slowing down helps us to feel that.

The text continues, *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*

The word written by John that is translated as dwelt means to make a dwelling or to make a tent. I love Eugene Peterson's rendering of this word in *The Message*, "he moved into the neighborhood"³. The original audience would have heard this

² Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 119.

³ Eugene Petersen. John 1:14 *The Message*



word dwell and heard tabernacled, and the idea here is a call back to the Old Testament tabernacle (Ex. 26).

So, what was the tabernacle? Well, in short, God made the whole world and walked freely with people in the Garden of Eden. After people sinned, God didn't dwell with people like that any longer. But God set aside a people for Himself, and He commanded this people, the Israelites, to build this beautiful tent mimicking God's heavenly temple. It was understood that God met with His people in this tent. God's presence was in this tent. God's priests would speak to God in this place. God's prophets would hear from God in this place. God's people would worship God in this place.

So, when John wrote that "The Word became flesh and 'tabernacled' among us," his readers, mostly Jewish, or at the least familiar with their history, would likely have been overwhelmed with the profundity of God taking on flesh as His grandest gesture of love toward people. He LITERALLY, moved into their neighborhood. Church don't miss this; GOD MADE THIS MOVE TOWARDS US! This is part of why the incarnation is so significant. It's God who bridged the divide that man caused!

Imagine for just a minute, what it would be like to have God move into Charlotte, into your neighborhood, into your apartment complex. Wouldn't that be amazing!?! Talk about

the best neighbor EVER! This idea is just insane, and just as it was life-transforming news for the original audience, it still is for us today! Jesus moving towards us like this should transform the way we, AS JESUS PEOPLE, move towards the lost around us. We mustn't run away from the lost, but instead take our queue from our Leader, the one we're following.

If this is new to you or you don't feel anything at all stirring in your soul at the sound of this truth, then please stick around Mercy for a while, keep reading in the book of John and, when you're done, continue beyond to the read the rest of the New Testament to learn about God moving even closer than human flesh, even closer than the neighborhood! I dare you!

Well, the text continues,

14 We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the father, full of grace and truth.

Now remember a few weeks back when we had our overview of the book of John. John is writing this account of Jesus' life quite a few years after Jesus had already left this earth and after all of the other accounts of Jesus' life, Matthew Mark and Luke, were written. As he looked back on all that Jesus did, who he had seen Jesus to be, he wrote these words:



We observed, or we've seen, his glory, God's glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Here John is doubling down on the significance of God becoming flesh. To most of his original audience when he said that God's glory has been seen or observed, there would have been an immediate connection to the stories of old, the stories that comprise what we now call the Old Testament. We should read the passage the way they would have read it. They would have understood glory to represent the image, the power, the revealed character, and the very presence of God.

Remember that tabernacle we talked about earlier? Well, that tabernacle was understood to regularly be filled with the glory of God even to the point of being visible as a cloud descending on the tabernacle. The "glory" of God was considered especially significant to God's people. So, John recounting in retrospect that *we have seen his glory* is another way of saying, we've seen God. In Jesus, we've seen God!⁴

John continues.

⁴ D. A. Carson, [*The Gospel according to John*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 127–128.

He says that he, referring to Jesus, was full of grace and truth. Here we have another callback to the Old Testament understanding of who God was. We'll unpack that more in a minute, but for now let's keep going.

Here's what we need to know from verse 14: Jesus is God in the flesh dwelling with people and when we look at Jesus, we see God's glory—we see God Himself!

Let's continue

Verse 15

15 (John testified concerning him and exclaimed, "This was the one of whom I said, 'The one coming after me ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.'")

Now you might be a little confused here with who this John is. Here's what's going on: the author John, we'll call him John A (for John the apostle) is talking about John B (for John the Baptist).



John A is telling us that even John B testified to Jesus being God. He's saying that Jesus, who was younger than John B in age, was in fact in existence before John B. Next week, we're picking up with the first story in this book. We'll be done with our prologue and get into the actual stories about Jesus and His ministry here on earth. This little parenthetical reference is here to show us yet again-JESUS IS GOD.

Are you picking up on this theme? This theme is foundational to everything John is about to write down. Every single story that follows John 1 verse 18 pivots on this key truth- that Jesus is God. And more, it's foundational to everything that we believe now in 2022. It's foundational to everything that Mercy Church has done, is doing, and will ever do. Jesus is the point of the whole story! And, if Jesus isn't God, then none of this story matters!

Alright, let's continue in verse 16

16 Indeed, we have all received grace upon grace from his fullness, 17 for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Now John is shifting into talking about what we've received in the person of Jesus. First, he hit on what we've seen (see that in verse 14) and now he's hitting on what we've received in

Jesus. And church, in the person of Jesus, we have received so so much, I HAVE RECEIVED so much!

And that's exactly John's point here. When he talks of receiving grace upon grace from the fullness of Jesus, he's saying we have received **infinite** grace. Grace on top of grace on top of grace on top of grace. John's going to riff on this idea of unending blessing found in Jesus later in the book. In chapter 4, Jesus is going to tell a woman looking for water, that He gives living water that permanently quenches thirst. A picture of the power of God to bring forever life. In chapter 6, after taking five loaves of bread and turning it into enough bread to feed more than 5,000 people with leftovers, Jesus tells the people that He is the bread from heaven that gives life to the world and forever removes hunger. Another picture of Jesus being the SOURCE of life- eternal life.

Have you ever heard someone make the joke about gracing you with their presence? I've heard this used mostly as a passive-aggressive way to call out someone who's typically a little fuller of themselves than is tolerable. They show up at a party and someone drops it, "Oh Jake, so nice of you to grace us with your presence!" Or maybe you've heard it used to call out someone who's walking in late to a meeting. Again, passive-aggressive, but it usually gets the point across.

Well, here's the thing that's beautiful about verse 15, John is



saying that ALL have received grace upon grace from the fullness of Jesus. God truly has GRACED US with his presence in the person of Jesus and this is such incredible news!

The text continues in verse 17 and John starts to contrast Jesus with the law. But what's all of this law stuff about and why's it even in here?

In quick summary, around the same time that God gave the Israelites instructions on how to build that tabernacle, he also gave them what became known as the law- God's spoken commandments that would imprint His nature on His people when they followed them. If they obeyed His law, blessings followed. If they disobeyed His law, problems ensued. And we learn from other scriptures that Jesus came to fulfill or complete the law (Matt 5, Rom 8, Gal 3-4:7). So what John is saying here is that the law was GIVEN, not as a curse or something bad, but as a gift. Look at the word usage here in verse 17. The law was *given*, do you see that, implying something good. Cause you see God's law was and is good for His people. It reveals our need for a Savior by displaying our inability to be Holy or perfect. This is his way of showing the people that God has given, through Moses, a great gift-grace!

⁵ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Ex 34:6.

The law is grace to people. But John doesn't stop with the law and its benefits. No!

He goes on to say that grace AND truth came through Jesus. The law was given. But grace and truth CAME. Remember earlier when we read in verse 14 about Jesus being full of grace and truth? Well, now John's saying that grace and truth came through Jesus. So, what's so significant about these two words that John would use them twice within just a few verses to describe Jesus?

Well, back when this law referenced here was being given to Moses by God Himself, God speaks to Moses (Ex. 34) and describes Himself. Anytime we get to hear God describe Himself in scripture, we must pay attention. So, look with me at Exodus 34:6

6 The Lord passed in front of him and proclaimed: The Lord—the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth Exodus 34:6 CSB⁵

Abounding in “faithful love” and “truth”. These two words, translated elsewhere as steadfast love and faithfulness, become staple terms to describe the character of God



throughout many generations. The Old Testament is laced with these words and any Jewish child would have learned from an early age that these terms described the God of Israel-Yahweh, the LORD their God.

So, John isn't *just* saying that Jesus could be described as being full of grace and truth (or steadfast love and faithfulness), No church! He's saying that steadfast love and faithfulness CAME through Jesus. The law was given but grace and truth CAME. This is personalized language. "Came" implies personal intent.

Think of like this, imagine your hero or someone who's very powerful and important. Now, imagine that they sent you a personal gift for your birthday. Like, LeBron James sends you a birthday gift that he bought for you. Or maybe it's Queen Elizabeth who sends you a note with a personal gift just because. That would be pretty incredible right!?! Well, that gift, from that person who really has no business giving you a gift, is like the law. Grace given from a perfect God.

But now imagine this. Imagine that LeBron shows up at your doorstep. He wants to hang out. He wants to grab dinner. The Queen shows up to your workplace. As the buzz makes its way through the office, you hear your name called by her inviting you to lunch.

That gift was pretty epic. But the personal presence of the Gift Giver...that's next level! And this is what John is saying is happening. The law was given. But grace and truth CAME.

Do you want to know the character of God, what He's like? We just saw when he spoke of Himself back in Exodus that He's compassionate, that He's a gracious God, that He isn't quick to judge or become angry, NO! He is slow to anger and abounding in faithful love, steadfast love, unending love, and truth, faithfulness. This is the character of God! And John is saying that grace and truth CAME. He came to us Mercy Church! Oh, what glory?! What joy?! That God would come to us. Bringing life! Not condemnation for our sins, not punishment for our many wrongs, not the death that we EACH deserve, but life eternal! Oh, how we have received, IN JESUS, grace upon grace upon grace! Hallelujah! This is such good news for us! He's come! God Himself has come. And we have done nothing more than receive! We have in fact received (SLOW DOWN) grace upon grace upon grace.

Let's look together at verse 18

John finishes his prologue not too different from how he started.

18 No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father's side—he has revealed him.



John's doing the same thing here that he did back in verse 1. You remember when he said the Word *was* God AND the Word *was with* God? Well, he's doing the same thing here with this personal picture of the one and only Son who IS himself God and is also at God the Father's side. He's wrapping up this beautiful prologue with a bit of a poetic statement. He says that "no one has seen God". But he's already established that Jesus is God and that we've seen God's glory in Jesus. So no has ever seen God, UP UNTIL JESUS. BECAUSE CHURCH, JESUS IS GOD! So, when John or any of the disciples looked at Jesus, they saw God! And the same is true for us. If you want to see God, look no further than Jesus!!

We learned a few weeks ago something really key about the book of John. The book of John, unlike most books in the Bible, gives us its intended purpose. So, we MUST pay attention to this purpose.

Look with me at John 20:31. Right before the author concludes with his epilogue, he shares this

31 But these are written so that you may **believe** that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:31 CSB⁶

John wrote down all these stories and recounted many specific details so that the readers may BELIEVE and so that their belief would bring LIFE- forever life! Such a beautiful purpose to write something that is so precious, so sacred, and so wonderful that it's still transforming lives today! It's still bringing life!

Let me ask you a question friend...

Do you WANT to see God? His glory? His nature?

Do you WANT to receive grace upon grace? Steadfast love and faithfulness?

Do you????

I said earlier that I wanted to show you that "The only way to see God is to receive grace, and the only way to receive grace is to believe that Jesus is God."

⁶ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Jn 20:31.



This is my only sermon point because I want it to sink in.

Let me ask you this. Look up here for a second.

WHY ARE YOU HERE TODAY? Why are you in church?

(Obligation) Is it an obligation? I mean, maybe you feel like you HAVE to be here. Do your circumstances make it seem impossible to skip church? Maybe your parents are making you be here? Maybe you work here? You might be here today and feel a sense of obligation to *be in church*.

(Duty) Or maybe it's just HABIT or DUTY. This is what you do on Sunday. It's how you were raised.

I think of my upbringing,
"We are the Greers. And on Sunday, the Greers go to church."
Is that you?

(Guilt) Maybe it's GUILT. You've done some bad things in your life and being at church on Sunday morning makes your guilt subside a little. Are you sitting here right now having difficulty listening because you keep thinking about how much you did this week that you're ashamed of or wouldn't want ANYONE in this room to know about?

(Entertainment) Maybe you're here today because it's fun. You like the music, the energy, the passion. You enjoy the

break from your kids. Your favorite restaurant is over by the church and your favorite people go there every Sunday with you. You enjoy social interaction. You used to like the preaching, until I started this little segment. Is this you? Are you here to be entertained?

(Works) Or how about this one? This one's particularly sneaky! Maybe you're here today because it's what "good people" do and after all, you think you're a good person. Is being in church this morning with Bible and notepad ready, dressed in your Sunday best your way of EARNING your ticket to heaven? Do you think that being good enough will get you there?

Receiving grace makes you uncomfortable. You'd rather earn than receive. I mean that's what we WANT. We feel good when we earn something - an award, a break, a paycheck, a bonus, a spouse, a cheat meal, a good performance review. Because that's how it works right? We perform and then we are rewarded for our performance? We like that exchange. It feels fair.

Being in church...it's just part of the earning-the performance?

(Expectancy) You know though, some of you are here because you're expectant. You brought your Bible and journal because you love God's Word and learning more about it. Yeah, you made mistakes this week, but you come in here knowing that you're forgiven. And you want to sing your favorite songs celebrating the God who extended grace upon grace just this



last week. You're not here to earn but to receive. And you keep coming back, not because this church is special and not just because it's a habit, but because Jesus loves His church, and you love yours.

(Desperation) Maybe you've come here today because this is your last resort. You've been doing this life on your own for far too long and the church felt like a place where you could find a new way forward. Maybe you want healing. Maybe you're looking for forgiveness. You want renewal. You're in search of LIFE.

Well, listen my friends, let me tell you this. I don't care why you're here. I'm not bothered by your motivation. I don't judge you.

I've been in church before because of obligation.

I've been swept up in the duty and habit of spiritual things and lost grip on the sacred nature of this place.

I've tried to drown my guilt by listening to worship or acting in front of my Christian friends like everything's okay.

I've sought to be entertained by spiritual things and found myself disappointed when a church service was less than awesome.

And man, oh man, have I tried so hard through religious activities to EARN God's favor over and over to no avail.

But the more that I look at Jesus, my God, and see His glory, the more I come into this place expectant and desperate. I expect God to meet me here and I'm regularly desperate for that meeting.

Listen, I don't know why you're here. But I'm glad.

You know why? Because God is in this room. While He's not JUST in this room, but He IS here. I'm glad you're here because these verses on the screen hold POWER. I'm glad you're here because this is a place of worship, this is a place of healing, this is a place that offers hope and a new way forward, this is a place of forgiveness, this is a place of grace! I'm glad you're here because I love you and I believe, we believe, that God can change your life today.

And here's my hunch about you.

You DO want to see God!

You DO want to receive grace, truth, steadfast love, faithfulness!

I mean who wouldn't really want this!?



“The only way to see God is to receive grace, and the only way to receive grace is to believe that Jesus is God.”

Do you believe that? **Do you believe that Jesus is God?**

Now, for lots of us in this room, when we hear this question, we instantly answer with “yes! I do believe that.” We have received Jesus and we see Him as our Lord. If that’s you today, I want to challenge you to:

1. Worship Him like He’s God. Not just in this next song, but when you leave this place. If Jesus is God and you actually believe that it should change everything about your life. And your life should be characterized by praise! Because what else do people do in the presence of God but bow down and worship!
2. Love others like He’s God. Jesus gave two simple commands to his people- Love God and love others. So that’s my second challenge to you. Where do you need to love God more? Where do you need to love others more? Wherever it is, it’s worth it.

Now maybe when I asked that question **Do you believe that Jesus is God?** you answered, “No.”

If you don’t believe and you’re not ready to, here’s my challenge for you- my dare. Two things.

1. Stick around for this series and
2. Read the book of John.

See if John’s purpose comes true for you. See if you end up believing that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. God Himself! Cause here’s what I know. If you come to believe that you WILL FIND LIFE IN HIS NAME!

I’m praying for you.

Lastly, I want to address the final group in the room. When you hear me say, “Do you believe that Jesus is God?” you answer, “No, but I think I’m ready.”

If that’s you, here’s my challenge- During the next worship song, I want you to go to the back of the room and pray with someone. I know that’s a big step and probably makes you nervous enough to throw up right now. I know it’s a big ask! But, let me tell you, my friend. There is no greater thing than receiving LIFE, there’s no better gift than the Son of God, and there’s no other god, no other source of life, out there that can offer what the God of this Bible offers.

Jesus came, fully God and fully man. He left His throne to take on human flesh. He lived on this earth and experienced life



like you and I do with highs and lows, laughter and sorrow,
pain and suffering.

But...

He, unlike me and unlike you, never sinned. Not once!

In the pages of this book, in the weeks ahead, you'll see what
He is like.

He looks at the unnoticed,
He offers sight to the blind,
He calls the unchosen,
He speaks to the outcast,
He heals the sick,
He touches people who are disgusting to everyone else,
He feeds the hungry,
He stands up to evil men and stands up for the oppressed,
He serves His friends,
He blesses the poor,
He mourns with the hurting,

He forgives His betrayers
He takes on the punishment that you and I deserve.
He dies for all sins for all people for all time.
He rises from the dead and defeats death!
And
He is coming back someday for His people!
He is God!

He's changed my life. He's saved, healed, restored, renewed,
corrected, developed, forgiven, befriended, and sustained me.
Most of my life centers around Him! And IT'S ALL WORTH IT!
Jesus is everything to me! I can't wait to see him be everything
to you!

So, if you're ready to put your faith in Him today, you're ready
to believe by receiving this God that you now see, head to the
back and pray with someone. We're waiting for you!

Let's pray!