
JOHN 1:14-18

1. TEXT AND TRANSLATION

14 The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we saw his glory for ourselves, the glory of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. 15 John testifies concerning him and cries aloud, saying "This was he of whom I said 'he who comes after me is greater than me, for he was before me.'" 16 For through his fullness, we all received grace and more grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses, yet grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God, yet God the One and Only who is in union with the father, he has made him known. (Own Translation)

Verse 18 contains the only textual variant in this passage with five options for the phrase μονογενής θεός (*God the One and Only*). Options four and five: μονογενής υἱός θεοῦ (*only Son of God*); and ὁ μονογενής (*the One and Only*), have very little external support and can be ruled out up front. Of the remaining options, option three is the easier reading: ὁ μονογενής υἱός (*the only son*), and (perhaps for this reason) has significant external support particularly in the minuscules and Patristic writings. However, options one and two: μονογενής θεός (*God the One and Only*), and ὁ μονογενής θεός (*God the One and Only [article included]*) which have a very similar sense, differentiated only by the inclusion of the article in option two, both have the strongest internal support (a harder reading) and external support (earliest and weightiest support including minuscules, uncials, and Patristic writings). Finally, of these two, option one is to be preferred based on external evidence since this variant has the agreement of α , B, C, and P⁶⁶.

2. INTRODUCTION – LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although the author is anonymous in the gospel, given the strong external evidence, the traditional view is maintained here that the author is the apostle John, the

beloved disciple, albeit with some later editorial activity (21:24).¹ An early form of John's gospel likely existed,² but probably found its form which is included in our canon in around A.D. 80.³

A good starting point in identifying the recipients and their location would be to assume that the gospel is intended for the Johannine community in Ephesus.⁴ However, the question regarding whether the gospel is primarily evangelistic or edificatory should further clarify the audience, as will the question of whether the intended audience is Jew and or Gentile. These two questions will be taken in turn.

The purpose of the gospel is made explicit by John in 20:30-31, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs ... these are written 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." This explicit purpose, as well as the emphasis throughout on the need to believe in Jesus in order to receive and experience eternal life (6:35; 8:12; 11:25; 14:6) is indicative of a primarily evangelistic purpose, while a secondary purpose could certainly include the edification of existing believers.⁵

Kruse suggests that the audience is primarily unbelieving Greek speaking Jews.⁶ 'Unbelieving', because of the evangelistic purpose, and 'Greek speaking Jews' because (among other things) messiahship (*cf.* 20:30-31) is not a key issue for the Gentiles. The gospel is undoubtedly very Jewish,⁷ however in light of the inclusion

¹ While the external evidence is strong, this position is not without its difficulties. For further discussion in defence of the above, see D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (PNTC; Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 68-81. Or for an alternative interpretation, see George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *John* (2nd edn; WBC; Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), lxvi – lxxv.

² See the reconstruction by Colin G. Kruse, *The Gospel according to John : an introduction and commentary* (TNTC; Leicester: IVP, 2003), 18-19.

³ So, Beasley-Murray, *John*, lxxxi; Carson, *John*, 82; and Kruse, *John*, 32)

⁴ It is generally believed that John lived in Ephesus was an esteemed figure in the group of churches in this region. Kruse, *John*, 18-19.

⁵ So, Kruse, *John*, 22; and, Carson, *John*, 90-91.

⁶ Kruse, *John*, 21.

⁷ To this end, Beasley-Murray highlights that Jesus is presented in John as the fulfiller of the meaning of the Jewish Feasts including Passover (chap. 6), Tabernacles (chap. 7), and Dedication (chap. 10). Beasley-Murray, *John*, lix.

of numerous clarifications regarding Jewish authorities, festivals, and rites (2:6, 17; 3:1; 4:9; 5:1; 11:55; 19:21, 31, 40),⁸ perhaps a case could be made that John also had in mind the Gentile unbelievers on the fringes of his believing community. In addition, if the Greco-Roman usage of terms such as ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (*the Son of God*) in 20:30-31 are considered,⁹ perhaps the statement of purpose in 20:30-31 could be seen to be addressing both Jews and Gentiles utilising terms which are meaningful to both: messiah, and Son of God.¹⁰ Further, as many have suggested, the term λόγος (*word*) in the prologue is a significant one regarding John's audience, in that it engages a broad spectrum of religious backgrounds, speaking to both Jewish and Gentile hearers.¹¹ As such, it is suggested here that the audience of this gospel is primarily unbelieving Greek speaking Jews, but also includes Gentile unbelievers as well. This audience is likely those on the fringes of, or who interacted with, the Johannine community in Ephesus.¹² The purpose then is primarily evangelistic, urging the unbelieving Greek speaking Jews and Gentiles in Ephesus, that (1) Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that (2) through believing they can have life in his name.

⁸ key clarifications include "six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification" (2:6), "Passover of the Jews" (2:17; 11:55), "a ruler of the Jews" (3:1), "For Jews do not associate with Samaritans" (4:9), "the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the Sabbath, especially because that Sabbath was a day of great solemnity" (19:31), "according to the burial custom of the Jews" (19:40).

⁹ Van Tilborg identifies the religious and political significance of the term ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (*the Son of God*) in the daily life of the Gentiles (and Jews) in Ephesus. Some of the titles for the emperors include "son of God" for Augustus, "son of God Claudius" for Nero, "son of God Vespian" for Titus, as well as similar titles for Domitian, Trajan, and Hadrian. Van Tilborg suggests that these terms are practically exclusively reserved for emperors, but here in the Johannine text they are reserved exclusively for Jesus. These titles therefore carry religious and political significance for Gentiles living in Ephesus – both at the time of Jesus, and the time of John writing his gospel. Sjef van Tilborg, *Reading John in Ephesus* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), 38-39, 53.

¹⁰ Carson suggests that this view is without warrant since 'Son of God' is comprehensible within a Jewish framework (Carson, *John*, 90 fn1). While the latter is true, it should probably not be used to deny a possible Gentile audience. Perhaps not unlike his use of λόγος, John is using a key term which is meaningful to both Jew and Gentile hearers.

¹¹ Beasley-Murray, *John*, lxvi. See also Carson, *John*, 62.

¹² Interestingly, in arguing against a Palestine setting, Witherington points to numerous clarifications which suggest that the audience is unfamiliar with the geography of the holy land (1:28; 2:1; 3:23; 4:3-4; 5:2-3; 6:1; 11:18). Ben Witherington, *John's Wisdom: a commentary on the fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 33. However, the certainty of this Ephesian setting is not to be overstated.

The passage which is the focus of this case study (John 1:14-18) is part of the Gospel's prologue (1:1-18). In the wider structure of the book, this prologue is followed by three broad sections: Jesus' ministry and work in the world (1:19-12:50); Jesus' return to the father (13:1-20:31); and an epilogue (21:1-25).¹³ The twin themes of Jesus' identity, and his role in making the father known, which are introduced in the prologue are ever-present throughout each section of the Gospel. Regarding Jesus' identity, one need only trace the many titles given to Jesus,¹⁴ as well as the 'I am' sayings throughout (6:35; 8:12; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1). Regarding Jesus' role in making the father known, consistent with the way that Jesus is identified with the father in the prologue, in the Gospel which follows that which Jesus does is that which the father does (5:19ff; 10:37). 'Knowing Jesus' is the same as 'knowing the father' (14:6-14). Jesus makes the father known throughout the gospel in every aspect of his words, work, life, death, and resurrection (3:31-36; 5:17-26; 8:18-20; 10:37-38; 14:6-14; 16:3; 17:25-26; 20:26-29).¹⁵

The rhythmical prose¹⁶ of the prologue seems to be arranged in a chiastic structure as follows:¹⁷

A. The Identity and work of the Word in the beginning (vv1-5)

B. John testifies concerning the Word (vv6-8)

C. The true light in the world (vv9-11)

D. Those who believe become Children of God (vv12-13)

C'. The Word in the world (v14)

B'. John testifies concerning the Word (v15)

¹³ This broad structure is quite common. So, Kruse, *John*, 51; Beasley-Murray, *John*, vii-viii; Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John I-XII* (Anchor; New York: Doubleday, 1966), cxxxviii.

¹⁴ For example, Rabbi (1:38, 3:2, 26; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8), King of Israel (1:49; 12:13), King of the Jews (18:39; 19:3; 19:19), Son of God (1:34, 49; 3:18; 5:25; 11:4; 27; 19:7; 20:31), God (1:1, 18; 20:28), Messiah (1:17, 41; 7:41; 11:27; 17:3; 20:31), Lord (6:23, 68; 9:38; 13:13; 14:5; 20:2, 18; 21:7, 12), saviour (4:42).

¹⁵ These verse references could be multiplied many times. Jesus refers to his father in over 100 verses throughout the Gospel.

¹⁶ This is the genre suggested by Carson. Carson, *John*, 112. Others have suggested poetic prose, or poetry.

¹⁷ The chiastic structure presented here is similar to that of Colin Kruse, see Kruse, *John*, 58-74.

A'. The identity and work of the Word in the World (vv16-18)

As such, John 1:14-18 continues on from the center of the chiasm which itself echoes John's stated purpose (20:30-31) quite closely. Each section in John 1:14-18 picks up and extends the theme of its counterpart in the structure. Beginning with a description of the incarnation of the Word in the world (v14, cf. vv9-11), the passage then details a testimony of John the Baptist concerning the Word (v15, cf. vv6-8), before identifying the incarnate Word as the person of Jesus, and providing a header to his work in the world, in particular, making his father known to the world (vv16-18, cf. 1-5).

3. VERSE ANALYSIS

v14 In God's ultimate act of self-disclosure, the *λόγος* (Word) becomes flesh and he makes his dwelling among us. John's use of the term *λόγος* likely engaged a wide audience since it has roots in both Jewish and Hellenistic thought. Firstly, regarding Jewish background, which is likely the primary background for John, the 'Word' is illustrated in the OT as God's creative and sustaining word (Gen 1:3f; Ps 33:6) as well as the word of God spoken to and through the prophets (e.g. Is 7:3; 38:40; 55:11). In Psalm 119 the Torah is frequently referred to as the *Word* of God (119:9, 11, 16, 17 etc.). There is also contact between the concepts of Wisdom and the Word in Jewish literature. Wisdom is personified as the agent of creation (Pr 8:22-31), and this bears similarities with the personification of the Word in the inter-testamental period (e.g. Wisdom 7:22-8:1; 18:14-15). Similarly, Wisdom is described as the personification of the Law of Moses (Sirach 24:8-23). Secondly, regarding the Hellenistic roots, Greek philosophers used the term *λόγος* to signify "that which gives shape, form or life to the universe".¹⁸ For the Stoic Philosophers, the *logos* is the "the rational principle by which everything exists", Carson suggests that in Stoic

¹⁸ D. H. Johnson, 'Logos' in *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. J.B. Green; Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 481.

thought, there is no other god than this *logos*.¹⁹ Philo, a first century Jew influenced by Plato, makes a distinction between the ideal world of God, which he calls the 'logos of God', and the physical copy of that world which is the world in which humans live.²⁰ Similarly, *logos* for Philo can refer to the Perfect Human, distinct from fallen humans.²¹ Given the diverse background of the term, from these entry points, John is able to engage his audience and move towards his own specific meaning.

Logos becomes a suitable term for John to describe *God's ultimate self-disclosure*.²² In his prologue, John has identified the Word as pre-existent with God from the beginning (vv1-2), an agent of creation (v3), a bearer of light and life (v4), and one who shines in the darkness (v5). This is now extended in verse 14 where the Word becomes flesh, makes his dwelling among people, and displays the glory of God, full of grace and truth.

In becoming flesh, the Word participates in the creaturely weakness of humans.²³ It is precisely because of this incarnation which John highlights here, that other writers can confidently affirm "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses" (Heb 4:15). John engages the *logos* concept, and stunningly affirms both the divine (v1) and human (v14) aspects of Christ's nature. Yet John goes further, highlighting that this enfleshed Word, ἐσκήνωσεν 'dwelt' among those whom he created, literally 'lived in his tent' among us. For the Greek speaking Jews and God-fearers, this allusion to the tent, or tabernacle, in which God dwelt in the midst of the tribes of Israel (Ex 40:34-38) would not be missed.

¹⁹ Carson, *John*, 114.

²⁰ Carson, *John*, 114.

²¹ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 6.

²² Carson, *John*, 116.

²³ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 14.

Making further connections with this Exodus tabernacle imagery, John alludes to the glory of God in the tabernacle (40:34-38). An analogy is drawn between the Word's glory and the glory of a father's only son. The description here is not of Jesus' relationship to the father (that is made explicit in v18) but an illustration of the magnitude and uniqueness of his glory.²⁴ There is a key development here from God's glory as manifest in the tabernacle (Ex 40:34-38), to God's glory manifest in the Word made flesh. In other words, the glory of the Lord has become visible and knowable outside of the tabernacle. Further, John is able to say he is an eyewitness to this glory.

v15 The witness of John the Baptist captured here echoes that of its counterpart in the chiasmic structure (vv6-8). This cry (κέκραγεν) cast in the perfect tense likely functions here as an intensified form of the present, and is translated 'cries aloud'.²⁵ While the content of the prophetic message is difficult to translate, the thrust of John's affirmation is to underscore the superiority of the incarnate Word.

v16-18 This final paragraph complements vv1-5, revealing the identity of the Word as Jesus Christ, and extends the nature of his role from agent of creation to: making his father known to the world. The passage begins by picking up the 'full of grace and truth' theme of verse 14. Now, beyond just *seeing* that glory full of grace and truth, John engages his audience suggesting that through the Word, he and they have *received* χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος, lit. "grace replaced by grace".²⁶ The grace introduced here that they received finds its fullest expression in the climax of the gospel, as the Word incarnate willingly endures the cross for the sake of those he loves. This grace also encompasses the believers' right to become children of God (v12), and the life they can have in Jesus' name (20:31; cf. 10:10).

²⁴ The key function of μονογενής is to emphasise uniqueness. See, Kruse, *John*, 70-71.

²⁵ Constantine R. Campbell, 'Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative: Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament.' (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 161-210.

²⁶ Kruse, *John*, 72. See Carson for a good discussion regarding the translation of the phrase χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος. Carson, *John*, 131-134.

This idea is then extended by means of a comparison with the law and Moses. From the lesser to the greater, the point is made that while the law may have been *given* through Moses, the heartbeat behind the law and God's covenant, namely grace and truth, *came into being* through Jesus Christ. This is not a low view of the law, but a high view of Jesus Christ, who here in verse 17 is now explicitly named for the first time in the gospel. Jesus is to be seen in the same light as Wisdom, that is, superior to Moses. With this lens now in place, the audience will be able to correctly interpret the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders (cf. 5:45-46; 6:32ff; 9:28ff).

With the Exodus allusions and comparison with Moses still in view, it is emphasised that *no one has ever seen God*, yet the Word (who is God) has made God known. Burge notes that Moses' 'face to face' encounter with God (Ex 33:11) is likely metaphorical because in 33:17-23 Moses must be protected from seeing God's face.²⁷ In any case, given that John is very familiar with this text, and having already alluded to it, it is likely that his point is that 'no one has ever *known God like this*'. Or in other words, he is emphasising the idea that Jesus (again, like Wisdom) knows God much more intimately than anyone, including Moses (and Abraham, cf. 8:58).

Although even more than that, John is identifying a problem which only the incarnation solves. The problem is that no one has ever *seen* (ἑώρακα) God. The solution is that God the One and Only who is in union with the father has *made him known* (ἐξηγήσατο). It is from the verb ἐξηγήσατο (translated here: *made him known*) that the technical term *exegesis* is derived. Beasley-Murray notes that in Josephus, this term is the technical term for the exposition of the law by the Rabbis.²⁸ Drawing out the key focus of this verse, and perhaps the climax of the whole prologue, Kruse suggests that Jesus has 'expounded', 'exegeted', or 'made

²⁷ Gary M. Burge, *John : From Biblical Text ... to Contemporary Life* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 60 n22.

²⁸ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 16.

known' God to the world through his person, words, and works.²⁹ Indeed, in the Gospel which follows, Jesus is able to remark to his disciples "From now on you do know him, and you have *seen* (ἑώρακα) him" (14:7, cf. 1:18).

This solution, the role of the incarnate Christ to make the father known, is only possible because of (1) his unique identity, and (2) his relationship to the father. Firstly, regarding his unique identity, μονογενῆς (One and Only) is a nominative of apposition, that is, it gives further information about θεὸς (God). As such, the phrase μονογενῆς θεὸς (*God the One and Only*, assuming it is the correct reading³⁰) in reference to *Jesus* is one of the highest Christological statements in the New Testament since it describes the Only One of the father as *God*. Secondly, regarding his unique relationship,³¹ this One and Only God is literally "in the bosom of the father", which is translated here as "in union with the father" to capture the relational aspect. Rounding off the prologue, these two terms form an *inclusio* with their counterparts in the first paragraph of the chiasm: 'God the One and Only' (v18) corresponds to 'The Word was God' (v1), and 'in union with the father' (v18) corresponds to 'was with God' (v1).

4. CONCLUSION - GOAL OF THE TEXT

This passage (in partnership with its chiasmic counterparts) serves as a header for the grand themes of Jesus' identity and role. It begins to answer the questions: (1) 'Who is Jesus?', and (2) 'Why did he come into the world?' Firstly, Jesus is the Cosmic Word, the glory and Wisdom of God, the agent of creation, God the One and Only, who was with God in the beginning, and he has become human and lived

²⁹ Kruse, *John*, 74.

³⁰ see §1 - Introduction

³¹ The term 'unique relationship' is used intentionally here. It should be underlined that the term μονογενῆς (one and only) is used to denote *uniqueness*, not 'begotten-ness'. So, Kruse, *John*, 70-71.

among us. Secondly, the climax of this passage (v18) highlights that Jesus came into the world to make God known.

In the prologue John is introducing these themes, and categories, so that his audience will know the true identity of Jesus, and his relationship to the father. Then, in the Gospel which follows, as they see *Jesus* in action, they will realise that they are seeing *God* in action. Ultimately, as the audience follows Jesus' journey all the way to the cross, they will realise the full extent of God's love for them (13:1; 15:13). This is the God – as made known by Jesus – that the evangelist is urging them to receive (1:12). In so doing they will earn the right to become children of God (1:12), they will have life in his name (20:31).

5. APPLICATION

Greidanus suggests that the objective of good application is to “let the word of God address people today just as explicitly and concretely as it did in biblical times.”³² In order to achieve this, Greidanus' method – ‘Considerations for properly bridging the Gap’ (pages 166-175) – will be followed in order to work through both case studies. Greidanus organises his method using four headings (1) Concentrate on the Original Message, (2) Recognise the Discontinuity, (3) Recognise the Overarching Continuity, and (4) Focus on the Goal of the Text. As such, both case studies will be organised under these headings of Greidanus.

John 1:14-18 is a passage with a degree of ambiguity and difficulty, and was chosen in order to challenge the effectiveness of the chosen methodology. The contemporary audience in view includes young people born 1981 to 1995 (referred to as Generation Y) living in the North-Eastern suburbs of Melbourne Australia in 2008 who are part of, or have contact with Southern Cross Community Church.

³² Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text : Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), 159.

5.1 Starting Point for Application – Exegetical Conclusions

This passage (in partnership with its chiasmic counterparts) serves as a header for the grand themes of Jesus' identity and role. It begins to answer the questions: (1) 'Who is Jesus?', and (2) 'Why did he come into the world?' Firstly, Jesus is the Cosmic Word, the glory and Wisdom of God, the agent of creation, God the One and Only, who was with God in the beginning, and he has become human and lived among us. Secondly, the climax of this passage (v18) highlights that Jesus came into the world to make God known.

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5.2 Concentrate on the Original Message

The foundational exegetical work above has drawn out the original relevance of the passage. The questions which this passage, and indeed the entire gospel of John, begins to answer are (1) 'Who is Jesus?', and (2) 'Why did he come into the world?' As outlined above, Jesus is the Cosmic Word, the glory and Wisdom of God, the agent of creation, God the One and Only, who was with God in the beginning, and he has become human and lived among us. Regarding the reason for Jesus coming into the world, one could highlight the fact that Jesus' incarnation allows him to fully identify with humanity in every way. However, while other NT writers draw attention to this aspect of the incarnation, John does not major on it. Instead, John's focused response in this passage to the question of why Jesus came into the

world concentrates on the idea that Jesus came into the world *to make God known* to the world (v18).

This passage has relevance for both a Jew and Gentile audience. For a Jewish audience, this is relevant because previously God has made himself known through the patriarchs, the prophets, and the tabernacle/temple, but the time of Jesus ushers in a new era when Yahweh has made himself known in a new way through his own son (cf. Heb 1:1). This new reality is relevant also for the Gentile audience. By becoming human, Jesus reveals his father not only to Jews, but to all humans. This self revelation goes beyond the Jewish tradition and becomes truly global.

5.3 Recognise the Discontinuity

Greidanus identifies three major causes of discontinuity between the original and contemporary audiences, which will likely affect how the message should be transferred to the contemporary audience. Changes in the message may be required due to (1) progressive revelation, (2) stages in kingdom history, and (3) cultural changes.

5.3.1 PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

Given the uncertainty surrounding the way in which the gospel is composed, there is some ambiguity as to exactly where this work stands in the continuum of progressive revelation. Depending on one's assumptions regarding the circulation of an early form of the gospel, the date could perhaps be pushed forward, but how far is uncertain, as is the issue of whether or not the prologue would have been included in an earlier form. Assuming an approximate date of A.D. 80 for the final form of the gospel places it towards the end of the timeline of NT books, and therefore toward the end of the continuum of the canon's progressive revelation.

Considering the narrative timeline of the gospel, these verses of the prologue refer to the beginning (Jesus' incarnation, v14), and also to the middle (the testimony of

John the Baptist, v15; and the ministry of Jesus, v18). The prologue itself should not be viewed in isolation, but considered as a fountain-head for the key themes of the rest of the gospel, and complemented by events after the death and resurrection of Jesus, in particular, the giving of the Spirit. This is significant because while in verse 18 it is Jesus' role to make God known, in chapters 14 – 16 it becomes the Spirit's role to make Jesus known, to testify about him, and to lead people into all truth.

5.3.2 STAGES OF KINGDOM HISTORY

In regards to the stage of kingdom history, this passage belongs to what might be termed 'The Church Age'. The original audience heard this gospel in the same phase of kingdom history as does the contemporary audience, because John's original audience heard the words of John, not the words of Jesus. This phase is the overlap of the ages, after the death and resurrection of Christ, and prior to his final return. This phase of kingdom history has been inaugurated by Christ, and believers wait for its final consummation.

5.3.3 CULTURAL CHANGES

Given that the contemporary culture is not immersed in Old Testament, nor Greek Philosophical modes of thought, sadly John's ingenious identification of Jesus as the Logos/Word is meaningless, and allusions to OT Exodus imagery and the glory of God are missed by all (except perhaps a few keen students of the bible).

5.4 Recognise the Overarching Continuity

Greidanus identifies two facets of continuity between the original and contemporary audiences. This continuity is to be used to help bridge the gap between the two audiences.

5.4.1 SAME FAITHFUL GOD THEN AND NOW

This text, as with all biblical texts, is primarily about God. More specifically it's about God's ultimate self disclosure. That he took off the royal robes of heaven, and came to live among his creation as a human, so that they could truly know him. This God who was fully committed to making himself known *then* through the person of Jesus, is still committed to making himself known *today* through our scriptures (as they attest to the life and works of Jesus), but even more directly through his Spirit. The original and contemporary audiences have this in common: they didn't see or know Jesus while he was on the earth, yet they have access to the scriptures, the Holy Spirit, and the community of believers who have experienced the risen Jesus.

5.4.2 ONE COVENANT PEOPLE

The church now, just as the church then, is the recipient and bearer of this gospel of Jesus. This passage in particular reveals that God's missionary strategy is not passive but active. He doesn't wait passively for people to get to know him, rather he actively makes himself known through his son. God actively reveals himself to the world. Perhaps this should inform the church's mission and evangelism strategies.

5.5 Focus on the Goal of the Text

Ultimately, since this text has an evangelistic goal, the author desires to communicate both the identity of Jesus and his reason for coming into the world so that the audience may believe in Jesus and experience eternal life. As such, the preaching of this passage, and this Gospel, should have in mind a similar goal. Perhaps the postmodern penchant for 'experience' as the key way of knowing and discerning 'truth' and 'reality' is to be engaged here since this is the way Jesus makes God known – through real life experiences and relationships.

At this stage, Greidanus' method prompts the consideration of whether or not there is a relevant analogy in the contemporary audience, so that the text is now a relevant authentic response to *their* situation: questions, sin, sorrow,

discouragement, ignorance, lack of praise, trust, obedience. If so, this analogy is to be used to guide the application. If not, a more complicated procedure is to be considered to guide the application. (See 'step 4' of the summarised method provided on page 28 below.) In this first case study passage, a relevant contemporary analogy can be discerned and used to guide the application without having to follow the more complicated procedure.³³

The contemporary analogy to which this text is a relevant and authentic response is the set of postmodern questions which ask: "Does God Exist?"³⁴ "Is God knowable?" and, "What is God like?" These questions are just below the surface for many, and on the surface for some. Many young people today have consciously or unconsciously developed answers to these questions based on what their parents believe, what their friends believe, their personal experience of church and religion, and their perception of God as presented in popular culture and the media.

5.6 Relevance for Today: The Application

This text in John is an authentic and relevant response to the contemporary questions listed above: "Does God exist?", "Is God knowable?" and, "What is God like?" In short, it answers, "God does exist", "God is knowable", and "God is like Jesus."³⁵

Firstly, this text can be applied as a response to the question of the existence of God, affirming that God does exist. Built into the worldview of those living in first century Greco-Roman culture is the assumption that God exists. This is not questioned, and therefore not explicitly answered. However, for the contemporary

³³ This more complicated procedure is required for the second case study passage and therefore will be tested as part of that case study.

³⁴ In a recent Australian survey, of those Gen Ys [members of Generation Y] who did not identify with any particular religion, 44% were unsure as to whether or not God exists. Overall, 51% of Gen Ys believed in God, and 32% were unsure. Michael Mason et al., *The Spirit of Generation Y: Young People's Spirituality In a Changing Australia* (Melbourne: John Garratt Publishing, 2007), 83.

³⁵ Some will find this third short answer distasteful as though it were a denial of Jesus' divinity. This is not what is meant, and the divinity of Jesus is affirmed below. What is meant is that for John, to get to know Jesus is to get to know God.

audience, a new perspective which is open for discussion is the possibility that God doesn't exist. Therefore, for those in the audience who hold this view, or are unsure about the existence of God, the relevance of this text in John begins one step back by first affirming that God does exist. To put it in more postmodern language, this text can be applied regarding the existence of God not by dogmatically asserting that God exists, but by inviting people to experience the reality of God – a God who dwells among us. A teenage girl on the verge of suicide cries out to God, and in the moments which follow she experiences him for the first time. God steps into her reality. The church does not need to assert the existence of God like some authoritarian world power trying to forcefully back up their propaganda claims, rather as a community of people who experience God dwelling in their midst, the church is able to invite people to experience the healing love, and resurrection power of a God who is real.

Secondly, for those who do believe in some sort of God, and who question whether God is knowable, this text affirms that this God is personal (v14) and knowable (v18). The way in which God is knowable is through Jesus, specifically because Jesus is God-in-the-flesh and he lived among us (v14). This text then forms a basis for the common assertion that one can get to know God through a relationship with Jesus. The incarnation shows that this relationship is initiated, and actively sought by God. To this it should be added that in some ways, the Spirit takes over Jesus' role of making God known. As Jesus begins to talk with his disciples about his departure, the language regarding the Spirit, or Counsellor, is very similar to some of the language applied to Jesus.³⁶ It becomes the Spirit's role to testify concerning Jesus (15:26), to bring glory to Jesus (16:14), and to teach all things (14:26). Therefore, after Jesus' return to the father, and the giving of the Spirit, the Spirit plays a key role in making Jesus known, and leading people into all truth. So, in one way it is Jesus, and in another way it is the Spirit, who today makes God known.

³⁶ 'the world cannot accept him' (14: 17; cf. 1:10-11; 7:7); 'will teach you all things' (14:26; cf. 3:2; 7:16f; 8:2); 'from the father' (15:26; cf. 1:14; 16:28) 'he will testify about me' (15:26; cf. 18:37) 'he will not speak on his own, he will speak only what he hears' (16:13; 8:28; 14:24;); 'make it known to you' (16:15; cf. 1:18; 4:25); 'bring glory' (16:14; cf. 14:13).

The relationship with God is made possible through Jesus, and this relationship is experienced through the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, this text provides an answer for those who question what God is like. Perhaps Carson puts it best, describing Jesus as 'God's ultimate self disclosure'.³⁷ God actively shows himself to the world through Jesus. For those who ask, 'What is God like?' It is helpful to answer 'God is like Jesus.' That is, to look at Jesus is to look at God. To know Jesus is to know God (Jn 14:7-9). This is true because Jesus is God (Jn 1:1, 18). However, the application will have more impact if it addresses a more concrete situation. For example, a young person who is struggling with grief will likely question the nature of God, asking "If God is good, how could he let this happen?" An understanding of what Jesus is like – that he is good – will go a long way to affirming that God is good. If a young person explores Jesus for themselves (through scripture, interacting with a community of believers, and the illumination of the Spirit) and discovers that Jesus is good, then they will be able to see that God is good. Further, the way in which Jesus experiences and deals with suffering gives insight into how God feels about suffering, grief and loss. A theology of suffering must be big enough to include the understanding that Jesus, who is God, experienced suffering and death. Jesus shows us that suffering is not only experienced by sinners, or the result of a lack of faith, but that God himself was not insulated from suffering.³⁸ Therefore the experience of Jesus needs to reshape our understanding of suffering, and the nature of God. Other avenues to apply this concept of Jesus making God known, would be to address and correct other misconceptions about God, for example: the genie god who is meant to fix all your problems, the angry parent god who punishes people for misdeeds, or the cosmic 'party-pooper' god who just wants to ruin everyone's fun. By making God known,

³⁷ Carson, *John*, 116.

³⁸ A friend who recently became a Christian had a string of bad luck ending in \$5000 worth of damage to his car through no fault of his own. In a pit of despair he repeated over and over again: "God hates me." He equated suffering with God's disfavour. An understanding of Jesus' suffering should correct this faulty logic. Jesus, who God loved, experienced suffering and death. The life of Jesus suggests that there is more to suffering than it simply being a result of God's disfavour. Further, John's Gospel presents positively the reality that God loves the world (3:16). In this way, Jesus makes God's true nature known.

Jesus shows that these concepts of God do not capture the reality of who God is. In their place Jesus presents a living, breathing picture of who God is. Ultimately, the cross is the clearest demonstration of the extent of God's love for the world (3:16). Jesus exegetes God to the world, he makes the true God known.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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