

Sunday Evening 15th December 2013 Kenneth Gray John 1:14-18 “Law and grace”

John's gospel provides a theological basis for understanding the nature of Jesus Christ - God and man. Verse 14 sums it up: *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* It describes what John himself witnessed in both aspects of the nature of Jesus i.e. the man - the flesh and blood person and the divine glory of the deity that Jesus embodied.

Kenneth observed that we tend not to talk about our flesh until something hurts it or we become sick, then we are swiftly reminded of our human vulnerability. How remarkable that Jesus so willingly accepted the limitations of fleshly humanity. So remarkable that some secular writers depict Jesus as some kind of superman: not 'human' but 'superhuman'. The church has rightly rejected such writings.

In Matthew 26:53 we are reminded by *Jesus himself in Gethsemane that he is both wholly human and wholly divine: ‘Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?’* He could have returned to heaven's glory at any time but he chose to accept human limitations to serve the Father's will.

John desires us to recognise the glory of Jesus shining uniquely through his humanity. No doubt throughout his life John will have seen high ranking, 'glorious' people and will have met with people who were role models in godly living. Many of us will know special individuals whose goodness has inspired and influenced us. But John has encountered in Jesus a person whose glory and godliness is greater than that of anyone else. The glory of Jesus is incomparable and unsurpassed.

Jesus frequently prefaced his teachings with the phrase *‘I tell you the truth...’* and generations of people through the past 2 thousand years have picked over his words and argued about his teachings but have failed to disprove the Truth that Jesus provided.

When John was writing this gospel the crucifixion had taken place 40 or more years before. Many people were still keen to be followers of John the Baptist rather than of Jesus. They felt they understood and accepted John the Baptist's message: repent and be washed clean in baptism. For us John the Baptist is a relatively minor, shadowy figure - almost a footnote in modern preaching. In the gospel writer's day, however, the Baptist's message still resonated with people's own experiences.

But John repeats John the Baptist's own words: *“He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.”* He was the older cousin of Jesus but he knew that Jesus was the Eternal One, the Messiah.

Jesus did not come to abolish the law that had come to the people through Moses. There was nothing wrong or deficient about the law - God's law is perfect and righteous. But John, aware of growing contemporary and future potential heresies, emphasises that we can only make ourselves right with God by receiving the grace and truth of Jesus.

The Jews' mindset in relation to the law of Moses had become characterised by fear of being found to be in contravention of it. It had become a mechanistic observance of rituals. It was a little like our reaction to speed cameras when we're driving on the roads. We tend to slow down *just in case* we're caught speeding rather than because it is the safe and responsible way to drive. The Jews observed the law *just in case* rather than because they desired to please and honour God. John is not advocating that they ignore the law but that they come to the foot of the Cross and accept the Grace and Truth that Jesus offers because through Him our sin is no longer a barrier.

John explains *“No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”*

No-one has ever seen God. That is the difference between Jesus and everyone else who has ever lived - Jesus has seen God. The rest of us can only speculate about what that will be like. Philosophers and theologians have spent their lives trying in vain to discern what God is like. In Kenneth's experience it is more often the least 'learned', more open-hearted folk who are most aware of and best able to speak about the presence of God in their lives.

And that is why we celebrate Christ's incarnation every Christmas. Like Peter we conclude "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life...*" Like those first apostles we believe and have come to know that Jesus is the Holy One of God and we are right to bring our worship and our hymns of praise to the Babe who came to dwell among us.