

# John 1:18

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[0:00] There are four Gospels, I'm sure you know. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, they each have their characteristics, their ways of writing.

And the fourth Gospel of John is unique. It's unique in its simplicity. It's unique in its sublimeness, the way it presents the Christian faith.

I want to use verse 18 as a summary this afternoon. No one has ever seen God, the only God, who is at the Father's side. He has made him known.

Now notice there's a great positive statement there, but it's preceded by a very negative statement. And what you discover when you read through John's Gospel is that again and again you have a positive statement and a negative statement side by side.

And very often it's not possible in life to say the positive without saying the negative. So if I said to you, let's meet at a bank station this afternoon. Let's meet at a bank station this afternoon.

[1:04] Well there are on there seemingly about 500 entrances to bank station. I would say not the Mansion House one. I would say the Bank of England one. Not the Mansion House, but the Bank of England.

If I meet you at one of the kind of big train stations in London, I would say it's no good to say meet me under the clock at Paddington Station. When there's two clocks. I have to say meet me under that clock that is there and not there.

And John uses that again and again and again. It's very interesting to read through the Gospel and see that. John wants to define to you what the Christian faith is. It's already towards the end of the New Testament era. John's Gospel is one of the last books to be written.

And rivals have come into the Christian faith. The church is beginning to fragment and divide misunderstandings. And John is the most careful of all the Gospel writers. To say exactly what he means so that you will not misunderstand us.

And he wants to tell us that God has revealed himself to us by Jesus. And he makes that very plain. As I'll show you in a moment. By saying that there is no other way by which we may see God.

[2:16] Now let's start with the positive statement in verse 18. He says God, the only Son or the only God. There's a little bit of debate on how that is translated. God, the only Son, who is at the Father's side.

Which that presumably means, doesn't it, who is very close to him. Who is intimately connected with God. God's Son has made the Father known.

So he begins his statement at the beginning of his Gospel. And he says God has made himself known. There's a more theological word. It's the word revelation.

The word revelation is one of the great Christian words. And it comes from a very ordinary Greek word. Which means the word for an unveiling. So you know how it is, isn't it? You go to a hospital. And the hospital are unveiling a new wing. And there's a little curtain on the wall as you go in. And on that day, some famous dignitary, Prince Charles or Prince William or Kate, will come.

[3:19] And they will pull a string. Or they'll press a button. And the plaque will be unveiled, won't it? You can't see it. She presses the button.

She pulls the string. And it is unveiled. You can now see what has been hidden. And this great word, unveiling or revelation, is one of the great themes of the New Testament.

That God is veiled. You don't know what's going on behind. It is all hidden to us. It's there beyond the grave. But that God, through his son, the Lord Jesus, has unveiled it.

He has revealed it. And that is the theme of the prologue. Shown to you by verse 1, isn't it? Can you just look at verse 1? I love the way in which this gospel begins. In the beginning was the word. In the beginning God spoke.

God has always wanted to speak. We do not live in a silent universe. We're often told, aren't we, how vast and gigantic and empty and cold the universe is.

[ 4 : 17 ] And it may be so scientifically and technically, but it's never that to the Christian. John 1 verse 1 stands against the idea that we live in a cold, meaningless universe.

In the beginning was the word. And the word was with God. And the word was God. Now look down to verse 14.

The word became flesh. Became skin and bones. And dwelt amongst us. Tabernacled amongst us. Lived amongst us for a while.

God has spoken. So why do we meet here every Tuesday? Why do we meet here every Tuesday? We meet here for speaking and for hearing. Why do we meet here?

Why do we meet here? However nice my shirt. And however impressive my gestures are. I know they're not. Or however good Chris's cup of tea or coffee is.

[ 5 : 13 ] Or how comfortable your seat is. I doubt whether you would survive many Tuesdays with you. If I didn't speak. If I just stood here. You may not survive any Tuesdays at all.

Many Tuesdays at all. But you wouldn't survive any. You'd say. It's a total waste of time. Just let you go there and hear nothing. How do we communicate with one another? After I finish speaking. Hopefully you will talk to the person next to you. And you will make yourself known to them. Through the opening of your lips. I was at a conference this morning. And there was a little bit of time where people would greet their neighbours. And of course there's this great concophony of noise.

And it's the usual questions isn't it? What's your name? What do you do? Where do you come from? You get to know each other. You introduce yourself to one another.

And so what John is saying. Right at the beginning of the gospel. Is that God speaks. And God desires you to know who he is. He desires to introduce himself to human beings.

[ 6 : 16 ] He sent his son into the world. And he's going to reveal himself. And that is tremendously important. Because it defines and distinguishes Christianity from every other religion. Religion speaks of man's efforts.

You do this. You do that. And you get to God. And to reach God you need to do certain things. But that isn't the case with biblical Christianity.

The thing I hate most about my job more than anything else is having to sign people's passports. I've got two assistant ministers starting in July. And I'm going to refuse to sign another passport for a whole year. All right.

And I have to put at the bottom of them. Reverend A.P. Levy. Profession minister of religion. And I've decided after preparing this talk I will never do that again.

Because Christianity is not a religion. It is a revelation. It is not man's ladder going up to God. It is God speaking down to man. So in the future if you bring me your passport.

[ 7 : 21 ] I will sign it. Reverend A.P. Levy. Minister of Revelation. I'll probably get a call one time from the passport office. Calling you a right crack. Now you might think I'm making a pedantic point. But I'm not.

I have a number of Bible dictionaries. I opened one last night. And religion. Needless to say. It's got a very very brief entry. Because the Bible is not interested in religion. This is how it summarises. It's 18 or 19 lines. It says. Thus the word religion as used today. Can hardly be said to be a biblical word. At all. It does not occur in the Old Testament. And in the New Testament.

There is no sanction for the modern usage. As the word religion. Is actually used in the New Testament. A kind of liturgical practice. How we. Our liturgy. The faith in Christ.

Is not presented as. Presented as one of the religions of the world. But of the unique and final truth. With which no other gospel may be compared. It. The New Testament knows nothing of comparative religion.

[ 8 : 19 ] It regards the revelation of God through Christ. Being of quite a different order. This is something unique. It's not man struggling to God. But God coming to man.

Now in order to make that point. Which is so unpopular isn't it. It's so unfamiliar. He makes a great negative statement. At the beginning of verse 18. Can you see it?

No. One. Has ever seen God. I hope you won't come up to me. At the end of this talk.

And say. Well. Well. That all depends on your interpretation. Doesn't it? I get very tired of people saying that to me. And it does sometimes. I'm sure. But I don't think. Can you look at verse 18.

Those. First. Six words. Can you misinterpret those words? If you can think of anything. Any other thing. What do you think of these words mean?

[ 9 : 16 ] Do tell me. The words in John's gospel. Are normally. No longer the one syllable. No man. Has ever seen.

God. Can you mistake that? It's as clear as crystal. No one. Has ever seen God. No one. Has ever seen. God. No one.

Has ever seen. God. Did you get it? What does this mean? Well it means three things. First of all. It means that God is unknowable. If we can't see anything.

We can't measure it. So there can be no knowledge of it. No scientific knowledge of it. And if there's no scientific knowledge of it. We can't know it. So we can't know God in any real way.

Because he is invisible. He is out of reach. He is. What the theologians call. Transcendent. He is simply beyond you. But not only that.

[ 10 : 19 ] Because we are sinful. And the New Testament warns us. That because we are sinful. Our ideas of what God is like. Ask you if. They're off balance. That even if God was knowable.

Because sin is so affected us. We wouldn't be able to know him. Because we have disqualified ourselves. By our rebellion. So you get these typical words.

Of the Apostle Paul. Which I think are very striking. The word of the cross. He says. The word of the cross. Is foolishness. To those who are perishing. If you know anything about the Bible at all.

If you know anything about the New Testament. You will know that the word of the cross. Is essentially the gospel. That is how you and I are saved. So Paul is quite simply saying. The essential gospel. Is foolishness.

To most people. For God has said. I will destroy the wisdom of the wise. The cleverness of the clever. I will fought. Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe?

[ 11 : 15 ] Where is the debater of the age? God has made them foolish. For in his wisdom. The world did not know God. Through wisdom. I don't know what grades you've got in school. Kids in our church seem to get.

A stars. At A levels. For fun. But however many A levels you've got. You cannot know God. Because we are all sinful.

He is beyond us. We cannot understand him. And even if we could see something of him. We would misinterpret it. As the ancients did. In terms of idolatry. So the ordinary person on the street. They recognize this. And I think most people would say. I'm agnostic. Which literally means in the Greek. I don't know.

That's what people say. So they might not use the term agnostic. But when you talk to them. They'll say. Well there may be a God. Sometimes it doesn't feel like a God. I don't know. It is strange isn't it. People are very proud of being agnostic. The Latin equivalent.

[ 12 : 11 ] Is the word ignoramus. No one has ever come up to me and said. Paul. You know. I'm not an unbeliever. Actually I'm an ignoramus. No one. No one ever said that.

And yet. Many people say. I just don't know. I'm not a believer. I just. I just don't know. I'm an agnostic. Not realizing what they're saying. And when people say that.

I don't know. I'm an agnostic. What they're saying is. I'm ignorant. And yes indeed you are. And so am I. And so if we were dedicated.

To. Kind of spiritual game. Of mountaineering. Of trying to climb up towards God. Well we might as well close down this morning. Because no one. Has ever seen God. We can't know him.

And that means secondly. That the religions of the world. They are testimony to man's ignorance. You think of the classic way. That Paul spoke to the intellectual.

[ 13 : 13 ] Literacy. In Acts 17. Paul stood on the hill in Athens. Before all the temples of idolatry. And talking to those really. Really intelligent men. The kind of cultural commentators of the day.

Athenian culture was very intelligent. And he looks around. At all the evidences of idolatry. And he tells them. I see. That you are supremely. Ignorant.

Of God. Let me tell you about him. And he tells them of God. And he finishes his sermon. In such a delightful way. Doesn't he. He says to these great brains. The boffins that are on TV.

The pundits. That they roll out. These men who could get an A level. With just a couple of days studying. He says to them. You ought not to think of God. As you do. With all these temples of idolatry.

But all this ignorance. God is willing to overlook. Because he has now sent the gospel to you. So that you can know. That's wonderful isn't it? Imagine I got all the council leaders together in London. [14:13] And I got the government leaders together. And I said. I said to them. Listen. You don't know how to run a council. You don't know how to run a government. In some ways. We'd like to do that wouldn't we? But Paul stands in front of all these really really intelligent men.

And he says to them. You know nothing about God. You religious people. You don't know anything about God.

You're the Imam. You're the Abbot from Ealing Abbey. You're the head of the Jehovah Witness. You're the Mormon chief.

You know nothing about God. So arrogant isn't it? You've been searching for him. You may be thinking about him.

You might have been talking about him for centuries. And you know absolutely nothing. Because. You might think.

[15:18] Who is this arrogant Welshman? Look at verse 18. No one has ever seen God. And if no one has ever seen God. Then religion must be futile. A waste of your time.

Unless God gives us a clue. So our knowledge is not enough. First of all God is unknowable by man. Secondly religion is no way to find him. And thirdly. No claim to know God can be acceptable. Unless it's through the knowledge of the incarnate son.

Now let's just look at what he's saying in verses 14 to 18. That God has been made known to us. Through his only son. And that his only son became flesh.

Now I do want to make this point. Because I think it's very important. Christian revelation to us. Is given to us. Through the life. And the teaching of the Lord Jesus. It's given to us through the incarnation.

God may flesh. The body. The words. The wisdom of Christ. That is the only way we know. Christians. Do not believe that revelation comes in any other way. And so that means that Christians are not believers in mysticism.

[16:23] John lived in a day of mystery religions. And there were many people that offered a knowledge of God. To those who were initiated into religious practices. But John is saying very, very clearly.

There is no knowledge of God that way. There is no knowledge of God. From anybody. Even though he may stand up in a Christian church. And they might say.

God has spoken to me. God does not speak to you. The word of God. Does not come to preachers. Preachers. Go to the word of God. That is the direction. And so I don't dare to get up on a Tuesday lunchtime. And speak to you. Unless I've opened the word of God. And turned to the word made flesh.

And studied what the word of God says. The word of God does not come to me. I go to the word of God. And so we need to be aware. There are lots of crackpots in London.

[17:24] Who get up today and say. Well they've got a special word for the church. Because God has given it to them. Personally and individually. And John stands against that.

And he would say. No one has ever seen God. So don't listen to anyone who says he has. God has revealed himself through his only son. Who was made flesh. And that's given to us in the testimony here.

Do you see what it's saying? He's saying spiritual mountaineering is useless. The idea that we search for God. You put all the religions together in one pot. And there's this man's tremendous effort.

To find an answer to the meaning of the universe. And a solution to the puzzles and the mysteries of life. And John takes the carpet underneath their feet. And yanks it. And he says there's no such journey.

Because man is not looking for God. Man is flying from God. Man is running from God. And man is on the run because he's a rebel.

[18:21] Garden of Eden. He takes of the fruits. He gives it to Adam. In the Garden of Eden. In the game of hide and seek. In the Garden of Eden. Who is looking and who is hiding. It's always the way he's left.

God comes and says where are you? And they say we were hiding. Man is on the run. Man is not trying to get to God. That's complete nonsense.

But he brings us marvellous news. Because he said God has come right down to earth. Right to our level. And he says he's come right to a person who could be handled. And touched. And seen. And heard.

What a person. Look at the relationship between this person and God. In verses 1 and 2. He was with God in the beginning. Verse 2. So you must know something about God. Look at the relationship with creation.

Verse 3. All things were made through him. And without him was not anything made that was made. There's nothing made that was made by him. There's 4. And it was life.

[ 19 : 17 ] And the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness is not up to come in. So this son. This Christ. This word made you. And the whole world.

And it ties everything in to the revelation of Jesus Christ. To all of life. It refuses to say. Well religion is a little tiny pocket.

For those who are interested in old things. Some people are interested in golf. Some people are interested in travel. Some people are interested in football. And there's this weird man on a Tuesday. He was into religion. It says no one.

The one who made flesh. Was made flesh. Made everything in the world. So that means everything in the world. Can only find its meaning. In the word made flesh. Everything belongs to him.

In him all things hold together. You can't understand anything in creation without him. Look at the next. Look at the verses 9 and 10. The true light. Which gives light to everyone who's coming into the world.

[ 20 : 21 ] He was in the world. And the world was made through him. And yet the world did not know him. It's wonderful isn't it? The true light. Which gives light to everyone who's coming into the world. The Hindu. The Buddhist. The Muslim.

The council worker. The agnostic. The unbeliever. The minister. It's for everybody. It's for the world he'd made. In rebellion against him. But sadly verse 10.

The world did not receive him. In verse 11. The world is foolish enough to turn from him. Look at this word in relation to the prophets. Verse 6. The man who was sent from God.

Whose name was John. John the Baptist. And he came as a witness. To bear witness about the light. That all might believe through him. He was not the light. But he came to bear witness about the light.

John testifies. Doesn't he then in verse 15. Another great theme in John's gospel. And he cries out. This was he of whom I said. He who comes after me. Ranks before me. Because he was before me. John the Baptist.

[ 21 : 22 ] Summarises the whole of Old Testament revelation. He towers above all the prophets. And he says. This one who is to come surpasses me. So verse 17. For the law was given through Moses.

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John picks up all the Old Testament. Moses. John the Baptist. The law. The prophets. And he folds them up. And he says. That is the foundation. For the one who has come to speak now.

So listen to him. And look to him. And that leads me to my final thing to say. There is a tremendous punch in verse 18. No one has ever seen God. But many saw Jesus Christ.

John's gospel. All the way through this. This big theme. Of seeing is believing. John is a great enemy. To the kind of preaching. That says. Faith is a leap in the dark.

What's the only thing you'll get. From a leap in the dark. A broken ankle. And John is not inviting you. To take a leap into the dark. John is actually saying.

[ 22 : 28 ] Take a step into the light. John is saying. We actually saw. And we invite you. To see through our eyes. We heard.

We handled. We touched. And he says. Come with me. Through this John's gospel. And I will tell you what we saw. God. Unseen. You can never see him. Jesus.

Yes. You can see him. Therefore. Because he is the perfect revelation of God. And you can see him. And you can know him. And as you come to know him. You know the unseen God.

Let's pray. Let's pray.