

Do you recognize Jesus?

[Announce Text] Please keep your Bibles open to John 1:14

[Scripture Introduction] Good morning, my name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here at Grace Christian Fellowship where we exist to glorify God through gospel-centered worship, evangelism, discipleship, and community. If you are joining us for the first time, we have been in an advent series where Dave Farley, Jeff Brinkman, and I will rotate between our three campuses celebrating the birth of Christ.

[Prayer for Illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] You would think that the Queen of England would be easy to recognize. She's on TV and magazines. She's on coins and currency. But I read an interesting story this week that occurred about 50 miles west of Aberdeen, Scotland. There was a time when Queen Elizabeth was walking near one of her well known homes called the Balmoral Estate- a castle and its surrounding property. She was wearing a headscarf and a tweed coat and was with her former protection officer Richard Griffin. While on this walk they were approached by a group of American tourists. Not recognizing who they were talking to, the Americans asked her if she lived in the area. Her Majesty responded by saying that, "Yes, I have a house nearby."

The American tourists then asked her if she had ever met the Queen and she responded by saying, "No," and then pointed to Richard and said, "But he has." After a few more pleasantries the group left without recognizing whom they had been talking to! Now, it's one thing for an average person to go unrecognized, but for someone of royalty and importance to go unrecognized seems appalling and preposterous. And here's what's noteworthy- those tourists were excited to know someone who had met the Queen, but they had an opportunity to actually meet the Queen herself. But they missed the opportunity because they didn't recognize her.

We all have missed opportunities because we don't recognize them. We all bump into people we should recognize but we don't. Perhaps that has been you. You didn't recognize the celebrity or the friend or the opportunity and now you've missed your chance. You didn't recognize that stock or business venture until it

was too late. But the annual approach of Christmas tells us that when a baby was born in a Bethlehem stable and laid in a feeding trough more than 2000 years ago it was someone even greater than the Queen of England who went mostly unrecognized. It was the King of the Universe. So John 1:14 lays a charge on you and me regarding Christmas and it is this:

[Proposition] Christmas calls us to recognize Jesus

Don't let this opportunity pass you by. Don't let Him go by unrecognized. This December we must recognize Jesus. John has written His gospel to help us and this verse tells us to recognize three things about Jesus. We must recognize Jesus as the Word. We must recognize what Jesus has done. And we must recognize Jesus' glory. Let's look at them in order

[Main Point 1] Christmas calls us to recognize Jesus as the Word

The Apostle John lived with Jesus during His ministry. He was one of Jesus' closest disciples. But he spent the later portion of His life living in Ephesus and teaching there. There he would have encountered many Greeks and many Jews- in fact our study through the book of Ephesians has revealed that the church there gloriously included both groups of people. So let's look briefly at what would have been recognized when Jesus was called the Word- the Greek word- λογος

[Subpoint 1] How Greeks would recognize the Word

When Greeks would have read John's letter for the first time and would hear

And the Word (λογος) became flesh

When Greek minds heard this, they would drift back to ancient Greek philosophy. Where the λογος represented a series of things. What they mostly would have thought of was something amazing. The λογος meant something like the principle of reason that ordered the universe- something very high indeed! They would have thought of something needed in order to bring much of creation and thought itself into existence. Scholars suspect John wanted His Greek readers to make some of these connections. But Greeks would have thought of something material- made of matter. They would have thought that this λογος, this Word, was created out of existing stuff. And they would have thought of this λογος as impersonal.

For a while scholars who don't believe the Bible to be God's Word made a big deal of this. They said that with this Greek technical stuff meant that John, an uneducated Jewish fisherman, couldn't have written this book of the Bible. But boy, they made a mistake putting their skeptical eggs in that basket. Recent scholarship has pointed out that John was clearly written with a Jewish emphasis pointed to a primarily Jewish audience. This means that focusing on the Greek understanding might not be where we should spend most of our time.

So as Christmas calls us to recognize Jesus as the Word let's not only notice how Greeks would recognize the Word, let's recognize

[Subpoint 2] How Jews would recognize the Word

When Jews would have read John's letter and heard 1:14 to say

And the Word (λογος) became flesh

Their minds would go back to the Old Testament understanding of the Word. I don't want to get too technical here but if you will dig down with me, we're going to strike gold. In the Old Testament there is a Hebrew equivalent of λογος and that word is "dabar." Scholars have taught me that that word "dabar" has far reaching meanings. Within the ark of the covenant there were the "dabarim"- "the ten things" meaning the 10 Commandments. The Holy of Holies is the "debir," "The Word House."

So Jews would hear "And the Word became flesh" and they would think about the written law on tablets of stone in the Holy of Holies. They would have thought about it written on parchment in the local synagogue. They would have recognized that the prophets spoke this Word. This "dabar" this "λογος." But now a very unique event has come. All those prophets properly represented God to His people as they spoke the Word- so every word of the Old Testament can be trusted. But the prophets never quite perfectly embodied the Word in all aspects of life. They were fallen, and sinners, and claimed this about themselves. They could speak the Word, but they couldn't be the perfect Word. But now The Word has come in a person. Jews would have recognized that this is something that had never happened before. There had always been obstacles in getting the Word to the people. People's sinful hearts. But now the Word has truly and fully come in a special way to be recognized. This is how Jews would recognize the Word.

[Illustration] My legal name is Brett Michael Sweet but I've had lots of nicknames in my life. When I was wearing diapers I was called stinky. Being called "Brett" spawned a few nicknames- Brettly, Brettster, Brettasaurus Rex. My last name has given me a few as well. Sweetness. Sweetcheeks. Sweetie-pie. B-Sweet.

Additionally, I've received nicknames connected to tasks I've made an effort with: "Deadeye" for my efforts to be accurate with my B-B gun. "The best putter in Stevens County" for all the time I spent on the practice green when I played a lot of golf. "Lightning" for my use of a hammer- because I never could seem to strike the same place twice. But I picked none of those nicknames. In fact, most of the time we don't pick our nicknames- they are assigned to us.

[Application] But, interestingly, that is not the case for Jesus. He is God and God has perfectly nicknamed Him the Word. And think about this- when Word and reality match the result is truth. I can say things. I can use words. But only when they align with reality are they really true. And Jesus perfectly embodies the Word. He is the truth. Do you recognize the Lord Jesus as the Word today? Jesus is the Word that precisely corresponds to reality. The whole system of the Old Testament- the written law, the Temple, the prophets, they were all built around the word. Pointing forward. Giving us clues and hints. Setting the stage. Helping us recognize the eternal Word when He would come. Do you recognize Jesus as the True Word this morning. This Christmas season? Or will you go on your merry way like some tourist who doesn't know who it is who is before you?

Christmas calls us to recognize Jesus. This means we must recognize Jesus as the Word. But just as tourists might recognize a vague similarity between an elderly lady in Scotland and Queen Elizabeth, we can recognize some things about Jesus and miss others. Something else we must recognize:

[Main Point 2] Christmas calls us to recognize what Jesus has done

Jesus is the eternal Word. But what is it that Jesus, the Word, has done?

[Subpoint 1] The Word, Jesus, became flesh

Look with me at that first phrase of John 1:14

And the Word became flesh

The eternal Word. Which we now know is not something impersonal as Greeks might think- but personal. This is what Christmas is all about. The Eternal Word became flesh. God has become something He wasn't. The Word, Jesus, became flesh. What this means is not that He became a sinner but that He became a specific, certain man- the Lord Jesus of Nazareth. Here Christmas and advent call us to recognize Jesus but what made Jesus so hard to recognize was that He was truly a man like us. JI Packer has said that there is nothing in a fairytale more fantastic than this- but it's true! Do you recognize what Jesus has done? He became flesh.

That, in itself, is something amazing to recognize. But what else must we recognize that Jesus has done

[Subpoint 2] The Word, Jesus, dwelt among us

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,

Do you recognize that Jesus didn't just wave at us from space like a passing comet? Jesus, the Word, didn't just shout from the sky so that we could hear His voice. He has come and dwelt among us. He came and lived with us! That word "dwelt" is connected to the tabernacle. Jesus tabernacled among us. He pitched his tent with us! He walked roads with people like us. He ate food with people like us. He slept in homes and in the open hillside with people like us. In that OT tabernacle, God couldn't be seen. He couldn't be touched. He couldn't be smelled. But in a manger in Bethlehem, we are called to recognize what Jesus has done- He's come and dwelt among us.

[Illustration] One of the things I love about being around little kids is watching how many of them can be crammed onto a bench. But what's funny about that is that even though they take up space on the length of the bench, there's very little weight holding the bench down. So I've seen times where a grown up has begun to take a seat on the end of a bench only for a quick cry of panic to arise from everyone's mouths as they feel the bench start to tip over because the adult has put the whole bench out of balance.

When The Word became flesh and dwelt among us it is an utter miracle that the whole universe didn't tip over. God, who made the Universe, has humbled Himself by becoming man and He dwelt among us. But His gentle compassion for

us is so great that He didn't tip over this earth and end our existence before it began. And do you recognize what He's done? He's shown that, even though He doesn't need us, He wants to be with us. He dwelt with us. Jesus has come, calling you to recognize Him, so that you can know Him and be known by Him. He loves people. Do you see how this becomes relevant for prioritizing the local church? If the Word would come and dwell with people for more than three decades so that we can dwell with Him for eternity, shouldn't we be eager to dwell with a group of His people and commit to them for years and decades as well? This is why gospel-centered community is a priority for us here at GCF. This is one reason why we've always been about building healthy local churches and plan to always be that way. When we recognize what Jesus has done- by dwelling with people by becoming members of a local church- it will change our priorities.

Christmas calls us to recognize Jesus as the Word and what He has done. Christmas also lays another demand on us.

[Main Point 3] Christmas calls us to recognize Jesus' glory

The end of all things is to enjoy and reflect God glory back to Him and to the rest of creation. He is perfect and holy and projects these qualities outward to the whole universe. So if Jesus, the Word, is God then He must, by definition be projecting glory as well. The question is: Do we recognize Jesus' glory? What is it like? John 1:14 helps us here by showing us that

[Subpoint 1] We must recognize Jesus' glory as the Father's only Son

Read John 1:14 with me again

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father,

In the Old Testament (Exodus 33:18ff), Moses asked to see God's glory, and God responded that no one could see His face- the fullness of His glory- and live. But when Mary and Joseph pushed the sheep and donkeys out of the way and looked into a feeding trough they saw the glory of God- which the Apostle Paul says is found in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4). But did they recognize it right away? Did they know that this little One would be a perfect image of God the Father as the Father's only Son? It was probably hard to recognize. But as John is writing this under the direction of the Holy Spirit, he is thinking about how Jesus,

the Word who became flesh perfectly imaged His eternal Father's glory. Just like people could look at Jesus and say they saw a resemblance to His mother. Here, we're told that the One who had existed forever as the Son now, as a man, could perfectly resemble the glory of His Heavenly Father. Do you recognize His glory today? Do you want to know what God the Father is like in the fullness of His glory? Then spend your time meditating on Jesus. You'll recognize that Jesus' glory is the glory of an only Son of the Father.

Christmas calls us to recognize Jesus. My hope is that as God's Word does its work, your ears are turning to eyes and you are beginning to see Him. Do you recognize His glory? In Luke 2:14, when the angels announced Jesus' birth they announced God's glory in the highest. John tells us that this means recognizing Jesus' glory as the Father's only Son. It also means that

[Subpoint 2] We must recognize that Jesus' glory reveals Him to be full of grace and truth

Let's read our verse in its fullness

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

When you recognize Jesus in His glory, you don't see Him as harsh or hostile. You see Him as full of grace- eager to forgive sins. When you see Jesus in His glory you don't see Him as soft and wishy-washy about good and evil, or indifferent to religious opinions. You see Him as full of truth. If you think of Jesus as withholding good things from you, as begrudging, then you aren't seeing Him properly. You aren't recognizing His glory. He's full of grace. When you start to believe what our culture believes, that Jesus affirmed everyone all the time, you aren't recognizing Jesus. He is full of truth. That little baby displayed God's glory. And Jesus' glory reveals Him to be full of both grace and truth.

But how can Jesus be so gracious to forgive sin and yet so full of truth that He doesn't deny our sin? What we saw earlier as we discussed this idea of the Word is that in the Old Testament, when the written word of God was held aloft, it was casting a shadow of a different shape. The Word was casting the shape of a Person- One that would lie in a manger in ancient Bethlehem. But when we gaze at the manger in ancient Bethlehem to recognize Jesus' glory, we notice that that

little baby casted a shadow of a different shape too. It wasn't the shadow of an infant on a mother's knee- it was the shadow of the cross. Christmas calls us to recognize Jesus by anticipating the cross of Christ. At the cross, we recognize Jesus as the Word- who perfectly fulfilled the written law of the Old Testament. Living obediently as we have failed to do. Then at the cross we recognize that Jesus as the Word perfectly satisfied the punishments our sin deserves. At the cross we recognize what Jesus has done. He has become flesh- so that He could not just dwell among us, but die for us. At the cross we recognize Jesus' glory. He's the Father's only eternal Son. That's where grace and truth meet. Where God graciously shows the baby all grown up saving you no matter what you have done. No matter how far astray you think you've gone. There we see truth we can build our lives on, not the shifting views of our culture or our changing emotions.

[Conclusion] When you think about Christmas, you have to listen to what this season calls you to: it calls you to recognize Jesus. So the application for this text is a question: Do you recognize Jesus this morning? Queen Elizabeth went unrecognized and those American tourists walked away in ignorance- even though her face can be found everywhere. They'd heard of the queen but they didn't recognize her. Maybe you've heard of Jesus but you really don't recognize Him. If you recognize Jesus you won't walk away- ever! You'll worship. Do you recognize Jesus? The Apostle John recognized Jesus. Don't let Christmas pass you by until you do.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.