

# To make God known

John 1:14-18

*Pastor Wyley Jenkins, Jr.*

Maurizio Cattelan is an artist. Most recently, he became famous for his work of art called *Comedian*. *Comedian* sold for 91,000 euros, twice. The third piece of the artwork is being negotiated for 110,000 euros. What is *Comedian*? The piece of art is a real banana duct-taped to the wall. That is it. Is it a joke? Artnet News reported that the Art Gallery owner, who has worked with Cattelan for more than 25 years, dismissed the idea that the artwork is a joke. Mr. Perrotin told Artnet that every aspect of the work was carefully considered, from the shape of the fruit, to the angle it has been fixed with duct tape to the wall, to its placement. *Comedian* is sold with a certificate of authenticity, and owners can replace the banana as needed. The story does not end there. The taped banana caused so many people to visit the gallery that it was removed. It was also eaten by one guest who videoed himself eating the banana. Though all of this is interesting, the real news is the price paid. Two buyers paid 91,000 euros, and the question on everybody's mind is, "Is a duct-taped banana worth 91,000 euros?" And more fundamentally, "What makes something art?" If you hung the duct-taped banana beside a Monet painting, which one would be art? If you hung it beside a sculpture of Michelangelo, which would be art?

Do we know what is valuable? Do we know what is real? Do we know what is beautiful? Nothing seems to have a fixed meaning anymore. Nobody's opinion seems to be better than anyone else. Criticism is not wanted. But is this only true of the way we think about art? Now, we do this with religion as well. One person follows the teaching of Buddha, and another Confucius. One is a Hindu, and the other a Mormon. One is a Muslim, and the other a Christian. The way of thinking in our time is that everybody's religious opinion is only a banana duct-taped to the wall. It may be worth a lot to you, but worthless to me. They believe that your faith is only your personal opinion and not a universal truth to be shared. Despite this cultural way of thinking, many people are seeking to know who God is. This is the irony. They travel the world to go to temples, churches, or sacred monuments. They fast for days and even weeks. They give large sums of money to charities. Everyone hopes that, somehow, they can reach the real God. But would they know him when they found him?

Many others in Madrid have given up on any chance of knowing the real God. Our time is a time of religious confusion and great religious contradiction. Every one of us is thrown into this world, and we cannot avoid it. We are pressured on every side to turn away from Jesus or at least to be quiet about him. We are told it is arrogant to believe we are right, and others are wrong. Does the Bible have something to tell us about this confusion? Is the question really difficult to answer? What if the answer is right in front of us every Christmas and we don't see it? According to the Bible, God is not hidden; we are blind. Today, I want to challenge us to rejoice in the God who came to us when we could not see him. Our Bible passage for this morning is John 1:14-18, and it speaks to this religious confusion. It is intended to be part of an introduction to the rest of the book of John. In this small passage of Chapter 1, we learn some very important things about God, Jesus, and the reason Jesus came to earth.

***<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") <sup>16</sup> For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.***  
(John 1:14-18)

The first thing this passage is saying is that Jesus is totally unique. ***"The Word became flesh"*** means Jesus, who is God, became a human being. To be able to understand what this passage is saying, you need to understand an important fact about God. The God of the Bible is separate from his creation. Do you know what that means?

Think about the difference between Christianity and Hinduism. Christianity says that God is different from his creation in the same way that a painter is different from a painting. The painter paints, and though you can see his brilliance in the painting, he is a separate thing from the painting. On the other hand, Hinduism sees God and creation as the same thing. The painter and the painting are the same thing. The painter is the painting, and the painting is the painter. Hinduism tells people, you are God, the cow is God, the tree is God.

That is not what ***"the Word became flesh"*** means. Our passage needs to be seen in the right way. It should amaze us that the God of the Bible, who is eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, in control of everything and separate from everything, would become a human. It is the only time this has ever happened. So what John is saying is that Jesus is not just a more spiritual person than us; he is the creator of all life. Jesus is not just a teacher; in him is all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of the universe. Jesus is not just good at magic tricks, or a lucky person; he is God almighty who calms the sea or raises dead people back to life with his voice alone. Jesus is not just a good person who knows God; he is the ONLY Son of God. If you are searching for God, but you never look at Jesus, you are choosing to ignore the most unique person who ever lived. Listen to what Jesus says about himself, and you will be amazed. Here are 20 things he calls himself:

1. **The Son of God** (Matt. 26:63-63)
2. **The Son of Man** (Matt. 16:13; Mk 14:62)
3. **Giver of eternal life** (Jn. 10:28)
4. **One with the Father** (Jn. 10:30)
5. **Forgiver of sin** (Mk. 2:10)
6. **The bread of life** (Jn. 6:35)
7. **The good shepherd** (Jn. 10:11)
8. **The true vine** (Jn. 15:1)
9. **The great "I Am"** (Jn. 8:58)
10. **The giver of living water** (Jn. 4:10)
11. **The light of the world** (Jn. 8:12)
12. **The future Judge of all humanity** (Jn. 5:22-23)
13. **The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world** (Jn. 1:36)
14. **The baptizer with the Holy Spirit** (Lk. 3:16)
15. **The door of salvation** (Jn. 10:9)
16. **The Savior** (Jn. 3:14-16)
17. **The Messiah** (Jn. 4:26)
18. **The healer** (Lk. 18:42)
19. **The only way to God** (Jn. 14:6)
20. **The one who came from heaven** (Jn. 6:38)

That is who was born in the manger. Please do not reduce Jesus to a gifted good teacher. Don't shrink him into a loving person. Don't characterize him as a social justice warrior. Don't politicize him as a peaceful political rebel. If that is what you say about Jesus, it is not what he says about himself. You may be thinking: "It is great that the Bible says that about Jesus, but how do we know that he even existed?" Did you know that there are at least ten non-Christian people who wrote about Jesus and the early Christians? Jesus appears in the writing of the historians Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Thallus, Phlegon. He appears in the writing of Roman Government Officials like Pliny the Younger, Emperor Trajan, and Emperor Hadrian. There is a Greek poet and writer named Lucius who writes about him. Jesus even appears in the Jewish Talmud, which is the tradition of the Jewish teachers. In these non-Christian and even anti-Christian writings, they talk about Jesus and the early Christians beliefs. One scholar has made a list of at least 12 historical details that these non-Christian sources teach us:

1. Jesus lived during the time of Tiberius Caesar.
2. He lived a virtuous life.
3. He was known to be a miracle-worker.
4. He had a brother named James.
5. He was acclaimed to be the Messiah.

6. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
7. An eclipse and an earthquake occurred when He died.
8. He was crucified on the eve of the Passover.
9. His disciples believed He rose from the dead.
10. His disciples were willing to die for their beliefs.
11. Christianity spread rapidly as far as Rome.
12. His disciples denied the Roman gods and worshiped Jesus as God.

All these details are told by his enemies or those who did not believe. Do not believe the lie that Jesus is a made-up person. That is just not true. People may want it to be true, but it is not factual. Jesus is real and he came to make God known.

The second thing you need to understand is that this passage is comparing the interaction of God with Moses, in Exodus 33:18-23, 34:4-8, to the interaction of Jesus with his disciples. John says, ***“the Word became flesh . . . and we have seen his glory.”*** In the biblical book of Exodus 33:18, Moses asks to see God’s glory. John says in John 1:14, ***“we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.”***

Moses met God in the tent of meeting that moved around with God’s people. John says, ***“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”*** The world’s most distinguished scholar on the book of John says this: *“The Word dwelt among us’ means that the Word pitched his tabernacle, or lived in his tent, among us. For Greek-speaking Jews and other readers of the Greek Old Testament, the term would call to mind the skēnē, the tabernacle where God met with Israel before the temple was built.”*

In the famous scene in Exodus 34, God passes before Moses and it says that God proclaims his own name to Moses saying:

***“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty.”***

In that list, there are really only two reactions from God. There is mercy, grace, slowness to anger, steadfast love, faithfulness, and forgiveness. In one sense, these are all things no one really deserves. They are forms of God’s amazing grace. But the very last characteristic God says is that he will not let the guilty go unpunished. That means that even with all the amazing grace of God, he is still about justice, because the truth is, we are sinners.

You could say God was revealing grace and truth to Moses. John tells us that Jesus is the ***“only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*** John also says that ***“the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”*** Finally, God tells Moses that ***“You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.”*** John tells us, ***“No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”***

So, Moses wanted to see God’s glory and was given only a glimpse, but we have Jesus, who is the very radiance of the glory of God. Moses had to go to the tent to meet God, but Jesus

came from heaven, pitched his tent with us. God revealed Himself to Moses as the God of grace and truth; Jesus was the very fullness of grace and truth on earth. Moses couldn't see God and live, but Jesus came to the earth so that the whole world would have a chance to know the real God. You see, the mystery of who is the real God was solved already. Jesus has come to make him known.

Some of you here have it backward. You are waiting to know whether or not Jesus is God before you surrender to God's will. Jesus says that you are thinking backward. He says in John 7:17, ***"If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether my teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority."*** If you will surrender and do God's will, you will know that Jesus is who he says he is. Surrender, to know God. Don't think you have to know everything about God to be able to surrender. Follow Jesus in surrender. The baby in the manger grew up. He came to earth to reveal God. He surrendered his life to save ours. The grace and truth of Jesus came together on the cross. It was his grace that caused him to love us and die for us while we were still sinners. It was his truth that demanded the payment for sin. The truth is we deserve death, so he paid for all of our disobedience and rebellion.

#### **Discussion questions:**

1. What are a few common opinions about God that people hold in Madrid? (Example: God is a Myth.)
2. Why is the birth of Jesus important? How does it make God known?
3. Is Jesus a historical person?
4. How is John 1:14-18 similar to Exodus 33:18-23 and 34:4-8?
5. Name five things that Jesus says about himself.
6. How does the grace of God come together with the truth of God on the cross?