

# Christ is the Fulfilment

23 March 2008 (Youth Congress)

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Ps. 122: 1 - 3

Ps. 97: 1, 4

Hymn 55: 2, 3

Hymn 18: 1, 2

Ps. 89: 1, 7

Scripture reading: Ex. 40: 34 - 38; John 1: 1 - 18

Text: John 1: 14 - 18

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Lately you have been listening to sermons explaining a few controversial texts - texts that have been twisted by many to their own destruction. Texts such as Rom. 6: 14:

“...you are not under law, but under grace”.

And texts such as Rom.7: 4:

“...you...have become dead to the law...”

And Rom.7: 6:

“...now we have been delivered from the law...”

This afternoon we will listen to the preaching of God’s Word from yet another text like that:

“...the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ...” - John 1: 17.

Many have used this very text to say that the old covenant was a covenant of law, but that the new covenant is a covenant of grace. And is it not clear from the text itself that the law was given through Moses, but that grace came through Jesus Christ? No, it is not clear from the text! In fact, by leaving out only one or two words, this is a gross twisting of the text!

And therefore we turn to God's Word once more with careful discernment.

The Old Testament is not a covenant of law, while the New Testament is a covenant of grace. It is not law given through Moses, and grace given through Christ. That is not at all what the apostle is saying. He is speaking of something totally different. He is speaking of promise and fulfilment.

Scripture calls the New Testament era "the fullness of the time".

"...when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son..." (Gal.4: 4)

The fullness of the time came with the incarnation of Christ. It means that we live in the time of the fulfilment. Christ came to fulfil all God's promises.

The Old Testament administered Christ in shadows. The New Testament administers Him to us as the fulfilment of that same covenant. In Christ we have the full reality of that which was still veiled in the Old Testament. And so the relation between the old and the new covenant is that of promise and fulfilment.

The new covenant is simply the fulfilment of the old covenant.

In the new covenant we see the realisation and fullness of **everything** that the old covenant contained.

The text here in front of us is the fulfilment of that promise made to Adam in Paradise, and repeated to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. It is still the same gospel. Once again it will become clear to us this afternoon that the old covenant and the new covenant is one covenant, one gospel.

Brothers and sisters, the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant is not a difference in doctrine.

The difference is only this: that the promise of the old covenant has now come to its fulfilment. The difference of the new covenant lies in the glory of its fullness - fullness in the sense of fulfilment.

"...when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son..."

A correct understanding of this relation between the old and the new covenant is of the utmost importance for a correct understanding of the gospel itself. For it is exactly because of a wrong understanding of the covenant, that this text, John 1: 14 - 18, has been used by untaught and unstable people to twist the Scriptures to their own destruction.

What does it mean that the law was given through Moses, but that the grace and the truth came through Jesus Christ?

It is clear that the apostle John is making a contrast between the old and the new covenant. But what exactly is the contrast?

He is speaking of shadow and reality. In Christ we have the fullness and the truth of that which was spoken by Moses. The contrast that he makes is not between law and grace, but between shadow and reality. It is not a contrast between law and grace, but a contrast between grace and more grace.

I proclaim this gospel to you with the theme:

## Christ is the fulfilment of the covenant promise

We will note...

1. That God tabernacled amongst us
2. The greater glory of the new covenant
3. That God revealed Himself in Christ

In the first place we note that...

### God tabernacled amongst us

“...the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us...”

If we would translate the Greek text literally, it reads:

“...the Word became flesh and **tabernacled** amongst us...”

The apostle John is not using the normal Greek word for dwell. In fact, the verb that he uses here appears only once, here in our text, and a few times in the book of Revelations.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and tabernacled amongst us.”

**God** tabernacled amongst us.

It is clear that the apostle John uses typical language from the old covenant.

God has promised to be a God to His people. And the tabernacle, which had to be erected in the midst of His people, signified His dwelling amongst His people. There, behind the second veil, was “the Holiest of All” (Hebr. 9: 3). There the glory of the Lord was present - a glory that no man could enter, except for the high priest carrying the blood of atonement.

Later the tabernacle was replaced by the temple in Jerusalem on the mount Zion. When Solomon was finish building that temple, the temple was filled with the glory of the Lord, so that no one could enter; and again, there in the Holiest of All, dwelt the glory of God. For all of Israel this was the sign of God's presence in their midst. There God dwelt in their midst. And so the temple was called the house of the Lord.

But we know also from the rest of the New Testament that the tabernacle which was built by Moses was only a shadow of the real tabernacle in heaven. Thus we read:

“...Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us...”- Heb.9:24.

The tabernacle in the Old Testament was a copy of the true tabernacle in heaven. There, in heaven, God is enthroned in his heavenly and spiritual temple. There, in heaven, the most holy place is the very presence of God Himself. God dwells in the heavenly and true tabernacle.

Now you understand what the apostle John is saying when He says that the Word became flesh and tabernacled amongst us. He is using an image from the Old Testament where the tabernacle was a sign of God dwelling amongst His people. Now, the same apostle John also tells us what the final fulfilment of this shadow will be.

**“..Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people. God Himself will be with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God” - Rev. 21: 3.**

That will be the final and glorious fulfilment. There in Rev.21: 3, when John says that the tabernacle of God will be with men, and that God will “dwell”with His people, the apostle again uses this unusual Greek word: He will tabernacle with them.

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will tabernacle with them.

Our text, here in John 1: 14, is a clear parallel of that text in Revelations. The line from the tabernacle in the desert, through to the incarnation of Christ, runs even further and finds it's fulfilment when God, in the fullness of His glory, will dwell amongst us.

Christ is Emmanuel. He is God with us. He is the fulfilment of the covenant promise. In Christ *God* became flesh, and tabernacled amongst us.

“...and we beheld His glory...”(John 1: 14)

There was only one place in Israel where the glory of the Lord dwelt: in the tabernacle. But the glory of God was veiled behind a curtain. The apostle John says that that veil has now been removed: we beheld His glory! The glory of the

Lord is no longer to be sought in an earthly tabernacle, a shadow of the true; no, the reality has come! God's glory is to be found in Christ. **He** is God amongst us. In Him we behold God's glory. The shadow has made room for its fulfilment.

We beheld His glory: the glory of the only begotten of the Father. He is very God of very God. Look at Him: the fullness of grace and truth! Our translation reads:

“...full of grace and truth...”.

Again it is a pity that our translation did not stick closer to the Greek text. The Greek text does not say that Christ is “full of” grace and truth. No, it says that this glory which we behold in Christ is grace and truth in its fullness.

We have to read verse 14 as follows:

“...the Word became flesh and tabernacled amongst us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father: complete (or “full grown”) grace and truth!

It means that by the incarnation of Christ we receive the complete grace and truth of God's glorious presence. In Christ God tabernacles with us. It is no longer the shadow; it is the full reality. It is the fullness of the grace and the truth of God's covenant promise.

Look, it is here! The fullness has come!

That is what the apostle John is saying.

Then follows verse 15:

“John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said: He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me’”.

Together with all the prophets of the Old Testament, John the Baptist spoke of the coming of Christ. And then, finally, John the Baptist had the privilege to point out Christ with His own finger: here is the long expected Messiah! Don't look at me; look at Him! I am only the servant who had to announce His coming. He is by far greater than I am:

“...for He was before me”.

This expression “He was before me” is the same as where Christ says:

“...before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8: 58).

Or as it stands here in verse 1:

“In the beginning was the Word....”

John the Baptist testified of the same thing. It is true, he said, that Christ came after me, yet He was before me.

Now, what has this to do with our text? Brothers and sisters, the apostle John is using the testimony of the prophets - including the testimony of John the Baptist - to confirm that Christ is indeed the eternal Son of God. He is placing this gospel in the context of prophecy. Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world - verse 29. "...We have found the Messiah..."- verse 41.

In this whole chapter John is showing us that the glorious fulfilment of all the prophecies has come. Here is the long expected Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. He is the true tabernacle. He is the Lamb of God. He is the fulfilment of all the prophecies.

The fullness has come. The shadows have come to their full reality. Christ Himself *is* the fullness. In Him the grace and the truth of God's covenant promise is complete.

The fulfilment is glorious. In Christ God's tabernacle is amongst us.

And thus we note in the second place

## The greater glory of the new covenant

If we want to stay as close as possible to the Greek text, then we have to translate verse 16 as follows:

"For out of His fullness we have all received; even grace in the place of grace".

He states that the fullness of God's grace has come to us in Christ.

And then the apostle again uses an unusual expression, saying that we received grace in the place of grace. Grace was exchanged with grace. At first this may seem a strange thing to say, but the meaning soon becomes clear when we read the very next verse, verse 17:

"For the Law was given through Moses; the grace and the truth came to be through Jesus Christ".

Yes, that is again a literal translation of the Greek text: *the* grace and *the* truth came to be through Jesus Christ.

The fullness of the grace and the truth in Christ are contrasted with the Law of Moses. But what exactly is the contrast? The Law of Moses refers in this context to the whole Old Testament. Literally it refers to the first five books of Moses -

Genesis to Deuteronomy. But what the apostle is doing is to show us the fullness that has now come in Christ. Thus he puts the shadows of the Old Testament over against their full reality in Christ.

He is not saying that the Old Testament was not true and that it was without grace. No, that is not the contrast. He is not contrasting the doctrine of Moses with the doctrine of Christ. Not at all! What he is doing is to contrast the shadows of the Old Testament with its fullness in Christ.

In Christ the Law of Moses finds its full reality.

Now it becomes clear to us what the apostle means when he says in verse 16 that the fullness of God's grace has come to us in Christ, and that there was an exchange of grace for grace. It simply means that the fullness of Christ has replaced the shadows.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament contains the grace of God's covenant, but the shadows of grace have now been replaced with the fullness of grace.

In the third place we note that...

## God revealed Himself in Christ

“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” - verse 18.

Our text started by saying that Christ has become our tabernacle; in Christ God tabernacles amongst us. In Him we see God's glory. Now, compare this with the Old Testament. Moses asked the Lord:

“Please, show me Your glory”

But the Lord answered him:

“...You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live”.

Then the Lord said to Moses:

“...Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen” - Ex.33: 18 - 23.

What does that mean? Moses saw God, but not His face; he saw only the form of God from the back. While it is said that God spoke to Moses face to face - Num.12: 8 - it is immediately added that Moses saw “the form of the LORD”. The glory of God’s face was still veiled.

But in the New Testament we read that this veil has been taken away in Christ - 2 Cor.3: 14

The apostle John is now saying the same thing.

In Christ we behold the glory of God’s face! He is very God of very God. In Him the veil of the tabernacle is taken away, so that we see the fullness of His glory in Christ.

Yes, the fathers in the Old Testament have seen God, but not the glory of His face. No one could see God’s face, and live. But through Christ we enter the most holy place of God’s presence and we behold His face in the face of Christ.

“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”

The time of full and clear revelation has come.

The expression “the only begotten Son” refers to the divinity of Christ. He is very God of very God. And the expression “in the bosom of the Father” means that He shares in the most intimate secrets of the Father. Christ - who is God Himself, and who knows even the deepest secrets of God - He has revealed the Father to us.

In Christ the heart of God has been revealed, and His glory has been laid bare.

In Christ we see God’s face - and live!

Let us therefore not misuse this text to imagine a contrast between the doctrine of the Old Testament and the doctrine of the New Testament, as if the Old Testament contains a covenant of law, and the New Testament a covenant of grace. No, nothing of that! But let us appreciate the fullness of God’s glory that has now been revealed to us.

Brothers and sisters, let us also live from the fullness of God’s grace and truth in Christ. And let us expect that day when this gospel will reach its final fulfilment on the day of Christ’s coming. Then we will behold His glory and the glory of God, where God will tabernacle amongst us - a tabernacle without a veil - where we will live in the fullness of His glory.

The line of promise and fulfilment runs through the Law of Moses to the first coming of Christ, and it also runs further to the second coming of Christ:

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will tabernacle with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God”.

There you have the final fulfilment of the covenant promise.

In Christ the promise is fulfilled, and in Christ it **will** be fulfilled on a new earth where we will see the full glory of God’s face, and live. In Christ we received the fullness of God’s grace and the fullness of His truth. Through Christ we entered the complete glory of God: a glory that will finally be revealed at Christ’s second coming. Then we will see the full glory of God’s face in Christ and live in the glory of His very presence, forevermore.

Amen.