The greatest happiness/blessedness any human being could ever experience, is the happiness of seeing God.

Jesus said=> “Blessed [happy/fortunate] are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8).

Westminster Shorter Catechism=>

Q#1: “What is the chief end of man?”
A: “Man’s chief end is to glory God, and to enjoy Him forever.”

To see Him will be to enjoy Him.

But the Apostle John wrote, “No man has seen God at any time.”

God is an invisible Spirit, whom no human eye can see.

So are we to be forever deprived of that 1 experience in which our souls’ greatest potential delight lies?

Was Jesus holding out a false hope to us, of seeing God?

No, because John then added=> “The only begotten God [Jesus X], who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (Jn 1:18).

Jesus is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His nature (Heb 1:3).

To see Him, is to see God.

And in our case, we “see” Him by faith—for now.

Peter reminded us (I Pet 1:8)=> “Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy
inexpressible and full of glory.”

Last time we considered John’s words in John 1:14=>

“The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld [looked closely in order to perceive/understand] His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

X’s glory was the divine glory of the Father, and because one aspect of that glory is His perfect grace/graciousness, Jesus is full of God’s grace, a/w/a truth.

Grace is a dominant factor in Jesus’ character, excluding anything/everything that would be ungracious, in any way.

He is also “full of truth”—absolutely given over to truth.

As we carefully examine what the Bible says about Jesus, reading it with eyes of faith, illumined by the H.S., we too perceive X’s glory=> His perfect holiness, His compassionate love/grace, His incomparable/superlative truth.

In a word, we discern His “fulness” of divine grace/truth, and therein we find blessedness for our souls.

This morning, let John show you 4 facets of Jesus’ glory in today’s text, and how you should respond to them, so you can enjoy the blessedness of “seeing” the only begotten God by faith.

One might say these are the “glories” of X’s divine glory.

* Christ Is Eternal God: Honor Him

[John 1:15]=> “John [the Baptist] bore witness of Him, and
cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, “He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.”’”

In John’s world, honor was closely tied to a person’s age.
John was born only 6 months before X, but in that culture, it was enough to give him higher rank/status than Jesus w/i their Jewish society.
John had taught the throngs of people coming to hear him what must have seemed like a contradiction=>
Someone born after him was coming, who outranked him, because he actually existed before John.
He existed long long before John—in fact, before anyone/anything else.
That Person was Jesus—and He existed from eternity past, because He was/is eternal God.
Jesus X is the incarnation of the 2nd Person of the Godhead, the eternal Word, who existed before the beginning of time.
2000 years ago He emptied Himself and came to earth as a Man like us.
John was recognizing Jesus as Someone who outranked him by an infinite/eternal factor—because He was God.
His timelessness was simply an indication of His deity.
Jesus said, “Before Abraham was born, I am” (8:58).
What He meant was that, in His deity, time is irrelevant to Him—unlike everybody else in the world.

We are all slaves of time.

Time is our unrelenting master—its tick tick tick never slowing down, speeding up, stopping, or reversing course.

God is not enslaved to time at all.

X eternally is.

And w/ His eternal existence, He is unlimited by time—unconstrained by time’s restrictions.

Apart from X’s humanity, 1 day is as a thousand years to Him, and a thousand years are as a day—just as Peter said of God (II Pet 3:8).

Q: **How must we respond to X in view of His being eternal God?**

A: Honor Him, just as we would the Father, because “He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him” (Jn 5:23).

We are to honor Jesus, just as John the Baptist did, by humbling ourselves before Him, & thus acknowledging His divine majesty.

1st, we do that by humbly submitting our will to His will, even if we must relinquish our own will.
John submitted to Jesus, baptizing Him, in spite of the fact that he felt he himself should be baptized by Messiah. He didn’t feel worthy of baptizing the Messiah, or even of untying His sandal straps, for that matter. But when Jesus asked John to baptize Him, he did it.

We too honor X by submitting to Him as our Lord, and to His will for our lives.

2nd, and related to #1, we submit to Jesus’ wisdom, as revealed in the Word—not leaning on our own understanding, or the foolish speculations which this world views as its wisdom.

3rd, we honor X by speaking reverentially of Him to others, just as John did, when he announced, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29).

4th, we honor X by pointing people away from ourselves, seeking glory/honor for His name instead.

John lit. encouraged his own disciples to follow Jesus instead of himself, saying=> “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn 3:30).

He rejoiced at the coming of Jesus, the Bridegroom of the Church, happy to have merely had a part in the wedding as a friend of the Bridegroom (Jn 3:29).

* Christ Is Our Grace-Source: Praise Him

[Verse 16]=> “For of His fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace.”

In verse 14, John had said he/other-Xns beheld Jesus’ glory as of the only-begotten of God, “full of grace/truth.”
One can see a fullness of divine grace throughout X’s entire life.

1st, in His incarnation into human flesh, having left behind the glories of heaven—a pure act of divine/godly grace.

He became a human to save other humans by His own very human death.

In the process He experienced all our various trials/temptation/sufferings, so that He might become our High Priest, sympathetic to our plight/problems, mediating on our behalf w/ tender compassion, because He understands the human condition and our feelings

2nd, we see Jesus’ graciousness throughout His ministry on earth.

Everything He said was full of grace/love.

Jesus’ whole life was one of gracious compassion, as He healed the sick, raised the dead, cared for the needy.

3rd, the ultimate act of grace, seen in this Man so full of grace, was His death—pouring out His soul, bearing man’s sins in His own body, & bringing us salvation.

But not only is Jesus “full” of grace w/i Himself, He gives us grace, out of His own abundance of grace, & so we receive it.

That’s the lit. wording of verse 16—“Out of” Jesus’ divine fulness of grace, we “received” grace to ourselves.
Initially we received X’s grace the moment we believed in Him, becoming born again, and it came to us in the form of multiple gifts=>

* Life (in Jn 10 Jesus said)=> “I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish” (10:28).
* Peace (in Jn 14 He said)=> “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (14:27).
* Joy (Jn 15)=> “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, & that your joy may be made full” (15:11).
* God’s Word (Jn 17:14)=> “I have given them Thy word.”
* The H.S. (Jn 20)=> “He breathed on them, and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit” (20:22).
* Everything we need for spiritual life/growth (II Pet 1:3):
  
  "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness.”

But in addition to all this at the start of our Xn life, X then adds “grace upon grace”—1 grace-gift heaped upon another, w/ no possibility of X’s grace ever running out.

John says, all those who have believed in Jesus received God’s grace, out of X’s infinite/abundant supply of grace.

We have hardly assimilated one manifestation of God’s unmerited grace from X, before we receive another.

God’s gracious gift of salvation was just our initial installment of grace, and the start of an endless string of gracious gifts/blessings He continually gives us—& always will.

Rom 5 puts it like this=> “…through whom [Jesus] also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this
One of the most marvelous grace-gifts we receive is grace itself, as a communicable attribute of God.

Jesus (being God) gives us grace, so as we grow spiritually in Him, we become full of grace ourselves, like Him.

Stephen, the Church’s first martyr, was an example of that, & so he was described as being “full of grace” (Acts 6:8).

Peter wrote to all believers—> “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (II Pet 3:18).

So the key to growing in grace, is growing in the knowledge of our gracious Savior, through study of His Word.

In view of X’s endless grace to us, how should we respond?

Just think about this most wonderful gift we have ever received, or could ever receive—God’s grace, received from Jesus X;

* A gift that has saved our souls, & will forever preserve them from ever slipping out of X’s hand;

* A gift that will never cease to make us more like Him, & to bring even more wonderful things into our lives…

As we think about all that, our response should obviously be to praise our blessed Savior w/ hearts full of gratitude/love.

I can’t help but think of John leaning on Jesus’ breast in the Upper Room, as I imagine how he must have responded to X’s gifts of grace.
He would undoubtedly have praised his Lord, but his praise would have been the overflow of a heart full of love, for his Savior/Friend/Benefactor.

And our praise too should come out from hearts replete with gratitude/love, because of all He has done for us.

* Christ Is Our Realization of Grace/Truth: Rejoice in Him

[Verse 17]=> “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.”

John contrasts the Law of Moses, w/ the grace/truth of God—which we realize/receive through Jesus X, in the gospel.

This comparison implies the gospel’s superiority to the Law.

1st, the gospel’s grace/truth had a superior form of transmission.

The Law was given through Moses like water passing through a pipe.

God wrote it on stone tablets, handed it to him, and told him to teach it to Israel, even though Moses himself wouldn’t be able to keep it perfectly, because it was foreign to his own nature.

Grace/truth weren’t just given like that thru Jesus, but were actually realized thru Him, because He was Himself full of grace/truth.

They were His own perfections, manifesting His deity.

He lived them out, allowing us to see the glory of God’s grace/truth translated into His own human life.
There were times when God’s glory appeared on Moses’ face, but then it would fade because it wasn’t his own glory.

The glory of Jesus’ face came from within Him and could never fade.

2nd, as verse 16 has just said, we who are believers already received grace directly from X at our conversion, and after that “grace upon grace.”

Under Moses’ regime of the Law, man was always condemned by the Law because he could never fully obey it, due to the weakness of his own flesh.

In fact, Rom 7:8 says man’s flesh is so rebellious that the Law just incites it to further disobedience.

But having received Jesus’ grace, those whom He has regenerated and filled with His Spirit have both a new love for His law, & a new capacity to obey it.

Rom 8=> “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, / in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (8:3-4).

X’s transmission of divine grace didn’t simply inform us, it transformed us, from the inside.
The gospel of X’s grace/truth itself is also inherently superior to the Mosaic Law, for a number of reasons=>

* The Law was always just a shadow of the good things that X would bring, even as He Himself fulfilled the Law on our behalf.

* The Law (unlike God’s grace) knows nothing of mercy.
  
  Heb 10=> “Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy” (10:28).

  Grace/truth are full of mercy, just as X Himself is merciful.

* Although the Law demonstrated God’s grace in a limited sense by giving man a means of forgiveness (through the offering of sacrifices), that forgiveness was never full/final.

  There was always another sacrifice needed, forever reminding man how helplessly/hopelessly sinful he was, & that the Law could never transform his essential nature.

  Heb 10 points that out very clearly, saying the Law=>

  “can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near. / Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered?” (10:1-2).

* The Law also ran the risk of being misused by those, like the scribes/Pharisees, who would try to turn it into a self-help system of works-righteousness, as man’s pride took over.

  He’d view it as a method of exchanging favors with God=>
I do what He wants (offer my sacrifice), so He does what I want (turns a blind eye to my guilt).

In a barter system like that, there’s no room for God’s gifts of grace because man is trying so hard to save himself, by his own religious/moral efforts.

**We who form a relationship w/ X by faith have attained**

(thru His grace/truth), what the Law could never give: **salvation, full/free.**

X graciously took upon Himself the punishment of all sinners who place their faith in Him.

In that way, justice was done, & the Law was satisfied, even as they were saved, by an act of His grace.

Jesus was now free to forgive their sins, having paid the Law’s penalty for those sins on the cross.

And X did it all for His people, as a loving act of undeserved grace, which they could never repay.

Jesus became our salvation from Law’s condemnation, & all we had to do was receive Him by faith.

If you have never understood that you were condemned by God’s perfect Law…

Or that you can escape from its condemnation and be forgiven of your sin by simply believing in X and receiving these gifts of His grace…

Ask Him now to save you from your sin/sins.
Not only was grace realized in Jesus, truth was realized in Him as well, in a couple of different ways.

1st, He is the Truth that lay behind many of the OT’s symbols. He is full of truth, and He is the full truth about God.

E.g. * He was the true Passover Lamb, toward which all other Passover sacrifices looked forward.

* He was the Reality anticipated by every sacrificial lamb—the burnt offerings, the sin offerings, the peace offerings, the morning/evening offerings.

* He was the true Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world, once/for-all.

The whole sacrificia system pointed forward to Him, being a mere shadow, of which He would be the Reality/Substance.

2nd, truth was realized in X, in the sense that He dealt truthfully w/ our salvation, even though it cost Him His life to do so.

There was no cheating justice, or shading/hiding from the truth, in any way.

He didn’t cut any corners, nor did He ask the Law to pull its punches in order to spare Himself the pain of having to pay the full/terrible price for our sins.

Instead, He became our propitiation, even when it resulted in His crying out on the cross=> “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me” (Mt 27:46).
He had asked His Father at Gethsemane if the cup might pass from Him, because He was squarely facing the truth of what He’d have to endure to reverse the curse brought on the human race, by our sin.

X dealt truthfully with our condemnation, unleashing on Himself the Law’s full/terrible fury for our sakes. Jesus didn’t say, “The Law is too harsh, & they’re only human.” That attitude leads only to a sentimentality that sets truth aside in favor of moral weakness, while operating under the guise of kindheartedness.

X honestly faced truth’s hard reality, that we were sinners deserving death—flagrant violators of God’s Law. If we didn’t die, someone else would have to, as our substitute, & He determined to be that Someone.

Jesus perfectly blended/balanced loving grace w/unbending/absolute truth.

**If you are truly a believer in Jesus X, He is the realization of God’s grace/truth for you; You should rejoice in Him.**

Rejoice as even true OT saints never could rejoice.

He has fulfilled the Law’s requirement on your behalf, & it will never again be able to condemn you.

Spiritually speaking, you’re off the hook, you’re home free. So take a deep breath, set aside your fears, rest in Him… And rejoice!
Review

X is=>
* Eternal God: Honor Him
* Our Grace-Source: Praise Him
* Our Realization of Grace/Truth: Rejoice in Him.

* Christ Is Our Explanation of God: Worship Him

[Verse 18]=> “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.”

John says that no man has ever seen God, but for believers that is our great hope, because, as we saw earlier, Jesus promised=>

“Blessed [happy/fortunate] are the pure in heart [whom X has graciously made holy], for they shall see God”
(Mt 5:8).

Moses longed to see God, & so he said to the Lord=>

“I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!” (Ex 33:18).

But there is danger for sinful man in that sort of direct encounter with the Lord, because of the overwhelming brightness of God’s glory.

So God told Moses=> “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” (Ex 33:20).

Manoah saw the Lord, & then he told his wife=> “We shall surely die, for we have seen God” (Judg 13:22).

In our own text, John makes an unequivocal statement that no man has ever seen God.

But how can that be true, given the fact that Manoah/others did see Him (at least in some sense, to some degree)?

Isaiah (6:1)=> “In the year of King Uzziah’s death, I saw
the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted.’”

What John is saying is that it’s impossible for man to have a true knowledge of God, as God, (the invisible Spirit) within the limitations of our own humanness.

John indicates that, by using an anarthrous noun which emphasizes God’s nature, rather than His Person.

What Manoah, Moses, and Isaiah all saw was the pre-incarnate X.

One of the reasons it was so important that the 2nd Person of the Godhead come to earth, is that Jesus (incarnate God) is our only true visualization of the unseen God.

Jesus is fully qualified to explain God to us, for 2 reasons=>
1st, because He is God’s “only-begotten”—the only Man who shares God’s own essential nature.
2nd, because He is “in the bosom” of the Father.

This is a Hebrew expression that describes the closest and most tender kind of relationship/fellowship.

It is used in Num 11 to describe a child’s relationship with his mother (11:12), in Deut 13 of a husband’s relationship w/ his wife (13:6), & in Lk 16:22, of Lazarus’ fellowship w/ Abraham in heaven.

Because of the joy/closeness of X’s relationship with His Father (being in the bosom of the Father) and because He has been face to face w/ God from all eternity, He alone is able to explain/interpret God to us.
When Philip said to Jesus=> “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us,” X answered=> “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:8, 9).

Though we can have no direct knowledge of God as God, we understand God—“see” God by faith—through this One who shares our human nature, & yet is fully God as well—Jesus X.

As Col 2 says=> “For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Col 2:9).

Thus, our souls are delighted, as X’s promise is fulfilled (Mt 5:8):

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

We see God in our Savior, & will have all eternity to gaze in delight, at Jesus’ glory.

X has “explained” God (lit. interpreted God) for us, in terms we can understand w/o being destroyed, & so we are blessed to worship Him, & in doing so, to worship God.

In Mt 11, X said no one knows the Father, “except the Son, & anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (11:27).

X has revealed the Father to us through His own glory.

In that way, we have come to know/delight-in God.

We worship God, by worshiping His only begotten Son—the eternal Word, the Lamb of God, our Lord/Savior Jesus.

We pray to Him, as Joseph Conrad did, in this 19th cent. poem=>

Thou art the everlasting Word,  Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou
The Father’s only Son;  That every knee to Thee should bow.
God, manifestly seen and heard,  And Heaven’s beloved-One

- 17 -
“Christ Jesus: Our All”
December 30, 2012

Text: John 1:15-18

1. The greatest happiness or blessedness any human being could ever experience is the happiness of [14 seeing] God.
   Mt 5:8; Jn 1:18; Heb 1:3; Jn 1:14

2. Grace is a dominant factor in Jesus’ character, excluding everything ungracious; He is also [10 full] of truth.

Let John show you four facets of Jesus’ glory in today’s text, and how you should react to them, so you can enjoy the blessedness of “seeing” the only begotten God by faith…

* Christ Is Eternal God: Honor Him
   [John 1:15]

3. John was recognizing Jesus as Someone who outranked him by an infinite, eternal factor because He was [8 God].
   Jn 8:58; II Pet 3:8

4. How must we respond to Christ in view of His being eternal God?
   [12 Honor] Him just as we would the Father.
   Jn 5:23; 1:29; 3:30, 29

* Christ Is Our Grace-Source: Praise Him
   [Verse 16]

5. One can see a fullness of divine [12 grace] throughout Christ’s entire life.

6. Not only is Jesus full of grace Himself, He gives [6 us] grace out of His own abundance.
   Jn 10:28; 14:27; 15:11; 17:14; 20:22; II Pet 1:3

7. God’s gracious gift of salvation was just the start of an endless string of gracious [12 gifts] and blessings.
   Rom 5:2; Acts 6:8; II Pet 3:18

8. Our response should obviously be to [14 praise] our blessed Savior with hearts full of gratitude and love.
* Christ Is Our Realization of Grace and Truth: Rejoice in Him  
[Verse 17]

9. The gospel of Christ’s grace and truth itself is inherently [18 superior] to the Mosaic Law.

Heb 10:28; 10:1-2

10. We who form a relationship with Christ by faith have attained, through His grace and truth, what the Law could never give: [20 salvation].

11. Truth was realized in Christ; He dealt truthfully with our salvation even though it cost Him His [10 life] to do so.

Mt 27:46

12. If you are truly a believer in Jesus Christ, He is the realization of God’s grace and truth for you; you should [16 rejoice] in Him.

* Christ Is Our Explanation of God: Worship Him  
[Verse 18]

13. One of the reasons it was so important that the Second Person of the Godhead come to earth, is that Jesus (incarnate God) is our only true visualization of the [14 unseen] God.

Num 11:12; Deut 13:6; Lk 16:22; Jn 14:8-9; Col 2:9; Mt 5:8; 11:27

14. We worship God by worshiping His only begotten Son—the eternal Word, the Lamb of God, our Lord and Savior, [12 Jesus].