

## Sermon Series: *The Gospel of John*

# No One Has Ever Seen God

## Jesus Was Not A Good Teacher

**John 1:18** (ESV)

**18** No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

“Knock, knock.”  
“Whose there?”  
“Jesus.”  
“Jesus who?”

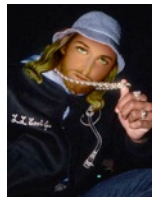
That is THE question? Jesus who? There are so many Jesus's.



There's “Baby Jesus,” who perpetually lives in a manger and never grows up, but makes for really a neat story for kids.



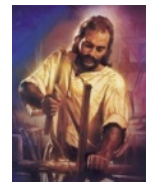
There's “Buddy Jesus” who just wants to hang out with you and help you have a good time.



There's “L.L. Cool J Jesus” who wants to help you be rich and famous.



There's the “Teacher Jesus” who wanted everyone to be nice and live well, but he was not the Son of God or the Savior of the world. He was just a good teacher.



There's “Carpenter Jesus” who was a real guy, but he got mixed up in all this messiah-business and accidentally died young and so many confused people have mistakenly thought him to be someone he's not. He was just a carpenter.



Then there's “Dead Jesus.” His friends went nuts with grief after he was killed. They stole his body, starting telling everyone he rose from the dead. The story snowballed and today we have this crazy religion called “Christianity.”

Who is Jesus? John was one of Jesus' closest friends. He lived with Jesus for about three years. Here's what John said about Jesus.

**John 1:18 (ESV)**

**18** *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

In the Greek verse eighteen literally reads,

**John 1:18**

“God, no one has seen at any time;  
the one and only God, the one who is in the bosom (lap) of the Father,  
that one has made him fully known.”<sup>1</sup>

Some people are discouraged from trusting what the Bible teaches about God because of apparent contradictions. The first phrase in this verse brings up one such instance.

**No one has ever seen God.** “Really?” says the doubter. “No one? That’s not true, because the Bible itself tells us of two men who saw God—Isaiah and Moses.” Now, John, the author of this gospel, was a good Jew. He knew the Scriptures. He knew the Torah and the prophets. He had read the scroll of Isaiah. So why would he write this? He knew what Isaiah wrote in chapter 6.

**Isaiah 6:1 (ESV)**

**1** *In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.*

Isaiah saw the Lord seated on a throne with a robe on. How can John say no one has ever seen God? Isn't this a contradiction or is there more to this than first meets the eye? And what about Moses? John knew what we know about Moses. Didn't Moses see God? Didn't he?

**Exodus 33:9, 11 (ESV)**

**9** *When Moses entered the tent (i.e. the tabernacle, the tent of meeting), the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses.*

**11** *Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.*

That sounds like Moses too saw God. This appears to be a contradiction, right? God spoke to Moses face to face just like you and I talk to a friend. That's what verse 11 says. However, just seven verses later we read the following. Moses is talking to God and he says to Him,

**Exodus 33:18-23 (ESV)**

**18** *Moses said, “Please show me your glory.”*

**19** *And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name: ‘The LORD.’ (YHWH)*

**20** *“But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.*

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<sup>1</sup> Lukaszewski, Albert L. and Mark Dubis. *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament: Sentence Analysis*, Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009, John 1:18.

21 And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock,  
22 and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.  
23 Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”

So Moses did not see God’s face. He saw God’s back. But why then does the same author writing a few verse earlier say that the two of them spoke “face to face.” When Exodus 33:11 says that God spoke to Moses “face to face” it means that God did not go through anyone else to speak to Moses. The point is that there was no intermediary between God and Moses. The communication between God and Moses was direct.

When God spoke to Moses, He did so in the form<sup>2</sup> of a cloud (i.e. “a pillar of cloud” vs. 9). So when Moses asked God to show Him all of His glory, he was asking for something much more intimate and personal than anything he had previously experienced while speaking with God. What Moses was asking was for the cloud to be removed.

Talking to God through the cloud was possibly something like talking to God over the phone. He heard Him *directly*, but he did not see Him *fully*. Moses didn’t want to talk over the phone any longer. Moses was asking for a face to face encounter—a meeting in person.

Have you ever felt like this? Have you ever yearned to speak to God face to face? Are you tired of the cloud that keeps God forever, just around the corner, and out of reach? Don’t you wish the cloud could be removed and you could really get to know who God is and what He is like?

Moses did. That’s why he asked the question. Moses was asking to see God in the complete fullness of His essence in all of His majestic glory. Moses knew there was more of God than just the cloud. He was asking to see God as He truly is, in the fullest expression of His entire essence.

If God allowed this, it would mean revealing the undimmed brilliance of His holiness. The intensity of God’s white-hot holiness would consume anything impure that came into its presence. This is why God denied his request. This is why God said, “You cannot see my face and live.”

It is impossible for even the best of men, even Moses, to see the full essence of the God in pure holiness and live through it. Witnessing the full radiance of the undimmed perfection of God’s holy, holy, holiness would bring about the death of any and all who were impure in even the slightest way. Moses had sinned. Sin is what separates us from God and keeps us from seeing God’s glorious face.

**Isaiah 59:2 (ESV)**

*2 but your iniquities have made a separation  
between you and your God,  
and your **sins** have hidden his **face** from you  
so that he does not hear.*

No man who has ever sinned can see the face of God’s pure holiness and live. So Moses was not allowed to see God face to face in the way he wanted. Moses was unable to see the high noon of

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<sup>2</sup> When God says that Moses “beholds the form of the Lord” in Numbers 12:8, apparently the cloud is in view and indicates that at the time there was no one who was closer to the Lord than Moses and does not intend to communicate that the form was the complete revelation of the full essence of God.

God's glory, but God did allow him to catch a rear-view glance of the sunset of God's glory—but even that dim glory was bright enough to illuminate Moses face so much that the people were afraid to look at him (Ex 34:29-30).

The sinfulness of man prevents man from **in the flesh** seeing God. So Moses, in his sinful flesh, did not see God face-to-face. This is what God employs dreams and visions. These hazy obscurities allow revelation without extermination. The experience Isaiah had was through a vision or a dream. So even Isaiah did not, in his sinful flesh, see God in the fullness of His complete essence.

Furthermore, God is Spirit<sup>3</sup> and thus invisible<sup>4</sup> to the fleshly human eyes. Paul writes to Timothy about God,

**1 Timothy 6:16** (ESV)

**16** *who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.*

So it has been the consistent teaching of Scripture that sinful persons cannot see God (who is holy, holy, holy) and live and these two instances are not contradictions. **Thus no one who has ever sinned has ever in their flesh seen God in the fullness of His essence,<sup>5</sup> nor are they able to.**

## The Insurmountable Problem

If no sinner has ever seen or can ever see God, then, if you have the desire to see God and get to know Him, then you are hopeless. To see His glory is to know Him in all the fullness of His essence and personality. If you really wanted to see and know God and you've sinned even only once, then you simply cannot see and know Him. All persons are sinners, therefore no person has the right to see God. No one who has sinned has the right to see and know God.

Only one who is sinless can see and know God. Only God is sinless. Therefore, only God can see and know God. So if we sinners are ever to have the hope of seeing and knowing God, then God Himself must come to us and reveal Himself to us. He must give us the right to know Him. How this insurmountable problem is overcome is what John explains in the next three phrases.

## God the One and Only

**John 1:18** (ESV)

*... the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

These phrases explain that God has made God known. Who is "the only God who is at the Father's side?" Is not "the Father" the only God? Yes. Jews believe in only one God and so do Christians. We are both monotheists. We both affirm that there is only one God. So if there is only one God, then how can the only God be at God's side? How can God be at His own side? [Does God ever elbow Jesus and say, "I am standing here beside myself!" Is there humor within the Godhead?]

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<sup>3</sup> John 4:24.

<sup>4</sup> Rom 1:20; Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17; Heb 11:27.

<sup>5</sup> Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2002), Jn 1:18.

This language sounds very much like the very first verse of chapter one.

**John 1:1** (ESV)

*1 In the beginning was the Word and Word was with God and the Word was God.”*

Who is the Word? Answer: Jesus is the Word (Jn 1:14, 17). Who is “the only God who is at the Father’s side?” Answer: Jesus is the “only God who is at the Father’s side.”

The phrase “the only God” (ESV) is one word in the Greek, *monogenēs* (μονογενής) and it means, “unique; the one-and-only.” Thus, “Jesus is here described as ‘God the One and Only.’”<sup>6</sup> Jesus is absolutely unique. ***Jesus is the one-and-only God.***

## John Believes Jesus Is God

John is abundantly clear about His opinion of who Jesus is. Jesus is God in every sense of the word. Jesus always *was* God, even before the creation of the world. Jesus is also separate from God. Jesus was the agent through whom God created the entire universe and this same Jesus, who was and is God, became flesh and lived among men. John believes Jesus is both the one and only Son of God (who is with God) **and** God the one-and-only (who is God). John is teaching us that Jesus is both!

OK. John is clear that He believes Jesus is God, but would Jesus agree with this? Did Jesus think he was God? Did He claim to be equal with God? Did the Jews understand him to be teaching that he was equal with God?

Maybe John just blew one or two of Jesus’ statements out of proportion? Maybe he misunderstood what Jesus was claiming. If Jesus was just a good teacher and he has been somehow misunderstood, let’s be clear about exactly what Jesus taught regarding himself.

1. **Jesus taught that everything he did, he did because he had seen the God the Father do it.** “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise” (John 5:19).

Jesus referred to himself as the son. So he is saying that whatever he does, he only does it because he has seen the Father do it. That means Jesus is claiming to both **see** the Father and emulate all that the Father does. Who can say this?

2. **Jesus taught that he did nothing on his own apart from God the Father and that he did not seek his own will, but only the Father’s will.** “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:30; see also Luke 22:42).

Jesus is claiming to be able to *hear* God the Father and be able to *do* the will of the Father and not his own will. He says he does **nothing** “on his own.” He is claiming that everything he does, he does in partnership with and cooperation with God the Father. Who can say this?

3. **Jesus taught that failing to honor him was the equivalent of failing to honor God the Father.** “Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him” (John 5:23).

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<sup>6</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *John: The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Vol. 4, Gen. ed. Leon Morris. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 74.

Jesus is teaching that failing to rightly honor him was the same as failing to rightly honor God. What kind of teacher would teach something like this? Is this a joke? Does Jesus expect to be taken seriously?

4. **Jesus taught that to know him was the same as knowing God the Father.** *“If you knew me, you would know my Father also”* (John 8:19).

Knowing Jesus is the same as knowing God the Father? Who on earth would ever say something like this?

5. **Jesus taught that God was happy with everything he did.** Speaking of God the Father Jesus said, *“... I always do the things that are pleasing to him”* (John 8:29).

Can you say that? What would you think if that sentence came out of someone’s mouth over lunch today?

6. **Jesus taught that to receive him was to receive God the Father.** *“... whoever receives me receives the one who sent me”* (John 13:20; see also Mark 9:37; Matthew 10:40; Luke 9:48).

This saying of Jesus is repeated in all four gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all thought this was significant enough that each of them recorded it. Who would ever even dream of saying this?

7. **Jesus taught that he was one with the Father.** *“I and the Father are one.”* (John 10:30)

The listening Jews understood this to be blasphemy and picked up stones to kill him. They said, *“You being a man, make yourself God”* (John 10:33). It cannot be any plainer. Jesus is teaching that he is equal with God. He is teaching that he is God. This is quite remarkable teaching!

8. **Jesus taught that to believe in him was the same as believing in God the Father.** *“Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in Him who sent me”* (John 12:44). What manner of man would say something like this?

9. **Jesus taught that he was in the Father and that the Father was likewise in him.** *“Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me”* (John 14:11; see also John 10:38; 14:10, 20; 17:21, 23).

10. **Jesus taught that to see him was to see God the Father.** *“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father”* (John 12:45; 14:9). This makes your head spin.

11. **Jesus taught that to hate him was to hate God the Father.** *“Whoever hates me hates my Father also”* (John 15:23).

12. **Jesus taught that only through him could anyone find their way to God the Father.** *“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6). These are unbelievable words.

13. **Jesus taught that he was the only person who has ever seen the Father.** *“... not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father”* (John 6:46).

Jesus is plainly teaching no one else but him has ever seen the Father. He claimed to have been sent from God so he means himself. Jesus is teaching that he has seen God. Who does Jesus think he is?

14. **Jesus taught that He was God.** *“Truly truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am”* (John 8:58).

Jesus was claiming to have existed before Abraham was born. Abraham was born a little over 2,000 years before Jesus was born and was about 30 when he said this. This is an amazing claim. But what is even more amazing is that claimed for himself the title “I Am.” This is the exact title that God chose to use for Himself when Moses asked God His name. God told Moses that His name was “I Am.” The Jews completely understood what Jesus was saying because they reached down and picked up rocks to stone him to death for blasphemy!

Who talks like this? Why does Jesus say these things? If these statements are not true, Jesus was **not** a good teacher. If these teachings are not true, then Jesus was a pathological liar. If these things be not true, then he was at best insanely delusional and at worst demonically evil.

No good teachers teaches that he is equal to God and is God if it is not true. No good teacher teaches that everything he does is pleasing to God. No good teacher teaches that he is the only person who has ever seen God. No good teacher teaches that failing to honor him was the same as failing to honor the Creator of the universe! If these things are not true, then Jesus’ name does not even belong in the same sentence with “good teacher!”

But what if they are true?

Look at how John describes Jesus.

### At the Father’s Side

Jesus is ‘God the One and Only.’ He *is* God and is *with* God. He is the only God who is **at the Father’s side**. Literally, the phrase (εἰς τὸν κόλπον, *eis ton kolpon*) means ‘in the Father’s lap’ or ‘in the bosom of the Father’<sup>7</sup> (NASB, KJV) and refers to the “unmatched intimacy of Jesus’ relationship with the Father.”<sup>8</sup> The phrase is an idiom “for the greatest possible closeness.”<sup>9</sup> The NIV picks this idea up and translates it “in closest relationship.”

This same phrase is used of the beggar Lazarus who leans in the bosom of Abraham (Lk 16:22-23). It is also used of the author of this gospel who at the Last Supper leaned into the bosom of Jesus. This speaks volumes into the depth of relationship that existed between Jesus and John (who is writing this gospel). That he would use the same word to describe Jesus’ relationship with God the Father points to how deeply personal and intimate John understood that relationship to be.

### He Has Made Him Known

The last phrase in verse 18 says, “... *he has made him known.*”

#### John 1:18 (ESV)

**18** *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made Him known.*

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<sup>7</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 134-35.

<sup>8</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 49.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

The Greek word here for “made known” is a rare word, *exēgeomai* (ἐξηγέομαι), which is found only here in this gospel. When Luke uses this word in his gospel<sup>10</sup> it means “to give a full account” in the sense of “telling the whole story.”<sup>11</sup> John is saying that Jesus “is the full account of God’s whole story.”

We have our word “exegesis” from this word. Exegesis means to explain, to expound, and to give the full meaning of a text or a passage. It means to bring out all the truth and the full meaning of a text. What John is saying is that **Jesus is the exegesis of God**. Jesus has expounded God. All that we did not know about God before, has been completely revealed through Jesus. Jesus is the full meaning of God. He is the full explanation of God. Jesus has brought out all the truth of who God is.

Jesus can do this because he is God and because he never sinned.

## Knock, Knock

Right now Jesus is knocking. “Knock, knock?” says Jesus. “Who do think I am? A pathological liar? A dead myth? Or a sinless Savior who is God the one-and-only?” C.S. Lewis was right. There are only three options available to us regarding Jesus. Either he was a lunatic, a liar, or he is Lord.

### **Revelation of John 3:20 (ESV)**

*20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*

If you want to get close to God, then you have to get close to Jesus. If you want to be near to God, then you must draw near to him through Jesus, because the two of them are inseparable. Jesus is at the Father’s side.



In 1650 Rembrandt painted a portrait of Jesus which is unimpressive, but probably more true to who Jesus is than many others that have been done. It is quietly beautiful. If you want to see a portrait of Jesus, don’t go to an art museum. Paintings are helpful but all of them utterly fail to express him fully. If you want a faithful portrait of Jesus, then you need to read your Bible. If you want to draw closer to Jesus, then observe the portrait of the Jesus which the writer of this gospel paints. Read God’s word. If you want to know the real Jesus, then read this gospel. Read all the gospels. Read all the whole Bible. It’s about Jesus from beginning to end, but I recommend starting in the gospel of John.

To look to Jesus is to look to God. To believe in Jesus is to believe in God. To have faith in Jesus is to have faith in God. To receive Jesus is to receive God. To look away from Jesus is to look away from God

If you want to see the glory of God, then turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face.

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<sup>10</sup> Luke 24:35; Acts 10:8; 15:12, 14; 21:19

<sup>11</sup> Köstenberger, 50.