

"The Coming of Light"
(John 1:1-18)
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(John 1:1-18)

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ") ¹⁶ Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Let me begin by recapping last week's message on the Logos. John begins his gospel by introducing us to this person called the Logos, the Word. And he tells us some stunning things about him. He tells us that the Logos was there when there was nothing, at the moment of creation, that he existed. Then he says that the Logos was with God implying that he existed side by side with God. And then he drops the hammer and says, and this Logos was in fact God. Then in verse 3 he says that the Logos was the creator. In fact he made everything. Then he continues to teach us about who this Logos is and when we get to verse 14, John drops another hammer blow and tells us that the Logos became a human being and made his dwelling among us. So that's what we've learned so far.

In verse 4, John tells us that since the Logos is the creator, in him was life. That makes sense, doesn't it? Shouldn't the creator of living things have life in himself as well? You might even say, all created things have life, with a small 'l', while the Logos has Life with a capital 'L'. So far so good.

What does John say next? Keep looking with me to verse 4. He says that the Logos, who is life with a capital L, was the light of all mankind. Okay, that's something new. A new idea is introduced, the idea of light. That's what we'll be focusing on today.

Look with me to verse 9.

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

The Light in the world (v9)

Until we understand what we are, what our condition is and what are needs are, we will never look for answers and solutions. In other words, you and I will continue to think that Christmas is about buying presents for each other, about office parties, and a fat bearded man in a red suit until we understand something much deeper about ourselves and this light. Even those of us who know that Christmas is Jesus' birthday, will never really appreciate his birthday unless we understand something about us. It's only during a blackout that you truly feel the need for light. We search for the candles, the flashlight, so we can illuminate our homes. The same is true here.

In this passage there are clues that tell us that the world is in dire need of the light. Let's start with the word, "**world**" in verse 9. When the bible uses the word world it's usually one of two meanings. One is very neutral with no moral or spiritual overtones. It merely means the planet earth. The other definition represents the evil, wicked realm of humanity. It's a realm that is in rebellion against God. It's a realm that is bent on self-destruction, exploitation, ignorance, greed, and immorality. So which is the definition here? In the Bible the second definition is used much more often than the first definition. Here's an example from John. It's known as the most memorized, most famous verse in all the bible—John 3:16. Listen to it. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

So, when it says, 'God loved the world,' what does it mean? Does it mean that God's an environmentalist; he's a tree hugger; that God recycles? No. God didn't 'give' his Son Jesus to die on a Roman cross, first and foremost to be green. The word, 'world,' here means, as it does in chapter 1, the evil rebellious world of men that is bent on dishonoring and living apart from God. You and I are part of this world. You and I are the rebels fighting against God's loving and just rule and reign. You and I are the ones shaking our fists up at a God that desires for us to be made whole. This is the world to which God sent his Son to be the Light.

The Light in the darkness (v5)

What about the word, "**darkness**?" The words 'light' and 'darkness' used in this passage are not words that are meant to be understood purely on a physical level. There is a deeper spiritual or moral meaning.

We were saying last week that the introductory words of this book would have immediately taken the reader back to Genesis 1, the very beginning of the bible that reads, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." And then right after that the first words of God speaking, to be recorded in Scripture are the words, "Let there be light." Hmmm. But if you remember the creation story, the presence of light preceded the presence of the sun. So most likely it was illumination that came from God himself. He himself was the light. And we also said that Jesus was there at the creation, so we can conclude that it was Jesus himself that was emanating light into the void, into the nothingness.

When you get to the end of the bible, something very similar to Genesis 1 is stated. Listen. (Rev 21:23; 22:5) "**23** The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. **24** The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. **5** There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever."

So, before creation there was no sun, but there was light. At the new creation, there is also no sun, but there is light.

John is intentionally picking up on this idea of sunless light and weaving it into his story, but things are now different. When the first light of creation came, there was nothing—no humans, no sin, no Satan, nothing, just the pure light of God, emitting into the vast nothingness.

Here in John chapter 1, things couldn't be more different. John says that the light shines in the darkness, but here, darkness is no longer referring to a vast nothingness, void of anything, void of life. Rather, it now has deep spiritual and moral overtones. The entrance of the light is into a vast spiritual blackness and moral darkness. And just as light was the beginning of the original physical creation, the entrance of light here is the beginning, the first step of God's re-creation or redemption of sinful humans.

These moral and spiritual ideas of light are true in our culture and are perhaps true in every culture. Every culture understands the concept of darkness and light as a scientific phenomenon. We all live under the same sun. But at the same time, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that all cultures, or at least the vast majority of cultures, also understand the concept of darkness and light as a moral idea, wouldn't you agree? Don't we all use those words to describe more than the presence or absence of physical light? In fact we probably use it more in the spiritual, moral way than we do in the scientific way. We say things like, "Man, that was the *darkest* season of my life." Someone asks us, "How was the movie?" and we answer with, "It was a 'dark' comedy."

When we enter the realm of values, morals, there is this frustration and confusion and inconsistency, because we are trying to live a life without morals and without moral consequences, even when we know intuitively that there are morals, and dare I say, morals that are absolute, that are universal. And these morals have serious moral consequences. Just look at what's happening with the sexual abuse scandals against women in Hollywood and American politics. The irony of course is that from a place that produces a plethora of immoral content, which includes violence against women, they are crying foul about the very content that they produce. So as inconsistent as Hollywood might be, it still shows us that we are all moral. The easiest way to prove to a person who says he doesn't believe in morality is to punch him in the nose. Very quickly he'll understand the reality and value of morals.

C.S. Lewis says in his most famous book *Mere Christianity*, that every person has a set of morals that they live by. Every time we say the words, "I ought..." or "She ought" we are making a moral statement. We are saying that the doing of that 'ought' is right and the not doing of it is wrong. The fact that there are morals, that there is morality, necessarily implies that there is such a thing as immorality, as immoral beings. This is the darkness in our world. And this is the darkness in us.

It's into this immoral darkness that the Light shined. And this can do two things for us. It can attract you or it can repel you. What do I mean? Well, think of great people, especially great spiritual people. We are naturally drawn to them. They become for us our gurus, our teachers. We want to learn from them and become like them. But they can also repel us. Why? Because their goodness exposes even more clearly, our badness. So even though we know we should go to them, submit ourselves to them, to learn from them, we turn the other way, because we don't want to be exposed. But exposure is what we need.

It's like our aversion to doctors. We think, ahhh, if I go to the doctor I know he'll find something wrong with me. I'm overweight, I don't exercise enough, I have high cholesterol, I'm too sedentary, I eat too many sweets, etc. etc. But then inside we know something's not right. We're not sure what it is, but something's there. If we go we know he'll tell us that something's wrong, and so we don't want to go; but only if we'll go will we find out how to make things right.

Christianity tells us that only the Light can expose and identify your darkness, your real darkness. The darkness that's literally eating you up from the inside out. And only Christianity tells us that that Light not only exposes the darkness, but eliminates it. Think about it conceptually for a moment. Darkness, in the countryside at night or in a cave is the absence of light. Darkness is the absence of light. And what happens when you turn on the lights, what happens when the sun shines at high noon? The darkness disappears. That's who the Logos is. That's who Christ is. Only he can remove the darkness of sin in our hearts.

Friends, Christmas with all the glamour and glitter, is really about a desperate 911 call to the scene of a crime or a terrible accident. It's a call for help. Would someone please hear me, find me, come to me, and rescue me? Christmas is a rescue mission, where God sends his Son into the blackest and darkest corner of the universe, into the blackest and darkest corner of our hearts to rescue us, so that we might find life again.

Later in the 3rd chapter, John writes:

¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. (**John 3:19-21**)

He tells us there are really only two responses to the Light of Jesus Christ. 1. You become a cockroach. 2. You become a plant.

A cockroach hates the light. It scurries away and hides from it. A plant can't wait for sunrise, and it bends its leaves and branches toward the light. Which will you be?

The gospel of John was written to us to tell us about Jesus Christ, but it wasn't only that we would know something about him, it was written that we would believe in him and that by believing we would have eternal life. For Christians those are common phrases that we often don't give a second thought to, but if you're relatively new to Christianity these phrases may seem a bit odd. When we tell another person that we believe in them, we mean that we have confidence in them. We tell a child that we believe in them, that we know that he or she could excel at whatever they're doing. But that's not exactly what Christians mean when they say they believe in Jesus. To believe in Jesus means a few things.

First, it's to believe that he's real, not in a Santa Claus or in aliens sort of way. Rather, it's to believe that he existed and still exists. He's not a fairy tale. He's not an ancient version of a Stan Lee created superhero. It's to believe that 2000 years ago, Jesus walked this earth because history tells us that he did. That's the easy part. Anyone with a rational mind can come to that conclusion. Anyone can believe in Jesus as you would believe that Genghis Khan existed or Alexander the Great existed.

But, there's more to believing than that. To believe in Jesus is to believe in who he is. And that's why the gospels were written, in order to help us believe in who he is, namely, that Jesus is God himself. He is the greatest being in all the universe. In fact, all the universe has its existence because Jesus himself created it. He is THE supreme, uncreated, eternal, all powerful being. He is God, who became man.

And, that takes us to another aspect of believing. It's believing in the reason or purpose for Jesus becoming a man, for entering the world of humans. You see what's happening? There's an initial layer of belief and then, on top of that, there's another layer and then, on top of that layer there's another layer. Jesus became a man to die in the place for sinners. He went to the cross and died the death of a traitorous criminal. He was accused and convicted of high treason against the only king, Caesar. But in dying as a traitor, he was actually dying for traitors, rebels, like you and me. We were traitors and rebels against the high king of heaven, God himself.

This brings us to the final level of belief. Let me borrow an illustration from theologian RC Sproul, who passed away a few days ago. Consider a chair. You look at the chair and you say, I believe that the chair exists. You take it a step further and you say, I believe in the purpose of the chair, that this chair exists so I could sit in it and find rest and take the weight off my feet and so on. I believe that it'll hold my weight and won't break if I were to sit on it, but you haven't yet believed in the chair until you do one very important thing. What is that? Sit in it. That's the final stage of belief and it's the most important stage.

Now think of Jesus. Yes, you may believe he existed and you should if you are any fair minded student of history. And yes, you may even believe that he is God, who became man. On top of that, you may believe in the reason for why he came—to die for sinners like yourself, but there's still a final step. You have to sit in the chair. That means you have to make a decision. That means you have to with your heart, soul, mind and will, believe that you cannot save yourself, that you are sinner that deserves God's punishment and wrath, that you are the darkness for which Jesus shined his light. And you believe and trust, in child-like faith, that Jesus did that for you. You turn to him, you cling to him, you treasure him. Throw yourself upon the chair, throw yourself on Jesus.

Let's pray.