

The Light of Men
John 1.4-5
Series: The Word Became Flesh
Advent 2020
December 6, 2020

I. Introduction

- A. We learned last week that John does not include any of the commonly understood details of the birth of Christ in his gospel
 - 1. We might think that he was just never in the Christmas spirit
 - a. That as far as gospel writers are concerned, he was the grinch
 - 2. That, as we learned, would be a mistake
- B. While John did not include any of the details of the birth of Jesus – the angelic announcements, the trek to Bethlehem from Nazareth, the inn and the manger, and all the rest
 - 1. He instead focused on the meaning of Christmas
 - a. Christmas is about God with us – Emmanuel
 - b. Christmas is about God coming to earth to live as a human being
 - c. Christmas is about the incarnation – God come in the flesh
- C. And one of John’s great theme statements of his gospel is
 - 1. **John 1:14** (NKJV) — 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
- D. So while John doesn’t give us the details of Christmas – he leaves that to Matthew and Luke
 - 1. He does give us the answer to the question, “What’s Christmas all about?”
 - a. It’s all about God coming in the flesh
- E. God coming in the flesh!
 - 1. That’s an astonishing thought, is it not?
 - a. There are so many dimensions of it to consider, it’s like discovering a magnificent diamond, which each facet revealing some beautiful refraction of light
 - b. It’s so hard to summarize in any kind of brief way
- F. But John, moved by the Holy Spirit, pretty much does summarize the magnificence of that diamond in our text this morning
 - 1. He introduces three concepts which capture the significance of the incarnation
 - a. And those are the concepts to which he will return over and over again throughout the gospel
- G. Text
 - 1. **John 1:4–5** (NKJV) — 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.
 - 2. Three concepts – three themes
 - a. **Life**

- b. Light
- c. Darkness

II. Life – “In Him was life...”

- A. One of John’s favorite themes throughout his gospel
 - 1. Uses the term “life” 36 times in the gospel – far more than any other NT book
- B. The source of life
 - 1. Remember how he opened this glorious book
 - a. John 1:1–3 (NKJV) — 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.
 - b. Everything that was made, was made by Jesus!
 - 2. That means that the incarnate Son of God was the creator of life itself
 - 3. It’s not just that He came as a living human being
 - a. There was a 1st Century heresy that had Jesus as a phantom, a kind of apparition
 - b. That He just appeared to be a human being
 - c. But that’s simply false – certainly is not the testimony of John
 - 4. Who said in his first epistle
 - a. 1 John 4:2–3 (NKJV) — 2 ... Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. ...
 - 5. Jesus certainly did come in the flesh as a real human being
 - 6. But He is more than that
 - a. He is the source of all life
 - b. John 5:26 (NKJV) — 26 For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself..
 - c. Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, has life in Himself
 - 7. Not like the life that is in us
 - a. The life that is in us is derived
 - b. We don’t conjure it up out of nothing; we have no power to do so – for we have no life in ourselves
 - c. We are completely dependent for our lives upon God – and upon Jesus who created all things including life
 - 8. He is the author of life; the source of all life
 - a. Biological life
 - b. Spiritual life
 - c. Eternal life
 - 9. On Christmas, Life itself became incarnate
 - a. The one on whom we depend for every breath we take came
 - b. The one who brought us into a relationship with God through faith – He is the One who breathed into us the breath of spiritual life
 - c. Remember – we were dead in trespasses and sins

- d. But we have been made alive in Christ Jesus!
10. Alive in Christ – all because the source of life became incarnate on Christmas!

C. **The quality of life**

1. But just think of the quality of that life
 - a. The spiritual life Jesus brings is called by John “eternal life”
 - b. But eternal life is not just life that lasts for a really long time
 - c. It certainly does last for a long time – it’s eternal
2. But it’s so much more than that
 - a. Eternal life is a qualitatively different kind of life
 - b. The late Dallas Willard used to call it “the eternal kind of life” to emphasize just that point
3. The essence of eternal life is life in relationship – in relationship with God
 - a. It’s eternal life because God is eternal!
 - b. **John 17:3** (NKJV) — 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.
4. It’s one thing to merely be alive
 - a. But to have a life in relationship with the One who is life itself – who has life in Himself
 - b. A relationship with the One who is love incarnate – who loves you more than you could ever love yourself
 - c. A relationship with the Holy One – the only One whose holiness is poured out into our lives by His Holy Spirit
5. What an incredible quality of life
 - a. All because God became incarnate
 - b. All because of Christmas

D. **The joy of life**

1. And once we enter into that relationship, the life we receive is a life full of joy
2. I know what Satan wants everyone to think – that becoming a Christian means the end of fun and enjoyment
 - a. Nothing could be further from the truth
 - b. Being a Christian demonstrates just how vapid and disappointing are the counterfeit substitutes the world offers to entertain those who have no eternal kind of life in them
 - c. And I know Christians who have bought into that nonsense – they seemed like they’ve been baptized in vinegar!
3. But the life of Christ is overflowing with joy
 - a. It’s as if we’ve grown new taste buds – and we begin to relish and delight in the things of God when before we were Christians God seemed so bland and distasteful
 - b. It’s as if we grew new rods and cones in our eyes so we could see color where the world before was merely black and white

4. One of the great pastors and biblical expositors G. Campbell Morgan told the story of an older man his father had led to Christ
 - a. A few days after his conversion the young Morgan encountered the man in a garden
 - b. The man was holding something in his hand; something quite small
 - c. He was gazing at it in wonder
 - d. The younger man asked him what it was
 - e. Then with a voice overwhelmed with awe, he showed him a leaf that had fallen from a tree
 - f. And he exclaimed, “the beauty of God”
 - g. New life in Christ had completely transformed his taste for beauty
 - h. The wonder of life!
5. Contrast that with Charles Darwin – the author of the theory of evolution
 - a. He had turned his back on God
 - b. He had committed himself to a view of life as purposeless, completely devoid of a designer, altogether naturalistic
 - c. In his biography he admitted that while he used to find joy in such things as art, music or poetry, none of those things evoked any wonder or pleasure
 - d. He no longer had any taste for life!
6. But Jesus said,
 - a. **John 10:10** (NKJV) — 10 ... I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.
7. Christmas is about life
 - a. The source of life itself has come
 - b. The quality of the eternal kind of life in relationship with the One who is life and love
 - c. The One who has given us abundant life, a life of incredible joy
- E. Is that the life that you have experienced?
 1. Have you discovered the abundant life by casting yourself on the person and work of the One who came down at Christmas?

III. **Light – “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”**

- A. Remember where John began:
 1. **John 1:1–2** (NKJV) — 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God.
 2. A text which echoes the beginning of the Bible: “In the beginning, God...”
 - a. And what was the first thing God said?
 - b. “Let there be light”
 3. John has already identified Jesus as the Word become flesh; God incarnate
 - a. And God, by executive fiat, declared the existence of light in the universe
 4. But now, in the incarnate Son, the One in whom is life itself
 - a. He Himself is the light

- b. "I am the light of the world" (John 8 and 9)
- 5. And He has come
 - a. He is the light
- 6. What does light do?

B. **Light to see**

- 1. Light reveals
 - a. It's not that we can look into the sun, the source of natural light for us
 - b. It's that by the sun we see everything else
- 2. Nothing can be seen in clarity, in reality, apart from the light of the world
 - a. Apart from Jesus, the world sees the creation as a fog, as shadows
 - b. But Jesus reveals the world
- 3. This is the light that was prophesied
 - a. **Isaiah 9:2** (NKJV) — 2 The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined.
- 4. More than anything else, the incarnate Son of God has revealed the Father
 - a. **John 14:9** (NKJV) — 9 ... He who has seen Me has seen the Father...
- 5. **John 1:14** (NKJV) — 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
- 6. The only way to know God the Father is through God the Son
 - a. And the only way God the Son has revealed the Father is by the incarnation, by being born as a baby in Bethlehem
- 7. Christmas is all about lights
 - a. No other holiday is so expansive in light
 - b. Lights are everywhere
 - c. Let them all be a constant reminder that in Christmas, the light of men was born
 - d. The light through which we see and come to know the Father of lights
 - e. The light through which we can see and understand the whole of creation

C. **Light to transform**

- 1. Light also transforms
 - a. **John 12:46** (NKJV) — 46 I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.
 - b. The truth is that Jesus changes lives
 - c. Often radically changes lives
- 2. Harry Ironside – preaching outdoors in San Francisco
 - a. Approached by well-known atheist; presented him a card
 - b. "Sir, I challenge you to debate with me the question, 'Agnosticism

versus Christianity' in the Academy of Science Hall next Sunday afternoon at four o'clock."

- c. Ironside read the card aloud
- d. "I am very much interested in this challenge... Therefore I will be glad to agree to this debate on the following conditions, namely, in order to prove that Mr. _____ has something worth fighting for and worth debating about, he will promise to bring with him to the hall next Sunday two people... one man who for years was under the power of evil habits from which he could not deliver himself, but who on some occasion... heard the glorification of agnosticism and his denunciations of the Bible and Christianity, and whose heart and mind as he listened to such an address were so deeply stirred that he went away from that meeting saying, 'Hence-forth, I too am an agnostic!' And as a result of imbibing that particular philosophy found that a new power had come into his life. The sins he once loved, he now hates, and righteousness and goodness are now the ideals of his life... all because he is an agnostic.' Along with such a man, Ironside asked the atheist to bring a woman who was similarly delivered from corrupt living by the power of unbelief.
- e. "I will bring with me at the very least 100 men and women who for years lived in just such sinful degradation as I have tried to depict, but who have been gloriously saved through believing the gospel which you ridicule. I will have these men and women with me on the platform as witnesses to the miraculous saving power of Jesus Christ as present-day proof of the truth of the Bible."
- f. The atheist walked away
- g. Ironside could easily produce 100 men and women transformed by the light of Jesus
- h. The atheist could not produce even one who have been transformed by agnosticism
- i. The light of Jesus transforms lives
- j. Indeed – so many of you would be able to offer the same testimonies as those who would have joined Ironside!

D. **Light to guide**

- 1. Not only does the light of Christ reveal, not only does the light of Christ transform, the light of Christ guides
- 2. **Psalm 119:105** (NKJV) — 105 Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.
 - a. Remember – the incarnate Son is the Word!
- 3. **John 8:12** (NKJV) — 12 ... "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."
 - a. We no longer have to stumble along in the dark, feeling our way in the shadows
 - b. We have the light of Jesus to be our guide

4. **Psalm 23:3** (NKJV) — 3 ... He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.
 - a. That's what the good Shepherd does!
5. Christmas is about the light of men guiding all those who trust Him to be the cosmic GPS
 - a. God's positioning system

E. **Light to grow**

1. In order for plants to grow, they need light
 - a. How much more true is it for disciples to grow
2. Only through Jesus – the light of men – can disciples grow in righteousness, wisdom, holiness
3. You will grow upward – grow in relationship to Him who is the light of the world
4. And you will also grow as a witness as the light of Christ shines through you to others
 - a. And the more you grow, the more the world will see Jesus and not Andy or Don or Jack or Janet or Richard or Karen

F. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

IV. **Darkness**

A. The drama of darkness

1. But there is also a dark side to Christmas
 - a. The Gospel of John would not be the compelling story that it is without conflict
 - b. And the conflict, in John's mind, is between light and darkness
2. **John 1:5** (NKJV) — 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.
 - a. Light v. darkness – a prominent theme all through the gospels
 - b. Luke 22:53 (NKJV) — 53 ... But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

B. **The context of darkness**

1. Darkness is the context for the light
 - a. Light only makes a difference when it is turned on in the dark and illuminates its surroundings
 - b. Light chases the darkness away
2. **John 3:19** (NKJV) — 19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.
3. Jesus came as light into a dark world
4. Richard Phillips: He was a light shining in the darkness. But for that very reason the world hated him. The hypocritical Pharisees resented him for exposing their legalism. The priests and scribes envied his popularity. The power-hungry Romans thought him a threat to their military domination.

And it wasn't just the elite, for the ordinary people also called out for Jesus' blood: "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" they demanded of Pontius Pilate (John 19.15). When God's Son came into the world, the world nailed him to a cross – the cruelest form of execution they could possibly devise – to suffer and die. People today similarly despise Jesus; for all their supposed admiration they refuse his claim to be Savior and Lord and resent his holy example that exposes their sin.

5. The light of men came to a world of darkness
 - a. There is still much darkness to be dispelled
6. What about you?
 - a. Are you still in darkness?
 - b. Is the light of Jesus piercing the darkness of your own soul in this very moment?

C. **The failure of darkness**

1. **John 1:5** (NKJV) — 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.
2. Comprehend – really extinguish it
 - a. ESV: overcome it
3. Jesus, the light of men, comes into a dark place
 - a. But the darkness could never contain Him, could never eradicate Him
4. When they sought to take Jesus and throw Him off a cliff – He simply walked past them
5. When they sent soldiers to arrest Him, they were so awed by Him that they stood frozen as He walked away
6. They nailed Him to a cross and He saved one of the thieves hanging next to Him
7. As they placed Him into the tomb, dead – He emerged victorious from the grave!
8. Darkness would never prevail
9. And nothing has been able to snuff out the light of Christ in more than 2,000 years!
10. All of you are evidence that, in spite of all the animosity, all the persecution, all of the movements throughout history to stamp out the people of Jesus, the church still exists, still expands, and will soon be found among every people, tongue, tribe and nation
11. The darkness will never prevail
12. The darkness did not overcome it
13. The darkness cannot overcome the light of men

V. Conclusion

- A. And the darkness will not overcome it now
- B. Our celebration of Advent and Christmas is testimony of that fact

Lord's Supper

- The cross was the last, desperate attempt for darkness to have its way
- But the darkness could never extinguish the light; could never overcome the light
- Your participation in this supper is your testimony that the light of men has made His way into your hearts
- And that at these very moments the darkness in your heart is being dispelled
- And the darkness in our community is being dispelled
- And the darkness in our nation is being dispelled
- And the darkness in our world is being dispelled