

The Gift of Life and Light

John 1:1-5

Anyone who has ever attempted writing knows that the hardest line to write is the first line. Whether you are writing a letter to a friend, a paper for class, or a novel – the first sentence is the most difficult to write. So much depends on getting it right.

Of all the books in the Bible, I think John's gospel has the very best beginning: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." We immediately realize that this book is not about trivial things. We are instantly brought into the realm and reality of eternal things, awesome things, things that will fill us with awe and trembling if we allow the weight of them to settle on us.

"In the beginning..." Before there was time, before there was a world, before there was a universe or angels or any "thing." In the beginning there was only God: the Father, the Word, and the Spirit. That's where John brings us as he begins his gospel – into the presence of the eternal God in all his triune, infinite, immutable, and eternal glory, beauty, goodness, and power.

John borrows language from Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." But this gospel is about a new beginning, the beginning of a new creation. The staggering message of this gospel is that the voice that spoke into the darkness of the abyss and called forth a universe has now **entered** the darkness of this world to call forth a new heaven and new earth. The marvel of the Christmas story is that the divine Word, the Creator of all created things, the God who is light and dwells in unapproachable light – this God invaded the darkness of this world as a baby was born in Bethlehem. The Word became flesh.

I. Who Jesus Is

A. He is **God**.

I know that, for those who've been raised in the church, this is not a new thought. But have you ever taken the time to really think about this? Do you have a sense of who God actually is? I don't mean merely an intellectual sense. Do you have an experiential sense of the infinite truth about God? When is the last time you felt the crushing weight of his holiness and trembled under the reality of his righteous wrath? Does that God still exist for you?

I listened to an excellent message by Francis Chan, delivered this past fall to the chapel at Azusa Pacific University. And he said, "I've been coming to speak at chapel here for over 20 years. And I need to tell you that things are different than they used to be. Twenty years ago,

the Bible was the unrivaled authority here. But over the past years, the Bible has steadily lost its place of authority as more and more weight is given to what people think and how people feel. We don't want to offend anyone or make anyone feel like they are being criticized or condemned. And yet, that is precisely what the Scriptures do. We've slowly crafted God into a more manageable being – less terrifying, more understanding and comfortable with our human failings, and more open to what we think and how we feel."

He reminded them that every time someone is exposed to the reality of God, they are terrified.

- The Israelites at Mt Sinai.
- John, when he saw the glory of Jesus in Revelation 1: "I fell at his feet as though dead."

Jesus is God. He is terrifying.

- This is the Jesus who judged the world of Noah's day by destroying the entire world with a flood, killing every living thing on earth save what was in the ark.
- This is the Jesus who devastated the super-power nation of Egypt with terrible plagues, ending with the death of every firstborn – man and beast – and the drowning of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea.
- This is the Jesus who annihilated the pagan cities of Canaan under the hand of Joshua.

I know that's offensive to many. But this is the Jesus of Scripture. He is God – in all the glorious, holy, terrifying, and magnificent reality of that truth.

B. He is the Creator of All Things.

1:3 All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

Jesus is the glorious architect, designer, and builder of this whole vast universe, of all things seen and unseen. Everything that is not God exists according to his will and design and for his purpose.

"God made me and everything that in this world I see.

For his own glory God made everything and me." (Judy Rogers)

Why does this matter? It answers the issue of authority and right. Jesus is the potter and you are the clay. He has the absolute right to command you to live for him! You owe your very existence to him. The moment he removes his hand, you will vanish like smoke.

These are awesome and overwhelming things John is telling us! And it's only as we begin to grasp experientially the overwhelming, staggering glory and holy terror of Jesus, that we can begin to grasp the glory of his birth into this world in human form for the salvation of sinners!

II. What Jesus Gives

1:4 *In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*

A. Life

Isn't that a staggering statement?! **In him was LIFE.** He isn't saying, "Jesus was alive." He's saying vastly more than that: Jesus IS LIFE. He contains, within himself, the principle and fountain of life.

In this, Jesus is utterly unique among all the children of men. What John says of Jesus could never, ever be said of any other man, including Adam and Eve. They had life, but it was God's gift to them and could be taken away from them. And ever since their fall into sin, the fact is that "in men" is not life but death. We carry death in our mortal frame from the moment we are born. The minute we enter this world the clock of time begins the countdown to our exit from this world. We live all our years with the presence of sickness and weakness and with the promise of death and decay. But here is one unlike every other child of Adam. He is truly man, born of a woman, and yet in him was life.

There are three Greek words for *life*, each referring to something different.

- *Bios*: refers to the life of the physical body and is where we get the word *biology*.
- *Psyche*: refers to the psychological life of the human soul, that is, the mind, emotion, and will. It is where we get the word *psychology*.
- *Zoe*: refers to the uncreated, eternal life of God; the divine life uniquely possessed by God.

This is what Jesus has in himself – the very life of God!

John 5:24 *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

This is what men and women need! All around us are men, women, boys, and girls who have biological life and "soul" life – but they don't have the life that is really life; the life of being reconciled to God in Christ and dwelling in the light of his favor now and his presence forever.

This is why we need to engage in the gospel mission. We are not seeking to bring people into our way of thinking, into our religion. Our desire is that our neighbors might be brought from death to life!

The glory of Jesus is that he came into this world – a world he created, a world which rebelled against Him, a world justly under the sentence of death – and he came as LIFE. **“And the life was the light of men.”**

John wants us to see the wonder of the life of Jesus as it is **applied** to the death and darkness of the human race. The life of Jesus was, and of course, still is, the light of men. Jesus pierces the darkness of our sin and death with light.

“The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin – the light of the world is Jesus.”

1:5 *The light shines in the darkness...*”

Present tense. It was shining when John wrote his gospel. He was a missionary for most of his adult life, far from Jerusalem, far from Galilee, in Ephesus. As he taught about Jesus, he saw the light of God shining into the darkness. He saw Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the truth of the gospel, penetrate the darkness of Ephesus, piercing the darkness of sinful hearts and minds and bringing them into the light and life of Jesus! The light of Jesus was shining brightly and powerfully, **and it is still shining today!**

“And the darkness has not overcome it.”

What is John telling us here? The word translated as “overcome” literally means “to grasp” or “to take hold of” and I think that’s the intended meaning. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness can’t “grasp” it – can’t comprehend it, can’t really see it!

We know this is true of the nation of Israel from John 1:11: “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” They didn’t grasp the reality and truth of Jesus.

This tells us the truth about the human race. It is a race enslaved in darkness. That’s the consistent message of Scripture. Why is the world the way that it is? Why is there crime, hunger, poverty, and war? Why are there so many broken homes and marriages? Why are people addicted to drugs, sex, work, and self – so that they act in ways that destroy themselves and those around them? Why?

Because we are lost in the darkness. We can’t see the one thing that would make all the difference – we can’t see the truth and glory of God. We can’t see the light.

The Bible points to several reasons for our inability.

Demonic influence: **2 Cor. 4:4** *The god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.*

Personal choice: **John 3:19** *And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.*

"Well," you might say, "what good is light if the Devil has blinded people and they like it that way? What good is light to a blind man?"

But that is the glory of the gospel! When Jesus came as the light, he also came with the power to give sinners sight!

There is a great illustration of the power of Jesus' light and life in John 9, where Jesus heals a man blind from birth. Every moment of his life had been lived in darkness. He dwelt there. It surrounded him and defined him. Until he met Jesus. On seeing him Jesus said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" and he made some mud, put it on the man's eyes and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. When the man did this his sight returned! For the first time in his life, light came streaming into his eyes and he could see – colors, shapes, and faces. He could see the beautiful sun shining down on God's creation. Can you imagine?

The Pharisees were upset because they didn't want to admit the miracle. They said to the formerly blind man, "Who healed you?" "Jesus did." "We know that he is a sinner." "I don't know about that. One thing I know, I once was blind, but now I see!"

Is that your story this morning? Jesus came to bring to you the gift of life and light.

John 12:46 *I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.*

John 8:12 *Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

That is the gift Jesus gives to all who call upon his name. Have you?