

Light and Life to All He Brings

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[0 : 00] Well, we started thinking a little bit with the children earlier, didn't we? I wonder what you think. Where does light come from? There are fixtures and fittings here, aren't there?

Some of you could tell us where they came from. Light made of metal, glass, wires. Outside, of course, there's that bigger light that we thought about a bit earlier, the sun.

Whether we can see it or not, by it, we can see everything, can't we? Some of you could tell us what the sun is made of, where that came from, perhaps.

Maybe some of you are really clever. You could tell us about photons, light particles. What are they? I had a little look online. I quickly gave up.

It turns out even physicists are not that sure. They're still working on it. Where do they come from? Last Sunday, we started this slow walk through the prologue of John's gospel.

[1 : 03] That's the first 18 verses of his gospel. And they're here to introduce us to what, but most importantly, who the gospel is about. And we saw John does that by taking us all the way back to creation.

And before creation, he begins his gospel in the same way that the whole Bible begins, in the beginning. But wait, he says, who was there in the beginning?

God and the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God. God's Word isn't just something that he said in the beginning.

His Word is personal. Not something, but someone who somehow shares in God's very being. So, now press play again. He says, in the beginning, the Word, he was with God and is God, created the heavens and the earth.

[2 : 08] And everything in between, all things were made through him. And just in case we weren't totally sure, without him was not anything made that was made. So, three sentences in, and John has told us that when we read in Genesis chapter 1, the first words of the Bible, and God said, we are reading about this living, personal, divine, and creative Word.

He was himself the Creator. And our passage today picks up that thread, because what happens next in creation? Do you remember in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and God said, let there be light.

Light. John uses that word, light, seven times in our five verses. That's a perfect number of times to a Hebrew mind, because he wants us to have the ultimate answer to that question.

And yes, he says, let there be light. But, where did light come from? Let's have a look at John's incredible answer to that question then.

One big point this morning, and then two big implications for us. Beginning with our big point, his life is our light.

[3 : 36] Just see that with me in verse 4 there. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Every light source has a source. Light fittings, light bulbs, they're made in factories. If the history of the universe had been filmed on camera, we could rewind it.

Couldn't we be far back enough to see the beginning of the sun when it started burning? And I don't know what we would see, but we could even go back far enough to see the very first photons burst into life.

But we could not go back far enough to see where light itself comes from, because he has no beginning. The ultimate light source has no source, says John.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. His life is our light. And his life is uncreated, eternal.

[4 : 43] Jesus uses an expression later on in the gospel in John chapter 5 that gets, I think, as close as we can get to understanding this. He says, as the Father has life in himself, so he has

granted the Son also to have life in himself.

The word that theologians use to describe that is aseity. And it's true of God alone, to have no beginning, no origin, and to be dependent upon nothing.

To have no need, like a fire that no one ever started and that continues burning without fuel. Just think, the sun started burning when certain gases ignited in space.

And if it burns for long enough, those gases will run out and the sun will stop burning. And in that sense, we and the sun have something in common, don't we? No one knows exactly when, but there is a time stamp in heaven that marks the exact second that you came into existence in the womb.

God also has written in his book, the exact second that your body will fail. And think how much energy and effort it takes to sustain your life every single day in between those two days.

[6 : 07] How much you need to eat and drink. How many medicines you've ever taken to fight illness. How many breaths you take in a day. Every created thing is like that in some sense.

Friends, Jesus claims that his life is not like that. With a beginning and an end. And things that he needs to support him in between.

He has life in and of himself. The same as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. John doesn't say his life began, but that in him was life.

As we drive about Caleb and Samuel, they love pointing out the Christmas lights. And that's great for our conversations in the car because Caleb, he's three, he's obsessed about birthdays.

So I told him, yeah, we put up Christmas lights to celebrate Jesus's birthday. And now he can't stop commenting on the sparkly lights for Jesus's birthday, he says.

[7 : 16] But John reminds us, friends, in a very profound way that the Son of God doesn't have a birthday. He did not come into being.

He has always and forever been in and of himself. And if that wasn't awesome enough, John tells us that in some sense his life has forever been light.

So that when God said, let there be light. Whatever physical forces and chemical processes started at that moment. It was simply a reflection.

It's as if John's saying creation itself is God's official portrait of his Son.

You'll have seen, I'm sure, the official portrait of King Charles III. If you're struggling to remember, it's the red one. Do you remember that? When Camilla saw it, apparently she told the artist, yes, you've got him.

[8 : 27] Now, the internet didn't agree. It was compared to flames, blood, and horror films. It certainly makes a strong statement, doesn't it? But if I can put it like this, John's saying that when God the Father began to paint his Son's portrait in creation, the very first thing he put on the canvas was light.

And the Holy Spirit said, yes, you've got him. Creation is making a statement about the life of God's eternal Son.

His life is our light. And now I think there's two ways for us to try to take that in. The first way, I think, is in the light of creation.

Have you ever heard someone say, if God is there, why doesn't he do something to prove it? Has anyone said that to you? Maybe you've said that. You know, if God is out there, why doesn't he just do something so obvious that nobody could doubt him?

Well, Genesis says, peel your eyes off your phone and look around. Look at the world. The universe you live in is the canvas of his glory, the position of the earth in space, the tilt of its axis, its distance from the sun.

[9 : 48] We couldn't have planned it better if we'd tried. And the earth is teeming with life, plants, animals, people. It all preaches to us that there is a creator God.

But John goes one step further. Creation doesn't just preach a God, any God.

The light of creation reflects the life of the second person of the Trinity, God the Son. It's his life that gives light to everyone.

His life is the light of mankind. creation is the canvas of his glory. The universe preaches him to us. In some way, it all comes back to him.

And nothing goes any further back than him. Because in him was life. And his life is the light for everyone. The author C.S. Lewis puts it so well when he writes, I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it, I see everything else.

[10:59] Notice he's not talking about religion or God in general, but Christianity. Brothers and sisters, there is not a neutral universe out there that God has to break into.

The universe puts God's Son on display. And I think that gives us immense security as Christians to know that there is nothing that exists independently of Jesus.

Or that doesn't in some way bring us back to him. Lots of you are scientists in one way or another, medics, engineers.

Scientific study is not neutral. And lots of people will say, won't they, that it's anti-God. Nothing has ever been less true. Scientific study is simply the discovery of Jesus' glory in the fabric of the universe.

Yes. When people say he doesn't exist, they're using brains and mouths and hands that he created to do it. Is there anything so futile? They are using his light to deny his life.

[12:12] It's self-defeating. It's tragic, but it's not threatening. Which leads us on to the other track. I think this takes us down the light of redemption. See in verse 5, John says, The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Now, why would darkness overcome light? He's not talking about day and night. Does he day and night follow a pattern? They're not in conflict. But John's saying there is a darkness that wants to overcome the light.

And he's talking about a spiritual reality that the light of Christ shines in a darkness that is huffing and puffing with all of its might to blow it out. It happened in his life here, didn't it?

He was violently opposed. But even when they crucified him, the darkness could not overcome him. His death was his victory over the darkness, sin, death, and the devil.

And John's saying the darkness has tried to defeat him since long before that. How strongly the nations tried to stamp out his worship and the identity of his people.

[13:22] And how often his people twisted his words and turned away from him. But the light of his life continued to shine in the darkness of a sinful world.

There's nothing in creation that doesn't point back to him. And, says John, there's nothing in all creation that can overcome him. Brothers and sisters, we should take great courage from Christians around the world who will celebrate Christmas this year in prison or in secret because of the intense spiritual darkness where they live.

They show us the truth of this, don't they? That there is no time or place on earth that the darkness can overcome the light of his life. And we can take great heart when we see the darkness in ourselves, when we feel our own resistance to him.

Because there is no sin or unbelief, no darkness that can overshadow or dim the light of his life.

Think, the very fact that ruined people like me and ye can come together like this in the year 2024 in the northeast of Scotland and read the Gospels and worship Christ should be enough to convince us of that, shouldn't it?

Friends, John reminds us that light and darkness are not two equal and opposite forces locked in eternal battle. No, in creation, as in redemption, darkness is only the absence of light.

[15:02] And where light comes, it chases away the darkness. His life is our light. So here come the two big implications then off the back of that this morning.

Firstly then, hear a voice in the darkness. Hear a voice in the darkness. Have a look at verse 6.

Like, there was a man sent from God whose name was John.

He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him. He was not the light that came to bear witness about the light.

And now if you have wondered, reading those verses, if you've read them before, why would we need someone to tell us there's a light? The simple answer is that it is because we live in darkness.

The days are getting longer finally, but all of mine and Dudley's dog walks the last few months have been in the dark. We go up into the woods, and I don't normally take a torch, partly because I know the woods pretty well, but partly because I enjoy just letting my eyes sort of adjust to the darkness.

[16:13] You can see a little bit more. You can hear, actually, a lot more. So that if anyone else is coming, you can actually hear them before you see them, even with their blinding head torches.

When we were stumbling around in the dark, only a few short years from the darkest day in history, God sent someone for us to listen to.

A voice in the darkness, John. And now that's not the same John who wrote the gospel. Gospel writer John stresses that sent from God, John wasn't the light that came to testify about the light.

Dawn is coming, he says. Put your head torches away and fix your eyes on the horizon, because he is about to dawn. And given that that was a spiritual darkness, they lived in the Middle East, where it's fairly warm and sunny, do you see the grace of God in sending John to his people? We were totally in the dark, would not have recognized Jesus if he stood right in front of us. In fact, lots of people still didn't.

[17:26] But some people did, because God had sent John to prepare the way for him. Look for the dawning sun, he says.

The true light is coming. Do you see God's grace in sending him for us to listen to you? And now he's better known to us as John the Baptist, but here he's John the witness.

And what does a witness do? Well, a witness is someone, isn't it, who's called on in court to testify to what they've seen and heard, in short, to give evidence.

So God sent John to give evidence that the light still shines and was coming into the darkness. He said, verse 15, He who comes after me ranks before me because he was before me.

And he said that so that, verse 7, all might believe through him. As it is for every witness, John's purpose in speaking was for his testimony to be believed.

[18:34] Not every witness can be believed. Memory fades. Stories don't add up. People are selective with the truth. But John is testifying to what he saw and heard from God.

Like the prophets of the Old Testament, he could introduce his evidence with the words, thus says the Lord. His witness is reliable. His words can be believed.

Implication number one, then, is to hear this voice in the darkness and believe what it says. You know, I take it that since God sent someone specially to tell us about the light, that we therefore need to be told about it before we can see it.

We need a voice to pierce through our deep, thick darkness. And that voice is speaking now. It's the voice of God through his holy prophets and apostles in the Bible.

And particularly, here are the prophets that came before Jesus and told people to look out and put their hope in him, like John, also Isaiah, who we heard from earlier in our service.

[19:51] And the more you get to know the Bible, the more you hear their voices speaking, the more you begin to see that they are speaking as one.

The Bible's a big book, but it has a simple message, and it is this, believe in Jesus. Put your hope in him, rest your life on him, see him as he really is, and have faith in him.

He came in history, but he is from eternity. He is the creator of all things and the only savior. The people of John's day were about to actually see him.

We can't see him physically now, but we can hear the voices of those who did. They are speaking to us in the darkness so that we would believe in the one true light, Jesus Christ.

As another of Jesus' very first followers, Peter writes in his first letter, though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

[21:11] How if they hadn't seen him? Because they heard a voice in the darkness speaking to them and believed what it said.

It's a reminder to us, friends, if we do love Jesus, that we can't go on loving him without the witness of his word, without hearing that voice.

The end of the year is a time to reflect, isn't it? Perhaps if you look back, you see that that voice, the Bible, hasn't had the place in your schedule or in your home that it should have done.

But the Bible itself says and experience teaches us that if we shut our ears, our eyes will soon follow. We won't see Jesus rightly because we're not hearing and receiving God's witness to him through those who he sent to speak for him.

That voice speaking into the darkness of our hearts and of our world is a gift of God's grace to us. We do not deserve their witness. And yet God continues to speak to us through their witness.

[22:29] So as another year comes round, brothers and sisters, take up and read. Take up and read. Come and hear. Come and receive.

And if you don't yet know the light that shines in the darkness, if you don't yet love Jesus, don't shut your ears. Hear his voice and open your eyes.

Hear more, not less. If you want to hear more, we would love to see you again. Come back every Sunday morning and evening. This is where we're found. Please come. And we'd love to talk more with you about the Bible.

We can do that in the week. We can get a coffee. We can come to your house. Or do you come to Christianity Explored? That's all it is. It's simply opening up the Bible and listening to it together. That's all it is. We would love to be able to do that with you. Please do take one of those flyers. Please come and speak to us more about it. But please, whatever you do, whatever you do, don't stop listening.

[23 : 35] Don't shut your ears just because you haven't seen him yet. We need to hear that voice speaking in the darkness to us so that lastly, and our final big implication this morning, we can see the light of the world.

Have a look there at verse 9. The true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world. One of the big differences between John and prophets of other religions like Muhammad or Buddha is that while they spoke of something that no one could ever see, a distant God or an impersonal force, John is telling us about a God who was personally coming into the world.

The true light was coming. You prophets of other religions can get six words into verse 18. No one has ever seen God but no further.

Only the New Testament carries on. The only God who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

It's one of the ways that we know that John's testimony is true because the one that he spoke about actually came and said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will no longer walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

[25 : 06] No other prophet or religion can claim that. But the gospel can and does that the one who was promised actually came.

If you're not sure, keep reading John's gospel. This is just the introduction. He wrote it to show you that. The gospels give us a lot of confidence that we can trust the voice of the prophet speaking to us in the darkness.

Now, next time Donald's got the word world, he last time had word, God, and made. I've got light, darkness, and witness. Can you see that John clusters these words together?

He makes his point by repetition. So, see there in verse 10, world, world, world. So, without stepping on the toes of verse 10, what the world means here in verse 9 is not just the world in orbit around the sun, but the world in darkness.

A world that when the light of the world came into it, shrank away from it and tried, ultimately, didn't it, to swallow him, to defeat, to punish, to overcome him.

[26 : 24] It's into this world, our world, that the light came. He is the light not of some other world, some kind, fictional, polite, and well-to-do world that we imagine the Bible deals with.

He is the light of the world that me and you live in and that me and you are part of. The world of the Bible is our world. And if it was grace for God to have sent us word about him, how much more grace for God to have sent him to us personally?

He was not satisfied for us only to see his light reflected in creation or to tell us that the light was out there somewhere, but he came into the world for us to see the light himself so that we who live in darkness could recognize him as the one true light.

He did not simply shine from heaven and ask us why we couldn't see, but came to banish our darkness so that we could see.

Friends, the wonderful good news of Christmas is that the light has come and has shone into the thick darkness of our world. So big implication number two, see the light of the world and believe in him.

[27 : 55] It's one thing, isn't it, for John to say it, though it should make us sit up and listen. It's another thing for him to say it himself. I am the light of the world, said Jesus.

darkness. Whoever follows me will no longer walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Whatever you think or wherever you stand with Jesus this morning, you need to factor in statements like that.

It's far from the only one. Statements where Jesus claims to be God on earth and claims that light and life come only through him.

They are not words that we can easily forget or shrug off. Again, as C.S. Lewis puts it in his book, Mere Christianity, a man who was merely a man and said the sorts of things that Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

He would either be a lunatic or else he would be the devil. Either this man was and is the son of God or else is a madman or something worse.

[29 : 05] You can shut him up as a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about him being a great human teacher.

He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. friends, John is inviting us this Christmas to see and meet with the real Jesus.

Not a Jesus that we can take out of the box with the nativity set and put back away again when we're ready, but the Jesus whose very life is the light of the world, who gives life and light to all who follow him, trust in him.

So do you see him? Will you follow him? Are you falling before him this Christmas time, the one true light of the world?

Let's pray that we would do that together. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we are deeply humbled before you.

[30 : 30] We bow before you. We are amazed by you, that you, the eternal light, the eternal creator of all things seen and unseen, would stoop down so that we would not be left in the darkness of our own sin, but so that we would see you truly and rightly.

Lord, we deserve only to be condemned by you and to be left in our own darkness, but in your great grace and truth, you came near to shine into our hearts the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And so, gracious Father, by your Holy Spirit, we pray that you would do so now for those of us, Lord, who as yet have not had that experience. Lord, for those of us who are now in darkness, would your light shine so that, Lord, this Christmas for the first time we would rightly know and worship and trust in your Son, Jesus.

Lord, for those of us who do know him, we pray, Lord, that we would walk in the light of life. Lord, banish the darkness from our hearts. Lord, lift, we pray, the heavy burden of our sin and our works. Lord, that we might walk in the light of life this Christmas and know the joy and the hope that he brings. These things we pray in Jesus' name.

[32 : 02] Amen.