

Jesus comes to a world seeking prophets or enlightenment

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- [0 : 00] Father, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us gently this morning. Father, some of us are missing loved ones. Some of us are missing loved ones on the other side of oceans, in fact.
- Father, pour out your Holy Spirit upon our loved ones, wherever they are today. Pour out your Holy Spirit. Make them, help them to come close to Jesus on this, the season when we remember his birth.
- And Father, we ask that you would pour out your Holy Spirit upon us as we remember his coming into this world, born in Bethlehem, on his way to Calvary to die on the cross, to make us your children by adoption and grace.
- Father, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us. And this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated. So one of the things which is a bit different, if you've never been to one of our Christmas Eve or Christmas services, one of the things which is a bit different here is because we don't have child care.
- I think we have partial child care today, don't we? So it's a bit where you guys get to act as if there's no child care. So one of the things we do is I show some videos to intersperse with the sermon because even though God bless me with nine children, I suck at kids' talks.
- [1 : 14] I don't know why, but I just do. Actually, I can do sort of one, and then I can't do them very regularly. My imagination just doesn't work that way. So I show some videos to break things up.
- And just to get the sermon sort of started, we're going to watch a video called Jesus versus Santa. As many of you know, this July, you folks partnered with me to be able to go with SIM, a missionary organization, into Angola for several weeks.
- And one of the privileges I had while I was in Angola was to speak to a semi-nomadic tribe that up until a few years earlier had been one of the unreached people groups on the planet, unreached by the gospel.
- And, you know, you folks, I'm sure, were praying like crazy. I was praying like crazy all the time that I was there because I had never preached with a translator before. And when I was preaching to this semi-nomadic tribal group on the edge of the Kalahari Desert, I had to have a double translator, one into Portuguese and one into the tribal language.
- And, you know, one of the things that it really brought home to me is that when you're trying to talk about Jesus and you're trying to share the good news about Jesus, it's hard to break into the cultural categories.
- [2 : 36] You only have the words that they have. And how do you sort of take the words that they have and their categories of thought and try to communicate something which is just different? And we don't tend to think of that as being a problem here in Canada.

But I think that's actually, I think it's a pretty brilliant video that in many ways when people in our culture think of God, they think of something really like old St. Nick or Santa, somebody who's distant, somebody who's watching to see whether we've been naughty or nice, somebody who we occasionally want to do business transactions with to get good stuff.

And it's so sort of common in our culture that there's all these expectations about what God is like that we can sort of forget that we can think we're talking to people about God, about Jesus, about Christmas, but we're really not.

They're interpreting and hearing everything within certain types of categories and in certain types of just ways of understanding. So if we think, it's one of the things, if you think about it, those of you who are Christians who are here, if you go back and you read the Bible, it's really interesting because if you think about it, the Bible was written, the New Testament was written when nobody had a Christian memory.

Like most of the New Testament was written to people who their experience of God was idols.

[4 : 01] And they had other categories as well, but they had their own set of categories. And it's really, really interesting that how is it that the New Testament writers tried to bridge the gap between how people thought all around them and them trying to talk about something like the birth of Jesus and what it means.

And so, you know, if you hear, listen with me, read along with me for the first few verses of John chapter 1 because John, one of the original apostles, he's going to write an intimate biography of Jesus so that people can know Jesus.

That's what he's going to do. And so, you know, he didn't have a computer where he can cross things out and everything like that, you know, just, you know, backspace and delete and move things around, right?

He had to work with parchment. And so every word has to count. We don't know if he made a few little rough drafts on scraps or on sand or with chalk or something before he committed it to paper, but he had to really think about this, think about Jesus.

And the first 18 verses of John's gospel, it's known as the prologue. John's sort of setting the stage to introduce Jesus. And so it's very interesting that he uses categories like light and darkness and word and enlightenment and prophets or oracles.

[5 : 30] It's another way of understanding what a prophet is, an oracle. And these are all sort of categories that people are used to in the ancient world, whether you're Jewish or whether you are pagan.

You know, many of the people, if you were in Rome or in Greece or in what we now call Turkey, you could go and you could hear a prophet or a prophetess speak. They would be as if they were an oracle, channeling the very words of God.

And it was very common that you would go and you would seek enlightenment. In fact, in our age, when we think of it, you know, what is the main rival for the Christian faith in much of the world? It is the religion of the prophet.

And in Ottawa, not many people like the prophet, but in Ottawa, people seek enlightenment. They seek enlightenment through yoga.

They seek enlightenment through a guru. They seek enlightenment in a more secular way through science, through reason, through poetry, through good music. It's a type of a category by which we try to understand our lives and seek to improve our lives, either by listening to the voice of a prophet or seeking some type of enlightenment.

[6 : 40] And that's exactly, it's in those categories and terms that John begins to introduce Jesus. But as soon as he does that, he's going to mess with it because he's going to try to get us to realize that the problem is how we think.

Like this just in the verse, in verses four through nine of chapter one, it says, in him was life and the life was the light of men. Now you think about that for a second, the light of the human race.

That just sounds exactly like enlightenment. What we seek, we seek the light of reason. We seek the light of beautiful music, of aesthetic experience. We seek the interior light for those of us who think that there's some light or some spark of the divine within us.

And then it even goes on, it sounds just like a greeting card. It sounds like it's just very optimistic in the way that Justin Trudeau could go with something like this. Donald Trump could go with, I suppose, something like this.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. It sounds like the fact that reason will prevail over barbarism, that beautiful music will prevail over things which are tacky, that the light of compassion will prevail over hatred.

[7 : 54] And then all of a sudden, when he's using these categories of enlightenment, all of a sudden he switches and it's as if he's talking about prophets, which is sort of the other way which we, throughout all of the religious history that we've gone, trying to understand things.

Look, in verse 6, 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.

So this next video, it's a beautiful little video, sort of talks a bit more about how we sort of, things happen in our lives where we, and in this particular case, God is going to speak to us by his word and it's going to sort of mess us up because the problem is how we sort of are interpreting what happens, not actually what God is going to see or God's going to do.

This is sort of a little bit of a way into that. If you could play the next video, that would be great. So, if maybe the problem is us and it's, if you're here and you're not a Christian, one of the things that you might find very surprising about Christians is that we aren't aware of the fact, we Christians aren't often aware of the fact that we complain to God that he doesn't act in the way that we want him to.

You'd think that we Christians would just learn to listen to what God says about himself and accept it but instead we're sort of always complaining that he's not sort of fitting within our categories.

[9 : 23] So, you know, just look at the way John is going to introduce Jesus and on one hand he's going to use this prophet of, these categories of prophet and enlightenment but he messes with our head.

so just, you know, if you'd follow along listen to, listen to how, what God through his servant John and his word does. Listen to, begin at John chapter 1 verse 1.

In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. I talked about this last week. It's a very strong statement that Jesus is God because we're going to see later on that the word becomes flesh.

It's the way of introducing Jesus. Two different persons but just one God. It's a very, very powerful statement but I talked about it last Sunday.

We'll just keep going. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. That the word is uncreated.

[10 : 25] He is the beginning. He is eternal. In him was life and the life was the light of men. The light shines and the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

In verse 14 it's going to show that this is all referring to Jesus but then look at this huge jump. How is Jesus calls John the Baptist the greatest of the prophets and the last of the prophets.

Here we have Jesus introduced and all of a sudden we have John. All this wonderful language for Jesus. Listen to how John is introduced. There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

If you could put up the first point Andrew Jesus is not a prophet. He is introduced.

He is uncreated light made flesh. John is going to try to say we're going to try to think of Jesus like a prophet like a good man like a good teacher.

[11 : 24] It's a very common way. It's a very common thing for people to say Christians suck big time but Jesus was pretty good. But John is going to say that category is closed.

Jesus is not a prophet. He is uncreated light made flesh. Continue reading with me in verse 7. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him.

That is through John the Baptist. John the Baptist he was not the light but came to bear witness about the light. John the Baptist is a witness and the word witness here is from the law court.

Somebody who is going to give true testimony in things which matter before the courts. And then verse 9 it could sound like something that it sounds like the force.

It sounds like Star Wars the force. It sounds like the way people talk about energy being throughout everything and everywhere. There was verse 9 the true light which gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

[12 : 28] And it has this I mean if we just stop there with the Bible it would be like people who love classical music would love this. People who love reason. People who love science.

People who love yoga. People who love mysticism. All of them would applaud this. It could be a greeting card which is sent out to everyone. But then he goes and messes everything up.

The true light which gives light to everyone was coming into the world. And then listen to verse 10. He the true light is a person. He was in the world and the world was made through him yet the world did not know him.

Notice that in verse 10 again. He him him to be able to know a person he came to his own and the word their own means he came to his it's referring to Jesus coming to Israel his own place he comes to his land he comes to his his temple he comes to his priests he comes to his rituals he comes to his own and his own people did not receive him.

So here's if you go up the next point Andrew you know earlier it talked about how in verse 4 and 5 in him was life and the life was the light of men the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it this text is going to tell us that some light comes from darkness I'm going to talk about it more in the weeks to come the gospel of John is often used as a prime example by Jewish people as an example of anti-Semitism because of the way that John will use the word the Jews and we'll talk about this more in the weeks to come as we go through John's gospel but the one thing I want you to understand is John was Jewish Jesus was Jewish all the apostles were Jewish and he wasn't anti-Semitic in fact what John is saying here is that the very best religion the world has ever seen rejects Jesus every time you see the word

[14 : 41] Jews in the gospel of John think of the pinnacle of religion and spirituality he uses it as a type of a symbol and he's saying in a sense even the pinnacle of religion is in the way of darkness and there are many people who claim that they've given themselves to the light but light can emerge from darkness just as we know that those who can call themselves oracles and prophets emerge not from the true light but from darkness to lead us into deeper darkness or keep us in darkness if you could put up the next point Andrew all true light comes from God but as John is going to reveal as the book progresses but not all light saves only the true light made flesh saves all true light comes from

God but not all light saves only the true light made flesh saves one of the wonderful mysteries in the scriptures made clear in the gospels in the new testament is this mystery of common grace there is a light of reason there is a light of aesthetics there is a light of beauty there is a light that we can see just in the created order there is a light that God constantly shines book of Romans says there is always enough revealed about God through a whole range of means that in the last day no one will be able to stand on their hind legs and complain about God that he did not give them enough information to know about him no human being will be able to make that claim but reason does not save religion does not save spirituality does not save music does not save mysticism does not save yoga does not save the only thing that saves is the true light made flesh let's pause and see another this is a beautiful simple video that sort of just draws connections it sort of looks a little bit like light which is one of the reasons I chose it it's called silent night what the bible is saying if you could put up the next point

Andrew when it says in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God he was in the beginning with God all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made in him was life and the life was the light of men when it talks about in verse 10 he was in the world and the world was made through him yet the world did not know him he came to his own people and his own did not receive him but to all who did receive him who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God and the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory glory as of the only son of the father full of grace and truth the bible is saying is that uncreated light made flesh lay in the manger uncreated light made flesh lay in the manger the next point

Andrew please and the bible is saying when it says in verse 9 the true light which gives light to everyone was coming into the world uncreated light made flesh died on the cross to save those in darkness uncreated light made flesh died on the cross to save those in darkness and John here isn't you know it's funny there's a lot of debate among scholars about John how smart he was and how well educated he was because from the historical records we know that he was a fisherman there's debates about how literate he is I mean I don't know whether he was literate before he became a follower of Jesus and became a Christian or if just as often happens throughout the history of the world the coming of the gospel being received into a person's life creates a desire for learning and a desire to know and maybe he learned how to read as an adult and learned how to write as an adult before he was able to write this simple but very profound gospel but it's not just an academic exercise for John listen again to verse 11 the tragedy that Jesus comes to his own and his own people did not receive him but here then verses 12 and 13 this begins to begin a theme that the rest of John's gospel is going to keep going that it's not just an academic thing it's not just to say how odd of

God to have done such remarkable things but to all who did receive him verse 12 but to all who did receive him who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God in other words he gave it's through receiving Jesus and John's going to make that clear throughout the rest of his gospel it's believing in him that he is God with us that he is God who saves that he is the Messiah the anointed one the one promised by God for centuries and centuries that God would send to deliver human beings that somehow or another we have to receive him and by believing in his name it's a matter of trusting in him that if we receive him and believe in his name he we become adopted by God and then in verse 13 we're born not of blood and in the original language actually it's plural bloods in other words it's not by genealogy

[21 : 02] I don't become a Christian because my parents were Christians I don't make made right with God because I had the right last name the right type of parents nor of the will of the flesh in other words it's not that I can just declare by myself that God has to adopt me and I can just declare by my own willpower that by my own willpower I am going to somehow be born again by my willpower my effort nor of the will of man in other words an institution can't do it you can't go and be dumped in some water by some old guy or some young guy or you can't go through some smudging ceremony or any type of institution nothing of the will of man whether it's an institution or an individual neither just by my own personal one nor by my heritage none of these things will make me adopted by God nor will any of these things do what only God can do which is in some way create me anew create me as a new person the inside at a spiritual level only God can do that and I cannot do it by genealogy nor by my willpower nor through any human institution but of

God only God can do it only God only God God put up the next point faith always aims in other words what the Bible calls believing which can also be called faithing it's not just that somehow I have to screw up some type of emotional feeling within me or just have some type of burst of optimism or it's nothing like that it's just a very very common everyday thing that we are always trusting something trusting in something hoping in something and we just have this category of human beings that this thing of being able to trust or lean on it aims at things might aim at ourselves a lot of times I'm going to be able to do this I have faith in myself but it might be that we have faith in an institution or we have faith in a method or a process but faith this human faith always aims and what

John is saying is this thing which aims that just trust we're made to trust we're made to lean on something we're made to rely on something that what we need to lean on is well let's look at this final video and then I'll share the final point if you could put up the final point Andrew only God can adopt me and make me a new creation and I can only receive this by faith that's what we remember today only God can adopt me and make me a new creation and only I and I can only receive this by faith so what do we remember you know I used to sort of be a little bit rankled by secular Christmas now I'm quite comfortable with secular Christmas those of you who read my blog and I had another thing just put on the

Gospel Coalition website and you know all around us people are celebrating family and hope and optimism and love and kindness and you know what that's we should just you know we should go ahead and say way to go have a great Christmas but the thing about us who are Christians is we remember today this unbelievable great gift this spectacular mystery which is not contrary to reason but when our reason meets it all we can do is receive it and stand in awe and wonder that uncreated life took flesh an uncreated life was laid took flesh and laid in a manger and died on a cross taking upon himself our darkness that we by faith in him that we by faith in him may walk with uncreated light light in our daily lives now and into all eternity uncreated light made flesh we remember that today and we remember it with joy because

I can do my day with uncreated light made flesh who died for me so that I can be God's child by adoption and grace and his powerful power could you please stand let's just bow our heads in prayer father thank you for Jesus thank you father that while he spoke true words of you he is not just a prophet he doesn't fit into those categories father but that he is uncreated light made flesh and we thank and praise you father that it can be hard for us to figure out what different types of lights are true and what come from you we give you thanks and praise father that by keeping our eyes on Jesus uncreated light made flesh born in a manger died on a cross risen from the dead that father we can begin to discern which lights are really darkness in which light really comes from you we ask father that you help us to be disciples of

[27 : 15] Jesus who are gripped by this gospel story and as we are gripped by this gospel story that we are learning day by day to walk with Jesus and live for your glory father all these things we ask in the name of Jesus your son and our savior amen off out