

The Baby born, the darkness doomed

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- [0 : 00] I go to the same coffee place to work on my sermon for, I don't know, about three years now. It's usually, most of the time, the same place. And a little bit after I started going there to work on it on weekdays in the mornings, towards the end of the day, I'd see a group of mainly ladies.
- 90% of the time, 95% of the time, it would be a group of three to five ladies who would come in together. And I figured out almost immediately that they were probably Jehovah Witnesses.
- And it turns out that they were. And so, just about maybe two or three times a week when I was there, they would come in. They'd all sit and have coffee and they'd all look at me. Not because I'm something special, but because I was working on my sermon, I had a Bible out.
- And they'd notice the Bible and they'd look at me. And eventually they'd start to smile and I found out that what they did is that they were witnessing, as they would call it, going house to house and witnessing in that region.
- And to get a bit of a break, they'd all have coffee together. And they have a name for it, which I can't remember what the name is for it. But Jehovah Witnesses have a name for it. And so, we'd be fine and I'd say, oh, they noticed that I was reading the Bible and I told them I was a pastor and I was a Christian and all of that stuff.
- [1 : 18] But I knew that at some point in time, a particular encounter was going to come. And sure enough, after several months, a time came when a woman around my age with her daughter, and her daughter was, in a sense, a professional missionary.
- She had been working outside of the country for several years and that's all she did. She made her living going. She raised support to go door to door and try to convert people to becoming Jehovah Witnesses.
- And so, the day came when there was just the two of them came in and they saw me and they came and sat down with me and I was waiting for something like this to eventually happen. So, we had a conversation that went about 45 minutes.
- It was a very interesting conversation. And this isn't by the way to boast. Maybe it's a bad thing, but they've never wanted to have a conversation with me since. But it, and it wasn't because I was mean or rude, but just because I know a little bit about Jehovah Witnesses.
- And they have a pattern, they have a type of thing that they go through, several different conversation patterns that they like to go through. So, if you ever get a talk with a Jehovah Witness, one of the best things to do is to knock them off.
- [2 : 27] There are different little streams of conversation that they have. And they started to talk to me and I said to them, after we'd been talking for about five minutes, I said, one of the reasons I could never be a Christian, I mean a Jehovah Witness, is because you ultimately don't believe that God is love.

And they were very offended by it. Well, they weren't offended. They were just surprised. They assured me that they believed that God was love. And I said, well, here's the problem. You believe that there's only this one God, that God is one, and you believe that God is love.

But if God has just always been one, then before he created human beings, who was there for him to love? Like before he created angels, who was there for God to love?

Is God sort of, was God sort of a needy God that he had to create angels and then human beings so that he could have somebody to love? But if he has a, if he's a needy type of God that has to create somebody so that he can love them, well, then how is he God if he has these particular needs?

And we went down this path because they would try to defend it. They'd never, I guess, come across an argument about one of the problems with their belief is that they couldn't believe that God is love.

[3 : 41] It culminated in me, of course, talking about not only the love that existed between, anyway, they just, they didn't quite know what to deal with it. Now, I mention all of this because the Bible text, which we just read a couple of moments ago, and we're going to look at John chapter one, verses one to five, is a very, very, very important part of the Bible.

I don't know if it's still the case, but when I was trying to learn Greek, the first place that you would go to try to learn Greek was actually these verses. It's very simple.

It's almost of the level of see Dick run, run Dick run, see Jane run, run Jane run, like the type of very beginning simple words. But on one level, they're very simple, but on the other level, every word is very, very profound and very, very carefully crafted.

And it tells us something which is quite astounding. So if you get your Bibles out and look at John one, we're going to begin reading it. And by the way, this isn't just sort of an academic thing to talk with Muslims or Jehovah Witnesses.

The fact of the matter is, is that love is unbelievably important to us as human beings, and especially in this cultural moment. We, in our moment, our culture has this constant huge desire and hunger for love.

[5 : 02] The more institutions break down, the more relationships break down, the more marriages break down, the greater desire and hunger of our hearts is for love.

And we might be confused about what love looks like. We might be confused about how love relates to justice. But there's this huge cultural desire for love.

It fuels the transgender movement. It fuels the LGBTQ movement. It fuels our concern for First Nations people and their concerns.

There's this huge hunger for love. So to look at whether or not, like how we can understand love and base it, it's not just an academic thing. It's very relevant and very deeply important to each one of us.

So in mind of that, listen to this. It doesn't sound like it's talking about love, but it really is. Listen to this. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[6 : 03] He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. Now, we can talk a little bit about why it is that Jesus, because that's ultimately who they're talking about, is described as the Word.

Maybe I'll say a few things about it in a moment. But actually, if you could bring up the first point, Andrew, that would be very helpful. What, amongst other things, this text of Scripture is telling us is that love is deeper and older than creation itself.

Love is deeper and older than creation itself. That's what the Bible is teaching here. You see, this word, was, is a really important word.

Listen again to the Bible. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. Sorry, not was, it's the word with. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. And twice in these few verses, it uses the word with. And we might think, well, with, like George, what's so special about the word with?

[7 : 19] Well, in the original language, there's two different ways that the word with could be used. One way would be to say, Louise, my car broke down.

Could you come and pick me up? And then she says, well, where are you? And I can say, I'm with the car. Okay, I'm with the car. And in the original language, there'd be a way of using with, which means that you're just sort of with something.

Something, you're with it, you're with either something which is impersonal, or you're with something, so you're with something which is just impersonal, or you're with someone in an impersonal way.

Because it would be the same word as I'm with the car, as saying I'm with some people at the bus stop. I'm at the bus stop. Are you there by yourself? She might say, no, no, there's some other people.

I'm here with some other people. But it's just, it's no different really than just me being with some objects. And there's another way in the original language of using the word with, which implies that there's a personal connection.

[8 : 24] And more than a personal connection, a relationship of intimacy and love. We would use it that way if I, maybe somebody, well, I know, back when I was in my earlier church, my previous church, there was a fellow who had to go to court because he'd been accused of something.

And I actually believe that in this particular case, I have to say in this particular case, because he was not unfamiliar to the police, but in this particular case, I think he was completely and utterly innocent.

In fact, I had good reasons to know that he was probably completely and utterly innocent. He'd been accused of something he didn't do. And I'll call him Bob. I almost said his real name. And I said to him, Bob, I'm with you.

I'm with you on this. And I'll go with you to court because I'm with you. And when you use that word with in that type of a sense, like I put my arm on him, so I'm with you. I'm with you, Bob.

I'm with you on this. We'll go to this together. And I'll sit with you because I'm with you. And so in the original language, there's a way of saying with, which implies this personal relationship.

[9 : 35] It's a relationship that only a person can have with another person. And it's not sort of just formal or impersonal. It's a very personal connection.

And that's the word which is used here in John chapter 1. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God. But it's telling us that it's a person, the word.

However we understand why it is that John used this word, the word, to begin to describe Jesus, I mean, we can meditate upon that. We can, the poets and the prayer warriors, we can meditate upon that.

We can think upon it. The artist can imagine why it is that God would choose this word to describe the second person of the Trinity. But at the very, very heart of this text is before there were stars, before there was a galaxy, before there were human beings, before there were angels, before anything existed that does exist, in the beginning, the word was with the Father.

And the Father was with the word. And both are God, but there's still only one God. They're with each other. There's a personal relationship. It's a love relationship. And that exists before anything that exists.

[10 : 57] So you see, from the Christian account, we can say that love is deeper and older than creation itself, because it's only in the Bible.

It's only in the doctrine of the Trinity. Islam has no basis to believe this. And Orthodox Judaism, it would be a puzzle within Orthodox Judaism, a puzzle that, on one level, they know that God is love, because it's, in fact, in the Old Testament scriptures, the Tanakh, I'm going to get it wrong, because I can't get the full phlegm, but chesed, God's faithful covenant love, is one of the most important ways to describe love.

But you have this idea, this truth that God is love in the Old Testament, but at the same time, they have to puzzle over how is it that God could be a God of love if there was no one other than him.

But from the Bible, from Jesus, from his death and resurrection, we understand this deeper truth that from all eternity, there is the Father loving the Son and the Son loving the Father.

And that love that existed between the Father and the Son from all eternity, it was a deep love, an eternal love, and a true love, and it is out of that love that things are created.

[12 : 12] So listen to it again. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. In fact, I would suggest that it's only in the Bible, only through what Christ has revealed to us, that we in fact have a way to truly understand and base this deepest desire of our hearts to know love.

You know, the central myth of our culture is the myth of naturalistic evolution. And at the very, very center of that myth is the belief that after time and chance work to create life, the way that we came about was through two simple truths.

The strong eat the weak. The strong adapt, the weak die. And how on earth do you derive from the strong eat the weak or the strong adapt and the weak die, therefore love one another?

Therefore love... That doesn't follow. I mean, what really follows is I should be able to eat the weak until I become weak. Or I should be able to adapt so that I will survive and it sucks to be weak.

And as we all know, that's so unsatisfying because eventually if we live long enough, we become weak. We begin weak. Some of us never are anything other than weak.

[13 : 48] But we always end up weak. And we can't be weaker than dying. And in such a context, there's this profound affirmation and teaching in the Bible that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. Actually, Andrew, I missed the point. Can you put up the second point? Basically, just as a matter of thinking, something or someone, somewhat or some who, I know it sounds like a Dr. Seuss line, but something or someone, somewhat or some who, has to have no beginning.

Like that's just the case. And we just have to be so grateful in our culture that our culture still is living off the remnants of the Christian story because if the thing that has no beginning is a what, if the thing that has no beginning is a thing, then how do persons come to be?

And how do they have value and how do they have dignity? And why is it that that if things and what's are the most basic with no beginning and no end, that human beings exist and seem to be made with this unceasing hunger for love?

And we Christians have to learn to not be intimidated by the myth of naturalistic evolution. and to be comfortable and confident that there's very simple ways how the Christian story is completely compatible with the true findings of science and say, it is a who, a person that has no beginning.

[15 : 56] In fact, it's more than a who. It's, well, one who, just one God, but the Father and the Son who know each other as persons, who love each other as persons from all eternity.

And out of them being persons and out of them being love, they created human beings. Now, I'm a man of a certain age and I have a certain type of context and for those of us of a certain age and a certain context, what would evangelists give to people that they wanted to try to become Christians or what would evangelists give somebody who had just become a Christian to study?

And for those of us who are of a certain age and have a certain context, the answer would be the Gospel of John. That's what, that's what, in, I don't know if they still, if in many places it's still done, but the Gospel of John would be what would be given to a person who either wants to be, that you want them to become a Christian and you want them to find out about Jesus so they'll become a Christian or after they become a Christian, how they can know Jesus more.

You'd give them the Gospel of John. Why is it that that is the case and why is it that we should maybe get back to it? If you turn in John's Gospel to chapter 20, verse 30, you'll see the answer.

Turn in your Bibles to John chapter 20, verse 30 and 31. And here's what John writes, right towards the end of the Gospel. I keep sort of walking into that.

[17 : 39] I guess you can't see that from the other, from the image. And it says this, just almost before the very end of John's Gospel, John reveals why he wrote John's Gospel. He says, Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Like, just say that verse 31. Why did John write the Gospel? Why, as John is beginning to write his Gospel, and as he's starting with chapter 1, verse 1, and as he does chapter 2, and chapter 3, all the way through John's Gospel, John said, I wrote everything, everything that I wrote, I had a purpose.

And my purpose is my hope that as you read this, you will come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, that he is the Son of God, and that by believing him, you may have life in his name.

That's why John wrote his Gospel, and that's why for many, many generations in many, many different cultures, the Gospel of John would be the Gospel that was given to people. And some of you might say, George, if you say that to us, that sort of means that it can't be true.

But that's not the case at all. It's not the case. It's, John knows that he's writing this, that it's going to be, there's going to be pushback, there's going to be people who disagree with it.

[19 : 24] When our church, because we used to be part of the Anglican Church of Canada, and over a very important doctrinal issue that was an issue of salvation, we felt that we could no longer be part of the Anglican Church of Canada, and we walked away, and we used to own a building and have property, and our former church sued us, and then we went to mediation before going to court, and in mediation, both sides say why they're right.

They share the facts of history, they share the legal facts, they share the legal principles, and each side puts them in such a form to convince the mediator that the facts stand with their position.

And that's how we have to understand what John is doing. John isn't saying, so I just sat down and invented as many interesting stories as I possibly could, and I just sat down and invented as many fables and fairy tales and myths and marketing things as I possibly could so I could hoodwink you.

If you go and you look at the very last words of John's gospel, look at chapter 21, verse 25, actually verse 24, you'll see what John, how he actually closes his words.

So he shared with us that his whole point is to talk about, just to share the way that Jesus talked when he was being far more philosophical and poetic and mystical and intimate, and to share some of these key conversations with Jesus.

[21 : 09] He's going to share them with us so that we can know Jesus. And then look at how it ends his gospel, verse 24 of chapter 21. This is the disciple who is bearing, he just recounted an incident with somebody, and he's saying, listen, I'm that guy.

I'm that guy that I just told you about in the story. This is the disciple, verse 24, who is bearing witness or testimony. It's a legal word. I am bearing testimony about these things.

It's a word from the courts who has written these things that we may know that his testimony is true. It's a word from the courts. Now, there are therefore many other things that Jesus did.

Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. In other words, John is saying, I'm just bearing witness and testimony to what actually happened so that you might come to believe in Jesus.

Now, I share this with you because this is the first Sunday of quite a few Sundays where we're going to go through John's Gospel, and I encourage you to read along with me. In fact, to read ahead of me so that when you come to church you've looked at the text itself.

[22 : 20] But it means that every time you read John's Gospel, what you can always ask yourself is saying, why did John include this there? What is it that he is saying here that will help me to believe?

Like, why is this important to understand who Jesus is and come to believe in him? That's not a, that's in fact the question that you need to ask if you're to actually read the Gospel of John properly.

How does this fit in with this? How does this fit in with this? That at the end, I am to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, I'm to believe in him, and I'm to have life.

How does that contribute every little bit to this ultimate purpose of John? Well, just in closing, turn back to the beginning of John's Gospel, chapter 1.

Chapter 1, verse 1. And let's just read these five verses that we're looking at today. Next Sunday morning at 10, we're going to look at verses 6 to 13.

[23 : 31] And if you don't come both times on Christmas Eve, you can listen to them later online. And Sunday evening, which is Christmas Eve evening, I'll look at verse 14. And then on Christmas morning, and I know only me and a couple of others will be at all three of the services, but I'm going to do a different sermon in the morning and the evening and on Christmas morning.

I'll look at verses 15 to 18. But listen to these first five verses. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. In other words, just pause for a second. Before anything else existed, the Word and God the Father existed and were with each other in love and intimacy and communion and similar purpose.

And then verse 3, all things were made through Him. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. It's making a claim about donkeys and horses and birds and mountains and hills and stars and planets and moons and galaxies.

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.

[24 : 57] The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Listen to verse 4 and 5 again. 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. If you could put up the next point, please, Andrew, that would be very helpful.

Here's the thing which the Bible is teaching, is that the Creator became the Redeemer. The Creator, it will be up there in a moment. Oh, sorry, it's a previous point.

Did I? Sent you two emails. Okay, well, listen, while that's getting sorted out, it's only five words, so you can remember them.

The Creator became the Redeemer. The Creator became the Redeemer. So what this Bible text is telling us here, if you look at this, what it's saying, and John probably knew about the other gospel accounts, and John knew all about the story of Jesus, and so what John is saying is that when you see the baby being laid in the manger, you see the Creator of all things being laid in the manger.

[26 : 21] When you see the baby being laid in the manger, you are seeing the life that is light being laid in the manger.

When you see Jesus throughout the gospel of John talking, when you see him teaching, who are you seeing teaching? You are seeing the Creator of all things who's entered into his creation.

It is the Creator who is teaching. When you see Jesus teaching, it is the life that is light who is teaching.

That's who's teaching. And then when you see Jesus hanging on the cross, who is hanging on the cross? The Creator of all things is hanging on the cross.

When you see Jesus hanging on the cross, who do you see? You see the life that is light hanging on the cross.

[27 : 22] That's what you see. It is the Creator who enters into our created order to save us. Now, if you could put the final point up, now that I'm not too confused, to turn to Christ is to turn to the life that is light.

To stay turned away from Christ is to continue to walk in darkness. To turn to Christ is to turn to the life that is light.

To stay turned away from Christ is to continue to walk in darkness. That's what the Bible is teaching.

Notice here it says, 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. Some of your Bible versions might say that the darkness has not comprehended it.

And maybe the better translation would be, because both words are included in the original language, some versions might use the word master, which is a really good word, because you know how you master a subject?

[28 : 35] Or you master some other person, you wrestle somebody and master them down. And so what the Bible is saying is that darkness didn't come from God, there's this problem of human darkness.

And human darkness and supernatural darkness, by its very nature, it can't understand light and it can't understand life. By its very nature, it can't understand God and it can't understand Jesus.

And darkness, whether it's human darkness or supernatural darkness, not only can it not truly understand, it also can't overcome, because what it can't understand it wants to overcome.

But darkness will never overcome God, it will never overcome the life that is light. It just cannot master it in any type of a sense. And what's so important about this teaching, that it is the life of the world who is the light of the world, that comes to be born in Bethlehem and die upon the cross, is it tells us that human and supernatural darkness is so unbelievably powerful, and I use the word unbelievably on purpose, it is so unbelievably powerful and so unbelievably dangerous to us, far worse than our worst nightmares, that only the life who is the light could deliver human beings from it.

It tells us something about the power of darkness and the power of evil, and its power to blind us as human beings, who keep thinking that we somehow by our own efforts can make ourselves right, where some effort can fulfill the hole in our heart that hungers for love, that by our own efforts can become somehow God-like, and the text is telling us that there's something about the darkness which is so much more powerful than we can ever truly understand, that our need is, and our doom is worse than our worst nightmares.

[30 : 57] that it requires the light, the life who is the light, to be the one to deal with it. But at the same time, it is telling us that we are loved more than we can ever believe, because we are so deeply loved by God, that God himself would come to die for you and me, that we are so deeply loved and so deeply precious to God, that the life who gives light would hang on the cross for you and me.

This story is setting before us the depth of our danger and need, and the depths and heights of God's love for you and me, and his hope that we will believe in Jesus, who is the life of the world, the light of the world, the creator of the world, the sustainer of the world, the end of all of our longings and of our yearnings.

That's how John begins to introduce Jesus to us. Could you please stand? So as we're watching the pageant, which is going to begin in about five minutes, and when we see the really cute kids and the cute adults who are helping them, and we see the little baby, John wants us to remember who is it, who is in the manger, and the creator of all things is in the manger.

Who is it who is in the manger? It is the life that gives light that is in the manger. That is who is in the manger.

And why is the creator of the world in the manger? Why is the life that gives light in the manger? That you and I might come to know Jesus as our Savior and walk with him.

[33 : 13] Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would move in hearts and minds and wills and imaginations and in our dreams and in our nightmares, that your Holy Spirit would move very powerfully in us this morning, that your Holy Spirit would draw us to Jesus, that we would hear these words, that we would believe them, that they would be engraved on the command center of our lives, to know who it is that died on the cross for us, who it is that entered into this world for us.

Father, may that be engraved in our heart, that we might know Jesus, that he might know us, that we might know him as our Savior, that we might know him as our Lord.

Father, help us to know Jesus, to know him more and more, and rest in him and walk with him. And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.