

Light in the Darkness

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[0 : 00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweep from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. And as always, if you'd like to learn a little more about us as a church, you can go to FCCGreensburg.com or you can check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, today we are excited to get into the Word of God, but most of all, let this Word get into us and change these hearts. The message today comes from a series called Word Alive. We're in week number two, and the message is called Light in the Darkness.

So go ahead and grab your Bibles and turn to John chapter 1. Now, have you ever wondered if God will have a blooper reel of us when we get to heaven?

See, from everything I see in the Word and from walking with Jesus for almost 25 years now, I believe our God has the best sense of humor. And maybe Moses and Paul are already up there watching some of our highlight reels just belly laughing.

Maybe it was the time that you got up in the middle of the night, pitch dark, you try to maneuver through the house, you're in stealth mode thinking you're a Navy SEAL going undetected, when suddenly you trip over a landmine, I mean a stool, and you do a somersault, kick the dog, and break grandma's old vase all at the same time.

[1 : 24] And now, everyone who was sound asleep is standing over you asking what happened, and you can't even move because you threw your back out. A little dramatic, but I bet some of us have a story that's not far off.

You know, I remember one time when I was a kid, maybe eight or nine years old, playing a game with my older brother and sister. So just to give some context, DJ's almost five years older than me, Maya's about three and a half, and we would blindfold one of us, and then that person in my parents' bedroom, which was kind of big, had to try to tag one of the other two who didn't have a blindfold.

Well, it wasn't always easy when you couldn't see. I mean, we're talking total darkness, unless it was my brother, because he liked to scoot his mask down and cheat a little bit. But I was having a hard time catching them.

And one thing we would usually do is we would often use the bed as a barrier. So I knew where the bed was, that they may be hiding on the other side of it.

And so I was just going to nonchalantly just dive across the bed and try to swipe at one of them on the other side. So I did.

[2 : 38] I jumped as far as I could with a reckless abandon because the soft bed would catch me. And do you know what I discovered? I had miscalculated.

I landed smack dab on the floor. And to make matters worse, they are rolling on the ground laughing, not with me, but 100% at me.

Meanwhile, I just knocked the wind out of myself, and they were too busy cackling to care. So I went crying to my mom. And that's one of those stories that my siblings still tell to this day.

But you'll notice the common denominator in both of those stories is darkness. It's amazing how much we can stumble when we're in the darkness. But when the light is bright, we can stay upright. Yes, that rhymes. And before we go there, welcome back to the second week of our series called Word Alive. If you want to turn to the Gospel of John, chapter 1, we're going to be in verse 4 here real soon.

[3 : 43] But we very intentionally started this Christmas series early so that we could have a few more weeks to dive into one of the deepest passages in all the Bible where we discover the true identity of Jesus.

And last week we realized that 90% of John's Gospel is different, or it's not in the other three Gospels. And John's purpose for writing is very clear. He tells us at the end of the book, John 20, 31, the Holy Spirit inspires him to write these words. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name. And listen, John ain't playing around. He starts off verses 1 through 3 showing the whole world that Jesus is eternal, existing before creation. That means He's God. And He's also part of the triune Godhead, three in one, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, creating everything out of nothing. So we looked at a mammoth passage last week where you literally have to write your own translation and change the Word of God if you want to continue denying Jesus as God. [5 : 01] And then today we come to another authoritative passage where we see two powerful concepts merge together, life and light. So let's just read through these two verses for today and then we'll start to break it down.

John 1, starting in verse 4, God's Word says, In Him, we know it's talking about Jesus, in Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. May God bless the study of His Word. And listen, with this being such a profound passage with all kinds of theological implications, we need to stretch our brains a little bit this morning, okay, while also getting real practical with it all.

So here's the first thing I want us to see. Jesus is the life. Now, there are some different Greek words for life that are used in the New Testament.

There's first a word called bios, which refers to physical life. So that's where we get the word biology, okay? And we already learned last week that our physical life is dependent on Jesus being the Creator God.

[6 : 19] In fact, David in Psalm 139 says, For you, God, created my inmost being. You, God, knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Now, did David understand that the Messiah was a part of that? I doubt it. But Jesus is bios life as our Creator. But that's not the word that John uses here.

There's another word for life in Greek, and it's psuche. But it's spelled like psyche, okay? And that's where we get the word psychology.

This is life as in personality. It's the mental. It's the thinking part of life. So have you ever heard someone say this phrase, Man, they just have a lot of life in them?

See, that's psuche, okay? And that's not the word that John uses here either. See, he uses the word zoe, Z-O-E, zoe, and it refers to spiritual life.

[7 : 20] So here's what the first part of John 1-4 says as it uses this same word twice. In him, Jesus, was zoe, life, and that zoe, life, was the light of mankind.

So church, this is just another instance among many where John makes it clear that Jesus is God. And the original audience would have gotten this immediately.

And it's because when you say, In Jesus was life, you are saying that he is self-existent. He has life in himself. And listen, only God can say that, who is self-existent.

We, the created, rely on our creator for bios, for physical, psuche, the mental, zoe, the spiritual life. But Jesus is life. And John makes a big deal about this using the word zoe 36 times in the Gospel of John. See, just to give you some context, Matthew only uses zoe seven times, Mark 4 and Luke 6 times.

[8 : 30] So, do you think maybe, just maybe, John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is trying to make it abundantly clear that Jesus is your Messiah. He's your God.

And in him, you have life. Because he is life. That God possibly knew, insert sarcasm, that there would come men and women with false motives of fame and fortune and grandeur who would attempt to pervert his word.

Absolutely, he knew that. And that's why the word must be our source of truth on everything. That's why we study in context. That's why we go deeper.

That's why I tell you often not to just buy everything that I preach hook, line, and sinker, but actually study it out. Go deeper in the word for yourself. And let me give you more biblical evidence from later in the Gospel of John as we start to get real practical.

See, in John 11, 25, as Jesus arrives late after hearing Lazarus was sick, his friend has now at this point been dead for days when Jesus arrives and he meets Martha there and she kind of meets him on his way actually and he begins to comfort her.

[9 : 47] And even before she knew that he would raise Lazarus from the dead, here's what Jesus said to her in verse 25 of John 11. I am, by the way, one of the seven I am statements, I am the resurrection and the life, the zoe, the one who believes in me will live even though they die.

Then in John 14, 6, as Jesus is ministering to his disciples, knowing he will go back up to heaven after his death and resurrection, he says, I am the way, the truth, and the zoe, the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. Church, he wants to be our God. He wants to be our life.

He wants us to discover life in him. And right now, I need to talk to 16-year-old me who is as lost as can be. I need to talk to anyone who's never truly let Jesus be their zoe, their eternal life, whether it's been just not understanding like the way I grew up or maybe for you, you're just going to be honest about it, just flat out rebellion because no one, including God, is going to tell me what to do. Whatever the reason you've never repented of your sin and surrendered your life to Jesus, getting baptized into him, living the rest of your days sold out for his kingdom, listen, today that can change if you're willing because in Christ is the life that you've been searching for all this time.

[11 : 27] That relationship, that spouse, man, they can be an absolute blessing to you, but they can't fill the God void. Achieving success in your job or career is fine if done with integrity, but it won't satisfy the way that we think it will.

Living in the big home, driving the expensive vehicle, having all the four-wheelers, the UTVs, the RVs, not bad things, but they won't bring zoe. Filling my bank account with security with all those zeros at the end of it doesn't do it.

My kids' success in sports or academics or other extracurriculars can't bring life because true life is only found in knowing Jesus, the source of life.

And I love the story. I love the story of Lenny LeBlanc. Born in 1951, he hadn't been to church in 20 years, and he figured he just didn't need religion.

Well, after all, he had signed this big contract with Capitol Records and was now enjoying success after another, after another. Pop music was his life. And then one night in 1981, he got a call from a friend who had been a drug smuggler, but the guy sounded different.

[12 : 41] And he said, Lenny, man, I got saved. And then he asked, are you saved? Well, Lenny didn't even know what it meant to be saved. So his friend sent him a Bible and said, you got to promise me you'll read it.

So he said, okay. He began reading it. And listen, within two weeks, he cried out to God to forgive him. And he became a born again believer. Still under contract with Capitol Records, he wandered in no man's land wanting his life to have a kingdom purpose.

And finally, Capitol Records released him and he was free to write worship songs as he felt the Lord leading him to do. And one day, lyrics popped into his head. And you may recall this from your memory bank.

He wrote, there is none like you. No one else can touch my heart like you do. I can search for all eternity long and find there is none like you.

So whether you don't know Jesus as Lord, or if you've just found yourself kind of straying off the straight and narrow path as a baptized believer, or even if you've been in church all your life, but listen, it's just been about duty or obligation or who the preacher was or religion, the way that we've always done it and you've never truly walked with Jesus as your Lord.

[14 : 00] Listen, there is grace and Jesus wants to be your Zoe life. He wants his truth to set you free. Now watch what our passage does next as we fill this in.

Jesus is the light. He's the life and he is the light. And while we're going to make some distinction between those two words, life and light, we're also going to see that you really can't disconnect the two concepts because they merge into one powerful truth.

So look back at John 1, 4 again with me, but now focus on the second half of that verse. In him was life and that life, watch this, was the light, the foes of mankind.

Now in trying to wrap my mind around this, I was using a helpful tool that I have, a commentary by John MacArthur and here's how he described this. He said, the light combines with life in a metaphor for the purpose of clarity and contrast.

God's life is true and holy. Light is that truth and holiness manifest against the darkness of lies and sin. So he says, and he kind of brings it home, so light is God's life manifest in Christ.

[15:21] And what's cool about life and light is that we see this theme throughout God's word. And let me give you one of several examples. About a thousand years before Jesus would come to this earth, David, King David, wrote these words in Psalm 36, 9.

For with you, God, is the fountain of life. In your light we see light. Now coming back to the New Testament, also in the book of John, chapter 8, verse 12, Jesus connects the two concepts again when he says, I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. So two things about light that I just want us to see today. First, Jesus' light reveals impurity.

I love the story from the famous evangelist Billy Graham. He used to tell this story about when he was being interviewed by one of the big networks, TV networks, and this was going to air on national TV like Sunday night.

Okay? Now that doesn't happen today with organizations like ABC, NBC. It was one of those big boys, but it did happen back then. And because it would take place in his home, he and his wife, Ruth, cleaned the house until there wasn't a speck of dirt anywhere.

[16:39] I mean, just immaculate. They even stepped back and kind of admired their hard work on the cleaning job. But when the crews arrived and they set up all the lights, they flipped the switch, and that's when Billy said he was mortified.

Because when the bright lights came on, now you could see all kinds of dust and cobwebs and imperfections that they had no idea were even there. And like any good preacher, he had to make it spiritual, right?

He said, when we come before the perfection, the light of Jesus, the Holy One, all our impurities are magnified and we can see how desperately we need him.

So once again, as we journey through the first part of John 1, we already know that Jesus is the eternal God. He's the creator. He's part of the Trinity. He's life.

He is light. But what good is it for us if we don't respond to him, if we stay in darkness, because when you study out what light often means in Scripture, it refers to truth, to holiness, to purity.

[17:45] And Jesus perfectly embodied all of that because he is light. And I want to take you to Luke chapter 2, which is actually the book right before John.

So if you got your Bible open to John, just head back one book. And after we read about the birth of Jesus, we're taken to a field not far from there. A group of shepherds were winding down for the night as they cared for their flock.

And if you understand their culture, and I've said this before, but shepherds weren't despised in their society, but probably better stated they were forgotten or maybe they were unimportant to most.

See, shepherds weren't viewed like tax collectors and prostitutes as the lowest morally in those days, okay? But they did carry a stereotype of being kind of those rough blue-collar workers who were often loose on morals.

So here they are in a field like any other night when suddenly the darkness was filled with light as an angel of the Lord appeared to them. Then a choir of angels appears singing praises to Jesus.

[18:53] And it says they were terrified. Guys, I'm guessing they might have fallen on their face as we often see when an angel surrounded by God's glory would appear to people.

But this angel came to tell them of the birth of their Savior, the greatest news of all. And what I love about this is that God chose to reveal the most important event in human history alongside the cross and the resurrection and he chose to do so to forgotten and possibly morally bankrupt shepherds.

Well, after the angels left, they were kind of looking at each other like, what just happened? And they decided to go. And they found Jesus just as the angels said and they looked in his eyes for themselves.

And then in Luke 2.20 it says this, the shepherds returned so from seeing Jesus glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen which were just as they had been told.

So like I said, we don't know the character, we don't know the heart of these shepherds before the angelic choir appeared but we do know that everything changed after they looked into the light of life.

[20 : 08] And Jesus knowing our sin that separates us from a perfect God wasn't just born into this world to say, okay, I'm here, everybody come worship me, serve me. He was born to die.

He was born to die for your sins, for mine. He selflessly, sacrificially was born to show us the light of purity, of holiness and what it looks like to live a life as an image bearer of God walking in the light. And when we step into the light of Jesus, the first thing it does is reveal our impurity as Romans 3.23 says, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

All have missed the mark of perfection. That's you and me both. And it would take perfection to enter heaven by good deeds which wave bye-bye to all of us.

It shows our need for a Savior to forgive and set us free. And then it also is this, his light, Jesus' light brings victory.

[21 : 11] You know, I started off having some fun about the goofy story of tripping over the stool and waking up the family. Even how much easier I could have found my siblings if I wasn't in total darkness.

But how many times, seriously, have we just needed some light for our path? How often has a flashlight or a cell phone light come in handy for us? And you know what?

We also need the light to shine into the chaos, the darkness that life can sometimes be for us. Even in John 12.46, Jesus says, I have come into the world as a light so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

And like we mentioned earlier, light in Scripture is often a picture of truth, holiness, and righteousness. And darkness is that picture of evil and sin.

And when we come into the light through a surrendered life to Jesus, darkness vanishes because darkness is simply the absence of light. And when Jesus fills our life, there's no room for darkness.

[22 : 19] And in John 1.5, it says, the light, Jesus, shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Church, I am saddened to constantly see gifted preachers that I admire, usually those who have like a national or worldwide stage that I admire, have these great spiritual falls where the world learns of the darkness that have been going on in their life maybe for years behind the scenes.

It also happens in the church way too often with people that we know and we love. But here's the good news. If we'll walk in the light in Jesus and His word in a relationship through prayer and purity and integrity and faithfulness and love mimicking the light of Jesus, then darkness cannot overcome it.

Because listen, there is victory in Jesus. I need you to hear that. No matter what you're walking through, there is victory in Him. Chains of addictions are broken.

Selfishness and materialism give way to humility and selflessness and contentment. Obsession with appearance is replaced by the pursuit of a godly inner beauty. Sexual sin falls as purity becomes our pursuit.

A troublemaker is transformed into a peacemaker. See, when you are stamped by Jesus and He says, paid in full, you are no longer in the darkness but you're a child of the light and when we are a child of the light, we seek to live in a manner that pleases the God who set us free.

[23 : 55] I love, I love how 1 Peter 2.9 puts this. It gives us our identity. Okay? And there's a lot more identity in Scripture than just 1 Peter 2.9 but listen to this.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.

See, in the 11 o'clock service last week, we prayed over one of our church members who had a really bad car wreck about two and a half weeks ago.

One minute, he's fine. Driving down State Road 3 in his truck, pulling a trailer with machine on the back of it and the next moment a lady pulls out right in front of him and there's nothing he can do as they collide.

Both were lifelined as it crushed part of his leg. He will be undergoing a long surgery really soon to reconstruct much of his lower right leg.

[24 : 57] Just a tough situation where the future of his mobility is really pretty uncertain right now. And yet, when I sat down with him about a week ago after this accident, even in terrible pain as we're talking, he knew his God has him under control.

He constantly was pointing out the good and what God was doing. I watched guys come in and visit him, friends and people he has mentored and he's ministering to them and he's encouraging them

to walk with Jesus.

and I heard his heart as he cared so much about the other lady and the accident. All he was cared about was her and that she would be okay.

There was no bitterness there. And as I walked out to get in my car, I thought to myself, that's what a godly man looks like. That's someone who's walking in the light.

The victory that Jesus brings. That's someone who knows their identity in Christ and that's my brother in Christ. So let me give you this challenge for you and me both.

[26 : 04] If you and I are disciples of Christ, then we can't be okay with darkness. It has to mean something as we are called to follow the one who is life, who is Zoe and who is the light.

So church, let's walk in the light. Let's pursue purity. Let's live in victory over the darkness. And when that glorious day comes where we take our last breath or maybe even if Jesus returns to get his church first, we will know Zoe life like we could never imagine.

That's the hope that we walk in as we walk in the light of Jesus Christ. Amen? Amen. Pray with me. Father, we are just so, so very grateful for how much you love us and how you as God just continue to guide us every step.

I'm so grateful for Jesus being the light, the self-existent one, and for that life being the light of mankind, being our light that guides our path every day that we don't just have to wonder, well, what are we supposed to do, but you've given us your word.

You've given us truth. You've given us the word, Jesus, to be our light, to show us, to light our path so that we can walk in a way that is worthy of our calling, so that we can walk a life of holiness, not perfection, but a life of seeking your heart with all that we are.

[27 : 46] So thank you, Jesus, for speaking truth into our hearts today. May we take it, may we let it stir in us, and Holy Spirit, we pray that you will make us more and more into the image of our Savior, Jesus.

We pray all this in his precious name, and God's people said, amen, and amen. Hey, let me give you a quick invitation. First, I want to thank you for listening today.

Once again, my name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana, and if you're a regular listener, thank you. We pray that God is using this word in your life.

We'd love if you're able to invite you to come visit us on a Sunday morning, 8 o'clock, 9.30, and 11 o'clock are our three services. We'd love to see you on Sunday, but we also want to give you this invitation.

If you are someone who has questions about faith, about our church, or even about following Jesus, will you reach out to us and let us walk alongside you and be there to help you?

[28 : 47] Let us get you into the word of God and show you what he teaches. So here's how you can reach out. Give us a call, First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana, 812-663-8488, or you can email me, ray at fccgreensburg.com.

Hey, thank you so much for tuning in today. God bless you and have a great day.