

Light In Our Darkness

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- [0 : 0 0] In the summertime, we come through the bright noon hour sunshine into this dark little hole in the basement of Christ Church Cathedral.
- But on this, the month of December, we come from the dark, wet, cold, inhospitable outdoors into this warm, light fellowship that we have here.
- So that there's a contrast between the two, and it always seems to me a great providence that in at least the northern hemisphere, Christmas and the shortest day of the year are close together.
- I think somewhere back in history in a previous calendar, they were the same day.
- In our calendar, it's the 21st of December, but it used to be the 25th of December, and they came together. So next week, a week from today, the winter solstice takes place, and the days start getting longer.
- [1 : 1 5] Isn't that? It's always discouraging to me that in June they start getting shorter. But yeah. The, one of the things that always upset me when I was sort of in a parish at Christmas time was the number of people for whom Christmas was not a very happy occasion.
- It made them feel their poverty of family, their poverty of circumstance, their poverty of joy, the poverty which illness brings.
- And so that it was a difficult time, and they rather resented people who went around having a good time.
- And I suppose the fact that a lot of people take a lot of alcohol and drugs to get through Christmas, because it's a very difficult time for people, and it's difficult for the reason that, I think, it tends to heighten the meaninglessness of our lives.
- Now, I want to apologize for my cough today. This isn't my usual cough. This is a real cold cough. So, I, this is a different situation.
- [2 : 5 7] We're looking at John chapter 1 and verses 1 to 13, which, which I think are, well, we talked about it this morning.
- And, and, uh, I, uh, Merv said something which I found really quite helpful. He said that he gets up in the morning and reads the newspaper, you know.
- And, uh, and he says, because usually within an hour or so of the business day beginning, somebody will get him on the phone and say, Merv, did you read what was in the paper this morning?
- And if he hasn't read it, he will appear to be a little off base because he didn't do it, you know. And, uh, the argument we were having or the discussion we were having was that, uh, this passage is, is the kind of thing that you should read every day of your life.
- It is far more relevant to the everyday circumstance of your life than anything that the media can produce. Uh, in critiquing the media, uh, which is something we all do, uh, what, what, what, they say what journalism has done for us is to take, to find an event, to hone it to a sharp edge, to give it a big headline, and to make it desperately important that you should know about it.

[4 : 26] But then they have to go through another sort of process, and that is that by tonight, you've thrown it into the ash can, and you're ready for a new headline telling you what the world's all about tomorrow morning.

And that we move on in that kind of world, and that we, we, we therefore live in a world where there's a, you here, and somebody sitting here, and somebody sitting here, and somebody sitting here, and all the world consists of is us and right now, that that's, that's the way we live our lives.

And we move from one form of distraction to another, getting caught up in one immediate situation after another, uh, so that, so that our life has glamour and charm and all the things that it should have.

We keep doing it, and the media help us to do it. They promise that, uh, that there will be this big game tonight, there will be this news break tonight, there will be this announcement tonight, there will be a speech from Bill Clinton tonight.

This immediate kind of thing keeps us going around the fact that right here and right now is all that really matters. And if you're in touch with right here and right now, you're with it, and if you're not in touch with right here and right now, then you're out of the game.

[5 : 46] You don't, you don't know what life is all about. So it's fascinating that, uh, that the whole of this introduction to the Gospel of John dismisses right here and right now as being practically of no significance at all.

Well, uh, the, uh, we, we learn to live our lives in a term, kind of, terms of right here and right now. So when you pick up John's Gospel, as we do today in the first chapter, and it says, In the beginning, it, uh, it's talking about something which is outside of, of time.

You may find some similarity in this drawing, but here it is. Uh, there you are.

That's time, you see. And the sweep of the hands cover the whole of all that there is comes within the circumference of time.

And, uh, we, we find ourselves by the use of these things and perhaps the second hand, which brings, becomes more exact. We find ourselves always at a point in time.

[7 : 05] And, uh, in verse 1, it says that, uh, uh, in the beginning means before there was time.

Uh, it, it, it, it's, I guess it's an attempt to get us to look at, at the still point that doesn't move, that's at the very center. But most of us are at the periphery somewhere and time is moving very quickly around there.

There's a lot of action, a lot of motion. And we always find ourselves somewhere in the, in the, in the process of time. But what this chapter does is to say, in the beginning, where it all start, where it all started, there was that which was there.

Now, I, it's hard not to become very philosophical about all this, but look, look at the text so that you can be with me in it. Uh, in the beginning, uh, means eternity.

The eternity that existed. Jesus talks about, uh, that, to, to, in, in his prayer in John 17, he talks about sharing with God the Father as it was before time began.

[8 : 21] That there was, there was a reality which was before time began, and that reality we call eternity. So that the, uh, the, the reality of our lives is not to know precisely the moment which we exist right here, but the reality within which the whole of our lives are lived.

And when the, when John's gospel begins, it says way out beyond this, and at the center of this, is, is, is eternity, and, and, and time and creation all are within this circle, and this circle, which has a still point at the center, and beyond which you can go, is what life is all about.

And that's why John's gospel talks all, all the time about, uh, if you believe in him, you have eternal life. That is, you have life which is not circumscribed by time.

Eternity was there before time began. Eternity will be there when time is over. And the nature of your life is that you are, uh, you are meant to be an eternal creature.

You are meant to live in eternity, not just locked into a process of time. And that's, that's implied by John when he starts this gospel by saying, in the beginning was the word.

[9 : 51] Now, uh, the word is, is a very, very difficult, uh, Greek word, which is logos. And, and, uh, and, uh, that's not bad, is it?

We could just... Let me turn the face.

That's just... You see, what I think happens is that we all understand the concept of logos.

It means something far more than a four-letter word or something. What it has to do with is...

And I think in our contemporary, secular, materialist, scientific, technological society, we have a logos. We have that in which it all comes together.

[10 : 58] And we consider that the logos is something which is infinitely in the future. It means when genetic engineering has achieved mastery, when the scientific process has achieved understanding, when technology has built the ultimate machine, when human life is no longer subject to suffering, illness, and death, but has triumphed over all that.

That will be the logos. That will be the great moment for which the whole of history is thrusting forward, trying to come to its ultimate meaning.

And that ultimate meaning is there. And we live as slaves to a kind of future logos, which none of us really believe in, but which keeps the world going in spite of the fact that despair and despondency seem to prevail in our hearts.

So that's what I think logos means. And you see, the radical thing that John is saying as he begins this gospel is that the logos was there in the beginning.

It's not something that we have to achieve. It's something that has been given. And it was there in the beginning.

[12 : 19] In the beginning, it was there, that word. And the word was with God, and the word was God. So that God and the ultimate meaning of history, the ultimate purpose of our lives, the ultimate rationalization of existence, the ultimate expression of reality is this word.

And it was there at the beginning. It's not something which is way down the road. It's something that was there at the beginning. And it says that it was with God, and the word was God.

He was with God in the beginning. So that God had this purpose in mind. This purpose in mind is the logos, and the logos is God himself.

I mean, he is the purpose for which we exist. He and this purpose are inescapable.

It's fascinating. I mean, this has been hard for me to begin to comprehend because I think everybody's looking for it in a way.

[13 : 43] I went back to Toronto and saw all sorts of old friends last week. And when you go back and see them only once in a year, you get a kind of different perspective on their lives, you see.

And whenever you see somebody and you know somebody and you know something of their history, you become aware that somewhere in their life there is a sense that there needs to be something that holds it all together.

There needs to be something that gives it meaning. There needs to be something that undergirds it and provides a foundation. There needs to be that.

But where is it? And how do you define it? And most of people's lives, our lives, seem to be a kind of fearful anxiety.

That's when you get older. You people are too optimistic at your age to understand this. But when you get older, you become aware that maybe it ain't there.

[14 : 45] Maybe it doesn't exist. Maybe it's not all going to come together. And maybe if it does come together, it doesn't include me. And that kind of fearful anxiety is the way we live our lives.

With that kind of fearful awareness that maybe it won't all come together. But what the gospel says is that in the beginning it was there and it was God.

And it was inextricably bound up with God from the very beginning. Somebody here whom I know and you may know gave me a book.

And the book is called Real Presence. And the guy who wrote it is George Steiner. Has anybody ever heard of this book?

Well, don't. I mean, it's one of those, it's terribly intellectual. And totally baffling. But it's a fascinating book nevertheless.

[15 : 50] Because what he's saying is that behind all art, behind all music, behind all painting, behind all writing, behind everything, is a real presence.

And that the difficulty for our society is that we go on with our painting and our writing and our music, but there is nothing behind it. You know, that we have taken out all those things so that it becomes meaningless.

And what this philosopher is doing, because it's basically a philosophical book, it's not a religious book at all. It's basically a very philosophical book. He says it's there.

And if it isn't there, then there is in fact nothing. But you see, what this gospel is beginning to say to us, and what we desperately need to hear, because we so live in a world where there is just you and me and right now, and some anxiety.

But what I'm going to do next, what we need is the profound awareness that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[17 : 13] He was with God in the beginning. So that there is, this is where it all begins. It all begins. It all begins before time begins, because time is part of the creation.

And that's what he goes on to say, you see, in verse 3. Through him, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made.

So that everything derives from that. All culture, all society, all technology, all history, all the created order of things, they all derive from that.

They are that giving expression to itself. There was the beginning, and in the beginning was God, and the Word was with God, and that was all there before time began.

And then when time began, as a kind of theater of creation, then all this manifests itself made by him. I'm in the glue right now.

[18 : 23] Because I realize that it's very difficult to be practical about this. I mean, what are you going to take, how are you going to take this back to your office?

What are you going to do with it? Your head's swollen with great theological concepts, so you can hardly get through the door when you leave. Hang in, maybe we'll get there.

What happens then is that it talks about the whole of creation. Then it says, in him was life. Now, the importance, I think, of it saying that, in him was life, and the life was the light of men.

It says that life is not a brief candle, as somebody important has suggested it is. It's soon to be snuffed out.

That this life will ultimately consume the darkness. You see how he says it? In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

[19 : 43] So he makes this comparison between life and light, and between death and darkness. And life is of such an order that death cannot overcome it, in the same way that light is of such an order that darkness cannot overcome it.

And that's the way he describes it. So whatever it is that has happened, the basis of human existence is that there is life which is capable of overcoming the darkness.

That despair is not legitimate. Despair is something gone wrong. And he says that, in him was life, and the life was the light of men.

And the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness, though it seems to be closing in fast on us, it can't destroy the light as death can't destroy life.

And that's, you see, that's what makes Christians so ridiculous in our world. And that is, that when you're dead, you're not dead, you know. Because one of the truths of our world is, when you're dead, you're dead.

[21 : 08] And Christians go around saying, when you're dead, you're not dead. And people don't understand that. They think it's impractical, and it doesn't have... But, you see, the reason Christians go around saying that is because, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

That was before it all began. And in that Word was life, and the life was of such a nature that it couldn't be snuffed out.

Like light and darkness, it's there. And you have to come to terms with it. You have to try and get hold of it.

So that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood it. Well, that's because it's difficult to translate it. It can't put it out, is the way some put it.

It can't comprehend it. It doesn't know what to do with it. You know, and somehow it's an untidy mess, because we can't handle the fact that life is stronger than death.

[22 : 12] We know how to order our world when death is stronger than life, but we don't know how to order our world if something's happened, that life is, you know, life is stronger than death.

And so you turn to verse 6, and in verse 6 you get John the Baptist coming along. And he was sent from God.

His name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him all men might believe. Now there's a wonderful optimism about the Gospel of John, which doesn't recognize our...

And then it, because it says, this is for everybody. It talks about the world. It talks about all men. It talks about every man coming into the world. It talks about everybody coming to believe.

It has this terrific thing about the fact that John is to bear witness to the light so that all men might believe.

[23 : 14] That what is meant for the whole of humanity is that they come to a place of faith. Now we have lots of gloom and doom prophets who will tell us, and do consistently tell us, that the gloom and the darkness is closing in on us and will soon overtake us.

But what John the Baptist came to bear witness to was that in the midst of the gloom and the darkness and the despair and the doubt and the difficulty, the suffering and the reality of physical death, in the midst of all that, John says there is light.

And that light is to be the focus of all men believing. Then it says in verse 8 of him that he was not that light. He came only as a witness to the light.

The light was in a sense reflected from him, but he wasn't the source of it. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. And so you see that when he points to the light, he's pointing to life.

When he points to life, he's pointing to the word. When he points to the word, he's pointing to Jesus Christ who's coming into the world. Now, that's how he puts it.

[24 : 40] Then he says the true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world. The world was made through him. But the world didn't recognize him.

That strange... Oh, goodness.

I've only got... How am I going to get out of this? He's talking here about the light that comes and that he comes into the world and the world doesn't know him.

You see, he doesn't fit in the world. And though the world derives from him, everything that was made was made through him.

He was in the beginning and he was with God and he was God. All that confronts us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[25 : 51] And the world doesn't recognize him. We don't recognize him. He came to that which was his own.

But even the people who were, in a sense, uniquely prepared to recognize him didn't recognize him. Now, let me conclude this way.

You know that wonderful song, Tie a Yellow Ribbon to the Old Oak Tree? And I think it's written by a soldier who's gone away and he writes back to his girlfriend and he recognizes that time has passed and there would be reason to believe that she wouldn't be glad to see him back because her life would have gone on and her relationships were different.

And so he says, All I'm going to do is I'm going to drive through town. And when I drive through town, if you want me to stop, put the Yellow Ribbon on the Old Oak Tree.

And you know it's a lovely story because when he gets there, the whole town is festooned with Yellow Ribbon. It's a kind of lovely romantic story, you see. But it's the same idea here.

[27 : 05] Jesus says, I'm coming through. Now, if you want me to stay, tie a Yellow Ribbon. And he comes to the town and there's no Yellow Ribbons.

And he goes right on through. And that's the way of our life is that somehow we reject him.

We are so full of ourselves and so full of our own accomplishments and our own plans and of our own purposes that the one who came to us, when he comes to his own, his own don't recognize him and don't receive him.

And you see, beginning in our own hearts and in our own lives, as well as praying for our own community, is that we're not praying that everybody will join our particular denomination or everybody will go to our particular church or even go to church, but that they will recognize the word which was in the beginning and the word which came unto his own and that his own will receive him.

Then in verse 13, it tells you how that happens. You believe in his name and you become children. Well, I can't talk about it now, but I'll go back to it next week as we celebrate the enclosing of darkness being broken and the light beginning to shine.

[28 : 44] Let me pray for us. Father, the eternal purpose that you have towards us in Jesus Christ that demands that we shake out of the narrow limits of our time-bound, worried, anxious little lives to join in praising you and in receiving you and in acknowledging you and in acknowledging that there is life which is stronger than death and that in the midst of our darkness there is light which can't be put out.

Give us this kind of faith as we turn to you in our hearts and in our lives and help us like John to bear witness to the light in our dark world.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.