

John 1:2-5

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[0 : 0 0] If you turn to John chapter 1, on page 886 in the Bible in front of you, it's been thoroughly disinfected, cleaned, and doesn't carry any germs. You can pick up the Bible, 886. We have three verses this morning from John chapter 1, verse 3, 4, and 5. And the more I understand about these verses, the more I realise I don't understand them at all. And I have come to the conclusion that John 1 is completely beyond me. When I was younger, I happily preached on these passages, but right now I'm joyfully flummoxed by it. The words are very simple, and they're deeper, and have more spiritual life and impact in them than any of us, either individually or together, can cope with. And I've come to the conclusion John 1, 1 to 18, is like a poem of praise, of wonder and worship of Jesus Christ. And I think the mark that we're coming close to it and beginning to grasp some of it is when our hearts are stirred to wonder and to worship.

Let me give you an illustration. Every worldview question that there is, is covered and then overwhelmed with joy and light in these first 18 verses. You know, worldview questions, our basic orientations and commitments, our assumptions, our beliefs about the world, they're often hidden in our hearts and only come up when we are in crisis. Where did I come from?

Where am I going? Why am I here? Who am I? What is wrong? Worldview questions. And along comes the Gospel of John and takes our carefully curated worldview chessboard and goes, and says, you and your life is part of a much bigger story that goes back way before the beginning of creation, and it doesn't even centre on you. It centres on Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, the Son of God. He is the key to every worldview question. And last week, just for example, again, we looked at verses 1 and 2, and these stupendous statements that before the world existed, Jesus was there. The perfect, the Word of God, the perfect expression and communication of the only God, with God, continually drawing close, which means the deepest reality in our relationship is relational, which is why being loved and loving are the most important things to us. And when we're disconnected from each other, we feel anxious. And as we go through this prologue, as we will till the end of the year, we have to keep pinching ourselves and reminding ourselves we're talking about the man, Jesus

Christ, who was born in Nazareth 2,000 years ago. When we come to the end of the Gospel, John himself puts his pen down and confesses a kind of a happy defeat. In the last chapter, in the last two verses, he says, look, I was an eyewitness. Everything I've written down, I know they're true. And then he says, if all the things Jesus did were written down, the world itself couldn't contain all the books.

I just can't do justice to Jesus. That's why it's great to welcome you, no matter whether you call yourself for a follower of Jesus or not. This period of Christmas is a great time to ask ourselves, what's so special about Jesus anyway? It's good for those of us who believe and those of us who are sceptical or those of us who are intrigued, for anyone who wants to come and see. And our little passage this morning, just three verses, verses three, four, and five, John takes us and gives us three different camera angles on the person of Jesus Christ. The first one is high above, where he speaks about creation. The second one goes right inside Jesus, where he speaks about communication. And the third one is a wide angle lens on earth, which is about celebration.

[4 : 34] Got three C's there. So let's go. The first one, verse three, is about creation. And he takes us up higher than any drone or any satellite has ever been above and beyond the cosmos. Verse three, all things were made through him, speaking about Jesus, and without him was not anything made that was made. That is such a massive claim, we have to slow down. All things means there are no possible exceptions. The word means everything separately and individually. There is nothing outside Christ's creating power. Nature, galaxies, mountains, lakes, people, planets. It all depends on him for its existence. It means you and I, we belong to him, as does Pluto and Plato and quarks and whatever else.

And that means our world and creation is not eternal. It's not ultimate. It's not self-existing, but it depends for its meaning on Jesus Christ. We discover the meaning and purpose of a thing.

We can't discover it apart from the man, Jesus Christ. And this just has massive implications. It means that the Christian view of life is not really a philosophy, an airy-fairy philosophy out there, or even a religious morality, but has to do with dust and dirt and bodies and babies and creation through Christ. The child born in the manger 2,000 years ago was the maker of the world.

The man crucified on the cross was the creator of the cosmos. You see how big this is? I mean, people generally like Jesus today. You know, he's a nice person. This is claiming something vastly higher, something that changes everything. Christ was not created. What John is doing is he's drawing a line in the sand between God and creator and everything created on the other side. He says, you shouldn't confuse the two of them. Creation is good because it comes from Christ, but it's not God.

It's not divine. And every religious teacher who's ever arisen in the world is on that side of the line and Jesus is on the other until he becomes a man. So all the design and shape and purpose and wisdom and intention of creation is there because of Christ. There is no meaning or purpose in nature which is separate from the purpose of Jesus Christ. I mean, just imagine you lived a thousand years ago and you came across, you found a laptop. Let's call it an Apple laptop.

[7 : 35] You see a little apple insignia on it and you might bite it and think this is the worst apple I've ever had. It's shaped a bit like a strange discus for playing with and you throw it a few times. That's no good. You find it's quite a good hammer for nails. Until you know the purpose, you don't really know how to use it. And the purpose and potential of everything in this universe, including us, is caught up in Jesus Christ. He is the key to nature, to the world, to creation, to the cosmos. And when it says all things were created through him, it's a beautiful reminder that God the Father is the source of creation and Jesus the Son is the agent of creation. And that means that nature and matter come out of cooperation and the connection of love between the Father and the Son. So the great matter of matter is love. Creation itself bears the marks of this relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

He just, it's massive. And in the second half of the verse, the shift is, John shifts a little and he changes the tense which doesn't really come across. And the second half of the verse is telling us not only was Jesus there at the beginning of creation but he continually now holds everything in existence today. Jesus sustains and upholds everything that is. He's not just the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end but he's everything else in between as well.

So if your world feels like it's falling apart, the one to turn to is Jesus Christ. He holds all things together. He is the substance and deepest reality of our lives and of our world. We are alive because of him. We find our lives in him. That's why there's such joy at this season that he became human for us. And you see all the worldview implications. I mean, why is there something rather than nothing? Where did I come from? Why am I here? They're all bound up in who Jesus Christ is.

The reason we exist, the point of life, the goal of creation, the one on whom all life depends. He stands above creation as its Lord and maker. And the overwhelming message we'll come to in two and a half weeks time is that the creator becomes part of his creation. And that's all I want to say in verse three. So we move to verse four and we move from creation to communication and the camera angle goes from way up high to coming, zooming right into close, in close to Jesus himself, actually in Jesus.

You see verse four, it says, in him was life and the life was the light of men, humans. Now, the New Testament was written in Greek and there are two words in Greek for life.

[10 : 52] One is biological life, animals, trees, the life that ends in death, you know, the cycle of birth and growth and decay and death, natural organic life. This is a different word. And the word used here speaks of a different quality of life. It's a life that has a constant, a newness within it. It bubbles up. It's the life of God. It's spiritual life. It's the life we lost in the Garden of Eden.

It's often referred to in John's gospel as eternal life, which doesn't mean it goes on and on and on and on and on and on, although it does, but eternal life speaks about the life of the heavens, the quality of life, more about quality than quantity. And what John means when he says in him was life is not just that Jesus came to earth to bring life, not just that he came to show us life or to point us to life, but he is the life himself. Eternal life is in him and it can only be ours in connection with him. That's why in verse four, this first reference to human beings, this life was the light of humanity. If you read through the gospel, it's full of life. He's come to share and communicate his life with us primarily by giving his life over to death, but it's so rich. Jesus uses all these pictures for what his life is like and what it means to be connected to him. I am the bread of life.

You'll never hunger. I'm the way, the truth in the life. You'll never be lost. I'm the resurrection in the life. You'll never die. I've come to give you life. He says life in abundance, the overflow.

It took me a long time to learn this. I grew up in a Christian home, a good Christian home, and I so wanted this life. And for some reason, I thought it came through doing lots of religious exercises. And I prayed and I gave myself to lots of very Christian methods. And all it did was made me feel more and more dead inside. And I had to come to learn for myself that the answer is not in here what I'm doing, not from looking more deeply within, it took me time to realise that the life was in Christ Jesus. And that it came to me from him and from our connection together. I know that sounds terribly simple. But the life God has for us is not, doesn't come to us by trying hard to gain his acceptance, but in receiving his life as a gift of grace by trusting Christ to give us that life and drawing close to him. That's why John explains life in terms of light. That life was the light of humanity. Because everyone who comes to know Christ personally describes it as the lights going on.

The first hallmark of true Christian experience, life in Christ, is that we are radiated with the knowledge of God. So when Christ communicates his life to you by faith, you begin to see him, you begin to see who you are, you begin to see what's wrong, what you're made for, who can fix it.

[14 : 16] And it makes sense. He alone has been at the Father's side from all eternity past. He alone is qualified to make God known to us. So that when we come into connection with Jesus Christ, he shows us the face of God, the glory of God, the love of God.

And you know this, you can't look at the sun directly. When I was at university, we went on an archaeological, sorry, an astronomical journey where we watched the full eclipse of the sun.

And all the telescopes we took with us had filters on the outside. Because you can't look directly at the sun. It will damage your eyesight, even cause blindness. And you can either look at the sun as it's projected and reflected onto something or through a filter. In the same way, the Bible says you can't look at God directly. It's too bright, too much glory. But Christ is the perfect reflection and image of God. And if you look to him, you can see the glory of God himself in Jesus Christ.

And since Christ is the light of the world, it just means that God's not hard to find. He's not hiding from anyone. The very reason God came from heaven from the Father's side is to make him known, to give us life and light, to communicate that light and life to us. That's verse 4.

So I want to move to a third camera angle. So we've gone from the high camera angle to inside Christ. And now the camera pans over the world as we know it. And we go from creation to communication.

[16 : 02] And I've called this point celebration. Because verse 5 is a defiant celebration of the triumph of light over dark. See verse 5 down there? The light shines now in the darkness.

That's the first present tense. And the darkness has not overcome it. So although it's celebratory, we are brought down to earth with a thud with the introduction of darkness.

Darkness is the picture of ignorance and despair and death. And in the Gospel of John, darkness is always self-chosen ignorance. It's pride and unbelief and selfishness and coveting and greed and spiritual ignorance. And in two chapters, Jesus says this, the light has come into the world and people love darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed. That's why there's opposition to Jesus. It's not just because Christians act badly, although we do, and it doesn't help things when we do. But this is why the world doesn't naturally bow with wonder and take joy in Jesus at Christmas. You can't understand yourself or the world until we see this astonishing truth that although the world was made through him, although in him was life and light, although he comes bringing goodness and grace and love, he was met with hostility, rejection, and revulsion. And there is something in our hearts that makes us hostile to his light.

And it's partly because there's only room for one God in my heart and I'd prefer it to be me, thank you very much. Also, I like the darkness because there are things I like doing which I would hate to have exposed.

So the coming of Jesus Christ into the world creates something of a crisis for us. He came out of love to give us light and life. He didn't need to do it. He didn't even need to make the world. He didn't need to come as a baby.

[18 : 21] Yet the reaction then and the reaction now is generally not to receive him with open arms, but to treat him with suspicion or even to reject him because we love our darkness.

But here is the reason for the celebration in this verse. The darkness has not overcome the light. And John's gospel is a series of examples of how the light overcomes the darkness.

The man who is born blind has his eyes opened. Lazarus who dies is raised from the dead. And finally, the one great example where the bitter opposition between light and darkness come together, where darkness seems to get the upper hand over Jesus and he is arrested, tried and executed on a cross.

And even on a cross, Jesus is talking about the finishing of his work. And he steps into this on the cross and he receives and takes the darkness into himself.

And then three days later, he rises again, defeating death, defeating darkness and bringing new hope and this life of heaven to us, sharing eternal life with anyone who will trust in him.

[19 : 35] And that is exactly what we celebrate today. And I think that's what we need to hear right now. I mean, this year has been such a hard year for so many of us.

And I don't just mean COVID and COVID craziness and the distances, but the disasters that have afflicted so many. Yet John gives us this defiant trumpet blast.

The light shines now, ongoingly in the darkness and will finally triumph. It will not be overcome. And the light overcomes the darkness in two ways.

It'll overcome the darkness finally when Jesus comes again as the dawning sun, where he removes death and mourning and pain and weeping, replacing them with joy and blessing his presence forever.

Where those who belong to Christ will sing and everlasting joy will be on our heads and we will obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and darkness shall flee away. But right now, the light overcomes the darkness when any person turns from their darkness to Christ.

[20 : 45] When we turn away from our despair and from our fear and ask Christ to shine upon us. When we turn away from having too small a view of Jesus Christ, from our ignorance, our unbelief and our pride, and we begin to try and receive Jesus as he really is, the maker of the heavens and the earth, the light of the world, the one who has life in himself, full of grace and truth.

And as we do that, we make him the one who we serve above everyone else, the number one in our lives. And then we're told we become children of light.

And God shines the light of his glory into our hearts. And as we grow stronger in our connection with Jesus Christ, he shines his light through us to others.

And it's no wonder I think that John 1 is chosen as the Christmas reading in every Anglican church around the world. Because in the darkness of this season, we need to come back and look at Christ and let his life and his light flood us again.