

The Light of Life

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Date: 07 December 2025

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! And the life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

In a poem by Robert Louis Stevenson, a young Scottish man leaves home and goes off to sea.

The poem tells the story about this man. It's in the midst of winter. He goes off to sea. He leaves quickly without stopping to say goodbye to his parents or giving much thought to how it would affect them.

[1 : 18] It continues and tells the story about being on this ship in the winter. The ship sails north into a fierce and freezing headwind, and the storm begins to press down.

So he's out there in the storm. The storm drives them perilously close to the shore. As the sun rises, the storm continues.

The ship is so near the shore that the sailor begins to see the lights flickering in people's houses. He begins to see the flickering of the fireplaces in people's houses.

Suddenly, he recognizes his own home. From the ship. From the ship. Sees the flicker of the fireplace in his own home.

And he remembers that today is Christmas Day. His parents, as he continues, must be around the fire. They must be talking of the son who is gone.

[2 : 27] There's a shadow over the household this day. He begins to feel himself to be a wicked fool, realizing how far he had strayed, not merely from home, but from his family, from those he's called to love.

The poem ends with Robert Louis Stevenson saying, All that the man could think of in the darkness and the cold was just that I was leaving home and my folks were growing old.

Perhaps you've had that sensation before. You know, like no other time in the year, Christmas stokes a longing for home in many of us.

We want to go back. We want to return home. We want to gather with everyone around the table and we want it to feel right. You know, you've been around those gatherings before and it's just felt wrong, right?

We want another living room packed with familiar faces and laughter and music and presents. We want another Christmas without the shadows of those who've gone before.

[3 : 38] That's why I think we approach Christmas at times with a frantic obsessiveness. I think the way it goes is, whether we realize it or not, if we can't go back, we seek to make this Christmas one to remember, one for the ages.

Tis the season to do it all. To deck every hall, watch every movie, read every story, attend every gathering, satisfy every desire, spend every dollar, and of course, eat every cookie.

After all, it's tradition, right? It's what we do. We kill ourselves on Christmas. Traditions can be wonderful ways of deepening our understanding and appreciation of the right things, but far too often the traditions around Christmas can be little more than nostalgia, trying to get back to the good old days.

But there's a better way to spend Christmas than longing for home or in frantically trying to fulfill every desire. Home is a place you can't get to anymore.

And home was always meant to leave you longing for something else for someone else. You know, your home may have been great. That's why you longed to get back there.

[5 : 00] All the memories are great and you feel so distant to you, but your home may have been terrifying. That's why you've been running your whole life. Either way, home was always designed to leave you longing for someone else.

Don't spend your Christmas longing for home. Spend it longing for the Lord Jesus Christ. This morning we're going to continue our series on the theology of Christmas with the next two verses in John's Gospel.

These verses ring with wonderful words of Christmas. Life and light, all men shining into the darkness. If we're not careful, these words just blend into the sights and sounds that we hear at Walmart with little thought.

But if we listen, if we have ears to hear as the Spirit is speaking, these words ring with wonder and warmth, depth and sanity and breathtaking welcome.

These words are up to the task of untethering your heart from so many other things and driving them into the heart of Jesus Christ. That's where we're going. In a word where we're going is all the light of the world is from the Lord Jesus Christ.

[6 : 21] Inviting us to turn and walk in fellowship with God. All the light of the world is from the Lord Jesus Christ. Inviting us to turn and walk in fellowship with God.

We're going to break this out. Three points. The first is the word of life. The word of life. As we mentioned last week, John takes us all the way back.

You know, before Mary and Joseph, even before John and Elizabeth, he takes us back in his Christmas story before time itself. To behold the glorious person at the right hand of God, the Father, the Son of God.

He was there in the beginning. He was there before the beginning. John continues talking about him. You see the pronoun here in verse four, but it's in reference to this, to the word, which we know as a person, as we talked about last week.

In him was life. Having already mentioned that in the beginning was the word. And mentioning all the things that were made through him.

[7 : 29] We might assume that John would say, in him was light. Right? Because the Lord said, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

He spoke and said, let there be light. And there was light. But John is alerting us that before there was light, there was life. Now obviously, life here is not a reference to creature life, to human life, because human life cannot exist without light.

Light creates the conditions in which human life can be enjoyed. Without life, the ground would freeze, plants would die, and all human beings would eventually die as well.

So life here, in the beginning was life. In him was life, is a reference to the fullness of life in the Son of God.

Now the life of the Son of God is already implied. And we talked about it, this a little bit last week, but if you look back up there in verse 3, it says, all things were made through him.

[8 : 39] It also says right after that, all things were made with him. Because lest we be confused, what was made was in no way made without him.

But this verse further adds to that. Not only were all things made through him and with him, all things were from him. The idea, immediately the idea is the word is not merely a cause, a means, a catalyst, an instrument of the life that fills this world.

The word is the source of life. The Son of God is the source of life. All life is from him. John's gospel tells us this, look in 526, we have this for you, for as the Father has life in himself, so he's granted the Son to have life in himself.

Now we know that's true because they share the divine nature, but you see what's going on, or 1 John 15, 520, he is the true God and the eternal life.

What in the world does it mean that Jesus is the eternal life? Now since this series is called The Theology of Christmas, we have to see something.

[9 : 51] Now undergirding this verse that in him was life, and the word was life before anything was made, is the doctrine of aseity. Aseity comes from the Latin word meaning from himself.

The idea is that all that God is, is from himself. All that God is, is from himself. Or to put it another way, God is eternal, independent, and self-sufficient.

God has everything he needs within himself, so he's before everything that was made, and being before everything was made, he's also independent, separate from everything that was made, and all that he is in being before everything was made, is from himself.

Acts 17, maybe in the whole Bible, states this, the most beautiful way I know of. Scriptures say, the God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in a temple as made by man, nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything.

Now we're born into the world with all sorts of needs. We're dependent on our parents for nutrition and nurture, but God does not need anyone or everything, or anything.

[11 : 07] We often treat God as if he's waiting on us, as if he's a bit like a needy mother-in-law, needing more of our time, more of our attention, more of our affection, more of our prayers, more of our obedience.

Surely that's why we come to church more around Christmas time. We feel like God needs it. The truth is, God doesn't need you. He doesn't need anything from you or me.

God doesn't need anyone or anything. Not in an affectionate sort of way. He doesn't need to be built up. Or in an existential sort of way.

He doesn't need anything outside himself to exist. But it continues. Acts 17 does. The God who made the world and everything in it gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

So the truth of aseity, the truth of God's independence is not merely that God is not dependent on anything. Right? That's a part of it. God is not dependent on anything.

[12 : 17] Nor is it merely that all things are dependent on God. The truth is that God exists eternally as the fullness of life in itself and supplies all that is made with all that it needs.

God is fullness of life and gives all people life and everything. Anselm says years ago that God alone has of himself all that he has while other things have nothing of themselves and other things have nothing of themselves and other things having nothing of themselves have their own reality from him.

Now that's a little bit of a tongue twister there. Or not a tongue twister but convoluted. He has everything that he has from himself. The truth is we have nothing in and of ourselves.

Hebrews 1 says God upholds the word of the universe by the word of his power. This means that all that you call life and existence is upheld by him.

You're absolutely dependent every moment. But God needs nothing. One of the most remarkable pictures of this in the scriptures is the picture of the burning bush.

[13 : 39] Right? We remember that story. The Lord calls Moses to be a prophet to Israel and he's out shepherding the sheep and the Lord calls him out of a burning bush.

Now bushes don't talk. But what made this even more complex is this bush was burning but it wasn't being consumed. Now we should not think of the flicker of a Christmas Eve candle here, you know, or some little small campfire.

It was a great sight is what the scriptures say. It was a big roaring fire. Moses saw it from a distance and saw something here. Now every kid knows that a fire needs oxygen, heat, and fuel to burn.

To build a fire you have to have those things. Take away the fuel and eventually it burns out. But this fire didn't need fuel. This fire was lit up but it wasn't consuming anything.

What in the world is he trying to show Moses? It's a picture of who the Lord is. The Lord is like a fire that never stops burning.

[14 : 54] What does that mean? He's eternal. His existence is eternal but he's also like a fire that does not need fuel.

He's independent. He's self-sufficient. Surely the Lord reveals this burning bush to Moses to say I don't need you Moses to do what I need to get done.

Surely also he was saying that anything that stands in the way of you will not stand in the way of me. the Lord is separate from all that he made and all that he is is from himself.

The Lord is independent and self-sufficient. But the shock of this verse in John 1 is that it says in the word was life.

Last week we talked about how verses 1 to 3 establish the Lord Jesus Christ as eternal as a person as fully God.

[16 : 02] Well this verse makes clear that as God Jesus Christ the Lord Jesus Christ shares all the attributes of God. Jesus is not a God let a lesser being an exalted angel or any of those things he is fully God.

That's what it's saying when it says in him was life. But what does all this theology mean? And what does it have to do with local boys like me and you?

It's as if the Lord or John is urging us to understand the Lord Jesus Christ rightly. Now if you were inviting me over to your house and you said come on in Walt but stay out Alexander I wouldn't know what to do.

My name is Walt Alexander I am both names. Even if you said just half of you come in the half that's Walt come in but half that's Alexander stay out I wouldn't know what to do either.

You know I'm 100% Walt and 100% Alexander and yet we do the same thing with Jesus Christ. We can think I like the helping Jesus whenever you call me I'll be there.

[17 : 25] I like the loving Jesus who welcomes all come as you are never confrontational. I like the Christmas Jesus because he just stays quiet in a manger and we don't have to worry about him but that's not the whole Jesus.

It's as if John is saying do you like the powerful Jesus the one who knows your thoughts and your attitudes ones who can discern that from afar do you like the sovereign Lord Jesus Christ who says whoever does not obey the will of the son who does not obey the son shall not see life do you like the holy Jesus who dwells in unapproachable light after all if the distance between earth and sun was the thickness of a piece of paper and if 96 million miles between earth and sun was the thickness if the 96 million miles between earth and sun was the thickness of a piece of paper do you realize the distance between earth and the nearest star would be 70 feet high the diameter of our little galaxy would be a stack of papers 310 miles high and our whole galaxy is but a little speck in the universe and the bible says

Jesus upholds everything by the word of his power so it's as if John is saying do you really ask someone like that into your life to be your assistant do you really ask someone like that into your life to serve you it's as if John is saying will the real Jesus Christ please stand up it begs us you know this is the season where everybody has a cross but the question is is this the season where everybody follows the real Lord Jesus Christ calling him Lord and living it out the word of life point to the light of life the light of life John continues and unpacks how the source of life gives life to all men you know these are one commentator said

John's gospel the opening the prologue is ambiguity planned ambiguity so he's intentionally ambiguous unclear these grand words but the reference to life right there is a reference to life that's in Jesus look down there in verse four in him was life and the life was the light of man so that reference to life is the fullness of life that is in the Lord Jesus and then he's saying the life that was in Jesus became the light of man now every religion or most religions talk about light they talk about insight they talk about attainment revelation something like that you know the enlightenment was established because this idea that after the failure of traditions and skepticism and religion there's enlightenment man is the measure of all things but light here is not reference is a reference to something given to all look down there with me it says the light of men

I think a better way of translating is the light for men so this idea that light not merely of all men but light for all men all people as you remember the first act of God in creation was light God said let then the Lord made the stars to separate the night from the day the sun to rule by day the moon and the stars to rule by night then after making everything suitable for life God made man in his own image to live on the earth he created all the creatures that fill the seas and the sky and the land after light God gave life the light for all people is the it's planned ambiguity but I think what's going on here is that what is this light of all men light for all men it is the dignity of being made in the image of

[22 : 09] God being made unlike any other creature on the face of the earth being made to think like God to feel like God to talk like God to relate like God to build like God it's one of things I love I love a church with lots of babies we pray for the babies one of our neighbors had a baby they attend here as well Matt and Lauren and he's a teacher I remember asking him a couple months ago what did you do for fall break this little eight week old or 12 week old we just stared at our daughter and that captures the wonder when you have a baby bring him home it almost seems illegal to come home with his baby but they're with you and you're looking at him you're like what in the world is that what is the dignity of God it's the image of God that's what's going on here it's the wonder of being placed in this theater of God's glory the idea is we don't just see the!

fingerprints of God on and all that is in them but it's as if all of creation is saying can I witness can I witness to this great God the rain rushes in and waters the crops the sun rises and makes him grow grain enters to make fresh bread grapes give of themselves to make smooth wine trees offer up beans to roast coffee and there's music that thrills discoveries that alleviate books that refresh games that entertain you know one one author said wherever you cast your eye in the universe there's no spot where you can't discern at least a few sparks of his glory the light for all men is the light of the glory of this

God that's filled so many things but it's not just in dignity and wonder it's in friendship fellowship relationship it's not good for man to be alone the gift of life is to be shared it's the first time you find someone who gets you who makes you not feel alone anymore but it's also the first crush the first kiss the first time you hear a newborn cry in the arms of the person you love it's first steps first words first job first car first time they pack up and move out it's fellowship it's brothers and sisters of different mothers gathering together to worship and serve the same God all of this you know there's the life that was a light for all people is the gift of life there's few things more thrilling one of the games one of my sons my youngest son likes to play is the game life you know the old game life you get to roll the dice who doesn't like to pretend they're older you know so well then you're at a certain age and you want to go younger so I don't know how it works but you roll the dice and you dream a little bit you know you start your life it's exhilarating it's intoxicating you decide whether you want to go college you want to go trade school and career or something like that or just get a job you get married you buy a house you have kids my kids love that part you get to have some kids you get a few pets even

I mean yeah it's a pet centered world nowadays so you can get pets in life you know the game keeps going you better start putting money back you know because the payments are going to start coming and the loans are going to start being called in you're going to be in trouble in this verse it's as if John is taking it wide angle lens and he's saying everything that you call life squeeze it all in all of that all the things you know all the people all the experiences all the vacation all that squeeze him why life is a gift and it only makes sense when it's received life is like light you don't call for light you don't direct it you don't micromanage it you receive it and life is like that life the life that was in the Lord Jesus just explodes into existence forming a universe forming people forming the wonder of friendships but life is a lot more than what we can see and touch man does not live by bread alone these verses are intentionally broad and sweeping planned ambiguity but we know the light offered to all men is not just life but fellowship and communion with

God in the beginning the light was given not merely for dignity and wonder the wonder being in this theater of God's glory and relationship with fellow humans it was life in the presence of God and John is taking up this reality in his gospel he's saying he's letting us know that light is on a rescue mission and the rescue mission is to restore life with God one commentator says life is the subject of virtually every chapter in the first half of John's gospel so verses or chapters 1 to 12 life is the subject of virtually everyone but it's not mainly physical life John is talking about he's talking about spiritual life and communion with God John is called the word of life John offers the water of life John is called Jesus is called sorry not John Jesus is called the word of life Jesus offers the water of life Jesus is himself the bread of life Jesus speaks the words of life

[28 : 19] Jesus calls people to walk in the light of life no wonder he said the thief comes to steal kill and destroy but I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly life to the full the real secret sauce of life is not all the things not the marriage not the kids not the house not the vacation the loss of those things sometimes is crushing but it was never the secret sauce of life the secret sauce of life is fellowship with God Jesus is the water of life the bread of life what does that mean all the smart guys wrestle about what John is talking about when he uses those words the bread and water of life and he seems to talk about believing as if it's more than something just understanding but I think what's going on here is he's trying to point to life eternal life is not merely about believing a few things not about understanding a few things it's about leaning into those things and following those things into the

Lord Jesus Christ Jesus says he is the living water because he's not just out there to be known he's there to be loved to be celebrated to be feasted upon to be satisfied with and so he's the bread of life as well all of these things there's nothing more thrilling than knowing and communing with the Lord Jesus Christ what joy what peace what love has come to us in this one all else is dust and ashes compared to knowing to knowing him J.I.

Packer in his book I just love this quote he says knowing God is a relationship calculated to thrill a person's heart but what matters is not in the last analysis the fact that I know God but the larger fact which underlines it the fact that he knows me for some unfathomable reason he wants me as his friend this is true biblically God wants you he sent Jesus Christ because he wants you as his friend doesn't need you he wants you as his friend he desires to be your friend and has given his son to die for you in order to realize this purpose he is the word of life that we might walk in the light of life point three the triumph of the light of life the triumph of the light of life

John continues and unpacks how the light shines shines look in verse five the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it now it's the next obvious step if light is the light in him was life and life was the light of men it's the next obvious step that we begin to talk about what light does which light radiates right light shines light gives light now at no other time in the history of the world can it be more appropriately said that the light shines in the darkness than at creation right the spirit was hovering over the water everything was cloaked in darkness but then there was light but the light did not just shine in the darkness as John said it overcome the dark it overcame the darkness the darkness has not overcome it the idea immediately right here is that light and darkness are not equally matched foes!

if they're in this power struggle no the Lord gives light and darkness runs away and the Lord shines light in the darkness puts the stars to rule the darkness by day and the sun and the sky to rule the darkness by night but anyone who has read John's gospel before knows this verse foreshadows what is to come the light shines in the darkness in the beginning of creation but the light shines in the incarnation and in the redemption that is in Jesus Christ it's a summary of what he's doing the contrast between light and darkness day and night dominate the rest of John's gospels you can look at those words light and darkness and day night you would see things because John's laid it out that way darkness darkness comes to represent not merely the absence of light but the world in separation in alienation and in rebellion against

[33 : 33] God that's why he says do not love the world in first John two light comes to represent the light of the world and walking in fellowship communion with God now according to John's gospel we all walk in darkness things are so bad they're not as bad as they could be there is still beauty and goodness in the world but we're born in a world separated from God we're in darkness it would be worth reflecting how dark would our world be if we knew nothing about the light of the Lord Jesus Christ if no one ever broke the

Ten Commandments if no one set up success approval power prominence wealth in the place of God if no one cheated or stole or lied or gossiped or slandered or no one was angry or impatient or judgmental surely there would be no need for police or prison natural disasters may still occur but we'd all work together there'd be no need for insecurity or fear there would be no fear or shame or guilt all of us are in darkness what does it mean that Jesus is the light Jesus is the light it just means Jesus reveals Jesus reveals a field is faint before dawn but and fuzzy but all the contours come out in the light well so too

Jesus reveals no one is seeing God the only God Jesus makes him known Jesus reveals literally the words he exegetes God he comes out God is a spirit God has no body but Jesus the son of God takes on a human body to reveal the character of God in flesh and time in so that we can see and know his power and goodness and character but light doesn't merely mean that Jesus Jesus reveals Jesus rescues light does not shine for itself light shines to give you light to help you see to show you where to walk even a three watt night light transforms a room and so Jesus says I am the light of the world whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life I have come into the world as light so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness Jesus is the light of the world that reveals and rescues now I have a bit of a news flash for you discovered earlier this season that Home

Alone is a Christian movie now not the snarkiness of little Macaulay Culkin you have no doubt at least heard of this movie the 1990s classic about a family that goes on Christmas vacation and accidentally leaves their bratty little brother Kevin at home alone while his parents try every possible way to get back to their son Kevin has to learn how to survive on his own things get complicated when some burglars find out he's alone and are out for him but what makes it Christian what all revolves around old man Marley old man Marley is a neighbor he's an honest man but lots of stories are told about him he's in the neighborhood everyone knows him but they all reject him on a fateful night or on the fateful night when the burglars are supposed to come back at midnight or whatever it is

Kevin gets the booby traps ready that's why everybody watches the movie because the booby traps on these burglars and then he goes to church the choir is singing oh holy night fall on your knees hear the voices the angels singing the candle in the sanctuary is lit indicating that God the Lord Jesus is present with his people they're gathering Kevin is basically alone in the sanctuary then he realizes old man Marley is sitting in a pew near him and he stands up and walks towards Kevin leans towers over his pew and asks to sit down they begin to talk Kevin begins to confess he begins to talk about how he was a naughty boy you know he wouldn't have been on Santa's good list kind list whatever his list you know he wouldn't have been on there they begin to talk he talks about he been a bad boy bad younger brother said things he shouldn't say and so on and so on they have this little conversation when they're done talking old man

[39 : 05] Marley reaches out his hand and when they shake hands you see that old man Marley has a scar on his hand happens very fast we're not told what happens to his hand but if you remember the first time Kevin sees old man Marley he has a bandage and his hand was pierced all the way through blood on either side of the bandage now nothing said about the scar but at the end of the night Kevin cannot save himself from the burglars they catch him they hang him up ready to inflict pain on him one of the guys says I'm going to drive nails through his feet and just when they're ready to pounce on him old man Marley comes with his snow shovel and wham hits him both wallops him upside the head he pulls Kevin down and says let's get you home old man

Marley is the Christ figure in the book or in the movie the stranger who was rejected but rescues Kevin with a light and this passage in the light throughout John's gospel is foreshadowing the one who's come to redeem did you notice the way John says it the darkness has not overcome it and that didn't seem to fit creation the light shined and darkness just ran away but it seems to fit redemption because light does not merely just shine in redemption it seems as if light has to go into darkness and to almost appear overcome when the Lord Jesus is taken in the garden he says this is your hour this is the power of darkness and you remember this story the son of God is made man is hung on a cross a crown of thorns is placed on his head spikes are driven through his hands and feet mocking and ridicule are leveled at him after all that the humans could do with their afflicting this criminal in their eyes then the darkness falls the beginning of Jesus

Christ there was light at midnight the end of Jesus Christ life on earth it was dark at noon why it was symbolizing the punishment of God was falling on this one Jesus Christ I think the idea is the essence of sin is insisting in placing yourself in the place of God in the essence of salvation is God putting himself in your place dying the death you deserve and so light rescues and redeems light shouts and celebrates but light must be received the rest of John's gospel seems to say choose life choose life that's what the light is doing embrace life turn to life as John 3 says this is the judgment the light is coming to the world and people love the 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 but whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God the light has come into the world some love the darkness some hate the light in John's gospel the people that reject the light are the best of people in that world the Pharisees the scribes

Nicodemus comes by night Judas leaves when it was night light forces a decision will you humble yourself will you be honest will you come will you turn surely it doesn't say you should clean yourself up because if anything light says is that we all need it and we're all sunk without it it's a personal decision is Jesus the light of the world the light of your life is he precious to you is he the desire of your soul is obeying his commands the ambition of your life is your life too full of the busyness and pleasures of this world that you have no time for Jesus is your life too caught up in climbing the ladders of success financial independence or whatever though you climb to great heights in the eyes of men these verses are urging you to consider where you'll stand in the judgment of God if you walk in the light as he's in the light you have fellowship with one another and the blood of

Jesus cleanses us of all sin don't come to Jesus for fire insurance or any of these things come for life you know I'll never forget going back home the very first Christmas after becoming a Christian I was converted on August 9th 2001 going home for the first Christmas we did all the things right the tree the lights the family the food and I remember Christmas Eve service there used to be this man named Renee Herlong that would sing O Holy Night and it never felt like Christmas until you heard Renee sing and it was as if that night I realized for the first time that Christmas was not all the things it was a person I just remember communing with the

[45 : 28] Lord to this song I'd heard 21 times and yet it was as if I was hearing it for the first time that's my prayer for you this Christmas all the light of the world is from the Lord Jesus Christ inviting you to turn and to walk in fellowship with him that's what Christmas is all about Father in heaven we offer ourselves to you sincerely and completely Lord we yet again come to this moment and count it all loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord we want to be found in him not having a righteousness of our own that comes from the law but the righteousness from God that depends on faith help us we pray draw near to us reveal yourself that we might enjoy again the thrill of knowing you and walking with you we praise you in Christ's name amen you've been listening to a message given by Walt

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