

Jesus Came as Light

Good morning! Please open your Bibles to the book of John and chapter 12...
We're continuing our series "Let there be Light" and we're thinking about what it means that Jesus came as the light of the world.

In just a moment I'm going to read a longer section from John's gospel from chapter 12. These are the last words of Jesus in his public ministry – his last words to the world. In chapters 13 through the end of the book, Jesus is with His disciples, but here are His last words to the world at large.

There is a lot going on here that we won't have time to unpack today, but I want us to particularly look at how Jesus wants us to understand His purpose in coming. How does Jesus think about His mission in coming into the world? What does Jesus want us to know and understand about who He is and His purpose?

Read John 12:34-50

Intro

As I'm sure you're aware, Christmas is celebrated all around the world.
In the Netherlands and Germany and Australia, even Canada, just before Boxing Day – whatever that is.

Most, if not all, cultures around the world celebrate annual holidays. There are these regular times in each year in which the people stop their normal routines and do something different.

Earlier this year, we looked at the book of Leviticus and the different feast days that Israel celebrated each year. There's the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Tabernacles, The Feast of the Firstfruits, the Day of Atonement.

These were the holidays for God's people in the Old Testament. They were to be set apart from the other days – Holy days. And that's where we get that word, in fact. Holidays are holy days, set apart to celebrate and commemorate and give thanks.

In America, we celebrate New Years and Easter, 4th of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

Now, though, it seems there is a day for everything. Here's a few I found that are supposedly real: national clean your desk day (January 8th), national no socks day (May 8th), national Hawaiian shirt day (August 16th), and national donut day (June 7th and also November 5th).

I was dismayed to find out that I had been missing out on so many good holidays. These days had just come and gone and I hadn't really stopped to celebrate them. In a similar way, as good as it is that we celebrate Christmas as a culture, you and I both know that many (most?) people don't really celebrate the true meaning of Christmas.

Why do we celebrate Christmas? What is it all about?

The Christian message of Christmas is unique. We don't just celebrate His birth, but His life, death, and resurrection. Christians love Christmas not just because God has become man, but that He would do so in order to die for our sins. Jesus was brought down so that we might be raised up. That's the true blessing of Christmas if we see it as Jesus does. So to get that straight in our minds, I want us to see how Jesus understood His own mission.

What does Jesus want us to know about His purpose in coming? What is important to Jesus at Christmastime? I see three truths here, three statements that summarize what Jesus wants you to know about Christmas.

Jesus came as Light

The first clear truth that Jesus wants us to know is that He is light.

But before we get to Jesus's statement, we need to understand the questions asked by the crowd. Look again at verse 34...

John 12:34

So the crowd answered him, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?"

The crowd has two questions – How is it that the Son of Man must die? The Son of Man is a reference to Daniel chapter 7, in which it is prophesied that one like a Son of Man will come as a conquering king to set up an eternal kingdom.

But Jesus has told them that He must die. And the crowd has a problem with that. The Law says that the Son of Man, the Christ – the Messiah King who will come to deliver them – He must live forever. That’s what they claim the Law or the OT says.

D.A. Carson, who wrote one of the best commentaries on the book of John, says the crowd could have been thinking about Isaiah 9, where the government will be upon his shoulder forever. Or Ezekiel 37:25 where David will be Israel’s prince forever. Or Psalm 72 or Psalm 89 where the son of David will remain forever.¹

So the crowds have this pre-understanding that blinds them from seeing the truth that’s right in front of them. They know from the OT that the Messiah King from the line of David will remain forever. How then, does Jesus claim to be this Son of Man if He is also saying that He must be lifted up in death?

What kind of King is this? How could there be a crucified Messiah?²

So they’re asking for an explanation from Jesus. You are saying that you are the Son of Man, but we know that the Son of Man will remain forever. So what kind of Messiah are you? What kind of King dies?

But Jesus doesn’t answer their question directly. Instead, he speaks in a sort of riddle...

John 12:35-36

So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. **36** While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

They ask, how can the Messiah be killed? And Jesus answers essentially, “Hey, you need to pay attention before it’s too late.”

¹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 445.

² Edward W. Klink III, “For the crowd, a crucified Messiah is not only nonsensical, but abhorrent and heretical—even unbiblical. The scandal of the cross is meaningless to them, and the paradox that the Christ must suffer “puts an end to their welcome of Jesus as the Messiah of the Jews.” *John*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 557.

He sidesteps the question because they should already know the answer. This is the end of His public ministry. He's been preaching to them for a while. He's been telling them who He is, but they don't have the ears to hear it. They are, in fact, unwilling to hear it.

At some point there is such a thing as willful ignorance – not knowing something that you should know. This is the like the child who ignores your repeated warnings to put on a coat, and then when you go outside and he's cold and comes complaining to you. If he's four years old, you probably still help him. If he's fifteen, then he might just have to be cold. At some point, this is his fault. He should know by now that he needs to dress for the weather.

And so Jesus instead warns them – I've been near you and have been teaching you about who I am and what I came to do. But I won't always be. I'm going away soon. Now you must believe in the light, so that you are not overcome by the darkness. You need to believe in me, so that you may have my light.

The picture Jesus gives is as if a group is walking through the darkness and only one has a flashlight. Most of you know I live on the other side of this wall. So my kids, especially when they were younger would be walking with me through the church at night when all the lights were off. But I have a light on my phone. So I would walk and tell them not to run ahead or not to linger behind or they'd be left in the dark. Walk in the light while I'm with you.

That's what Jesus is saying here – walk in my light, believe in me while you still can.

So the point is that Jesus reveals Himself as the Light. He says it even more clearly down in **John 12:44-46**

And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. **45** And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. **46** I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

Do you see the connection between verses 44 and 46? Jesus says to believe in Him is to believe in the Father who sent Him. He is making a connection between His coming as Light and His coming as God. Do you see that?

That Jesus is the Light means that He is God. God is light. We saw this from 1st John a couple weeks ago. God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. And we saw last week from Isaiah 9 that the Light is a person.

And so here, like in other places in John's gospel, Jesus is making a claim that He is God. He says...

- Whoever believes in me believes in the one who sent me (v44)
- Whoever has seen me has seen the Father (v45)
- What Jesus says, the Father has told Him (v49)

Think about it this way – God is Light. And from God radiates out Light. Jesus is God and came from heaven with God as the radiating light from God Himself. So to see the Light radiating from the source of Light which is the Father, is to see the same divine nature that the Father has.

There is mystery here in the Trinity, yes, but we should not let that keep us from seeking to know who Jesus is. This is part of what Jesus wants us to know about Christmas, about His mission and purpose in coming.

At the end of His public teaching ministry, Jesus could have said a lot of things. He could have said, “Hey everyone, to summarize my mission and message – make sure that you love each other.” Or He could have said, “Keep the Law and obey the commandments.” Jesus does teach those things, but here at the end, one of the most important things that Jesus wants you to know is that He comes from the Father and that to see and believe in Him is to see and believe the Father. He wants us to understand more deeply what we have come to call the doctrine of the Trinity.

For the first decades and centuries of the church, Christians wrestled with how to talk about the Trinity. How do we describe the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? Think about this morning – what words would you use?

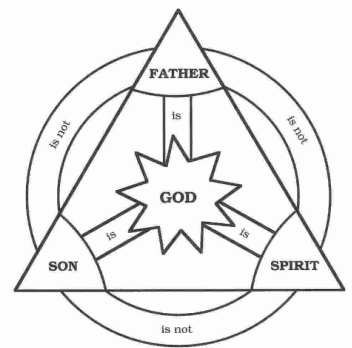
You might be tempted to think – how is this relevant to me, the doctrine of the Trinity? What will that change about my life? I would suggest that's the wrong question. It puts you in the center of the universe. The question is – how can I better understand God? There is nothing more important and worthwhile in all of life to think about.

So let's think about the doctrine of the Trinity. The early Christians saw, from passages like this one, that there is a close connection between the Father and the Son. If you piece together these various passages in the Scriptures, you can summarize the teaching like this: The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God. They all share the same divine "God-ness." They share the same essence – that's the word theologians landed on when trying to describe how to say that all three members of the Trinity are God and have all existed from eternity past and have together one singular will.

But they are distinct persons, such that each member of the Trinity can be distinguished from each other, not in having different essences but differing roles in their actions such that what the Godhead does is from the Father through the Son and in the Spirit.

One chart that I think is helpful in thinking about the Trinity is this one – (show diagram)

It shows that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all God, but that they are distinct in person from each other.



The catechism question we teach our 4th and 5th graders goes like this – How many persons are there in God?

There are three persons in one God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And this is what Jesus wants us to know. He wants us to understand that God is light and Jesus comes to us as Light because He is God.

What does all of this mean for how we think about God? About Jesus?

It means that Jesus is not...

- Just a counselor – someone who gives good advice on how to live, has nice principles for us to follow like loving your enemies and turning the other cheek
- Just a reformer or activist – someone who goes against the status quo, a revolutionary who worked to overturn the social order by elevating women and the poor
- Just spiritual teacher – who calls people to live in a new way and find forgiveness for their sins and healing for their wounds

So yes, Jesus is all of these things. But He is much more than that. He is God. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all there is. He is the One who is worthy of all worship. He is the one who overcomes sin and death. He cannot be contained or minimized. He will not be threatened or manipulated. He will not fit into a little corner of your life, only to be pulled out when it's convenient for you.

It's impossible for you to think thoughts about God that are too grand or too majestic. He is better and more perfect than our imaginations can fathom. Try to think about how infinite and holy and good and wonderful God is...He is better than that.

And so when Jesus tells us that He has been sent from the Father, to do all that the Father says, and that when we see Him, we see the Father – Jesus is making a claim that He is fully God, containing all of the fullness of Divinity in human flesh. He is Immanuel – God with us. Jesus came as light because Jesus is God. That's what He wants you to know about Christmas.

The Light brings Judgment

The second truth that Jesus shows us here is that the Light brings Judgment. Look again at verse 47...

John 12:47

If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.

You might say, wait a minute, you're saying that the Light brings judgment? Jesus just said here that He did not come to judge. What do you mean?

Well, that's a great question, and I think a lot of people would like to just leave it right there. Here you have a verse that says Jesus did not come to judge people. That's the kind of Jesus they want to follow – a Jesus that won't judge me. He's good with whatever I do.

And that makes perfect sense, until you keep reading...

John 12:48

The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.

Jesus isn't saying that you won't be judged. He's saying, "Oh, you will be judged...but not by me right now." He's saying that in His first coming, that was not His purpose.

But don't take that to mean that we won't face the judgment of God. He says very clearly, if you reject me and my words – you already have a judge. And the words that I have taught you – you will be judged by them.

Remember, He says, when you hear my words, you are hearing the words of the Father. My commandments don't come from me, they come from the one who will judge you.

If I send my youngest son Asher to go tell his two older siblings to do something. Do I think they are going to listen to him? Likely not. But if I tell him, let them know that I sent you. Well now they have a choice, don't they? Are we going to believe that our little brother carries the authority of Mom and Dad? Do we believe him because if we do, then we really are believing that Mom and Dad have the right to tell us what to do? Now they have to decide whether or not they want to face the judgment of Mom and Dad, don't they? The brother doesn't come to judge, but they will face judgment later about what they do with the words of the messenger.

The question then becomes, why will the light bring judgment? What will we be judged about? John told us earlier in this book that Jesus will judge the world for walking in darkness. Jesus says in John 3...

John 3:19-21

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. **20** For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. **21** 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."

There is a judgment that happens when the light comes because it exposes the wickedness of the darkness. Those who are practicing sin doesn't want to be held accountable for walking in darkness.

It's like when a parent goes into their teenager's room in the morning and opens the curtains and turns on the light. And the teenager groans and pulls the covers over their head. They don't want to see the light; they want to go back to the darkness.

But Jesus came to free us from the darkness. Look at verse 35 again from chapter 12...

John 12:35

Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you.

Or later in verse 46...

John 12:46

"I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness."

Jesus came as light so that you and I would not remain in darkness. Jesus is telling us what we might not want to believe but which is totally true – our natural state, our default setting, the way we all were born – is in darkness.

What does it mean to be in darkness? John here looks back to the words of the prophet Isaiah in verses 38-40 that it's because we have blind eyes and hard hearts.

Before seeing the Light of Jesus, we are all walking in darkness and blindness – unable and unwilling to see. We have hard hearts – stubbornness and pride that refuse to accept that I have broken God's Laws and I deserve judgment.

John 12:37

Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him,

They had seen Jesus perform miracle after miracle – healing the blind, causing the lame to walk, casting out demons. This crowd in front of Him right now had gathered because Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead just days before. They had seen all of these things, but they still do not believe.

Why not? Why don't they believe?

John tells us. It's because they loved the glory of man more than the glory that comes from God. Listen to verses 42-43...

John 12:42-43

Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; **43** for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

What a sad statement. But we get it, don't we? They feared the religious leaders. They didn't want to be kicked out of their community. They didn't want to tell those they had grown up with that they no longer believed like they did. They didn't want to say – I have seen the light and the Light is a person!

And Jesus has a warning for them. His Word will judge them on the last day. They're afraid of the wrong thing. They're fearing man when they should be fearing God. Or positively as John puts it here – they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

What does it look like to love the glory of man?

Loving the glory of man keeps us from standing up against our own tribe or making compromises to be accepted. Not upsetting the cultural norms around you. Not going against the grain. Not participating in the Great Salmon Swim, as Mike says, particularly in controversial areas like sexuality or standing up for the abused and marginalized.

Loving the glory of man can look like going with the flow at work instead of standing up for what's right against what is wrong, even if it costs you.

Loving the glory of man can look like doing the public, showy parts of the Christian life and neglecting the secret things – the prayers and the giving and the acts of service behind the scenes that no one will ever know about but you and God.

Loving the glory of man can look like hiding your sin instead of confessing it for fear of how people will respond if they really knew what was going on in your life. The darkness doesn't want to be seen and exposed by the light.

But one day when the judgment comes for the darkness, the question is – how will God judge you? In what ways do you love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God?

There is a judgment day coming. One day – each of us will stand before God to give an answer for all that we have said and done. That can be a scary thought if you're not ready for that day. But hear this – one day you will stand before your Creator and give an account for all that you've done. The day of judgment is coming and it is certain.

If we don't feel the weight of this, we will miss the glory and depth of our salvation. And Jesus says, "the light is among you for a little while longer, while you have the light believe in the light!" You have this light now, but only for a little while.

People talk a lot about privilege today. But let me tell you this – the most privileged position in the world is in a church hearing the good news of Jesus. This is one of the most fortunate places for you to be this morning – hearing the gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

So what will you do with the light?

If you are walking in darkness today, hear the words of Jesus...

"I am the light of the world..." You must believe in the light...

Will you turn from your sin and believe that Jesus is your only hope to be saved from the wrath of God that your sins deserve? Will you ask Him to forgive you and save you? Will you turn from your sin and follow Him?

The bad news is that our sin and darkness will be judged by the Light. The good news is that Jesus sees our darkness and can save us from it. He came as light so that we might not remain in darkness. Jesus was lifted up so that we might become sons of light. That brings me to our final point this morning...

The Light must be lifted up.

Why does Jesus say he has not come to judge the world?

Because he has come in order to be lifted up.

I know this isn't a very fun – Merry Christmas sort of message. Doctrine of the Trinity, the coming Judgment that we will face. But if we are really to get the beauty of the gospel and the true hope of Christmas, we need to know those things. And that makes the wonder of what Jesus came to do so much more amazing.

Like a diamond against a black velvet background, we need to get these things so that the gospel sparkles more brilliantly.

Look down at verse 32, just before the verses I read earlier. Jesus tells the crowd something in verse 32, which prompted their questions. He says

John 12:32-33

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” **33** He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

Jesus came into the world in order that He might be lifted up. He came so that He would be glorified and exalted. Paul will later say in Colossians, God is doing all things so that in everything Jesus might be pre-eminent. So He must be lifted up!

But this phrase has a double meaning...Jesus means that He will be nailed to a Roman cross which will be lifted up in order to humiliate and shame him through a painful public execution. But it is through this very same act that the Father will be glorified in saving people for Himself.

Klink writes, “In the context of the cross it [being lifted up] speaks of death, suffering, and defeat; but in its larger context, it simultaneously speaks of exaltation in majesty and glorification. In this one word the message of the gospel is presented. It is only in his humiliation that Jesus can be exalted and glorified.”³

The seed must die before it can give life. The road to glory goes through humiliation. The way up is down. Jesus came into the world in humility, born to a peasant family, placed in a feeding trough on the night of His birth. And He lived in poverty His whole life, not as royalty receiving the honor that He is worthy to receive.

Instead, because of His great love for us, He took the judgment that our sins deserve so that through believing in Him we might have eternal life. This is the commandment of the Father – believe in the Son who was lifted up for you!

³ Edward W. Klink III, *John*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 555–556.

John 12:36

While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light...

John 12:50

And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."

What is the commandment of the Father? Believe in the Son! And then you will become sons of light and have eternal life.

Jesus came as light in order to save us from the judgment that we deserve. He gave up His life so that we might not perish but have eternal life. He not only taught us the upside-down way of the kingdom, He invites us into it.

First, you must understand who Jesus is – He is the light. He is God in human flesh. And then we must come face to face with our sin and the judgment that we deserve if we are going to understand the beauty of Christmas!

The way of the kingdom of God is backwards and paradoxical – the way up is down, the way in is to go outside, the way to happiness and joy is self-denial.

That's why is so appropriate that on one of the darkest nights of the year that we celebrate the coming of Jesus as light.

So let me ask you, are you believing in the Light? What in your life needs to die in order to receive the grace of forgiveness? Are there areas in your life where you need to confess the darkness in order to really turn from it? How about this - are there relationships in which you'd rather be right than holy? Times where you'd rather have the glory that comes from man than that which comes from God? The way up is down friends.

This is what Jesus wants us to know about Christmas, about why He came into the world. He came as Light so that we would see that He is God and worship Him. He came so that we might believe and be rescued from the coming Judgment. He came so that He would be lifted up and save us from our sins.

Let's pray...