

The Light of True Life (Part 2)

The Surprising Way of The Lord / John 1:1-18

Introduction:

Through our Advent Series, we have been considering “The Surprising Way of The Lord.” We opened the series by looking at a prophecy in Isaiah 40:1-11 which spoke of the Lord coming to rule in power and care for His people like a shepherd cares for lambs in his flock. To remind us of the anticipation built through that prophecy, look at Isaiah 40:3-5 again with me.

3 A voice cries:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

5 And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

This prophecy proclaims that preparation for the way of the Lord is needed and verses 9-11 of Isaiah 40 speak of God Himself as the one coming in power to rule and care for His people. As we considered Isaiah’s prophecy, we saw the gospels showing that, though there was an immediate fulfillment of this in Israel’s history, a greater fulfillment was still to come. They do this by revealing John the Baptist as the voice crying out in the wilderness. The second week of our series had us observing the ministry of John the Baptist, shown through the prophecy his father, Zechariah, gave at his birth. Listen to a portion of it again from Luke 1:68-71

68 “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
71 that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;

Like Isaiah 40, Zechariah speaks of salvation in terms of powerful deliverance through the language of military conquest. Then, the ending of this prophecy pointed to John the Baptist preparing the way of the Lord that will give light to those in the darkness. Last week, we saw how John 1:1-18 brought the coming of the Lord in Isaiah 40 and ministry of John the Baptist together, revealing that Jesus Christ is the Eternal Word, who was with God, and was God. And that He came into the world as the light of true life, to give light that shines in the darkness which the darkness cannot overcome.

So far, our series has shown us that God did come into the world, just as Isaiah prophesied, but He came in a surprising way, by becoming human and dwelling among us. Today, we will conclude our series by focusing in on what the Light of True Life is in John 1:9-18, contemplating how the way of the Lord involved power and care in a completely unexpected, but necessary way. Before we can consider what the Light of True Life is, though, we need to understand how we can have this light. In verses 9-12, the apostle John shows us that,

THE LIGHT OF TRUE LIFE COMES BY TRUSTING IN JESUS CHRIST

Pay attention to how verses 9-12 build to reveal this truth. Start with verse 9 where John says, “9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.” Verse 9 is the conclusion of verses 1-8, to show that John the Baptist bore witness about the true light coming into the world to give light to everyone. Then, in verses 10-12, he contrasts different responses to the light. Verse 10 says, “10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.” Note how this verse speaks of the light as a person and the connection it makes to verse 3, where all things were made through the Word. Though the Word was in the world He created, the world did not know its creator. Now, when John uses the term world in his gospel, he isn’t referring to all the created universe, but the created order in rebellion against its creator, especially emphasizing humans. So, he is saying, humanity in rebellion against God, did not recognize and know its creator, though He was in the world. Look next at verse 11, “11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” Verse 11 moves from the response of the rebellious world to a more shocking response of a people who should have known who He was. John uses relational terms to point to the Jewish people, those part of the covenant community, that should have embraced their God and Messiah with welcome arms. Yet even they “did not receive him.” But what does it mean that they did not receive him? We find the answer through the contrast in verse 12. Notice how verse 12 starts by saying “But.” Contrasts are important to observe in scripture, because often terms and phrase find their meaning through what is contrasted with them. So, look at verse 12, “12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name.” Your translation may differ in composition here, but the ESV captures this correctly. The contrast and composition in the original language has the phrase “who believe in his name” modifying the phrase “who did received him.” This reveals that receiving is believing and believing is receiving. As you truly believe, you also receive. Although biblical belief involves more than we may think. The term used for believing, through the New Testament, isn’t just believing facts about something to be true. Rather, it involves trusting and giving full credit to certain claims. We also see, in verse 12, it is, “believing in His name.” For the first recipients of this gospel, the name of a person wasn’t simply a label but spoke to the character and identity of a person. And church, the name of Jesus Christ is no small name. Jesus means “Yahweh Saves,” or “Yahweh is salvation,” using God’s covenantal name to point to God Himself. Christ means “Messiah,” which was the covenantal king coming to rule forever on David’s throne. Believing in His name means we place all our trust in God alone as Savior and King. In his commentary, D. A. Carson says this believing, or receiving, is true faith that, “yields allegiance to the Word, trusts him completely, acknowledges his claims and confesses him with gratitude.” This is why I say the light of true life comes by trusting in Jesus Christ. And what claims are we trusting in? We are trusting in the claims we have been looking at over these past few weeks. We trust that Jesus is the Eternal Word, God in the flesh. We trust that He is the Light of True Life. We trust in the truths of the gospel, specifically that He came to save His people from their sins by dying on a Roman cross in their place. We trust that the sacrifice He made was sufficient to pay for all our sins and there is nothing more we need. And we trust that He rose victoriously over sin and death securing our salvation. What confessions are we making? We confess Jesus as our Lord, Savior and treasure. We confess our allegiance to Him alone over any heavenly or earthly power. We love, cherish, and worship Jesus with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, holding to our confession until he returns or calls us home.

We will see that the light of true life is of infinitely valuable, but we must first understand that we will not have that light apart from trusting in Jesus Christ. Are you trusting in Christ? Let's now consider what the light of true life is. I see two beautiful realities of what this is in verses 10-18. First,

THE LIGHT OF TRUE LIFE IS SPIRITUAL BIRTH THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

Follow the flow of verses 10-13 with me to see this. Verses 10-11 showed that the world didn't know its creator and God's people, the Jewish nation, didn't receive their King. Verse 12, then, contrasts those groups with "all who did receive him, who believed in His name," and says to these, "He gave the right to become children of God." The "right to become children of God" is the right and privilege of being part of the covenantal people of God. But do you feel the significance of the language used here? It doesn't say they are simply subjects that God protects and shepherds, it says they are children. This involves familial rights and relationship. Verse 13 continues this language, introducing the theme of new birth that will come up later in his gospel in John 3. Notice how it presents a series of negative statements to emphasize the positive statement in verse 13. He says these are children, "13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man." "Not of blood" points to blood lines, showing it is not by heritage. "Nor of will of the flesh" shows it was not by human desire, possibly even referring to sexual desire. Finally, "Nor of the will of man" shows it was not by human will and purpose. Some suggest the whole process of human birth is mentioned here. The goal is to show that this new birth is entirely void of human involvement, setting up the contrast at the end. Look there, "who were born," not of natural causes, "but of God." Three times natural causes are rejected to emphasize the supernatural cause. This is something vastly different than entrance into a human family. This is a new birth, and its source is God alone. And verse 12 revealed that the Word, the Light, Jesus Christ, is the one who gives the right to this new birth. God is its source, and it only comes through Christ. This sets up the truth we see in John 3:6, which says,⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. The light of true life is spiritual birth through Christ because those who believe in His name, are born of the Spirit of God, and given the right to become children of God. Let this sink into your hearts because children are in a more intimate relationship than subjects. Children are loved and cared for differently than subjects, at least they should be. Therefore, 1 John 3:1 rightly reminds us, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God." And we saw a few weeks ago in our Advent Candle lighting that we can never be separated from the love of Christ. This is because we have become children of God. Children also receive an inheritance of the King's possessions, subjects do not. This inheritance is Christ himself. It is eternity with God. It is the new heaven and the new earth, and rewards for faithfulness in this life. And it all comes through Christ because we have been given the right to become children of God. What a beautiful reality! Yet, I want us to see that being loved children and heirs of all things is not the ultimate joy of the Light of True Life. The ultimate joy is found in the grace this spiritual birth brings, which is the second beautiful reality I see, that

THE LIGHT OF TRUE LIFE IS THE GRACE OF KNOWING GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

We see this in John 1:14-18 which we looked at briefly last week. This week, focus in on how John reveals that the grace we receive is seeing and knowing the glory of God in Christ. Look at verses 14-18 with me. He starts in verse 14 by highlighting the glory of the Word. He says, "14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father." When he says the Word, "dwelt among us," he actually uses a term that means tabernacled, or dwelt in a tent. I am persuaded John is pointing to the Old Testament tabernacle here, reminding his readers of how the glory of God's presence filled the tabernacle in the wilderness. The Eternal Word tabernacled with us, so, he rightly says next, "and we have seen his glory," and describes the glory as that which corresponds with the glory of the only Son sent from God the Father. One commentator says it well, saying, "It was the glory of one who partook of His divine Father's essence."

The idea of this being the very glory of God is further magnified by the end of verse 14 by saying the glory was, “full of grace and truth.” Gospel writers often make what are called allusions to the Old Testament in their writings. These are moments where they speak of something that connects to the Old Testament without specifically quoting it. The terms for grace and truth coincide with the Hebrew terms for “steadfast love or mercy,” and “truth or faithfulness.” The apostle is likely alluding to Exodus 33-34 with the use of these terms. In Exodus 33, Moses asks to see the glory of God, and after God says Moses cannot see His face, in Exodus 34, God hides him in a cleft in the rock and causes His glory to pass by so that Moses sees only His back. As God passes by, He announces His name, “The LORD, The LORD” or “Yahweh, Yahweh,” and says He “abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness.” By alluding to this, the apostle is saying the glory seen by Moses as God passed by, is the glory he and his companions saw. Verse 15 serves as a parenthetical remark of John the Baptist pointing to Christ as greater and before him, and Verse 16 picks up the thought from verse 14. Look at verse 16 with me, starting in verse 14 to see the flow of through. “14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. 16 For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” I won’t unpack all the particular points of these verses but want us to notice how the grace upon grace, which we have all received, comes from the fullness of the glory of the Word. The flow of verse 14 into verse 16 show that this grace upon grace, the abundance of grace, the blessing stacked on top of blessing we have received, comes through seeing the glory of the Son which is the glory of God. And Verse 17 shows this did not come through the law given to Moses, but only through Christ. Now, pay attention to how Verse 18 drives the point home. Verse 18, “18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” Moses could not see God’s face. He could not see the full glory of God, only the trailing glory. and the Old Testament proclaims over and over again that God cannot be seen. Yet, God the Son, the Eternal Word who became flesh, the one intimately connected in mutual love and knowledge at the Father side, He has made him known. The light of true life is the grace to know God because Jesus Christ, God the Son, is the display of the glory of God for us. This is consistent with the testimony of Scriptures about Christ. Hebrews 1:3 says, 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. Colossians 1:15 says, 15 He is the image of the invisible God. This is why Paul speaks of gospel as “the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” in 2 Corinthians 4:4. And, 2 Corinthians 4:6 says that God “has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” God Himself is the highest good of the gospel. His glory, His goodness, is the ultimate good news of the gospel.

Conclusion:

Through this Advent series, we have been considering “The Surprising Way of The Lord.” We have seen that where Israel was waiting for military might and conquest over the physical powers that ruled over them, God was concerned with a greater battle in the spiritual realm. Where Israel thought their greatest need was their physical freedom from the oppression of Rome, God knew the deeper need was the freedom only spiritual birth could provide. Where Israel thought they needed a human king and denied the joy of the presence of God dwelling among them, God knew our hearts greatest joy and satisfaction is in His glory alone. You see, The Surprising Way of The Lord is that God came to win a battle we didn’t realize we needed won. God came to give a status to those who trust in Christ that we couldn’t imagine was possible. And God came to give us hope of enjoying His glory, which is a joy we can’t fully fathom on this side of eternity. Therefore, what we need to see as we end this series, is that

OUR GREATEST NEED IS THE LIGHT OF TRUE LIFE IN JESUS CHRIST

The past few weeks, we have been studying this introduction of John’s gospel that presents the Light of True Life as Jesus Christ and the light that He gives.

In John 20:30-31, towards the end of John's gospel, he gives us his purpose in writing it, saying, 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John calls us to believe, to trust, "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," so that we may have the Light of True life. Consider two questions as you respond. First, do you really have the light of true life in Jesus Christ? Jesus came to give all who trust in him the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, both now and for all eternity. This is true life. It can be easy to miss this truth and come to Jesus simply to fix our life on earth or gain things from Him in this world. Read the gospels and you will see many who come to Jesus for quick fixes in this life, but ultimately do not follow Him and turn away at the first sign of difficulty. Those accounts warn us of false belief and a lack of the light of true life. Don't get me wrong, God in His grace provides for us in physical and tangible ways at times. He does give us good gifts in this life, but if you aren't coming to Jesus for himself, you may not truly have the light of true life. If you aren't seeking the forgiveness of your sins in order to be reconciled to God, you have missed the point of the gospel. Believe the claims of Jesus, confess your sins, receive forgiveness, and trust in Him alone to satisfy your heart. The second question is, do you live for the light of true life in Jesus Christ? Some never come to Jesus, others come to Jesus for quick fixes and turn away, but others are truly given light of true life and then lose sight of the true joy of knowing and seeing the glory of God. The darkness doesn't overtake them but clouds their vision of the glory of God. Sin creeps in, worldly pleasures become a priority, and they forget that true joy is found in God alone. I have personally experienced seasons like this in life. Are you in one today? The call for you is to turn back to see the glory of Christ in all its beauty and goodness. It is a call to press in to know the Lord, confessing sin if needed. If God is stirring in your heart to respond to one of these questions, I would love to speak with you more about it. But let me also leave you with a precious promise to cling to from the words of Jesus in John 8:12, where he says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." Cling to this promise, turn and look to Christ, and enjoy the light of true life.

Would you stand as I pray this over us?