

The Light of True Life (Part 1)

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

Introduction:

If you haven't kept your place there, please turn back in your bibles to John 1:1-18. As the kids are making their way back to their seats, I want to dive right into our passage for today, to consider the light that shines in the darkness we have been speaking about. We will be in this passage for the next two weeks to close out our Advent Series on The Surprising Way of the Lord. It will land the plane, so to speak, as we see it bringing together the coming of the Lord, which we saw prophesied in Isaiah 40, and the cry of John the Baptist, which we saw last week guiding us to the light. Today our focus will be on verses 1-9, where I see the apostle John building in his teaching to help us to truly see what, and who, the light is. Our passage starts with

A FOUNDATIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE ETERNAL WORD

The first two verses of this gospel are packed full of intentional language to give us an understanding of The Word. The goal is to help us really see what, or rather who, the Word is, and has always been. Notice the specific words that open verse 1. "1 In the beginning was the Word." Does this sound familiar to you? It mirrors the opening words of the Bible, in Genesis 1:1, which says, "1 In the beginning, God." This is no accident. This gospel was originally written in Greek, and during this time, the people commonly used a Greek translation of the Old Testament. And the first verse of our passage starts with the same Greek words used by that translation of Genesis to make it clear what he is saying. When Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God," it proclaims that, before anything existed, there was God. Here, he is saying, before anything existed, there was the Word. This causes us to think the Word must be God. Yet, look at the next phrase that builds on this, "and the Word was with God." Here, the apostle makes a distinction that the Word was with God. The meaning is even clearer in Greek than our English translations because he uses a term that points to relationship. This is saying, the Word was a person, distinct from God, yet with God in a personal relationship. To which you might think, "well, maybe I misunderstood the first phrase, this must be a being that existed with God but wasn't God." But pay attention to the next phrase, building again, "and the Word was God." No, you weren't mistaken, he did mean the Word was God by emphasizing that the Word was truly God. So, wait a second, is this really saying the Word was God and was with God? Yes, it is. And, to make sure we understand this has always been the case, the first phrase is repeated in verse 2, "2 He was in the beginning with God." He is saying, the Word, this person who was God and with God in relationship, has always been that. From the beginning, this is how it has been, the Word was with God, and the Word was God. A writer named Edmond Clowney summarizes this in a helpful way, saying, "The Word was with God, God's eternal Fellow; the Word was God, God's own Self." This really is mind boggling and the truth is, we cannot and will not fully comprehend it. But we must humble ourselves before a God who is beyond our understanding and know this is the truth relayed to us, because everything else hinges on it. The question becomes, who is the Eternal Word? You may know the answer, but before we get there, let's let the passage guide us because it waits to reveal the answer and keepings building the wonder of it all. Follow, as the apostle builds on this foundational understanding of the Eternal Word. Next, he shows us that

ALL CREATED THINGS WERE MADE THROUGH THE WORD

Where verses 1-2 allude to the creation account in Genesis, verse 3 ensures we understand the full connection to creation. Look at how verse 3 says the same thing in opposite ways to drive the point home. First, positively, "3 All things were made through him." All things mean all things. Think about the smallest thing in creation you can think of. Maybe it is a tiny ant or flea. Or a molecule under a microscope. Now, think about the biggest thing you can think of.

Maybe it's the Grand Canyon, or the big trees. Perhaps you have looked through a space telescope to see the milk-way galaxy. Everything your mind can think of, from the smallest molecule to the largest galaxy was made through the Word, including you kids. Can you imagine all of that being made through one person? It leaves your jaw dropped, right? Parents, let me give an encouragement to point these things out as you explore the world and do different things with your kids. Help them to see the grandness of all created things be made through the Word to help them wonder at it. Now, notice what the apostle does in the rest of verse 3. He says, "and without him was not any thing made that was made." This is clunky sentence, but it leaves no room for misinterpretation. Essentially it is saying, absolutely nothing that was created without the Word. In other words, everything created had to be created through the Word. This means the Word, who was with God, was not created. The Word has eternally existed with God and was the God who created all things. The foundational understanding of the Eternal Word leads to the truth that All Created Things Came Through The Word, which leads to the next truth, that

THE WORD IS THE LIGHT OF TRUE LIFE

I am convinced the apostle is making a shift here in verses 4-5. He shifts from the act of creation in the first few verses, where all life is created, to a focus on spiritual life, that becomes the emphasis of the rest of this opening and his gospel. Notice what he says about the Word in verses 4-5. "4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men." He shows that life was in the Word, and that life is something particular, the light of men. Then, he expounds on this light in verse 5, saying, "5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." This is the first introduction of the concepts of light and darkness that run throughout his gospel, connecting to consistent themes represented by light and darkness throughout the Bible. Darkness often symbolizes the spiritual forces of evil leading humanity away from the glory of God, and light symbolizes all that is true and beautiful coming forth from the glory of God. Likewise, we commonly see spiritual death related to darkness and spiritual life to light. The apostle draws out these themes here to help us see three things about the Word. First, that the light of true life is only in The Word. Second, that the light powerfully shines in the darkness so that the darkness has not overcome it. Your translation may say "did not comprehend or understand it." There are reasons for both translations, but I am persuaded the ESV is correct because of how the apostle uses the same word in connection with the light later in John 12:35-36. There he says, 35 ... "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." The darkness cannot overtake those who have the light and believe in the light, because they become sons of the same light we see in John 1:5 that the darkness has not overcome. This brings out the third thing to see, that the light of true life is the only hope for humanity. The light of true life in the Word, comes from the Word to give light to humanity that shines in the darkness that the darkness cannot overcome. Do you remember those glowing outfits we saw earlier kids? Though they aren't a perfect representation, similar to how the darkness couldn't stop them from shining, the Word shines in the darkness, giving light to humanity that the darkness can never overcome. Hang onto this truth, that The Word is the Light of True Life because we'll see its importance at the end. Before we get to that, we need to see how these truths are driven home by pointing to the person and purpose of John the Baptist, showing that

GOD SENT JOHN TO TESTIFY OF THE LIGHT'S COMING

At first, verse 6 feels like an odd shift to a man named John. But, as we look closely, we will see the point. Look at verses 6-8 with me. "6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light but came to bear witness about the light." The apostle speaks of a man sent by God named John, and then through repetition and contrast shows that John was not the light, but a witness about the light. And we know this witness is John the Baptist because of the rest of chapter 1 in this gospel.

When it uses the term witness here it is using courtroom language. Think of a trial in a court room, and the point when a witness takes the stand to give a testimony of something, to point out the truth. John was a witness in this way. Twice, we see his testimony is about the light, with the purpose at the end of verse 7, so “that all might believe through him.” The purpose was that everyone would believe what he was saying about the light. Now, notice how verse 9 draws in our attention. Look there with me. “9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.” In verse 8, we’re shown that John the Baptist is not the Light that shines in the darkness, he was just the one testifying about the light. Verse 9, then, points to the true light, and says it was coming to give light. John the Baptist’s testimony was about the “true light,” that “was coming into the world.” And the true light, “gives light to everyone.” This means the true light provides light for all to see, not that it supplies the light to everyone. This will be clear next week, when we look at what the light of true life is.

Conclusion:

Our purpose, for today, is to see the surprise that the Eternal Word, who existed with God, and was God, came into the world. The Word that is the Light of True Life, which shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it, came into the world. And who is the Word? To end, I want to peak a head a little in our passage to see that

JESUS CHRIST IS THE ETERNAL WORD

John 1:14-17 shows this to us. We will unpack this more next week, but what we need to see today is the amazing truth at the beginning of verse 14, and how it is clear that it applies to Jesus Christ. Start in verse 14. 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Think about what this is saying. The Eternal Word became flesh, meaning He became human. The Word who was with God in the beginning, and was God, became like us. The Word that created all things dwelt among us. He lived, breathed, and walked with the very ones he created. Now, pay attention to how it is clear that this is Jesus Christ from verses 14-17. In verse 14, he says the glory of the Word was “full of grace and truth.” Verse 15 says John, the one sent to bear witness about the light in verses 6-8, “bore witness about Him.” Then, verse 16 repeats the ideas of fullness and grace, and verse 17 shows that “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” The witness of John the Baptist and repeating ideas of grace and truth, make it clear that Jesus is the Eternal Word. This means that Jesus Christ is the True Light of True Life. Jesus shines in the darkness. And Jesus gives the light we need for true life. Next week, we will consider the surprising truth about the light and life He gives. For today, consider the impact of the promise of John 1:5 for your own life. We live in a world full of darkness. The darkness is sin and its effects on our world that was created to display the glory of God. And this darkness has entered every part of life. As the worship team is coming up to direct our hearts in worship, I want to ask you, what is the darkness you are facing? Is it sins you continue to battle like pride, anger, lust, greed, or jealousy? Cling to this promise, “The light shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” Is the darkness you are facing coming from the darkness around us? Are you facing things like bullying, gossip, or mean speech? Are you concerned about the sin you see around you? Cling to this promise, “The light shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” Are you facing effects of the darkness in your life? Things like broken friendships & relationships, death and loss of loved ones, disease, and sickness. Cling to this promise, “The light shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” Church, this is how we fight the fight of faith. We take a promise like verse 5 and we carry it with us, clinging to it, and praying through it. Then God uses that promise to strengthen our faith. Let’s cling to this promise, “The light shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”

Would you stand as I pray this over us?