

The Divine Light of Life

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[0 : 00] We'll do sit, and if you'd open your Bibles with me to page 886, the beginning of John's Gospel, we're going to read together the first 18 verses of John chapter 1, called the Prologue of John's Gospel.

We're looking especially today at the first few verses, but we'll be covering this passage over the next few weeks. I'm sure you'll know the words well. Well, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

[1 : 14] The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

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.

John bore witness about him, and cried out, This is he of whom I said, he who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me. And from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.

For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

[2 : 36] Well, keep your Bibles open, and let's just bow our heads in prayer as we come to God's Word. Heavenly Father, as we read these sublime and majestic words, your Word to us for all ages, that your Word to us for this very day, and for our own hearts.

We pray that you would open our eyes, that the light may shine, that we may see wonderful things out of your Word, and so come to know you, our God and our Saviour, in whom we rejoice.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, over these three Wednesdays running up to Christmas, we're going to look at John's account of the birth of Jesus.

Now, immediately you might fire back a question and say, hang on a second, there doesn't seem to be an account of the birth of the nativity of Jesus in John's Gospel. And of course, in one sense, that's true. Unlike Matthew and Luke, there's no story about Bethlehem and shepherds and angels and so on.

But what John does give us, in his very sublime way, is an account of the significance of what we call the incarnation, the enfleshment of the Son of God.

[3 : 58] And that's just what we've read in these wonderful words. John, in fact, goes way back beyond the beginning at Bethlehem, beyond even the beginning of the world, doesn't he?

He takes us back into the very mists of eternity before time itself. In the beginning, he says, is where this story must begin. Must begin in the mystery of the triune God himself, before all worlds, in the one who is the source of all life and light, everything that there is.

And it's the story, John tells us, of how eternity, first of all, created time and space, and then moved into time and space, in the person of God the Son, for our sake.

It's a story, according to John, of light shining brightly into the darkness. First of all, there's the very creation of light and life, and the world as we know it.

Verse 3 says, He created all things. And then, there's a breaking in of God's ultimate light, to rescue, to redeem the darkness of human life, as we've made it.

[5 : 14] See, verse 11, He was coming into the world. Now, just to read this prologue of John's Gospel, we sense something of the profundity of his words, the majesty of his words.

And yet, at the same time, of course, John's Gospel is beloved of us, because, in many ways, it's also so simple, isn't it? It's no accident that, so often it's John's Gospel, that we turn to in times of crisis, when we're seeking comfort.

You all know so many of the words so well. I am the resurrection and the life, says Jesus in John 11. Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

John 14. You've heard those words so often. Somebody said of John's Gospel, it's rather like a pool, in which a child can paddle, or an elephant can swim.

That's something about the profound mystery, and depth of John's Gospel, that we see in this prologue, and yet, the wonderful simplicity, that makes it so dear to us. And these words in John chapter 1, are very profound, and yet, at the same time, they are very simple, as is John's purpose in writing to us.

[6 : 28] Let's just get that very, very clear in our minds, just as we begin, shall we? Just turn over a few pages to the very end of John's Gospel, page 906, the end of John chapter 20.

Do you see there's a paragraph there, headed the purpose of this book? It's always good when an author tells us what his purpose is, don't you think? We get to the end here, and John leaves us in no doubt. Let's just read this.

Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, 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.

That's important, isn't it? You see, John's telling us he's not a historian, although he does relate to us history. He's not just an academic. No, John's an evangelist, and he's writing with a purpose. His purpose is that you may have life in Jesus' name. How do you find that life? And by the way, in John, life always means eternal life.

[7 : 37] Well, says John, through belief. That's the only way to life. A belief in what? In clear, verifiable evidence. These things are written down, he says, so that you may believe their sayings and signs of Jesus of Nazareth.

They were seen by many witnesses, he says. Evidence testified to by many, many honest people from verifiable sources. Let's just be very, very clear about that.

You see, when the Bible speaks about faith, it's never, ever speaking about abandoning our faculties, about believing in something just unknown and unknowable. Of course not. No, rather, it's talking about a serious engagement with the truth, with evidence, based on the answers to the very deep questions of life.

The Bible is claiming to give us answers, satisfying answers, true answers, witnessed to by John and by many others who wrote their Gospels so that you and I could read reliable accounts of what they saw, what they heard, what they touched with their own eyes, their own hands, their own ears. Now, virtually everything that you and I know about life comes just that way, doesn't it? Either we see things with our own eyes and hear them with our own ears, or we believe things that other people tell us that they've seen and heard.

[9 : 04] That's how we know what's going on in other parts of the world. We watch our television reports, we read the newspapers, we listen on the internet. It's just the same process, isn't it?

We shouldn't be surprised or suspicious of God's method. It's just the way that information is passed on, always. I guess if God was revealing himself today, we might have ended up with John's blog instead of John's gospel.

It seems to be the end thing today, but of course then it was parchments and scrolls, and so John and the others wrote their gospels. We didn't get a video or a DVD, but it's the same thing. It's passing on of truth, witness to.

Well, that's why John wrote that we might believe the evidence and find life. But how did he write to us? Well, if you've read some of the other gospels, you'll know that John's gospel is a little bit different.

He tends to be rather more thematic. He tends to have emphases that run through his gospel. I think it's probably because John was an aged, elderly man when he wrote his gospel, and he was putting together really a praetere, a summary, a digest of his life's work, his life's preaching about Jesus.

[10:18] Put it all together into his magnum opus and said, this is the distilled essence of the preaching of John the evangelist. And that's why it takes the form that we do. And what he does right at the very beginning in these first 18 verses is rather like what an overture does at the beginning of an opera or the introduction to a symphony and a piece of music.

All the themes, all the key things that John is going to talk about are here in these few verses. And all the way through his gospel, he'll open them up. He'll give variations and changes and so on, rather just like a piece of music.

And those three things that we noticed in his purpose statement at the end of the gospel, evidence, faith, and life, these three things are very, very evident in these verses, aren't they?

It's full of life. Look at verse 4. He is the life of men. It's full of belief and unbelief, isn't it? Verse 7. Came as a witness that they might believe.

Verse 12. People believed in him. Although many didn't. And it's full of evidence, isn't it? Testimony, witness to the revelation of God on which all of our belief is founded.

[11:32] Look at verse 14. The Word became flesh and we have seen his glory. First-hand evidence. And we're going to see how John deals with all these themes in this passage, especially using one of his favourite themes through the gospel, the theme of light.

And this passage and the prologue and the whole gospel is full of John talking about light. And Jesus, John says in these verses, is the divine light of life.

He is the source of all eternal life that there is. He tells us too that Jesus is the dividing light of judgment. He forces people to believe or to remain in unbelief.

And thirdly, he tells us that he's the definitive light of revelation. He is the last and final and full evidence of the unseen God that no one has seen.

Everything, you see, everything here points to the fact that the person of Jesus Christ is the answer to all of life's questions, all of life's mysteries, all of life's enigmas.

[12:47] It's very, very important to grasp that. Everything I've written, says John, is so that you might believe that the Christ, the Son of God himself, God made known, is Jesus of Nazareth.

This man who walked the earth in real history. Nobody else. Nowhere else. He's not saying to us, well, let me tell you about Jesus of Nazareth.

This historical figure. Let me show you why he's just as special as some of the other great figures of the past. Let me tell you why he's just as good as Buddha or Krishna or Mahatma Gandhi or somebody else.

No, that's not what he's saying at all. John is starting in a very different place. He is saying, and it's a very, very bold claim, he's saying, I have got the answers to every single one of the great questions of life and the universe and everything else.

I have the unique revelation of Almighty God to pass on to you. And I'm going to show you that it's found only in the person of Jesus Christ.

[14:01] He is the answer to every question in the world. Every question about nature, every question about humanity. And into this world of darkness and confusion that we live in, Jesus Christ and he alone is the light.

He answers all the questions and he himself is the answer to all the questions. Not that Jesus gives us some light, just like Muhammad or Buddha or Confucius or anybody else.

Very important to understand that's not what John's saying. John is not like, what do you call him, Fergal Kean, you know, who does these programs on the television. There was one last year, I think, wasn't there?

A quest for the real Jesus. All these different things and different opinions of who Jesus might be. Now John is absolutely clear it's the other way around. It's not that we go seeking awareness. It's not that we are on a search for the truth about God through science or philosophy or anything else like that, man-made religion. It's not as if we're going to look for God in outer space as though somehow if we could get outside the galaxy we'd find him there.

[15:12] That's just preposterous. It seems ridiculous now, doesn't it, that Yuri Gagarin, do you remember the Russian cosmonaut went into space and came down triumphantly saying I've been

around the earth and God wasn't there.

It's just preposterous. If God was found floating around the space shuttle he wouldn't be God at all, would he? How can temporal, earthly people seek out something that's eternal and infinite and heavenly?

Well, of course we can't. That's why John says it has to be the other way around. It's not that we can go searching for the eternal in our world. It's that he must come out of eternity beyond time into our world.

That's the only way we can have any hope at all to see any light about the eternal God. And that, says John, is what the incarnation is all about. It's verse 5, it's light shining in the darkness.

Verse 14, it's the word, the eternal word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. Verse 18, it's the invisible God making himself known to us in our world.

[16:24] And if we are finite creatures, if we're made from dust, if we're going to return to dust, if we're going to know anything about the God who made this universe, then he must proclaim himself to us.

And that's what the incarnation is about, says John. The light of God's eternal glory shining into our finite world, into our transient world, into our dark world.

And Jesus Christ is the absolute eternal reality of God proclaimed into the world and definitively proclaimed forever. There is no more light after Jesus Christ.

He is the light of God. And the first five verses here of John's Gospel proclaim to us that Jesus is the divine light of life itself.

Do you see? He's saying that Jesus is the answer to the why questions and to the how questions of our lives. First of all, you see, Jesus answers the why question.

[17:26] Look at verses 1 to 3. John tells us very plainly there that everything in this world is because of Jesus Christ. Verse 1, he is the beginning of everything. Verse 3, he's the maker of everything.

I'm at the moment reading Richard Dawkins' book, *The Delusional God*. Some of you may have seen it, some of you may be reading it. And in that book, he admits that he has no answer to the why question.

But he answers it by saying, well, it's a non-question, we just shouldn't ask it, we don't need it. Well, try asking that to the policeman next time you get stopped for speeding on the motorway. Excuse me, sir, what speed were you doing?

Oh, that's a non-question. We don't need that question, it doesn't need to be answered. The problem is, Mr. Professor Dawkins, that people do ask the why question. They ask it all the time. Why is life like it is?

Why do bad things happen in the world? Why is there a world at all? And hundreds of other questions, why? From the beginning of time, human beings are being asking the question, why?

[18:28] That's what makes us different from the animals, doesn't it? From dogs and from horses and from amoeba. They don't ask why. Well, here's the answer to the why question. He is the beginning.

And that word beginning can mean the temporal beginning, the beginning in time, or the root cause. And John is saying that the beginning, the root cause of everything is the word. It might seem a strange phrase that, the word, until we realise what it means in the Bible.

The word is God's agent of creation. By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made, Psalm 36, 33, verse 6.

And the word in the Bible is the personification, it's the way of speaking in a personal way of God's wisdom. Proverbs 8, 22, talks about the word being appointed from eternity before the world began. And in the Bible the word is God's deliverer and his saviour, Psalm 107, verse 20. He sent forth his word and healed them, he rescued them from the grave.

[19:40] And see what John is saying is that the beginning, the source of all things, of all creation, of all wisdom, of all salvation, is the word. The one who became flesh, the one who lived among us in the person of Jesus Christ.

And this word, he says, verse 1, who became flesh in Jesus Christ is himself God. He was with God and he was God.

Now, at a stroke, that just banishes all the perversions, all the heresies, of the various sects and cults that have grown up around the Christian church, that deny the divinity of Jesus.

If you ever talk to a Jehovah's witness and they try to show you this in their Bible, you'll find that they've got their own translation of the Bible that says the word was our God. In lots of other places, they've retranslated it without a shred of evidence to base it on because they can't stomach the fact that Jesus truly is God.

But John says the word is God. It's an absolutely unique claim, isn't it? It brings us into a head-on clash with our pluralistic culture today, doesn't it?

[20 : 52] Because we're supposed to be very tolerant, but we will tolerate everything except the claim for the uniqueness of the divinity of Jesus Christ as the only revelation of the true God.

Just look at all the fuss over that lady working for British Airways, not being allowed to wear a cross. Did you know that Edinburgh University at the moment has banned the Christian Union from running a course on the campus about the Bible's plain teaching about sex because of complaints that it might be offensive to others?

Nobody else has been banned and I can tell you some of the things that are taught in university classrooms would make your hair stand on end, but that's banned. And for that reason very often in the church we go on the back foot, we're desperate to fit in, we don't want to ruffle feathers.

But John will not play this down. Jesus is the unique God, the only God. And he is the unique answer to all things. That's what John's claim is.

He's the answer to the why question. Why is there anything at all? The answer is he is the beginning. He is the source of everything. He's the creator of everything. Colossians 1 verse 16 says the same thing.

[22 : 07] All things were created through him and for him. By the way, that's another verse that the Jehovah's Witness Bible has to change. Now if we take John's words seriously, it's a staggering thing, isn't it?

He's saying that Jesus Christ is the reason for everything. He is God eternal. He's the source of all things. He's the creator of all things. And therefore it follows, secondly, doesn't it, that everything in our human world and our experience of life is also from Jesus.

Verse 4, in him was life and that life was the light of men. That's the answer to the how question. How has mankind achieved so much, learned so much, gained so much, experienced so much of life?

The answer is all the light that we have comes from the eternal Son of God, whether we see it or not. It's all from him. The psalmist says with you is the fountain of life.

In your light we see light. God. But so many don't see that. The irony you see about reading a man like Richard Dawkins, he's a brilliant man, he's so clever, he's gifted, he's intelligent.

[23 : 16] But all of that comes from God. All of his light comes from God. All the artistry, all the skill that he uses to write a book about a delusional God, and yet he's deluding himself because all the light that he has comes from Jesus Christ who he doesn't believe in.

And that's so many in our world, isn't it? They live in the light and the life that God has created through Jesus Christ. And yet they reject it.

All the light that we have, all our human intelligence, our science, our sociology, our psychology, everything comes from Jesus Christ. It's his light. Yet so many refuse to see it.

But in him was life, and that light is the light of men. And therefore, says verse 5, nothing in this world can ever displace Jesus Christ as the source and as the center of everything that matters. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. That word overcome is deliberately ambiguous.

[24 : 27] Some translations translate it as understood. misunderstood. And it's true, many have misunderstood the coming of the Lord Jesus and rejected him. We'll come to that next time.

But darkness has never, ever overcome the light of Jesus Christ. It's not as though it's some equal battle between the forces of dark and light like Star Wars. No, no, no.

The light has shined, says John, and the light banishes the darkness. The darkness cannot overcome him because he is the source of everything. Make no mistake, friends, that the light of Jesus Christ will never, ever be extinguished in this world or in the world to come because he's the beginning and he's the end.

He's the goal of everything that there is. That's why we're here today. That's why there's a gospel. That's why John the Baptist came, as verse 6 says, to bear witness to the light who is coming into the world so that people might believe.

And that's the point of Christmas. It's the light shining in the darkness. It's the light of life eternal. And it's all about finding that life in the light of Jesus Christ.

[25 : 40] So listen, what John is saying is this. Everything in this world is because of Jesus Christ and for Jesus Christ. All things were made through him.

Without him was not anything made that was made. Jesus Christ is the reason why. And all light and understanding of life that you have comes from him.

He alone can even enable you to think. Without him you can't even ask the questions how or why. In him was life and that life was the light of men.

And nothing in the world will ever, ever displace Jesus Christ as the center of all things. his light shines. It cannot be overcome. So John says, you better listen to him.

You better learn from him. He alone can give us the answers to all the questions that really matter.

Why there is life at all? How we find life that truly is eternal? Jesus says in John 10, I came that they might have life and have it abundantly.

[26 : 49] listen to Jesus Christ. He alone is the divine light of life. I am the light of the world, says Jesus.

Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. Light shining in the darkness that you might have life that is eternal.

that is the message of Christmas. Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you and we rejoice that you have not left us in darkness but that you have shined your glorious light upon us in the face of Jesus Christ, your Son.

may we open our eyes and receive and rejoice in that light now and forever, we pray for Jesus' sake.

Amen.