

The Definitive Light of Revelation

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[0 : 00] Well, now, we're going to read the scriptures together. We've been, for the last three weeks, reading in John's Gospel, chapter 1, the famous prologue, and you'll see it's printed there on your sheet for you.

And I'm going to read the whole of the reading that we have there before us. But we're concentrating, especially today, in our third study on these verses, on verses 14 to 18. So, you might like to pay special attention to those. But I'll read from the beginning. 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, and 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, well, understood it or overcome it.

There was a man sent from God. His name was John.

[0 : 59] 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. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

And 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.

[2 : 07] For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only God, or the only Son, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Well, do have a seat, and keep your service sheets open there, so you can see the words that we read from John's Gospel, chapter 1. We've been looking at this for the last two or three weeks, if you've been with us here at lunchtimes.

And we've seen that this famous beginning of John's Gospel is really like, well, it's like the opening buzz of a piece of music, a symphony. And John introduces all the main themes in these few verses that he's going to expand and bring back again and again, all the way through the story of the Gospel of Jesus that he tells.

And all of his Gospel, if you like, are many variations on one of his great themes, the theme of light. You'll have noticed that word as we read it several times in the reading there.

The first few verses of this passage here tell us that Jesus himself is the divine light of life. Verse 4 there, do you see?

[3 : 24] In him was life, and that life was the light of men. He is the source of all life. All creation, says John, is because of him and for him.

Look at verse 3. Without him, nothing was made that has been made. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was with God in the very beginning.

Look at verse 1. He was God. The Word was God. And not only that, although that's pretty breathtaking in itself, isn't it?

Not only that, verse 9 tells us that he appeared in history to shed his light on all people everywhere. And yet, when we were looking at this last week, we saw that his light is a divisive light.

The darkness, says verse 5, has not, well, one translation reads, has not understood it. That's why verse 10 tells us that many people fled Jesus' light.

[4 : 27] They refused him. They rejected him. Even when he came to his own, they would rather stay in darkness than face the light of Jesus. But at the same time, neither could the light ever overcome.

Ever be overcome. Verse 12. Look at verse 12. Isn't it a wonderful verse? Many did receive him, says John, and in doing so, they received the right to become part of God's very own family. Children, not naturally born, says John in verse 13, but supernaturally born, born of God. And through Jesus and acceptance of him is the only way to that intimacy of knowing God like that. Jesus is the unique source of life. He's the unique light. He said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me. Jesus, therefore, must be the great divider of men and women.

He is the person who divides people into light and into darkness, into life and death, into heaven and hell, ultimately. What divides people into these things isn't morality, not good intentions or bad behaviour, not generosity, not religion.

[5 : 58] No, it's whether you have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, who is the life. It's whether you've, as John puts it, received him, whether you've come to know him, whether you've been born of God.

And you see, the final section, look at verses 14 to 18. We're going to concentrate on these. The final section shows us why that must be so. It is because, John tells us, not only is Jesus Christ himself the divine light of life, not only is he the dividing light of judgment, he is so because he is also alone the definitive light of the revelation of God.

He is God made known. There is no other way. Jesus is God made knowable to human beings on earth, in all his glory, in all his majesty.

He's the revelation of the glory and the grace of God in all its fullness for all time. And in Jesus alone, therefore, is the answer to the who and the when and the where questions.

In whom and when and where do we find, ultimately, the truth about God for all eternity? Well, you see, these verses, 14 to 18, tell us that the revelation of God climaxes uniquely in a glorious person in history.

[7 : 21] And also, as we'll see, that it climaxes in a glorious place in human history. First of all, I want to think about this glorious person.

Look at verse 14. The word became flesh and dwelled among us. The one who created the whole world became flesh.

That's where we get our word incarnation. It's the Latin word for enfleshment. And that's what Christmas is all about. It's the celebration of the incarnation of the word of God himself coming down from heaven to become man in Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 18. It's very, very clear, isn't it? There's nothing half-baked about this. It's the eternal, unseen God moving from eternity into history so that he can make himself known.

It's the creator of the entire universe coming into the world that he's made so that we can know him not just by his reputation, by seeing what he's made and understanding things about him from the world that we see, but actually to know him personally, ultimately.

[8 : 32] It's almost impossible for us to imagine that, isn't it? Because it really requires us to think outside the dimensions of our own existence. It's rather like the author of a play coming onto the stage to fully explain everything that he was saying in that play that he'd written.

And that's what some of the Christmas carols at their finest are grappling with. Let earth and heaven conspire. Angels and men agree. To praise in songs divine the incarnate deity.

Our God contracted to a span incomprehensibly made man. We can't adequately understand it, of course, but that is the message of Christmas.

That God himself has invaded the world that he made and he did it so as to reveal himself to us so that we could know him forever in the person of his son, Jesus Christ.

Now, we don't have to talk like this to realise that for such a thing to happen, for the unseen God to make himself known, well, it must be a revelation from above, mustn't it?

[9 : 42] From heaven to earth. We could never find that out by inquiring from earth to heaven. That's the hopeless quest of all religion, human religion, all philosophy.

It begins with man and it says, well, we'll think about ourselves and we'll look up and we'll find our creator. But you see, that's as foolish as, well, I don't know, James Bond, say, going to Q and saying, now look, Q, there must be an author out there who's made us all up and invented this film that we're in.

Can you make me a gadget to get us in rocket-propelled boosters outside this film so we can go and find our creator? You see, that's preposterous, isn't it?

But you see, that's what people are saying, like I was telling you, I'm reading Richard Dawkins' book on the delusional God. That's what people like Richard Dawkins are saying when they're saying we can't find any evidence for God in our world.

Well, to think of my analogy, how could James Bond expect to find anything of Ian Fleming when he's living in a world that Ian Fleming created? He's his creator.

[10:47] He lives in a world totally beyond the universe that James Bond knows and understands. But, says John, though no one has ever seen God, how could they?

He lives in a universe outside. He has made himself known. And he's done it in his one and only Son, in a glorious person in history, in Jesus Christ.

He's come, says verse 18, from the Father's very side and come down into our world and revealed himself to us. And without that revelation, of course, the skeptics like Richard Dawkins and other people, well, they would be right, of course, wouldn't they?

Without revelation of God, by God, to human beings, well, all human religion is futile. Of course it is. It's folly. It's ignorant.

It doesn't matter how learned it is. That's what Paul said, by the way, to the very clever professors in Athens. Do you remember that in Acts chapter 17? They were very sophisticated people, very intellectual people, always talking about learning and philosophy.

[11:56] And they had this altar to what they called the unknown God. And Paul says, yes, you worship ignorantly. Unknown, unknowingly.

By the way, that's just the same word as agnostic. Did you know that? The Greek word for ignorant is agnostic. You don't get many people going around saying, I'm happy to be called an ignoramus. But people do say, I'm happy to be called agnostic.

Well, that's what they're saying. I'm an ignoramus. But you see, this is not ignorant agnosticism that we're reading about here in John's Gospel.

This is divine revelation. It's God opening up the picture and coming from another world and saying, you may know me. It's divine revelation.

It's unlike any other. It's God making himself known in Jesus Christ, a person in history, in the flesh. And he tells us that it's the climax of God's revelation in two ways.

[12:53] Do you see? Look at verse 14. It's the climax of God's glory made known. We have seen his glory. He dwelt among us, John says.

Now that word there, literally, is the word tabernacle. He tabernacled among us. He pitched his tent among us. Now John's readers would know exactly what he's talking about. He's referring to the tabernacle, which was the portable temple that the Israelites had in the wilderness.

Later on it became the temple, but that was the dwelling place of God's glory on earth. And John is saying to us that even that spectacular glory that used to sit over the tabernacle as a pillar of cloud, the Shekinah glory it was called, even that has been vastly superseded in the person of Jesus Christ in history because that's where the fullness of God's glory is made known.

It's the fullness of God's glory. Then in verse 16, you see, he tells us, not only is it the climax of God's glory, but it's the climax of his grace made known in the world.

Do you see? From his fullness, we have received grace upon grace. Now what does that mean?

Well, he goes on in verse 17 to speak about the grace that came through Moses in the law on Mount Sinai.

[14:15] And that was magnificent. That was glorious. Do you remember the mountain shaking and God coming down and giving his word to Moses for all his people, calling them to be his people? And what John is saying, all of that magnificent splendor was superseded by the grace that came at the first Christmas in the person of Jesus Christ, the flesh of Jesus.

On Mount Sinai, Moses had received the most magnificent revelation of God. Remember, it was so wonderful, he couldn't even look at it because he would be blinded. And God hid him in a crack in the rock and he walked past proclaiming, listen, the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious

God, abounding in grace, in covenant love, and in truth, in faithfulness.

You see, that was the great salvation of grace and truth revealed to Moses, but you would think nothing could better that. But John says, well, this does.

This is the crowning glory of all the grace that Moses spoke of, of all that the prophets spoke of, of all that the singers of old spoke of. This is the fulfillment of everything.

It's the definitive light of the revelation of God. There's no more to see of the glory and the grace of God than is revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ, a glorious person in history.

[15 : 46] And it's the climax. And that's the message of Christmas. That's what we sang about in that wonderful carol, Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see. Hail, incarnate deity, God in the flesh.

It's nothing less than God's very last word to human beings about himself. He's revealed in a real and glorious person in our human history.

And that supersedes every other vestige of revelation there is anywhere about the truth of God. If you want to know God and his glory and his grace, well, you see him in Jesus Christ.

Well, there's more to it just than that, but we'll come back to it after we've sung another carol. It's one of the loveliest ones and it speaks of this revelation of God coming down still the night, holy the night, Son of God, oh how bright love is smiling from thy face.

Strikes for us now the hour of grace and of glory too. We'll stand to sing. Do sit. Well, John tells us that the hour of grace struck for us in a person in history, Jesus Christ.

[17 : 05] But he also tells us that the definitive light of God's revelation, his glory and grace came at a real place in our human history.

Look at verse 14 again. We have seen his glory, says John. Now that word seen, means to look at, to observe, to actually see it with your very own eyes.

John uses it again in the very beginning of his first letter. And he says, what we're speaking about is what we heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched.

It's very definite. There's nothing vague. It's absolutely specific. They saw his glory. But where and when did John see the glory of God in the flesh?

Well, for John, you see, it wasn't in the cradle at Bethlehem. He doesn't record that for us, does he? It's Luke and Matthew that give us that story. Nor for John was it even on the mountain of transfiguration.

[18 : 16] Do you remember when Jesus went up and in the middle of the night he was glorified with the glory he had with his Father before all worlds. And he shone like the sun. John doesn't even record that. Although he was there, the other Gospels tell us that.

Where is he who is born King of the Jews? Do you remember that was the question that the Magi, the wise men, asked when they came looking for Jesus in Matthew's Gospel?

But you see, for John, there's only one answer to that question. Where is the glory of the King to be seen? Where's the climax?

Where's the pinnacle of God's glory made known on earth? Well, John tells us very clearly. It's just in one place. Remember Jesus' words later on in John chapter 12?

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified, he said. Now is, now is the Son of Man glorified and God glorified in him.

[19 : 19] What was he talking about? Well, Judas Iscariot had just come to betray him, hadn't he? Where is he who is the King? Well, for John, that only comes in one place.

It comes on the cross. Do you remember the first time in John's Gospel we see that word King? Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, nailed on the top of his cross.

Where in history was the glory, the pinnacle of the glory of the unseen God, where was it seen with real human eyes? Well, in the person of God incarnate.

Yes, he was made flesh. But not just that. More than that, in the place where the word was made sin for the world of lost human beings.

Not just in Jesus incarnate, but in Jesus immolate on the cross. That's where the ultimate revelation of the God of glory who made this world was seen with the eyes of human beings.

[20 : 34] by real people in real history. You see, the cradle of Jesus and the cross of Jesus can never ever be separated in the Bible.

Only together do they actually reveal to us the true glory and grace of God. And that's why so many of the carols take us in that direction. Following the Saviour whose cross right from the very beginning is overshadowing his cradle where he was born.

Like Mary, let us ponder in our minds God's wondrous love in saving lost mankind. Trace we the babe who has redeemed our loss from his poor manger to his bitter cross.

Or here's another one. There was no room at Bethlehem for him who left his throne to seek the loss at countless cost and make our Greece his own. But there was room at Calvary upon a cross of shame for him to die uplifted high and bear the sinner's blame.

See, for John that's the height or if you like the depth of the glory of God. And he saw it with his own eyes. And that's the message that he proclaims to you.

[21 : 49] This is the one. That's what John the Baptist said. This is the definitive light of the revelation of the glory of God to our world. Jesus Christ born and crucified for sins.

Of course, that's what explains why it's a divisive message. That's what explains why it's a glory that's rejected by so many people because it's so scandalous. No Jew could easily count into that kind of scandal.

God in the flesh and God on a cross. God in the flesh never. Never. Muslim people today would find that very, very difficult to tolerate.

It's a blasphemy to even think in such terms. The secularists of our own culture find that just laughable and foolish and scorned. But John says, I saw it.

I saw it with my own eyes. And it changed the world for me. It changed my life forever. See, at one time, John was just like you and me. He thought of glory in the same way as we do.

[22 : 57] Glory for us. Achievement. Strength. Remember that story about him and his brother fighting over who was going to get to sit on Jesus' right hand or left hand in the kingdom? But then you see, a time came when John saw with his own eyes the true glory of the living God in Jesus Christ lifted up on the cross, crucified to save sinful human beings.

And that's when God opened his eyes. That's when God changed his heart. And those two things, you see, they always go together, don't they? Because when you see God's true glory in Christ, when you see his death on the cross for you and for your sins, then your heart's always changed. It can't remain unchanged when you see that. If it's not changed, then you've now yet seen the true glory of our God and Maker. But friends, that's what John saw with his own eyes.

That's what he wrote down as a reliable witness that you might believe and having believed, find life in his name, in the name of Jesus Christ.

And that's the Christmas message. It's God's final word to men. It's the light of the glory of his being made known to us in his Son, Jesus Christ.

[24 : 19] Christ. And you know, Christmas, Christmas is a great time, a great time to open your eyes to the glory of Jesus.

It's always a great time to do that, but Christmas is an especially great time. And that's my prayer for you. That's our prayer here for all of you today. That God would open your eyes and keep opening them all through your life to see the truth of his glory made known ultimately in the person of Jesus Christ, his Son, who came into the world and in the place of the cross of Calvary where having come into the world, he bore our sins that we might have the right to be called children of God.

And friends, when God opens your eyes to that, your heart is changed and your life is changed and your world is changed and nothing will ever ever be the same again. Listen to these words.

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.

No one has ever seen God, the only God who is at the Father's side. He has made him known. Open your eyes to that this Christmas amidst all the celebrations and it will be a Christmas like none other.

[25 : 53] I do hope you'll stay and enjoy mince pies with us but we want to wish you a very, very happy Christmas and we trust that it will be a Christmas filled with the light of the glory of God in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now a prayer as we close. We bless you, Heavenly Father, for sending us your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. We bless you for shining in his face to us the light of your glorious eternal gospel and the saving truth in which we stand.

And we bless you that on the cross at Calvary he bore our sins away so that now from the throne on high he may indeed send us his Holy Spirit to guard and keep our hearts throughout this life and into eternity as sons and daughters as heirs of yours.

We praise you for the message of Christmas. We ask that it may thrill our hearts day by day and that all our praise and all our joy may be in you.

For we ask it in Jesus Christ our Saviour's name. Amen. Well do stay and enjoy the mince pies.

There's books here on the table and CDs as well.

[27 : 18] If you've got last minute Christmas presents you want to make there will be some very good things there to share the message of Christmas with others. But we rejoice in having you here with us and have a very happy Christmas.

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