

The Definitive Light of Revelation: Jesus Christ reveals unique light on the truth about God's heart

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[0 : 00] We're going to read from John's Gospel, Chapter 1, and you all have a sheet printed on your chairs, I hope, and we've been looking at this wonderful passage these last few days in our Christmas services, and I'm going to read it one last time this morning and think a little more about its words.

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 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. 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.

[1 : 22] 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 was 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. Amen. No one has ever seen God. The only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Amen. Well, we'll sing again another marvelous Christmas hymn. Let earth and heaven combine, angels and men agree to praise in songs divine, the incarnate deity.

[2 : 51] Do have a seat. In John's gospel, he is telling us that Jesus Christ is the light that declares the glory of God.

We've been looking these last few days in our services at the opening bars of John's gospel. It's really like a symphony. And John introduces all the marvelous themes and so on in this prologue. And throughout the rest of his book, really, he is building on them, orchestrating them, giving many variations and harmonies to the music of his wonderful message. Variations, if you like, all on the great theme that runs through the gospel, the theme of light.

So, in the first few verses, we see that Jesus himself is the defining light of life. Verse 4, in him was life.

And that life was the light of men. John's saying that he is the source of all life. All creation, he says, is because of him and from him and for him.

[4 : 00] Without him, verse 3, nothing was made that has been made. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was with God and who, verse 1 says, who was God, he is the eternal reality before all things.

And not only that, although that is quite a breathtaking statement, not only that, verse 9 tells us he appeared in history to shed his light on all people everywhere.

We were thinking about that last night in our Christmas Eve service, that that light is a divisive light. So, verse 10 tells us that many fled his light.

They did not want to know him. They refused him and they rejected him. They would rather remain in the dark than accept the light of God in Jesus Christ.

But at the same time, the darkness cannot overcome the light, says John. And verse 12 tells us that many did receive him. And in doing so, they received the right to belong to the family of God.

[5 : 13] Children, verse 13, born not naturally, but supernaturally. Born of God. And through Jesus, through acceptance of him, is the only way to that intimacy with God.

He is the unique source, says John, of all life, both in this world and eternally. Jesus himself said that repeatedly. I am the way and the truth and the life.

There is no other way. And that is why Jesus is the great divider of men. What divides people into light and darkness, into life and death, into heaven and hell, ultimately, is not morality, not good intentions, not generosity, not even religion.

But rather, what divides people is that intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Whether you have received him, come to know him, or whether you have not.

And the final section of John's prologue in these last verses, 14 to 18, they show us really why that must be the case. It's because, John tells us, not only is Jesus Christ himself the defining light of all life, not only is he the dividing light of judgment, he is so because he and he alone is the definitive light of revelation of God.

[6 : 55] He is God made known and God made knowable in all his glory and his majesty. He is the revelation of the glory and the grace of God in all its fullness.

That is the Christian gospel. And that means that in Jesus Christ alone is the answer to the great question, who and when and where.

Questions about how we find the ultimate truth about God and about life and about eternity. And yet, this marvelous revelation began in the birth of a baby, a child in a manger.

Well, let's break and sing that lovely carol now before we think some more. Child in the manger, infant of Mary, outcast and stranger, and yet Lord of all.

Do have a look at these verses again, especially verses 14 to 18 at the end of John's prologue.

Because in these verses, John tells us that the revelation of God for man climaxes in both a glorious person in history and at a glorious place in history.

[8 : 17] I want to think first about the glorious person in history. Look at verse 14. The Word, that is the eternal creator God, the Word became flesh and dwelled among us.

That's where we get our word incarnation. It means enfleshment. That is what Christmas is all about. It's a celebration of the incarnation of the Word.

It's a celebration of God himself becoming man in Jesus Christ. Look at verse 18. It's very clear, isn't it?

There's nothing half-baked about this. He is the eternal unseen God, says John. And this is a story of him moving from eternity into history to make himself known.

He's the creator of the entire universe. And he's coming into this world so that we may know not just about him, not just his reputation through what he's done, but so that we might know him ultimately and personally forever.

[9 : 30] Now, that's almost impossible for us to imagine because it requires us to think, doesn't it, outside the whole dimension of our existence. But it's rather like, I suppose, the author of a play, walking onto the stage at the end of the performance, to stand up and finally explain to all of those in the play and all of those watching the real meaning, the interpretation of all that's been going on.

And that is what some of the finest of these carols that we've been singing at Christmas try to grapple with and express. Let earth and heaven combine, angels and men agree, to praise in songs divine the incarnate deity, our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man.

It is by the very nature of things beyond us. We can't adequately comprehend it. And yet that is the message of Christmas. God himself invading the world that he has made to reveal himself to us forever in Jesus Christ.

Now you only have to think like this to realize that for such a thing to happen, for the unseen God to make himself known, it must be, mustn't it, a revelation that comes from heaven to earth.

It can't possibly be the other way around. It never could be an inquiry from earth that would reach heaven. That is the hopeless quest of reason and philosophy and all man-made religion.

[11 : 13] Man, since the very beginning, has been saying, oh, we will reach up to heaven and find our creator. But just think how foolish that is.

It's like somebody like James Bond saying, oh, well, there must be Q, there must be an author out there somewhere who's created us. So can you build me a gadget that will get me out of this world of 007 to find our creator?

I mean, it's just foolishness, isn't it? It's preposterous. But when you think about it, that is what people like Richard Dawkins and the like are saying. When they say, oh, we, with all our clever science, can't find proof of God.

Well, how could James Bond hope to ever find Ian Fleming? He's his creator. He is in a whole world and universe outside the world and universe that James Bond and all his characters live in.

But John says, though no one has ever seen God, how could we in that way? That God has made himself known.

[12 : 21] And he has done so in his one and only Son, in a glorious person in human history. He has come, says verse 18, from the Father's side, he who himself is God, and he has come into our world and has revealed himself to us.

Now, without that revelation, let me say that skeptics like Richard Dawkins and others would be quite right. Of course they would. Without a real revelation of God by God who is outside us and beyond us, without that, then all human religion is utterly futile.

Of course it is. It's just folly. It's ignorance. However learned it might be. That's just what Paul found, isn't it, when he went to the great city of Athens. They're very sophisticated, very intellectual.

The cradle of civilization in so many ways for the Western world. But Paul says you're worshipping an unknown God. You're worshipping quite literally ignorantly.

In other words, you don't know what you're doing with all your wisdom. That's the word, by the way, agnosticism. It means ignorance. It's not a great thing to say, oh, well, I'm an agnostic and be proud of it.

[13 : 37] You're really saying to everybody, I'm ignorant. I don't know what I'm doing. But this is not ignorant agnosticism, says John. This is divine revelation.

It is truly unlike any, any other. This is God truly making himself known in Jesus Christ, in the flesh, in a glorious person in history.

And John tells us that Jesus Christ is the climax of the revelation of God in two ways. Verse 14, do you see? It is the climax of God's glory made known.

He became flesh, he said, and dwelled among us. Some of you will know that word literally means he pitched his tent among us. He tabernacled among us.

And all John's readers, being Jewish Israelites, would immediately understand what he's alluding to there. He's referring to the tabernacle, the tent where God dwelt among his people and where the glory of God descended upon it when he took up his residence.

[14 : 43] The later word that the Jews used to describe that was the Shekinah glory from the word Shekinah, meaning the tent. It was where God's glory shined to the world.

And the tabernacle and later on the temple in Jerusalem was the throne room of God on earth. It was the most glorious place in the whole universe. But what John says here is that even that glory was far, far superseded in the bodily presence of God in Jesus Christ.

That's the glory that we saw, says John. The Father's only Son. It was the climax of God's glory.

And in verse 2, you see, sorry, in verse 16, secondly, John tells us that the incarnation was also the climax of God's grace being known to this world.

From his fullness we have received. He says grace upon grace or grace for grace or grace in place of grace. What does he mean? Well, he goes on to say in verse 17 that the grace that came to God's people in the law through Moses, although it was magnificent, although it was glorious, even that was trumped by the grace and truth, the greater grace by far that came through Jesus Christ. I just think what a stupendous claim that is again. At Sinai, when God revealed himself to Moses in his absolute glory.

[16 : 30] Moses couldn't even look for fear of dying. He had to hide himself in a cleft in the rock. And God passed by proclaiming the Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious, abounding in grace and covenant love and abounding in truth and faithfulness.

You see, God's great salvation was revealed to Moses from the God of covenant grace and truth in person.

You might think, well, what could better that? Many of the Israelites in the first century couldn't imagine what could better that. But this does better that, says John. Here is grace that crowns that grace. Here is the fulfillment, the definitive light of revelation of all God's glory and grace in the human flesh of Jesus Christ, God the Son. He's saying that all that Moses or the prophets spoke of at last has climaxed, has been fulfilled in God made flesh in Jesus Christ, in a glorious person in history. [17:46] And that is the message of Christmas. Veiled in flesh, the Godhead seen. Hail, the incarnate deity.

That means that Jesus is nothing less than the last word about God for all humankind. He is revealed in a real and glorious person in our own human history that we might know him. There's more even than that here. But before we think of that, let's sing another of these great carols. The one I just quoted from there. Hark, the herald angels sing. And dwell on these words in these verses that speak of the wonder of what John is telling us here. Not just in a glorious person in history. The definitive light of God's revelation was at a real place in our human history. Look again at verse 14.

[18:58] John says, We have seen his glory. He doesn't mean we, you and me. He means him and his contemporaries. That word seen, it's not a metaphorical word.

It's a concrete word. It means literally to look at, to notice, to observe with the eyes. To actually see. John uses the same word again, by the way, in the very first chapter of his letter. First letter, 1 John. And he uses it to emphasize what he says we heard. What we have seen with our own eyes. What we have looked upon and touched with our own hands. There's nothing vague about what he's saying here. It's very specific. It's definite. He says, we saw all this glory. We saw it with our earthly eyes. But what does he mean? Where did he see that glory? And when did he see that glory? Well, interestingly for John, it wasn't in the cradle at Bethlehem.

[20:10] You've noticed, he doesn't begin his gospel with the story of Bethlehem, as Matthew and Luke do. Nor, for John, was it at the Mount of Transfiguration, where Christ's glory shone forth on the mountain for his disciples to see.

He doesn't write about that either, although we know he was there. The other gospels tell us. The question that the magi, the kings, the wise men ask at the beginning of Matthew's gospel is this. Where is he who is born king of the Jews? But for John, the answer to that question comes only at the end of his gospel.

For John, the only answer to that question, where is the glory of this great king to be seen? Where is the pinnacle, the climax of God's kingly glory made known on earth? Where is that? Well, for John, it's in one place alone. John chapter 12, Jesus says, Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

[21:27] Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. When? What does he mean? He's speaking at the moment that Judas Iscariot goes out to betray him.

Only now, says Jesus, will my true glory be seen. Where is he who is born king? Well, for John, that becomes clear only when Jesus is lifted up onto the cross.

And at last, above his head are written the words, Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews. Where in the whole of human history has the greatness of the glory of God been seen with human eyes. In the person, yes, of God incarnate, in the Word made flesh. But not just that. It's more than that. In the place where the Word made flesh was also made sin.

The world of lost human beings. Not just in Jesus Christ incarnate. But in Jesus Christ immolate.

[23:02] Suffering and crucified for our sins. That's where the ultimate revelation of the glory of God to man was seen. With real eyes.

By real people in real history. You see, the cradle of Jesus. And the cross of Jesus just cannot be separated.

They're intimately bound together from the very beginning. Because only together is that revelation of God's true glory complete.

The artist Rembrandt understood that. Some of you will know his painting, The Adoration of the Shepherds. There's another one in the British Museum in London, which is a copy by one of his disciples.

But in both of those paintings you see the light of the infant Jesus shared abroad in the stable with his parents and with the shepherds there. But what you see in the background, formed by the beams of the stable, is the shadow of a cross haunting the background, even of the birth.

[24 : 14] And that's what's brought up in these carols that we've sung also. Carols that speak of the cross overshadowing the cradle from the very beginning.

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

Or another, there was no room in Bethlehem for him who left his throne to seek the lost at countless cost and make our griefs 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.

There is the height and the depth of the glory of God, says John. And we saw it with these our own eyes.

[25 : 19] And that's the message that we proclaim to you, he says. This is he, says John the Baptist in verse 16. This is he, the definitive light of the revelation of God's glory in the world.

It's seen in the glory of his cross that redeems the world. As his own lifeblood was shed for us. That, you see, friends, is why this is a glory that is rejected by so many in our world.

Just because it is such a scandalous glory. No Jew could countenance such scandal. God in the flesh?

God on a cross? Blasphemous. No Muslim today could possibly tolerate that idea of God.

Blasphemy.

No secularist today can possibly tolerate that idea of God. It's just foolishness. It's to be scorned.

But John says, I saw it with these eyes.

[26 : 32] And when I saw that, it changed the whole world for me. At one time, do you remember John?

John himself thought that glory was all about achievement and position and strength. He was just like the rest of us. Do you remember? He wanted, he squabbled with others and wanted to have the seat on high at the right hand of Jesus in the glory.

Do you remember? But then, one day, with his own eyes, he saw the true glory of God in Jesus Christ, lifted high on a cross to save rebel sinners.

And that day, God opened his spiritual eyes, the eyes of his heart, and changed his heart.

And those two things always go together, don't they? Because when you see, at last, God's true glory in Christ and his death on the cross for you, then your heart is always changed.

[27 : 43] Always. If your heart has not been changed by that, it just means you've never yet understood the true glory of God. But friends, what John saw with his eyes, he wrote down so that you and I, who are not there to see with our eyes, but so that you and I can today know for sure and understand everything that he saw and understood.

That this, the glorious message of Jesus Christ, is God's final word to man, in the light of the glory of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Friends, Christmas, Christmas is a great time to open your eyes and see the glory of Jesus Christ.

And that's my prayer for you this Christmas. That God will open your eyes and will keep opening them every day of your life until you see his glory.

Until your heart is changed forever too. The word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory.

[29 : 07] No one has ever seen God. The only God who is at the Father's side. He has made him known.

Let's pray. Gracious God, our Heavenly Father, how we praise you for the light of your glory shed into this world in the person of Jesus Christ and through the wonder of the cross of Jesus Christ.

So, O Lord our God, may our hearts be opened this day and every day to that glory and to that grace that we also might be those who are called children of God born not of the flesh or of blood or of the will of man but born of God.

Amen. We sing our final carol this morning. O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, come and behold him born the King of angels.

families. He is one, we come that way.

[30 : 38] Of the prophets? Be supp. Poder in thanks. aq■l Lindee occurring in touch in the mountains of Sam■