

The Dividing Light of Judgment

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's open our Bible, shall we, at John's Gospel, chapter 1, the chapter we're studying in these few weeks. It's page 886, page 886.

And today we come to the second little section, verses 9 to 13, but we'll read from verse 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God, and 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 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 : 0 6] The true light, which lightens 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.

Well, let's keep our Bibles open there, and bow our heads in prayer, shall we? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come before You in the midst of this busy day, in the midst of this week.

We're so conscious at this time of year of the darkness outside, and today the darkness is damp and close. And yet we read these words of the light of the world, shining in the darkness, unextinguished, undefeated.

And so we pray that as we bow before You now, You would open our eyes to the light of Your glory. That as the light of the glory of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ shines on every one of us as we attend to that word now, so it would shine upon us in such a way as to draw us into the light and out of our darkness, that in You we might truly find the light of life.

[2 : 5 6] So hear us and speak to us, we pray, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, now, I do have your Bible open in front of you, and we're back again for the second time into this well-known chapter of John's Gospel.

And we saw last time that John's explanation of the incarnation, the word becoming flesh, is all about life. Jesus, he tells us, is the eternal word. He's the very light of life.

Verse 4, you see, in him was life, and that life was the light of man. And in fact, John's whole gospel is full of life, it's full of eternal life.

It's all about how to find eternal life. And he tells us that that's why he wrote his gospel. Do you remember last time we looked at the end of chapter 20, verse 31? These things are written, says John, that you might believe that Jesus, nobody else, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you might have life in his name.

That's why John wrote this gospel to us. And in the first five verses of his prologue, John shows us that in Jesus is the meaning of life.

[4 : 16] He's the answer to the great question, why? And the great question, how? Why is there a world at all? Well, the answer is, says John, because of Jesus Christ. Verse 1 says, he's the beginning of it all.

Verse 3 says, he's the maker of everything. Jesus is the answer to the question, why? Well, how are we to make sense of human life? And how are we to find fullness of life?

Well, verse 4 tells us, in him is the fullness of all life for humanity. He is the light of life. And his life is what he came to bring us.

He came, says Jesus in John 10.10, that you might have life and have it in abundance. That's how you find life. Jesus is the answer to the how question.

And that's the Christmas message. That's the message we proclaim. On Sunday, shortly, we'll be getting to the story of the birth of John the Baptist. And it's an amazing story in itself. And yet here, you see, in verse 7, John is very clear.

[5 : 17] John the Baptist, all he's there for is to point to somebody else. He came for witness, to point to Jesus, so that all might believe through him.

In other words, that people might believe the witness, the testimony, the evidence about Jesus, about God's true revelation to man. That they might believe that through John's words.

And therefore, that they might find life through Jesus' name. And that's the only way to find life in all its fullness. That's John's message. It's the only way to eternal life.

That belief in the witness, in the evidence, that comes to us in Jesus Christ, of the eternal God, who is unseen. Only he, says verse 18, do you see?

Only he can make him known to us. Because otherwise no one has ever seen God. Now just be very clear about that. Let's get clear what John's claim is.

[6 : 15] We might not like it, but this is what it is. There is no light and no life in Buddha. Or in Muhammad. Or in Krishna.

Or in Ron L. Hubbard of the Scientologists, that Tom Cruise seems to think gives us such light. No light and no life in any of these, or any others. I am the way and the truth and the life, says Jesus.

And as the lawyers would say, for the avoidance of all doubt, he adds this next bit, doesn't he? No one comes to the Father except by me.

Now that's pretty clear, isn't it? You can't have that first part of John 14, verse 6, without the second half. And Jesus is very plain. Jesus himself is very clear.

His gospel is an exclusive claim. And John is faithful in passing that on to us. And it is really a devastating claim for every other belief system, every other religion in the world.

[7 : 17] We have to be honest about that. Therefore, either it's true, or it's not. Verse 18. No one has ever seen God.

Well, we understand that, don't we? But, the only God, the only begotten God, says John, who is at the Father's side, that's Jesus. He has made him known.

Uniquely. And so, Jesus, says John, is the only reason why this world, why life itself exists. And Jesus is the unique answer as to how you find life.

Find life's meaning, and find life without end. And therefore, you see, the next question must be whether. Whether people will find life and have it abundantly in him, or whether they'll refuse to find life in him.

John came, says verse 7, to witness to him that all might believe through him. In other words, the way to life is belief in the light that shines in the world in Jesus Christ. There's no other way.

[8 : 21] It's either belief or unbelief. There's no in-between. There's no third way. I know that's beloved of our politicians these days. But in the Gospel, there's no third way.

It's one or the other, belief or unbelief. And Jesus, the eternal Word of God, is the divine light of life. And when he appears, that light shines on men and women, human beings.

And when we're faced with the blinding light that shines us in Jesus Christ, we can't do nothing. That's the one thing we can't do. Either we must open our eyes to that true light.

In other words, we believe, we come into the light, we find life in him. Either that or, well, you refuse his light. And you insist on remaining in darkness.

Jesus Christ himself is the dividing light of judgment. He divides into those two paths.

[9 : 27] The person of Jesus Christ sheds light and divides the world of men for all eternity. And, as we'll see, the proclamation of Jesus Christ is also a light that divides the world for all eternity.

Look at verses 9 to 12. You see here, John is showing us clearly that the person of Jesus divides the world forever. He says, Jesus is the true light that enlightens every man.

That's who came into the world 2,000 years ago. In a real place, in a real time, in verifiable history. He was the light that enlightens everyone.

Now, when John speaks here of Jesus being a light that enlightens everyone, he's not just repeating what he said in verse 4. He's not just saying that all the light of reason and understanding and life and so on that the human beings have, that it all comes from Jesus.

That's true. That is what he's saying in verse 4. But here, when John says this of Jesus in verse 9, he's not just repeating that. He's not speaking here about a light that illumines us inwardly.

[10 : 39] He's speaking about a light that illuminates us outwardly, a light that shines on us, in the sense of shedding light upon people. That's really what the primary meaning of that word is, to shine light on.

Let me give you an example. It's the same word that's used in 1 Corinthians 4 verse 5. Listen. Paul says, Do not pronounce judgment before the appointed time, before the Lord comes, who will, listen, bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.

That's what John's speaking about here, bringing to light. The true light who brings to light the things that are hidden in darkness was coming into the world. And he came into the world to shed light on every person, to disclose the true state of our hearts before God.

That's why Jesus came. And all through John's Gospel, if you read through it, the light of Jesus has that great discriminating function. It divides.

Jesus is the light that shines forth the glory of the invisible God for everybody to see. And therefore, says John, everybody's without excuse.

[11 : 57] The light has shined on you. And yet he also shines his light on all of us to expose the truth of our hearts before God. And when that light shines, things are really shown up for what they truly are.

When we first moved to Glasgow, we didn't have a window cleaner. And my wife kept going on and on about it and trying to get me to get a window cleaner. And I kept saying, look, I don't see any need.

The windows are perfectly clean. And because the sun didn't shine very often, you know, it wasn't very obvious. But then one day, amazingly, the sun came out.

And I realized that our windows were absolutely filthy. My wife had been right all along. And she was right to be embarrassed. And so I went and got a window cleaner. But that's exactly what happens when Jesus appeared in the world.

The light of God shone and people's hearts were exposed. And it showed whether they truly were lovers of God and his light or whether in fact, although they might have said they loved God, they were haters of God and they loved darkness.

[13 : 10] And the whole of John's Gospel is full of the story of that division that's provoked by the light of Jesus' presence. It's all summed up here in verses 10 to 13. There's a clear division. He came, says verse 10, to a world that he made and yet verse 11 says he came to his very own people and they rejected his light.

And broadly, if you read through John's Gospel, that's the story of the first half of his book, coming to his own, the religious people. Even those who are most religious, the people who ought to have known everything and they rejected him.

Astonishing, isn't it, to realize that you can be very, very religious and yet you can be found in your heart to be rejecting Jesus Christ. But you see, as verse 12 and 13 makes clear, there were those who did receive Jesus.

That is, they believed in him. Not just that they became believers, says John, but what happened? They became children, he says, sharing the very privileges of the Father's house.

And that's the second half of John's Gospel when you get to those wonderful chapters from chapter 13 onwards. They speak, don't they, of that wonderful intimacy of those for whom Jesus says, I've gone ahead of you to prepare a place for you in the Father's house to become children of God.

[14 : 31] But do you see how stark that division is in verses 11 to 13? His light is one of discrimination, it's one of judgment, it's one of division. Because Jesus' presence exposes the heart.

And what might have seemed hidden and unnoticed, well, it suddenly becomes visible, it suddenly becomes clear in the light of Jesus and a confrontation with him.

It's just like the windows that seemed half decent when it was dull and raining, but when the light shines of the sun, well, the dirt's shown up. And you see, that's exactly the exposure that Jesus brings to the human heart.

And therefore, people divide because some bitterly resent that exposure, don't they? We don't like being exposed. And we resist it. But on the other hand, others recognize the dirt for what it is.

And they cry out for the cleansing that Jesus promises. See, the reaction of the world, the reaction of our worldly hearts, pride and self-sufficiency, the reaction is to resent that, to resist it utterly, the intrusion of Jesus on our lives.

[15 : 49] Because, well, he's causing our, causing us to question our own lifestyle, our standards, our morality. He's calling our righteousness into question. We don't like that. How dare this man show me up?

I'm as good as anybody else. I won't have this. I'm not having this talk about sin. Needing cleaning. And you see, that's what people said. Though Jesus made them, says John, they refused, says verse 10, to come to know him.

That is, they refused to come to know him intimately. That's a word of intimacy. It's a word used between husband and wife. They refused to have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

They would not receive him. Again, an intimate word. You see, you can be very moral, you can be very upright, you can be very religious. You can be very loving and kind and decent.

You can be all of this. But you see, what Jesus says is that the only thing that really matters is whether you intimately know God through Jesus Christ.

[16 : 58] And unless that is real, says Jesus, the verdict, the verdict is a terrible one. He says that you're evil. Just look over the page to John 3 verse 19.

Do you see? This is the judgment. This is what he's speaking about. The division. The light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.

Light has shined but there's resistance because it shows up a reality that people don't want to have to face. shows up that their deeds are evil. We're not so good as we like to think we are.

And we don't like that exposure and so we reject it. We don't want Jesus. But others, look on to the next couple of verses, others react very differently. Do you see verse 21? But whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God or by God.

You see, when somebody comes to the light, when they recognise the truth about themselves, the need for cleansing, they're glad to come into the light. They're glad to give all the glory to God. They're glad to admit that it's all God's doing because they realise that the light of Jesus did expose an awful lot of dirt in their life.

[18 : 22] But that in coming to him that led to the most wonderful cleansing. A cleansing that can only be done by God. See, there's two attitudes to light, isn't there, if your windows are very dirty.

One is, well, you just want it to be cloudy all the time so that you're not exposed. There's no blow to your pride and to your cleaning regime. The other attitude is that you want the sun to come out and to show up the dirt because you know that that's going to be the first step to getting things really clean, don't you?

See, John says, back in verse 12 of chapter 1, look at it, to those who welcomed Jesus' light, well, it was the first steps to them becoming heirs of God himself.

They were born not naturally, says John, not according to the will of man, but born of God. It was the first step that brought them into a new world of real life, of intimacy with God forever and ever and ever.

And all through John's gospel, you see, we see Jesus shedding his light on people, a light that divides men and women. Some, alas, remain in darkness, but others joyfully come into light.

[19 : 41] When you go home later on, if you want to, read John chapter 9, it's the most amazing story. Jesus comes to a man who's born blind and he heals him. The man says to him, Lord, I believe.

He worships Jesus with joy and yet the religious people, the theological people, his own people, who should have known, they reject him. Jesus says this, listen, for judgment I came into this world that those who do not see may see and those who see may become blind.

You see, Jesus is the dividing light of judgment. Jesus' person sheds light that divides the world forever into two groups.

The light that lightens everyone was coming into the world in Jesus. But friends, listen, not only Jesus' person. You see, the proclamation of Jesus also sheds a light that divides the world.

The light shines in the gospel today just the same way as it shined through Jesus' person 2,000 years ago when he walked the streets of Nazareth. And the same division occurs today as it did then.

[20 : 58] Paul, in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, speaks about people who are blind, he says, to the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. You see, the gospel witness to Jesus is also a light that brings faith and eternal life or a light that forces people away.

that's why John wrote his book so that you and I might have life. The gospel proclamation of Jesus through John and through any preacher today is a light that divides in exactly the same way and with exactly the same eternal consequences.

And that's why in the message of the gospel, in the message of Christmas, there's so much urgency. just as there was about Jesus' own words and his deeds. 2,000 years ago, Jesus shed light.

Today, 2,000 years later, the light of the gospel sheds light on every hearer. And it's a light that divides for all eternity. And as Alex always likes to tell us, eternity is a very long time, isn't it?

Let's look over again to John chapter 3. Jesus is clear, you see, the message about Jesus is not just one pointer along the way to God, is it?

[22 : 20] It's not just one insight among many. He is himself the fork in the road. That's why he came. Look at John 3, verse 16, the most famous verse in the Bible. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned. Do you see?

Whoever believes is not condemned. They're saved. But we can't stop there, can we? And leave out the other half of the verse.

Look at it. But whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only son of God.

You see, if you're not coming into light, you're condemned already. No decision is a negative decision.

[23 : 25] The default position for all of us is darkness, says Jesus. And you see, the church today in many parts of the western world has largely lost its mission. It's largely failing.

It's disappearing. Churches are closing down and turning into nightclubs and all sorts of things. Why? Because it forgets these two crucial things, doesn't it? The reality of darkness.

That those who do not believe stand condemned already, now. They forget that. But we also forget the wonderful power of the light of the gospel to call out of darkness and into light, to change lives, to get rid of condemnation and to give life now to all who will believe.

You see, if we take John seriously, we take the fact of Jesus Christ as a dividing light of judgment seriously and the proclamation of him as that light that shines on people today, then our mission would be very, very different, wouldn't it?

It will be different. It will be marked by three things, won't it? First, by urgency. Jesus puts it very plainly in John chapter 12, walk while you have the light lest darkness overtake you.

[24 : 40] That's urgent, isn't it? While you have the light, he says, believe in the light that you may become sons of light. That's urgent. When the light shines, you need to act.

Because the default is that you've already chosen darkness. To say later, you see, in the gospel is to say never. The gospel is urgent, it's got to be prepared.

It's got to be believed urgently. So whether it's you or me or any of us, there's an urgency, isn't there, about the church's mission. Second, there'll be realism about our mission, won't there?

There will always be, alas, rejecters of the light. But that very rejection is a mark of God's gospel light of judgment at work.

Jesus says the very word that they've rejected will judge them, at the last day. So there will always be rejecters of the light of God. There will be high profile ones and vocal ones.

[25 : 40] But friends, don't let the foolishness of others deter you from acting with urgency to believe the light while it's still day. And don't let the foolishness of others stop us proclaiming that either.

urgency, realism, but also joy. Look back at John chapter 1 verse 12. Look at that wonderful verse.

All who believe, all are given the right, not just the privilege, the right to become God's own children.

Until the very, very last day when Jesus comes, God will be calling to himself those to whom he gives the right to be known as children of God. Because the light that divides men and women is the light that saves men and women forever.

It's the light that gives new birth, that gives new life, that gives a calling of becoming children of God forever. And that's what Christmas is all about, isn't it?

[26 : 45] It's about the birth, not just of Jesus, wonderful though that is, the only begotten Son of God, the one who shows us the Father. It is about that birth, but it's about multiple births, isn't it?

Countless millions of those that by sending Jesus Christ into the world to save sinners, he gives the right to become children of God, brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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.

Friends, don't miss the joy of the light shining in the darkness this Christmas. Let that light be your joy and your delight. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you that you did not remain absent, you didn't leave us in the dark, you shine your light upon us in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that though your light exposes in us so much that makes us ashamed, nevertheless, it calls us to you and to the joy of cleansing and renewing, that all that would have made us ashamed is gone, and we bask in the glow and the warmth of your wonderful forgiveness, because now we're your children.

[28 : 24] Help us, we pray, to rejoice in your light, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, do you remember the books here?

Come back next week for the carols and our last study in John. And by the way, I thought you'd like to know that Ruth Hodgson, who normally plays the organ for us on Wednesday, as you know, she's been in hospital, but she's a lot better, and she's getting home from hospital tomorrow.

So I'm sure you'd like to have her in your prayers, and she will be back among us as soon as possible. Thank you.