

Christ: The Unique Light of Judgement

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[0 : 00] Well, now we're going to turn to our Bible reading for this morning, and you'll find that in your order of service, which you can follow along with if you don't have a Bible.

And as you can see, we're going to be reading John chapter 1, and our reading this morning will be in two parts. We'll pause part of the way through and sing again. But first, we're going to read John chapter 1, verses 1 to 9.

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 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 mastered it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came for witness, to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him.

[1 : 12] He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. 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 received him not.

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.

[2 : 15] For 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, but the one and only one himself, God, who is at the Father's side.

He has made him known. The Savior comes to earth, but familiar all the way along with rejection.

We sing again. Earth gave him no welcome, no shelter, no home. He slept in a stable. The inn had no room. The unique light of judgment.

Jesus Christ sheds dividing light on the truth in the human heart. Now John speaks of the coming of God into the world in terms of light shining in the darkness.

Light that brings meaning and purpose and understanding to all of life. We looked at the first verses of John's prologue last Sunday evening, and we saw that he declares Jesus Christ as the universal light of life.

[3 : 37] That he, and he alone, is the defining light that defines the entire world, that gives meaning to human life as we know it. He answers all the great questions of life.

Why is there a world at all? The answer is because of Jesus Christ. Verse 1, look. He is the source of it all.

He is the beginning. And verse 3, He is the creator of all things. So how are we to make sense of human life? How are we to find fullness in life?

Well, answer verse 4, In Him is life. And He is the light of all humanity. And the message all the way through this book that we call John's Gospel is that He who is life came that we might find that life.

And that's the Christmas message in a nutshell. That was John the Baptist's message. Verse 7, He came to bear witness about the light that all may believe through Him.

[4 : 47] Believe the witness, that is, the evidence about Jesus as God's ultimate revelation to man. And therefore to find life in His name, real life.

That is the life that we were made for. That is eternal life. And there's only one way to find that life in all its fullness. And that is through belief in the witness of Jesus Christ to the invisible God.

Only He has made Him known. Look at verse 18. No one has seen God, but the one and only God, that is Jesus, who is at the Father's side.

He has made Him known. See how clear, how unique a claim that is. John is saying that the one and only true God is revealed.

Not, not in Muhammad, not in the Buddhas, not in Krishna, not in Confucius, not in any other religious figure.

[5 : 52] And not in some kind of multi-faith amalgam of all of these that we might construct for ourselves, perhaps including Jesus Christ, but all these others. No. John's claim is far greater.

And Jesus' own claim was far greater. I am the way and the truth and the life. That's John chapter 14, verse 6.

But that verse, of course, has a second half. As the lawyers would say, for the avoidance of all doubt, Jesus says, no one comes to the Father except through me.

You can't have the first half of that verse without the second half. That might be hard for people to accept in our pluralist world today, but it was a pluralistic religious world that Jesus spoke into also, and he is exceptionally clear.

His claim is exclusive. It's utterly unique. And that means that the Christmas message is, I'm afraid, well, it's a devastating one for all other religious pretensions.

[7 : 04] There's just no avoiding that, if we're going to be honest. No one has ever seen God, says verse 18, but the only God, the only begotten God, the one who is at the Father's sight, Jesus, he has made him known.

As the word, verse 14, became flesh and dwelt among us. So he, Jesus Christ, the only God, is the sole reason that life exists.

He, Jesus, is the unique answer as to how you find life in all its fullness. And so the next question, therefore, that follows from that is, well, whether will people find that life?

Will they find it abundantly through him? And the answer Jesus gives to that question is very simple. It's another question, simply this, will they believe in him or not?

John the Baptist came, says verse 7, to witness to Christ so that all might believe through him. The way to life is belief in the bright light of compelling evidence that shines to the world in Jesus Christ.

[8 : 23] There's no other way and it's either belief or unbelief. There's no, there's no non-binary way, however much people like to use that kind of language today.

Jesus, the eternal word of God, is the universal light of life. And when he appears, that light shines on men and women, on human beings.

And when you're faced with the blinding light of Christ, you can't do nothing. Either you'll open your eyes to that light, that is you believe, you come into his light and you find life.

Or you refuse that true light and you remain in darkness. Jesus Christ, you see, himself is that unique light of divine judgment.

He sheds a dividing light on the truth that is deep in the human heart. He not only reveals God definitively to us, but he reveals our hearts definitively to God.

[9 : 33] I want to think for a little about Jesus Christ as this unique dividing light under two headings, because he does it in two clear ways. First of all, the person of Jesus divides the world forever.

The real Jesus of history was a uniquely divisive figure. Verse 9 says Jesus. Jesus is the true light that lightens everyone.

And that's who came into this world 2,000 years ago at a real time and a real place in history that we can verify. And when John says there that his light enlightens everyone, not speaking there about a light that illumines people inwardly, as he did back in verse 4, saying that all the light of reason, the light of life and so on, the light of humanity comes from Christ.

That's true, but no, here he's speaking of a light that illumines them, that lights them up outwardly, in the sense of shedding light on them. And that's primarily what this word enlightens here means.

The apostle Paul uses it when he speaks about the return of Christ to judge the world. And then he says he will bring to light the things that are hidden and disclose the purposes of the heart.

[10 : 58] And that's what John's telling us here in verse 9, the true light who brings to light the things that are hidden in the darkness of every human heart. He was coming into the world.

The Son of God came to shed light on every person and therefore to disclose the true nature and the state of their hearts before God.

And all through John's gospel we find this light and it always has this discriminating function. It is a dividing light. Jesus is the light that shines forth the glory of the otherwise invisible God for all to see and therefore everyone is without excuse.

And yet in doing so he shines his light as it were on men and women and exposes the truth of our hearts before God. And you know it's when light shines isn't it that things are thrown up and shown up for what they really are.

When we first moved to Glasgow we didn't have a window cleaner and I remember Rebecca kept going on and on about it. You know I did what most husbands do.

[12 : 12] I just nodded and ignored it and I couldn't really see the need for a window cleaner. Until one day the sun really was shining brightly.

I suppose it hadn't shone very much. It's not really a common thing here is it? But the sun was really shining and my goodness then I saw just how absolutely filthy our windows really were.

You see that's what happened when Jesus Christ appeared in this world. The light of God's glory shone so brightly and people's hearts really were exposed.

Showing clearly whether in fact they were lovers of God and lovers of his light or actually they were haters of God, lovers of the darkness.

And John's whole gospel is full of that division which is provoked by the light of God's presence in Jesus. And it's all summed up in verses 10 to 13 here.

[13 : 11] Look at the clear division. Verse 10 he came to a world that he made and verse 11 he came to his own people Israel and yet they rejected his light.

They did not receive him. And that is broadly the story of the first half of John's gospel. How Jesus was rejected even by the most religious of people.

It just proves by the way that you can be very religious, very spiritual. So you think but actually have no real knowledge of God at all in your heart.

But as verses 12 and 13 make clear as well, there were those who did receive him. That is, there were those who believed in him and became, notice, not just believers but like children of God sharing all the very privileges of the father's house.

And the second half of the gospel from chapter 13 on which speaks of the intimacy of those that Jesus goes to prepare a place for in the many rooms of the father's house.

[14 : 21] Do you see how stark that division is? His light is one of judgment. It's a discriminating light. Because Jesus' presence exposes the heart.

God. And he reveals us definitively to God. And what seems hidden perhaps and unnoticed by other people suddenly is utterly visible and opaque when the light of Jesus Christ shines on people.

Just as a window that maybe does look half decent, actually has shown up to have been a total disgrace all the time. Just as soon as that light of sun shines through it.

Well that's the exposure that Jesus Christ brings to the human heart. And that's why people were divided by his presence. Some bitterly resent that exposure and so they resist it violently.

And others of course recognize the truth that is exposed and so they cry out for cleansing. Some are hardened by the exposure of Christ. Others wonderfully are humbled.

[15 : 34] And the reaction of the world of pride, of self sufficiency is to resist, is to resent utterly the intrusion of Jesus which calls for everything that they believe to be put in question, calls their morality in question, calls their righteousness in question.

How dare this man show me up like that? I'm as good as anybody else. I'm not going to have this. That's what they said when confronted by Jesus. And though he created them, verse 10, they refused to come to know him.

Now, that word to know, it means to know intimately. It's a relationship word. That's clear. Verse 11 as well. His own did not receive him.

As you receive a friend into your home or as Joseph received Mary as his wife. That's the word Matthew uses. Matthew chapter 1 verse 24. So you can be very moral, upright, very religious even.

You can be loving, you can be a kind, decent person. All of these things, but what really matters, in fact, the only one thing that matters is to truly and intimately know God in Jesus, the Son.

[16 : 57] And this may shock you. Unless that is so, then the verdict of Jesus himself is you are evil.

A little later in John chapter 3, Jesus says this, light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.

That's why they refused him. Light has shined, but it's resisted because it shows up a reality that we don't want to see and face up to, that our hearts are evil, that we're not as good as we like to think we are.

And we hate being exposed like that, don't we? That's why people wouldn't receive Jesus. But there are others who react very differently.

John goes on in that same place in chapter 3, verse 21, but whoever does the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen clearly that his deeds have been carried out in God.

[18 : 10] That is, they come into the light and they happily acknowledge that it's not their own doing, it's all been God's. Yes, the light did, indeed expose an awful lot of mess and dirt.

But that led to a wonderful cleansing by God that could only be done by God. There's two attitudes, isn't there, that you can have to sunlight if you suspect that your windows really are filthy, perhaps especially say your in-laws are coming for Christmas dinner.

One attitude is to pray for clouds and darkness because if you're exposed, well it'll sort of be a blow to your housekeeping pride, show you up to the mother-in-law.

But the other attitude is to be glad to see that dirt exposed because that's the first step to ensuring that real cleaning is going to be done at last.

And John says here in chapter 1 verse 12 that those who welcomed the light of Christ like that, it was the first step to them becoming heirs of God himself.

[19 : 23] Verse 13, born not just naturally but born of God himself, brought into a new world of intimacy with him. And all through John's gospel, if you read it, you'll see Jesus shedding his light and it is always a light that divides the hearts of human beings.

A classic example in chapter 9 where Jesus heals a man who was born blind and he follows him, he worships him with joy, it's wonderful. And yet the response at that of religious leaders, theologians, his own people, they wanted to reject him.

And Jesus says here, for judgment I came into this world that those who do not see like the blind man may see. and those who see may become blind, division.

The person of Jesus sheds a light that divides the world and divides it forever. The true light that enlightens everyone, that sheds light on everyone was coming into the world.

but not only was Jesus' person divisive and this is the second thing, the proclamation of Jesus also sheds a light that divides the world still today.

[20 : 52] That same light of revelation shines in the gospel of Jesus today just as it shined in the person of Jesus. and it has just the same effect and just the same division still occurs.

In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul the apostle speaks about people who are blinded, he says, to the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. the gospel witness to Jesus is also a light that brings to faith and therefore to eternal life and that's why John wrote this gospel, that you might believe and have life in his name.

The gospel proclamation of Jesus is a light that divides in just that same way and with the same eternal consequences as an encounter with the person of Jesus.

And that's why the Christian message, the Christmas message, has the same urgency about it as Jesus' own words that have 2,000 years ago because the message sheds light and that light is a discriminating light, it's a dividing light of judgment for all eternity.

Jesus, you see, and the message of Jesus is not just one pointer along the road to finding out about God, one insight among many, things.

[22 : 16] Now the message of the New Testament is that Jesus himself is the fork in the road. And that's why he came. Listen to these very famous words from John chapter 3.

verse 1. 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.

Isn't that wonderful? whoever believes is saved. They are not condemned. But again we can't leave out the rest of that verse can we?

Jesus goes right on. But whoever does not believe is condemned already he says because he has not believed in the name of the only son of God.

[23 : 19] God. And that's the other side. This great division. Not believing, not receiving the light is itself condemnation.

To make no decision is well it's to make a negative decision. It's to remain in the darkness. It's to refuse the light which alone can lead to eternal life.

God. And I'm afraid to say that the church in our nation today is one which has for the most part entirely lost its way.

It's failing. It's largely disappearing as mainstream denominations accelerate their closures. It's a very sad picture. It's a pathetic picture. And it is because the church has largely forgotten or ignored these two crucial things that Jesus is insisting on here.

First, the reality of eternal darkness and judgment. That those who do not believe and know Christ are condemned already, he says.

[24 : 35] And secondly, it has forgotten entirely the power of the light of the gospel of Christ alone to call people out of darkness and into eternal light and life. Whoever believes should not perish but have eternal life.

But you see, surely, if the Christian church takes John's words seriously, that Jesus Christ is the universal definitive light of revelation and that he is the unique dividing light of judgment and that the proclamation of his gospel today reveals him to the world ultimately and divides the world ultimately, well then, surely the church's message will be quite different, won't it?

It will certainly be marked by at least three things. First, urgency. Jesus puts it very plainly himself in John 12, 25.

He says, walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. while you have the light, believe in the light that you may become sons of the light.

In other words, when the light shines on you, he says, you need to act. To do nothing is to choose darkness. To say later may very well mean to say never.

[26 : 06] Now, the gospel of Jesus Christ today is urgent. It's urgent for all. It's urgent for the witness of the church. It has to be proclaimed urgently by us.

And it's also urgent for those who are still outside the church. It needs to be believed urgently by everyone. Urgency.

Secondly, realism. There are always going to be rejecters of the light. rejecters. But that very rejection is the discriminating mark of God's judgment.

Jesus says in John 12, verse 48, the one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge. The word that I have spoken, which they have rejected, the word that I have spoken, the gospel will judge him on that day.

And there will be rejecters always. But that is the greatest folly in all eternity. Don't let the foolishness of others deter you.

[27 : 19] Either from believing in Jesus, believing the truth about him yourself, or stop you boldly proclaiming it to others who will believe. No, there must be realism.

Alongside that urgency. But thirdly, there must, must also be joy. Look at verse 12 again. Don't miss it. To all who believe in his name, he gives the right to become his own children, children of God.

Until the very last day, God will be calling out, out of darkness, into his everlasting light, those who are believing and trusting and loving his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The light that divides men and women is the light that brings salvation forever to those who believe. It's the light that gives new birth, that gives life, that gives new beginning as a child of God forever and ever.

And that's what Christmas is all about. It's about the birth, not just of Jesus, the only begotten son of God, but it's about the joyful birth of countless millions of those he is calling into the light to be called also children of God.

[28 : 48] Verse 12, 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.

So friends, don't miss the joy of the light shining in the darkness this Christmas. Receive this light, believe, and find the joy of this eternal life in Jesus Christ this Christmas.

Amen. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus Christ, who at thy first coming did send thy messenger to prepare the way before thee, grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end.

Amen. Amen. Well now we respond to God's word by singing and we sing together, there was no room in Bethlehem for him who left his throne to seek the lost at countless cost and make their griefs his own.

Amen. Amen.

[30 : 42] Amen. Amen.