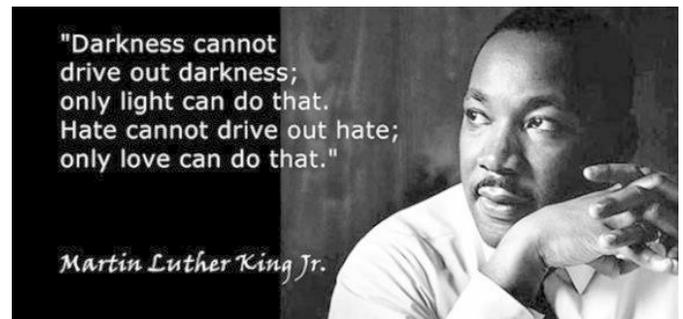


Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Psalm 147:13-21

Galatians 3:23-25, 4:4-7

John 1:1-18



THE TRUE LIGHT THAT ENLIGHTENS EVERY MAN

John's gospel was written "*that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name*"¹ (John 20:31). This was God's purpose in revealing himself to us through his Son. One must (1) be willing to *believe* Jesus is the Son of God, and (2) receive the *life* God offers. Otherwise, it will be difficult for the gospel to have its intended effect.

Paul wrote in Colossians, "*He is the image of the invisible God ... all things were created through him and for him ... he is before all things ... in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell ...*" (Col 1:15-20). John's gospel begins with this same theme – that the *fullness of God* was pleased to dwell in Jesus Christ. John wrote his gospel at least ten years after Paul wrote Colossians. Commentators say a principal motive for both writings was to combat an ongoing problem: Gnosticism. Gnosticism boils down to the belief that Jesus is either (1) not fully human or (2) not fully God. These beliefs have persisted throughout history. Why is it sometimes *expedient* (a word used by Caiaphas in John 11:50) for one to believe either (1) or (2)? Discuss the obvious risks inherent in setting aside either the humanity or the deity of Jesus Christ.

John 1:1-5. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God; ³all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

- *In the beginning was the Word ...* (v.1). Thus begins one of the most beautiful and profound sections of Scripture. There are endless commentaries on it. Today the old and wise explain its meaning to children, and children help the old and wise to understand it. Albert Einstein said, "The greatest truths are the simplest." Let us pray that God will open our hearts to the simple truth and beauty of these verses.

Word is translated from the Greek *logos* – a word referring to cosmic origin – the source of all wisdom and knowledge. In English, *logic* is a derivative of *logos*. Many unique titles other than *Word* are given to Jesus Christ in John's gospel, and each title refers to an aspect of God. To the Greeks, *Word* emphasized that the Son and the Father are one and the same. "*I and the Father are one,*" Jesus said (John 10:30).

Besides *Word*, consider some additional titles used to describe Jesus, which occur just in the first chapter of John's gospel: *God* (1:1), *The true light that enlightens every man* (1:9), *the only Son from the Father* (1:14), *Lord* (1:23), *The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world* (1:29), *Rabbi* (Teacher) (1:38), *Messiah* (Christ) (1:41), *Son of God* (1:49), *King of Israel* (1:49), *Son of Man* (1:51). Discuss the unique significance of each title. Which titles apply *exclusively* to Jesus?

- *All things were made through him ...* (v.3). The Son and the Father were partners in creation. Note that this verse precludes the notion of an eternal, static universe, which scientists held for centuries, but no longer consider correct. The current cosmological theory, based on evidence not known before the twentieth century, is that the universe had a beginning, as the text in John 1 in fact indicates.

- *In him was life, and the life was the light of men* (v.4). Two words here have special meaning in John's gospel. The first is *life*. We have conflicting feelings about life in the flesh. We say, "Forty isn't old if you're a tree." We don't like the effects of aging. But we also say, "The alternative is worse." We want to live.

¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV.

But immortality, that is, living forever as we are, (1) is a horrifying idea and (2) has been made impossible by God (Gen 3:19; also Gen 3:22-24). However, the *life* Jesus Christ offers is not just flesh and blood. It is *eternal* – the very life of God. Jesus said, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15).

The second word with special meaning is *light*. Since the days of John, scientists have discovered the physical nature of light. Some discoveries, like the fact that light is equivalent to matter ($e = mc^2$) seem to enhance John’s use of the word. But John was not writing about physics. He was using *light* to stand for something we do not have words to describe. In physics, *light* is something. It has energy and momentum. *Darkness* is nothing. It is the absence of light. Yet, men love darkness. Why? See John 3:19-21, “... *men loved darkness rather than light ...*”, and Isaiah 9:2, “*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined.*” When a person used to walking in darkness finally sees *light* of Christ, how would you describe the change in his or her *life*?

Discuss these words of Jesus: (1) “*I am the light of the world*” (At the temple – John 8:12), and (2) “*The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes*” (Near the end of his ministry – John 12:35).

John 1:9-13. *The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. ¹¹He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

• *The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world* (v.9). The *enlightenment* Christ brought to men came in terms of knowledge about God, the universe we inhabit, our own nature, and our relation to God and the world around us. The *true light that enlightens every man* teaches men to love one another, and gives us power to do it. Formerly, *men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil* (John 3:19). But today, *if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin* (1 John 1:7).

When Christ came, the prophecy was fulfilled: *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light ...* (Isa 9:2). People who live without Christ live in darkness. One of the last things he said publicly was, “*I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness*” (John 12:46). After this saying, the next place *light* appears in the Bible is in Acts 9, where Saul (Paul) was on his way to Damascus, “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, when suddenly a *light from heaven* flashed about him.” Thus the light of Christ comes to men according to the purpose of God.

• *He was in the world ... yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not* (v.10). Why did John write this? Certainly the shepherds in the field gladly received the newborn King. Certainly John remembered the multitudes following Jesus, trying to make him king (John 6:15).

But John also was at Calvary. This “disciple whom Jesus loved” saw the hatred of the authorities and heard the shouts of the people. And he took Mary, the mother of God, away to the safety of his home. As far as he could see, Jesus was rejected and killed by the very people he loved and came to save.

Christ is still rejected by many whom God loves and wishes to save. But if the time comes when you tire of the sin in your life and you seek a new and better way, the grace of God and the light of Christ are still accessible. “*Behold, I stand at the door and knock ...*” Jesus says in Rev 3:20.

• *But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God* (v.12). Receiving Christ – having the *light of Christ* in your heart – is more than agreeing with what he said about loving God and doing your best to be kind to others. It is like the miraculous light of Hanukkah in the Temple, which never burned out. *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it* (John 1:5). If you have the light of Christ today, nothing in the world can overcome it, because the world didn’t give it to you in the first place.

John used *power* to describe this gift of new life from God to those who receive Christ. It is “Christ in you” who gives you this power – *power to become children of God* – power that comes from Christ himself, filling your heart, overcoming discouragement and sin and death. *He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life* (1 John 5:12). It is that simple.