

JESUS CHRIST - THE LIGHT AND LIFE OF MANKIND - Teaching #2096

Christmas Eve - Monday, December 24th, 2018 - 6:00 p.m.

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John 1:4-5 (ESV) - "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. [5] The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

John 1:4-5 (NASB) - "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. [5] And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

I think you can immediately see the difference between these two excellent translations. In the ESV the darkness has not **overcome** the light coming in Jesus Christ while in the NASB the darkness did not **comprehend** it. And the simple reason for the conflict is the Greek word ***kat-al-am-ban'-o*** can be legitimately translated either as "**to triumph over**," (hence, "overcome" in the ESV) or, "**to perceive**" (hence, "comprehend" in the NASB).

I want to work with both of those ideas in the second portion of this teaching. But the outline of my thoughts comes from the flow of the two sections of our text. The **first** portion deals with a description of Jesus, the incarnate God the Son, in Himself - "**in him was life, and the life was the light of men.**" The **second** portion describes, not our Lord Himself, but the reaction - the situation - that arose **because** of His coming into a world like ours - "**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome/comprehended it.**"

I think it's also important to note the way John intentionally uses past and present tenses in his construction of **verse 5** - "**And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it**"(NASB). He moves from the **present** tense to the **past**. This is not mere carelessness on John's part. He has a point to make.

First, the **birth** of Christ is a past event. In Him **was** life (4). God has already accomplished this great redeeming event. He has come in all His creative power. It's the reason for our celebrating this Christmas. But the light didn't just shine **once** or **at one time**. No. The shining of the **light** of Jesus outlasts the **birth** of Jesus. The light **shines** - **continues** to shine - in the darkness (5). This light is a currently **active** light. In some way we need to explore, the light of Christ shines right now.

But there's more. The idea is the **incompatibility** - the **darkness** - the dullness - of the human heart in response to the light of Christ. And this inward darkness is ongoing and far-reaching. The situation hasn't improved. This is John's way of drawing our attention away from days long past and lands far removed. He wants all of us fixing our attention on **ourselves** and **right now**. The same light of Christ shines **now**. But the light of divine grace and revelation doesn't land **neutrally** in this world, and we shouldn't expect it to. It still shines into **darkness**.

This is the first thing our text forces us to look into. For all the lights that get strung in homes and churches and shopping malls, this great inspired apostle calls our Christmas attention to the **darkness** into which the light of Christ still shines - "**...the light shines in the darkness....**" (5).

Try to pretend you haven't read these Christmas verses a thousand times before. Let the words of John land on the soil of your mind and heart like they were landing for the very first time.

1) **THE FIRST OBVIOUS TRUTH OF OUR TEXT IS CHRIST IS THE SOURCE OF LIFE FOR ALL THAT EXISTS**

John 1:4a - "In him was life...."

And the "**him**" to whom John refers has already been introduced to us in the first three verses of this same chapter - **John 1:1-3** - "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**. [2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] **All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.**"

That's John's more expansive way of saying, "**in him was life....**"

In Christ is the eternal self-existence of God. He is the maker of all things. That means absolutely everything that exists other than Himself. There is an **uncreatedness** about the baby born of Mary. He doesn't **derive life** from another source -

John 5:26 - "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself." He never had a beginning and can have no ending. Here is One to whom no origin can be assigned. In this He is absolutely separate from the rest of His own creation.

This is the great paradox of the incarnation and crucifixion. The One who can never begin has a *birth* and the one who can never cease to exist *dies*.

We've heard those words hundreds of times - "*In him was life* (4). They are stunning when heard slowly and deeply. God alone is the source of all life. He is the generator of all life everywhere. This is a cold, hard fact and there are implications to it. This means every atheistic study of the origin of things had it all backwards. This means you have things exactly reversed when you start with matter and seek the beginnings of life. Life doesn't arise from matter. Matter arises from life. You must start with the Creator because, in John's succinct telling, "*In him was life....*"

All of this is true, of course. But is this all John is driving at? Is he merely making the point that Christ is the Creator of all - that we, like the rest of the creatures of the earth, have a common created beginning?

Is he merely echoing the words of Job - **Job 12:10** - "In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind."? Or the quotation cited by the apostle Paul - **Acts 17:28** - "...In him we live and move and have our being."?

I'm arguing this is not even close to John's chief point. There is so much more in this Christmas text than the magnifying of Christ's creative power over all that exists. And I think the words of the text make this clear.

2) WHILE CHRIST IS THE CREATOR OF ALL CREATURES HE IS THE LIGHT OF MANKIND ALONE

One can hardly miss this in our text - **John 1:4** - "In him was life, and the life was the light of men."

Life is given by the creating Son to all creation. *Light* is placed by the Son in the *soul* - the *heart* - of mankind alone. There is an *image of God* - a *divine capacity for response* - a *taste of being designed for more than the material realm*. This is the *light* that mankind - *all* mankind - has received.

John is not merely pointing out our *shared created origin* with the rest of the creatures. He is asserting the *unique enlightening* of mankind by God the Son. He is writing about our divinely intended capacity. He is calling us not to misunderstand or squander our *design*. He's saying to everyone in this room today, "*You were made for Christ.*"

It seems an urgent matter to John that we recognize what it is that functions inside our own skins. He seems driven to remind us of this inner divine enlightening. There is no created person left out by the light of the Son - **John 1:9** - "The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world."

But there is more than just comfort in these words. We resist more than we know when *conscience* is pushed aside. There is an accountability before that inner light from Christ. We are resisting more than just our own inner selves. And we distort more than we know when we use divinely given *reasoning capacities* to justify turning from the one who gave us those capacities in the first place. John echos the apostle Paul in probing the guilt of "*suppressing the truth*" the light from Christ has given to embrace.

This is John's passion in our text. He exposes the alarming truth that the very inner capacities that fuel our independence from the divine Son of God - the very things that empower us to turn against Him - are the capacities we *received* from Him in the first place!

3) THE LIGHT OF CHRIST STILL SHINES IN DARKNESS

John 1:5 (NASB) - "And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

John 1:5 (ESV) - "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

The light doesn't just shine. It shines in the middle of darkness. On this point our translations both insist. The light doesn't shine in neutral territory. There is a darkness in this day and every day actively pushing back against the inner light given by

the Son. There is no soul without inner resistance to divine light. Such is the dilemma identified in the Scriptures as our **lostness**. It's not a metaphor. It's our actual condition.

John tells us there is something we so easily find **incomprehensible** about the light of Christ. **Conscience** may speak and lead us away from evil but there are **inclinations** just as powerful drawing us into it. We frequently find it easier to resist the conscience than those desires against which it speaks.

We get faint gleamings of future accountability. We know our own mortality and at least the possibility of future judgment, but the present has more power over our inner monitor than the future. What is **distant** has little weight when set against what is **near**.

We are so frequently exposed - especially in a land like ours - to other masters calling out to us with far more glitter and promise than a Christ we can neither see or touch. Sight can easily crowd out faith in a material world like ours.

So yes, the light shines. It still shines. It shines on you as you hear these words from Scripture. But that light shines into the darkest of all places - the human heart.

4) THE LOVING PERSISTENCE OF THE LIGHT OF CHRIST INTO THE DARKEST OF HEARTS

John 1:5 (ESV) - "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Is there hope for this inner contradiction between the shining of the light and the darkness of the uncomprehending, deceptive human heart? Can blind eyes be made to see? Can wisdom once again embrace the grace we so desperately need?

Centuries ago a note of hope was introduced by a prophet who never saw the fulfillment of his hope-filled words - **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 has light shone."

So light and darkness are once again linked together. But the light here is a "**great light**." It reaches far deeper in its effect than the inner light of conscience or the power of reason. It has the power to penetrate the "**deep darkness**" of the most entrenched heart.

God-fearing Simeon immediately saw the light that would come with Christ's birth and darkness-defeating death - **Luke 2:25-32** - "Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. [26] And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. [27] And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, [28] he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, [29] "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; [30] for my eyes have seen your salvation [31] that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, [32] a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

This is why the darkness has "**not overcome**" the light. You've heard me speak of the nature of this darkness. Perhaps you've felt the power of your own heart's neglect of divine grace. You feel the coldness of your own soul and fear the lack of ability to escape.

But everything is now changed. The people of darkness - that's all of us - have been given a **great** light. This is light from the outside. It runs deeper than the **moral instruction or the light of conscience**. It reverses and cleanses and regenerates by the power of the shed blood of God the Son - the baby born to die for your freedom from the inner darkness of sin.

This light **exposes** the darkness of your heart for what it is. You can trust the power of this Light. **The power of Christ is greater than your fear of your own failures.**

Remember, we sing it almost every Christmas - "**Where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in.**" Refuse one more day of walking in darkness.