

December 13, 2020 by Steve Brandon



Jesus Is Light

John 1, 3, 8, 12

1. The Living Light (John 1)
2. The Judging Light (John 3)
3. The Present Light (John 8)
4. The Leaving Light (John 12)

This Christmas season, we are considering the theme of "lights." We are looking at "The Lights of Christmas." It's especially appropriate for us during this year of 2020, which began with so much promise, but has proved to be so difficult for so many. COVID-19 has swept across our world, which has brought on the earlier-than-expected deaths of hundreds of thousands of Americans. Our governmental response to the coronavirus has bound many at home, which has had a large economic impact. It has brought on depression and anxiety and loneliness and fear and hardships and tensions in the family.

Add to that the increase in racial tensions, wildfires out west, and the political divide in our nation, and our country has faced some difficult times. We have entered into some dark days in 2020, to which we need some Christmas light.

This past summer while Yvonne and I were in California on our Sabbatical, we took trip to northern California. We toured Shasta Caverns, a cave that is near Shasta Lake.^[1] It was wonderful and fascinating to see all that drips of water coming from the surface above have made in the underground world. If you have ever been to a cave, you know how dark it is. When there is no source of light at all. The only lights in the cave are the lights that the engineers have brought in to insure the safety and enjoyment of those who walk through the cave.

Now, as I remember, at one point in our tour, our guide flipped a switch, turning out all of the lights, so that we might get a sense of what complete darkness really is. It was so dark that you can put your hand in front of your face, and you can't sense it at all. There is not any light for any shadows to be cast. Your eyes to detect any difference in the light. It's utter darkness.

Such darkness can be disorienting, even though you are standing there, really doing nothing. The total darkness can bring confusion all over you. But even the smallest of lights, a light from a phone or a candle, however dim, can help to orient you again to where you are and what you are doing and the path to walk.

This is a bit what it was like for ancient Israel when Jesus came to them. Israel, during the days before Jesus were facing dark times as well. They were a conquered kingdom. Rome ruled over them. As a result, they were an oppressed people, forced to pay taxes to a hated government, who ruled over them with an iron fist. God seemed absent. They were lost. The lights seemed to be gone! Before the days of Jesus, there had not been a prophet for 400 years. In those years, they cried out to the LORD, but he was silent. Israel could well relate to the 13th Psalm, in which David says, ...

Psalm 13:1-2

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I take counsel in my soul
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

As Israel was pleading and praying and longing for the Lord to intervene, a baby is born in Bethlehem. His name was Jesus. He brought light into the world.

It was known early on, that this child would bring light. Zechariah and Simeon, godly old men in Israel, both testified to this very thing. We looked at the testimonies of these men last week.

Zechariah's story is told in Luke, chapter 1. He was the priest, who encountered an angel in the holy of holies, who told him about his son who was to be born. His name was to be "John." He would be great. He would point the way for the Savior, "Jesus." Even before Jesus was born, Zechariah prophesied of Jesus, that he would "give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke 1:78).

Indeed, this is what Jesus did. To those in Israel, who sat in darkness due to their sin, Jesus came to lead them out of their darkness. He came to bring them into the light. He did it by speaking the truth and by living the truth. Eventually, Jesus died upon the cross as our sinless substitute, to redeem us from our sins, exactly as Zechariah had prophesied: "Blessed be the Lord god of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people" (Luke 1:68). That's what Zechariah foretold.

This is also what Simeon foretold. His story is found in Luke, chapter 2. He was the old man, probably a priest, who spent much time in the temple. The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would not die, until he saw the Lord's Christ. When Jesus came into the temple for his dedication as a small baby, he saw Jesus and blessed God, saying, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation" (Luke 2:29-30).

In other words, Simeon said, "Lord, you promised me that I would see the Christ before I died. I saw baby Jesus. He is the Christ. I can die now. Take me home. I have seen the salvation that you have given to us! It's coming in this little bay." After saying this, he described Jesus with these words: "[He is] a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:32). In time, this proved to be true, as Jesus lived his life as a light for all of us to see. He taught us the truth. He showed us how to live. He gave us the way of salvation, through faith in his name.

Now, the reason why Jesus was a light for us is because he is light. He said in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world." The reason why Jesus shined as a light for all of us to see, is that he was a light, himself. In the darkness, you can have a flashlight to shine the way for you to go so that you don't stumble and fall. But Jesus is the light, himself. It's not as if Jesus needs a flashlight. Jesus is the flashlight! He is the light that shines the way.

My message this morning is entitled, "Jesus is Light." My hope and prayer is that it will give us light during these dark days of 2020.

By way of text, I simply want to walk through the gospel of John, looking at the times when Jesus is identified as "light." John refers to Jesus as "light" frequently, more than twenty times. This morning, I want to look at them with you, letting these instances of "light" form the basis of my message. It's the sort of message that any of you can discover for yourselves, by simply searching for the word, "light" on any Bible website or phone app.^[2] Then, simply read through the verses and see what they say about Jesus. These verses will form the basis of my message this morning.

The first occurrence of "light" in the gospel of John comes in chapter 1. The first 18 verses of the gospel are often called, "The Prologue," which means, "first words." They sort of set up the gospel of John, introducing Jesus to us. He begins with the creation of the world, describing how Jesus, the Word, was the creator of it all. Then, John proceeds to talk about John the Baptist, how he pointed to Jesus. Then John finishes by describing Jesus, who he is and his mission. That's why I have called this point, ...

1. The Living Light (John 1)

Let's begin reading in verse 1, ...

John 1:1-3

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 any thing made that was made.

Here, we read of Jesus, the Word, with God in the beginning, creating the world. This sets up everything after these verses. In verse 4 comes our first verses that describe Jesus as "light."

John 1:4-5

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.

Now, there are some confusing words in these two verses. Not all of them are confusing, but some of them are. The first phrase is easily understood, enough: "In him was life." Jesus is the one who created all things (verses 1-3). As such, he is the creator of life. Thus, it makes sense that "in him was life." Life came out of him. Easy enough.

But now comes the difficult part, "the life was the light of men." John is being a little poetic here. I think that the best way to understand this is to consider Jesus as "the life." In verse 1, Jesus is "the Word." If so, this verse reads, "Jesus was the light of men." That is, the path to life was Jesus, in whom is all life. This "life" came into the world, as a light in a dark place. Like a light in a cave, he came to lead people to have life. In other words, the very creator of the world, came into the world, as light, which shines in our dark world to give us life. The light was there to see. The life was there to be had.

Now verse 5 sets up the battle of the book of John. It's a battle between light and darkness. It's a battle Jesus and those who opposed him.

John 1:5

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Though many in Jesus' day tried to suppress him and defeat him and overcome him, Jesus prevailed. The light of life shined bright!

I can't help, but to think of what a great metaphor this is of the Christmas season. The light of Jesus is all around. Music in the stores that sing of Jesus in the traditional hymns. Images of Mary and Joseph are seen in the barn, with the baby Jesus in the manger. Even the name, "Christmas" has the word "Christ" in it. Yet, the world tries to suppress it all, by singing only the secular songs of Christmas, making Christmas to be about sleigh bells and snow and glamour and gifts and family and friends. Now, obviously, not all of this is bad. Some of it is good. But, it's as if the world is trying to drown out the message of Jesus during the Christmas season.

The good news is verse 5, "The darkness has not overcome it." Jesus still shines, even in these days of commercialized Christmas. But we see more of the light coming in the next few verses. We read, beginning in verse 6, ...

John 1:6

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

We read about John last week. He was the son of Zechariah, the priest. He was the forerunner to Jesus, the one given to prepare the way for him. This is exactly what we read in verses 7 and 8, ...

John 1:7-8

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.

John the Baptist was not the light. John the Baptist was a flashlight. He sought to shine his light on light! He wanted people to see the light and believe in the light, because, the light was the true light! John identifies this in verse 9, ...

John 1:9

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

The sad reality is found in verse 10, ...

John 1:10

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

How sad it is that the creator of the universe, the one who made the world, stepped into his creation and the world did not know. Again, it's like our Christmas today. There is so much going on in our day, that Jesus gets lost in it all. Yet, Jesus is the reason for it all. Tim Chester said it well, "Jesus is for life, not just for Christmas. He's not just the reason for the season; he's the meaning of everything. He's not just the point of Christmas; he's the purpose of life."[\[3\]](#)

He's the purpose of your life. You must receive him to have the life.

John 1:11-13

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.

Have you received him? Is he your light? He is the whole reason why we celebrate this Christmas season! Jesus is coming! He is (1) the Living Light (John 1). He is also ...

2. The Judging Light (John 3)

In John, chapter 3, John mentions Jesus as the light in verses 19-21. These verses come right after the most famous verse in the Bible, ...

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Not only is this verse famous, it is precious, because it lays out the gospel so clearly. It begins with God. It begins with his heart toward us. He has a heart of love toward us. God's love is so great that he was willing to give his "only Son" to us. That we might believe and have life in his name.

There's a blog that I read every day. It is written by Tim Challies, a very skillful writer. He gives daily insight into the Christians life. He has demonstrated an amazing resilience. I think that he has posted something every day on his blog for 15 years. Well, recently, tragedy struck his house. His son died suddenly. He wrote this on November 4, 2020:

"In all the years I've been writing I have never had to type words more difficult, more devastating than these: Yesterday the Lord called my son to himself—my dear son, my sweet son, my kind son, my godly son, my only son.

Nick was playing a game with his sister and fiancée and many other students when he suddenly collapsed, never regaining consciousness. Students, paramedics, and doctors battled valiantly, but could not save him. He's with the Lord he loved, the Lord he longed to serve. We have no answers to the what or why questions.

Yesterday Aileen and I cried and cried until we could cry no more, until there were no tears left to cry. Then, later in the evening, we looked each other in the eye and said, "We can do this." We don't want to do this, but we can do this—this sorrow, this grief, this devastation—because we know we don't have to do it in our own strength. We can do it like Christians, like a son and daughter of the Father who knows what it is to lose a Son.[\[4\]](#)

His subsequent posts have been very powerful, as he has been grieving for the world to see. They have been very heart-touching posts, as he deals with the reality of what it's like to lose a son. It has caused me to think about what it would be like for me to lose one of my children. It has helped me think about what it was for God the Father to give his "only son." Nick was a student at Boyce College in Louisville, Kentucky, a junior, I think. He was studying for the ministry. He wanted to be a pastor. Nick was a godly young man. Tim loved his only son, Nick. His love is demonstrated in a letter that he found among his possessions in his dorm room. It was a very touching letter that Tim wrote to Nick before leaving on a trip. On a note dated, September 7, 2018, he wrote, ...

Nick,

Before I head to India, there are a few things I want to clarify. First, I love you as much as any father can love a son. Second, I'm as proud of you as any father can be proud of a son. Third, I miss you as much as any father can miss a son.

Love, Dad[\[5\]](#)

Such was the love of Tim, for his son, Nick. Such was the love of God the Father to God the Son, yet infinitely more precious. This is the one that God gave to us: his precious son. We simply believe in Christ and have everlasting life, according to verse 16. What a gift!

There is much more that we could say about John 3:16. But our message takes us to verses 19-21, which mention Jesus as light to this world. It's good for verses 19-21 to be our focus, because we often stop at verse 16. There are more riches to be mined. Jesus says this, ...

John 3:17-18

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, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

The implication of God sending his only son is that life is offered. But those who refuse the life will die. To use the words of Jesus, they "will be condemned." This is because the light coming into the world is a "judging light." It brings us to a crossroads. It brings us to a point of decision. Verses 19-21 lay it out beautifully.

John 3:19-21

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

This is the reality of Jesus coming into the world (that we celebrate at Christmas). The light comes as a judgement. The light has come into the world (verse 19), the light that exposes sin. It has given people a choice, to follow after the light or to reject the light and live in darkness. Those who reject the light, hide away. They don't want people to see what they are doing. They don't want people to know their business. They want to live out their sin without any accountability. But the one who accepts the light and trusts in the light, has no need to hide. His life is an open book, before God and before men.

This is what the light does. It divides the world. That's what the word "Judgment" means. It means to decide, divide, separate, making divisions clear. The light of Jesus divides the world, between those who believe and walk in the light, and those who don't believe the light and choose to walk in their own ways of darkness.

Have you believed in this light? Have you trusted in Jesus?

The reason why people will walk in the light, is not because they know their righteousness, but because they know the Savior who cleanses from sin.

This past week, Yvonne and I were talking about some podcasts and blogs that that she had heard and read. She sent me one from Ray Ortland, Jr.. He was talking about the call to worship at the church he pastored for years. This call to worship was often repeated at the beginning of their church services. It goes like this:

Welcome,

To all who are weary and need rest;
to all who mourn and long for comfort;
to all who feel worthless and wonder if God cares,
to all who fail and desire strength;
to all who sin and need a Savior;
to all who hunger and thirst for righteousness;
and to whoever will come--

*this church opens wide her doors
and offers her welcome in the name
of the Lord Jesus Christ.* [\[6\]](#)

What a good "Call to worship." Now, it's not that we are such great lights that shine so brightly and are not ashamed to be open and exposed. It's that our savior will take us in, if we but desire to walk in the light. But the light judges. It divides us all, between those who want to be exposed and between those who are unwilling to be exposed.

Let's move on to our last two points (which we will deal with quickly). We have seen (1) The Living Light; and (2) The Judging Light. Now, we look at ...

3. The Present Light (John 8)

This is the famous statement in John 8:12, where Jesus says, ...

John 8:12

I am the light of the world.

I say that this is the "present" light, because of the words of "I am." These are words in the present tense. That imply a continual truth. When Jesus walked on the earth, he didn't say, "I was the light of the world." Nor did he say, "I will be the light of the world." No, he said, "I am the

light of the world." And what Jesus was then, he is now and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

Jesus is the light of the world, not Moses or Mohammed or Buddha or the Hari Krishna. Jesus is the light of the world, not others, be they your favorite counselor or philosopher or good writer or good preacher. At best, each of those you follow are those who point to Jesus (as John the Baptist did). When you follow Jesus, you will have life. That's how Jesus continues on in verse 12, ...

John 8:12

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

This is the message that John bangs on his drum. If you believe in Jesus and you will have life! This morning, we are looking at the light. What does it mean? Here in John, chapter 8, it means "freedom." In this chapter, Jesus was arguing back and forth with the Pharisees. Jesus said, ...

John 8:31-32

If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

This is part of Jesus being the light. In the gospel of John, when using "light" of Jesus, it's never used physically. It's always used metaphorically. Light is enlightenment. It is understanding. It is knowledge. It is truth. When you see him and believe in him and trust in him, you will have the light and abide in his word and you will know the truth. It will set you free. There is a freedom in Jesus, which is given to all who believe. A great picture of this freedom comes in the next chapter of John, chapter 9. It tells the story of a man born blind, who had never seen. Jesus heals him. He had come to see the light. He tells his testimony, "I once was blind, but now I see" (John 9:25).

There is an urgency to believe in this light. Jesus said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:5). Jesus came to dwell among us. John would later say in 1 John 1 that we have seen and touched and experienced Jesus in this life (see 1 John 1:1, 3). Jesus knew that his presence among his disciples physically was unique, and only for a short time. There would be a time when he would leave the earth and leave his disciples. While he was among them, he urged them to believe in him.

Jesus is the present light. He gives us freedom. Believe in him.

Now, our last point. I'm calling it ...

4. The Leaving Light (John 12)

This comes in the context of the last public words of Jesus to the Gentiles before he leaves this earth. In John 12:20 we read ...

John 12:20-21

Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

These Greeks come to the disciples, seeking to have a word with Jesus. Jesus speaks these last words to them in chapter 12. Chapters 13-17 will be the final words of Jesus to the disciples. Then, he is betrayed and crucified in chapters 18-19. So, these are the last words to the Gentiles in the gospel of John.

When these Greeks came to Jesus, he spent most of his time talking about his death. He talks in verse 24 of how a seed must die to live. Then in verse 32, Jesus speaks about being "lifted up," which is metaphoric of his crucifixion (see John 3:14-15). The Greeks who came to Jesus were confused. Finally, Jesus says, ...

John 12:35-36

The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.

Again, you see the similar themes of John, "believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." If you don't, you will walk in the darkness and you will stumble, because you don't know where to go. But Jesus has repeatedly said that he is the light. To these people, he says that he will be with them only a little while longer.

The exhortation is to believe while you have the light. This has application to us the Christmas season. As the light comes, you must believe in the light to have life.

One last time in the gospel of John does he use the word, "light." It's much the same idea as we have heard before. Jesus said, ...

John 12:46

I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

That's when Jesus comes as a light in the world. When he is there, he is calling people to turn to him, that they might not walk in darkness. While on the earth, he had compassion for those walking in darkness, as sheep without a shepherd. But he shined forth claiming to be the light, calling everyone to believe and trust in him.

But sadly, there are many who see and don't believe. This came in John 12:37ff, when Jesus speaks about the prophecy that Isaiah received of the Lord. Remember when he saw the vision of the exalted Lord, who cleansed him of his sin and said, "Who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:9). The Lord told Isaiah ...

John 6:40

He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their heart,
lest they see with their eyes,
and understand with their heart, and turn,
and I would heal them.

This is the reality of what Jesus faced in his ministry. He went forth with his message of light and truth. But many were blind to the truth and hardened in their hearts. They didn't see. They didn't believe. The only way that they would believe is by the sovereignty of God.

John comments, ...

John 12:41-43

Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

Jesus is saying this, "I'm here! You have the light! Believe in the light!" But some believed and some did not. Others were believing, but scared that they would be kicked out the synagogue.

Let me encourage you. At all costs, see the light, believe the light, and follow in the light. He is the eternal light. He will give us light through this dark time of the year 2020.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 13, 2020 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] See <https://www.lakeshastacaverns.com>.

[2] Here is a simple search that will show the instances of "light" in the gospel of John:
https://www.biblegateway.com/quicksearch/?qs_version=ESV&quicksearch=light&begin=50&end=50&resultspp=250.

[3] I'm not sure where to find this quote in print. But you can find a graphic of the quote here: <https://www.challies.com/a-la-carte/weekend-a-la-carte-december-12-2/>.

[4] <https://www.challies.com/articles/my-son-my-dear-son-has-gone-to-be-with-the-lord/>.

[5] <https://www.challies.com/articles/on-running-a-short-race-well/>.

[6] <https://renewalministries.com/2019/08/grateful/>.