

December 25, 2011 by Steve Brandon



The Light of Christmas

John 1:4-8

1. The Light Brings Life (verse 4).
2. Many Miss the Light (verse 5).
3. Do You Believe in the Light? (verses 6-8).

Here it is, Christmas morning--the day in which the church has traditionally celebrated the birth of Christ. And we have done so in our songs, in our Scripture readings, in our prayers. Traditions saturate our celebration of Christmas. We have traditional songs. We have traditional decorations. We have traditional customs. We give gifts. We watch "It's a Wonderful Life." We set out our nativity scenes. We cut down trees and bring them into our homes. We visit our relatives. We read stories. We go out caroling with our friends. Some of these traditions can be hollow. Like the NBA on Christmas day. Or like some of the cartoon stories. But, some of these traditions can be rich with meaning. I want for us to consider one of those rich traditions this morning: lights.

Think about the role of lights and Christmas. Lights are everywhere. We place lights on Christmas trees. We place lights on our houses and the streets and on buildings. The White House has a tree lighting ceremony each year. Here in Rockford, we have the "Festival of Lights." You can go to Sinnissippi Park and turn on your radio to B103fm to listen to Christmas music and look at more than 50 lighted displays, as you drive slowly through the park. The displays are up through January 1st. They are pretty. We have candles. Candles are placed in windows and on Advent wreaths and in churches. Stars are often placed on top of Christmas trees. Ornaments for the tree are often shaped like stars. Christmas cookies are often shaped like stars.

Now, not all of these have great spiritual significance. Even pagan cultures celebrate with light. A few years ago, I was in Nepal during Tihar, the Hindu festival of lights. It looked like our Christmas. The buildings were decked out with lights all around. It was very pretty.

Many times, the lights we display are for decoration according to our custom. Lights add to the festive spirit of the season. But ultimately, these lights do point to the ultimate light: Jesus Christ. Jesus called Himself "The Light of the World" (John 8:12). Any other light is a dim reflection of the light of Jesus Christ.

Can you imagine what it would be like without light? On November 9th, 1965, a significant portion of the northeastern United States and good portion of western Ontario, Canada and Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, New York, and New Jersey in the United States. "Over 30 million people ... were left without electricity for up to 12 hours." [\[1\]](#) It came to be known as the "Northeast Blackout of 1965". The blackout began to hit about rush hour, as everyone was heading home from work. One man gave this testimony, ...

"I had to take a plane trip from Boston to New York City. I got on the plane, and everything began to progress in the usual way. We got clearance from the tower, moved away from the gate, rolled out onto the tarmac, and then stopped moving. And we sat there, and we sat there, and we sat there. Finally, I looked out the window and what I saw was absolute darkness.

There wasn't a single light on in the airport. All the lights had gone out. Then the pilot came on the speaker system and told us that not only were there no lights in the airport, there were no lights anywhere in the city of Boston, anywhere in the state of Massachusetts, or anywhere in the New England region of the United States.

...

So, I had to get off the airplane and with great care find my way back to the house where I had been staying. There were no street lights. Traffic was jammed up at every corner. No electric trains were working. There was very little security protection for the people on the streets.

Elevators in skyscrapers stopped wherever they were, most of them between floors. People had to walk down from the top of the highest buildings in the world, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety, even one hundred floors, to get out on the street and try to get home. Restaurants couldn't serve meals. Shopping malls and movie theaters went totally dark. People couldn't get to the hospitals. Mothers about to give birth had great difficulties.

...

People were trapped in Darkness." [\[2\]](#)

That's how Jesus found the world when He entered. It was dark. It was black. It was without hope. That's the world that Jesus entered. But, being the light of the world, Jesus brought hope.

There was a prophecy from the book of Isaiah that said, "The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light, And those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, Upon them a light dawned" (Is. 9:2 as quoted by Matthew 4:16). The picture here is of a people, walking in darkness, just like in the Northeast Blackout, groping around without any direction or any hint of where to go. And Jesus comes

unto the scene. He was the light that came into the world. He was the light that "enlightens every man" (John 1:9). Jesus is the one who shows people the way. He leads them out of darkness into light. They are lost because of their sin, in darkness because of their sin. But, Jesus came to bring them into the light to see the light and to walk in the light.

Peter said it this way, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). Paul says it this way, "[Jesus] rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" [where we are] qualified ... to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light" (Colossians 1:12-13). That's what Jesus does. He takes people walking in the darkness of their own sin, and brings them to life in the light.

But, let's get to the Bible. My text is found in John, chapter 1. My message is entitled, "The Light of Christmas." I want to read the first 14 verses of this book, which uses the word "light" on six different occasions.

John 1:1-15

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 came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.

There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 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 saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This text is all about Christmas. It starts by stating the deity of Jesus. Verse 1 says, "The word was with God, and the word was God." These verses speak of how Jesus created everything. And Verse 3 says, "All things came into being through Him." And, the wonders of wonders, Jesus Christ came into the flesh. He came into His creation. Finally, verse 14 says, "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us."

We could reflect upon those verses for a long time. Jesus, existing eternally with the Father. Jesus, creating the world. Jesus, coming into the very world He created to save us from our sins. But, this morning, I want to look at some other verses here in John's prologue, particularly those verses that direct our attention to Jesus Christ as "the Light."

So, with this text, I have two observations and a question.

I want to look at verses 4-8, in which the theme of light is front and center.

1. The Light Brings Life (verse 4).

You can see this right there in verse 4, "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men." Jesus Christ has life, in and of Himself. "In Him was life."

Many people in this world believe the material substance of this universe came first, and then life evolved out of that matter in the cesspool filled with amino acids. But, here we read in John, chapter 1, that it's really the other way around. Life was first, and the world was formed from the life. Jesus, the Word, who was with God in the beginning, had life. The world was created by Him. From Him, life came to the earth.

Note well that life on earth didn't originate from itself. No, life on earth came from Jesus. "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men" (verse 4). When Jesus came to the earth, He came as life-giving light. Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life" (John 8:12).

Picture yourself lost in a cave in utter darkness. You can't see the hand in front of your face. You are lost and without hope. You are longing for someone to come along with a flash light to help you get out of the darkness. So, you wait and you wait.

And now, picture this: along comes Jesus. How does He come? He doesn't come with a flashlight in his hand. He is the flashlight. He illumines the way, because He, Himself, is the light. It's not that Jesus has the light in His hand that we follow. No, Jesus is the light that we follow.

And as we set our gaze upon Him, we will never be lost, but will be led to life. Oh, do you want life? Then heed the words of Jesus, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life" (John 8:12). That's my first observation: The Light Brings Life (verse 4). Follow the light, and He will bring you to life!

Here's my second observation, ...

2. Many Miss the Light (verse 5).

I get this from verse 5, "The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." Or another reading says, "The darkness did not overcome it." The ESV translates this verse in this way. It reads, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not

overcome it."

The difference in the words comes from the vagueness of the Greek text. D. A. Carson calls this verse "a masterpiece of planned ambiguity." In other words, the Greek text can be read either way and is purposefully ambiguous.

Reading it with the ESV, it's simply a statement about light shining in darkness, referring to the creation. When light shines in darkness, light always wins. "Darkness has not overcome [the light]." You shine a flashlight in the dark, and the flashlight will always win.

The New American Standard translation here reads differently. It's coming from the bigger perspective that we see throughout the gospel of John. It's the perspective that I want for us to think about this morning. Jesus, the light, came into the darkness. And the darkness did not understand the light. The darkness did not grasp it; it didn't take hold of it; it didn't "overcome" it.

This is what verse 11 says, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). He came into the world, and was not received by the world. He came to the Jews, and the Jews rejected Him.

When Jesus died, He had but a few followers. Though He fed thousands, though He healed hundreds, He only had a few terrified disciples and a few faithful women at His death.

This is my point: Many Miss the Light (verse 5). They missed it in Jesus' day. We see this in 1 Corinthians 2:8, "for if [the rulers of this world] had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;". And they miss it in our day. The message of Jesus is out everywhere in our society. You can see manger scenes all around town. You can hear the Christmas music in all the stores. Church services this weekend are attended by thousands, many of whom only go to church on Christmas and Easter. And yet, there are many in our society today who miss the light. They don't see the light. The gospel has not gripped them. They have been exposed to the light, but haven't been overwhelmed with the grace of God in their own lives.

There are two reasons why. First of all is the reason that Jesus gives. Jesus said, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). The picture is this: Jesus, the bright light, has come. But, men, like cockroaches, have hated the light. And so, they have scurried to get away from the light. They have wanted no part of it.

The second reason why many miss the light today is because of the work of Satan. In 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, "Even if our gospel is veiled [i.e. if people don't comprehend it], it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ."

The gospel of Jesus Christ is light and life for our soul! We are sinners and in need of grace. We deserve God's wrath because of our sin. But, instead, Jesus comes to redeem us. We simply need to believe!

We see a great example of this truth in Acts chapter 26. When the Lord Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, He gave him his life-long assignment: to go to the Jews and to the Gentiles, "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me" (Acts 26:18). This is the gospel. The gospel is turning from darkness to light. It is receiving forgiveness of sins by faith in Jesus.

As Tim Keller has said, "I am more sinful and flawed than I ever dared to believe. But I am more loved and welcomed than I ever dared to hope." That's the glory of the gospel. As deep as our sin is, God's love is greater still! Our error is that we don't see sin as dark as it is. We don't see Christ as bright as He is. Today, we might say Tim Keller's observation this way: "My heart is filled with greater darkness than I ever dared to believe. But, the Light of Jesus penetrates more deeply than I ever dared to hope!"

When Isaiah saw the Lord, he was overwhelmed with the brightness and saw the darkness of his sin. And yet, there is forgiveness if we just believe!

This leads to my final question. My two observations were that The Light Brings Life (verse 4) and that Many Miss the Light (verse 5). My final question is this, ...

3. Do You Believe in the Light? (verses 6-8).

Look at verse 6, ...

John 1:6-8

There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.

These verses take us to the ministry of John the Baptist. He was prophesied to be the forerunner to Christ, "to prepare the way" as Isaiah 40:3 says. And in so doing, he will identify the Messiah.

You can see the purpose of his life in verse 7, "He came as a witness, to testify about the Light" (verse 7). As if you didn't catch that, John repeats himself in verse 8, "He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light" (verse 8). And when you read of the ministry of John the Baptist, this is exactly what He did. He denied that he was the light. And he testified about the Light.

When the religious leaders came to him asking, "Who are you?" (verse 19), John said, "I am not the Christ. ... I am not [Elijah]. ... [I am not the Prophet]" (verses 20-21). "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" (verse 23). John wasn't the light.

Then, on one occasion, when he saw Jesus coming to him, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). And then, John told the story of how he saw the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and remained upon Jesus (verse 33). And then he says, "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God" (verse 34). John testified about the light.

Here's the thing that strikes me about the ministry of John the Baptist. The whole purpose of his life was to testify to Jesus Christ. When that job was done, he was done. John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). It's no accident that when John went to prison, the ministry of Jesus came into prominence. Mark 1:14-15 tells us, "Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'" Once the forerunner was out of the way, it was time for Jesus to arise in His ministry.

But did you catch the main reason why John was testifying about the Light? It wasn't merely a point of interest. It wasn't merely to cure a curiosity. No, it had a purpose. Verse 7, "He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him." He pointed out Jesus, that that all might believe. It's my question to you this morning: Do You Believe in the Light? (verses 6-8).

This is really the point of our celebration of Christmas. We celebrate because "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." We celebrate because this Word lived among us. We celebrate because this Word ultimately died upon the cross for our sins. We celebrate because we believe this! And I press this question to all of you here this morning. Do You Believe in the Light? (verses 6-8). Do you believe that Jesus is God? Do you believe that He came into the flesh? Do you believe that He died upon the cross as our sin-bearing substitute? Do you believe that He rose again, that we might have life anew with God?

"Once, Dr. [Earl S.] Taylor was in Calcutta during an eclipse of the sun. For days before that event he saw the city's streets crowded with pil-grims on their way to various sacred places, where they hoped to wor-ship and bathe in the Hooghly River just below the Ganges during the time of the eclipse, expecting thereby to ward off evil. When at last the fateful hour of darkness arrived hundreds of thousands of natives thronged the sacred waters, terrorized by the eclipse and making a great clamor because they feared a great power of evil in the form of a snake was about to swallow the sun god. As Dr. Taylor, looking from the Y. M. C. Building, witnessed this terrible evidence of heathenish superstition, he heard group of native Christians singing in their meeting: "The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin; The Light of the World is Jesus" ^[3]

Those words come from a hymn, written by Philip Bliss in 1875. Here is the hymn in its entirety.

The whole world was lost
In the darkness of sin,
The Light of the world is Jesus!
Like sunshine at noonday,
His glory shone in.
The Light of the world is Jesus!

Refrain: Come to the light, 'tis shining for thee;
Sweetly the light has dawned upon me.
Once I was blind, but now I can see:
The Light of the world is Jesus!

No darkness have we
Who in Jesus abide;
The Light of the world is Jesus!
We walk in the light
When we follow our Guide!
The Light of the world is Jesus!

Ye dwellers in darkness
With sin blinded eyes,
The Light of the world is Jesus!
Go, wash, at His bidding,
And light will arise.
The Light of the world is Jesus!

No need of the sunlight In Heaven we're told;
The Light of the world is Jesus! The Lamb is the Light
In the city of gold, The Light of the world is Jesus!

The Light of Christmas is Jesus. The heart of my message is this -- come to Him; receive Him; believe Him; trust in Him.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 25, 2011 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northeast_blackout_of_1965.

[2] <http://www.christlife.org/resources/articles/ForrestJesuslight.html>.

[3] <http://cyberhymnal.org/html/w/worldij.htm>.