

Advent 2023 Veiled in Flesh the Godhead See, The Light, John 1:4-11, 12/10/23

I was at the dentist this week, I have a very talkative dental hygienist. Very nice, although it is a little awkward having a conversation when she is 3 inches from my face...She asked me if we put up our tree, “ugh huh.” She asks “Now do you get a real tree or a fake one?” “Well we get a fake one.” And she looked at me, all I can see is her eyebrows because she has a mask, but her eyebrows are furrowed, she’s not happy. “You do? Ugh, that’s just wrong, you have to have real one!” And she went on a rant about why a fake tree goes against the spirit of Christmas. Now how many of you agree with her? How many are with me, you don’t want the hassle, and the mess, buy an overpriced tree every year...To me, whether it is fake or real, it’s all about proper light on the tree. This year I put 1200 lights on our tree, took me a few hours, but it looks fantastic in the window.

Lighting the Christmas tree is among the most cherished Christmas traditions. People from around the world flock to NYC to partake in the lighting of the Christmas Tree in Rockefeller Center, which has more than 50,000 lights. Did you know that people were lighting the Christmas tree before electric lights were invented? They would pin candles onto the Christmas Tree, which made me wonder how many homes burned down when inevitably little Johnny would knock over a candle and the tree would be up in flames. But did you know, the origin of this tradition goes all the way back to Martin Luther the great protestant reformer in the 16th century Germany. Luther was meditating on the Scripture that we are reading today, and he wanted to give his congregation a way to celebrate John’s depiction of incarnation of Jesus. The Christmas tree is a symbol of Christ as the giver of everlasting life and the lights symbolized Jesus, the light that came into the world born in Bethlehem that first Christmas. Read John 1-11

In verses 1-3, we’ve already seen that **Jesus is the WORD**. The Logos: The Divine, Personal Creator of everything that exists and the very purpose of our existence. Now John is going to tell us three things we need to know about Jesus as the Light. **The Purpose of the Light, The Rejection of the Light, The Witness to the Light**. Let’s look at the purpose of the Light.

⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Light is used 7x in John’s prologue to describe Jesus. Anyone familiar with the OT would have immediately recognized this as a messianic prophecy from **Isaiah 9:2***The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned*. When the Messiah came it was said that he would bring light into a dark world. But it wasn’t just John making this connection, Jesus often claimed to be the fulfillment of this prophecy, for example, **John 8:12***“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* What does it mean that Jesus is the Light? Jesus isn’t actually particles of energy that you can send through a prism to make a rainbow. So we need to explore this metaphor a bit. I believe Isaiah, Jesus and John all meant at least three things about Jesus as the Light. Let me just introduce the first one but we aren’t going to explore it because it will be the topic for next week’s message- **1) Light Gives Life**: John and

Jesus equate Life and Light here in this passage. The kind of light that Jesus brings, much like the light of creation in Genesis 1- brings life, without the light of Jesus, there is no life.

2) Light Illuminates Reality. I don't know about you, but I like to sleep in the pitch black, we have blackout shades. When we go on vacation sometimes we bring black trash bags and I tape them over the windows like I'm a vampire...Shannan loves how classy I am. The joys of being married to me are endless. The downside of sleep in the pitch black is...I drink a lot of water and I'm over 40, which means that I regularly have to get up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night. Now, I have walked the little path from my bed to the bathroom many times, but for some reason usually about once a month I will jam my thigh into the corner of our bed frame on the way back to bed...and I will cause commotion and wake up Shannan...again the joys of being married to me. You might say, the darkness blinds me to the reality of the bed frame. Navigating life without light is dangerous. If I was smart enough, I would carry a flashlight to illuminate my path and avoid the danger. Light illuminates physical reality. Light shows the nature of what something is, it tells the truth about what is so that we can navigate reality and avoid danger. John is saying- **Jesus is the Light because he illuminates ultimate reality.** His light reveals what is existentially, spiritually, actually true about everything in the universe, Jesus illuminates the ultimate reality of who God is. He says in **John 14:9 Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.** In Jesus, we finally see the light of the glory of God like never before, shining in the face of Jesus Christ. Jesus illuminates the ultimate reality of salvation: **John 14:6 I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.** Jesus says he is the very embodiment of truth. **John 18:37 In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.** Jesus illuminates the reality of our purpose, our identity, our relationships, our pain, our disappointments, the entirety of our life and death, so that by his light, we can avoid the existential and spiritual danger of walking in darkness. Jesus shines like a beacon in the darkness of modern culture that has undermined the nature of truth and exchanged capital T truth for little, personal truths of moral relativism. We are told to find the light inside ourselves, to look inside ourselves to see and discover our own truth. How's that working? But Jesus, the Light of the world says "Until you look to me you will never see ultimate reality, you will be groping in darkness running into far more than the bed corners of reality, but the greatest existential threat: life without the Light of God forever separated from Him in darkness. Every testimony of faith in Jesus is like the man born blind whom Jesus healed, whose testimony was simply, "I was blind but now I see!"

3) Light Exposes Darkness. Our first apartment in the DC Metro Area was a cheap one-bedroom apartment, very simple but we didn't care, we were young and in love so it didn't matter, we were just happy to be out of our parents' houses...until we found out the apartment complex had a roach problem. I discovered this the hard way when one evening I came out to the kitchen, flicked on the light and to my horror, saw a half a dozen roaches scurry back into the darkness. Needless to say, it was time to move. Light exposes what hides in the darkness... And let me ask you a question- is there anything beautiful, cuddly or loveable that lives in darkness and avoids the light? No- Do you think maybe God is trying to get our attention when we live in spiritual and moral darkness? This is a reoccurring spiritual metaphor in Scripture: the purity of light and the evil of darkness. What John is saying is that **The purity of Jesus exposes spiritual**

darkness. Listen to what Jesus says about himself, in John 3 ¹⁹ *This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.* ²⁰ *Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.*

Jesus was utterly sinless, holy and was the perfect embodiment of love, justice, goodness, humility, compassion, grace. He healed the sick. He encouraged the brokenhearted, served the poor. Never once did an impure motive, evil thought ever enter his mind and heart. His every desire was motivated by love and truth. In other words, he was utterly unique from every other human being who ever walked the face of the earth, and because of the exposure to his light, the darkness of this world and the human heart did not want to face it.

The purity of his life was in stark contrast to the world he entered 2000 years ago, just as it would be if he entered our world today. Imagine if the incarnation happened in our world today. Imagine how the light of his humble service would stand out in the power hunger of our political world. Imagine how the light of his tenderness and compassion toward the marginalized would expose the darkness of apathy and greed. Or how the light of his forgiveness and mercy would expose our bitterness and the cycle of revenge. Or how the light of his purity would expose the darkness of our entertainment and media. Imagine what the light of his truthful words would expose in the darkness of things that happen in our workplaces, schools, even our religious institutions. But it's not just the darkness out there, it's the darkness in here. That dwells in the dark corners of our hearts and lives and what we do when we think no one is watching. How would the world today receive the light of Jesus? How would you receive the light of Jesus? Would we humbly step into the light or scurry away back into darkness? This question leads us into the 2nd thing John wants us to know about Jesus as the Light. **The Rejection of the Light.**

⁹ *The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.* ¹⁰ *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.* ¹¹ *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.*

Jesus, the light of the world was rejected by the very world he made. Verses 10-11 John seems to be repeating himself, but he's not. These are two different groups. The World (Gentiles) and His own (Religious Jews)...both missed Jesus and missed him equally, no difference, all fall short of the glory of God. The religious and the rebellious, absolutely at the exact same spot but they missed him in different ways. Look back at verse 5 ***The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*** The Greek word here can mean two things: either overcome (over power) or understand. Which one does John have in mind? Based on verses 10-11 I believe it's both. See there are two ways that people rejected the light of Christ in his first coming- on one hand, some were hostile toward him trying to overcome and fight against him, and eventually kill him or on the other hand, some thought that they understood him and were

following him but were not, they had their own agendas, own misconceptions of who he was and why he came, even in his own family.¹

[Rejection Slide] How does this play out today? People still reject Jesus two ways. Many people are hostile to Jesus, they reject that Jesus really died and rose again, or there is just overall rejection of the notion of an absolute truth, or moral authority or logos that we have to conform ourselves to. No one can tell me what to do, how to live my life or become, I don't need a savior. There's a guy at the Y, we were having a spiritual conversation and he said, he's not interested in knowing Jesus because he doesn't want someone telling him what to do. I tried to explain to him that it's more like a healthy marriage, where you do things for your spouse and are willing to sacrifice your own agenda out of love...but he said, that's also why I don't want to get married. Maybe you are here today in church, but if you are being honest, your posture to Jesus is hostility. You don't want him interfering with your life, your choices, you don't want his life because you want to run your own life. How's that going? Honestly? Do you have joy, fulfillment, deep peace even when circumstances are difficult?

There are others who believe in God and Jesus, maybe even would say they are religious or even use the label Christian on survey. They might be attending church regularly, saying prayers, giving and serving, they might be good, moral people. And yet, aren't actually following Jesus because they miss understand who he is and why he came, they have their own agenda with Jesus. These are people that if you asked them if they died today and stood before Jesus and he said, why should I let you in my kingdom? They would probably say, "Well because I tried to be a good person. I went to church, I helped the poor, I cared about justice, I tried not to judge people, I recycled, I was vegan, I adopted not shopped for my pet..." or whatever else they believe makes you a good person. See, Jesus didn't come to the planet to say- here's how to live, live better, be a good person, be a net-contributor in the world and everything will be fine. No, he did tell us how to live. But that's not why he came. He came to overcome the darkness of sin in this world, in our hearts, our sin that separates us from a holy God, by being the only pure light, the only one without darkness and being our substitute for sin, dying in our place to pay for our sin once and for all. Until we admit that we are a sinner, and that there is absolutely no way for us to be good enough to get to heaven accept through Jesus, we are like those in the world in v.10 who did not recognize the light. Maybe you are here today and you think you are following Jesus because you are trying hard to be a good person but you have never received the light because you have not recognized your need for a savior from your sin. The hope of Christmas is the light of Jesus- his light is constant, it's always there waiting for us to come out of the darkness of our sin, our misconceptions and embrace the light.

Finally, **The Witness to the Light**

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

¹ Thanks to Tim Keller for these categories. Sermon from 1998 (www.gospelinlife.org)

The apostle John is speaking about another John, John the Baptist. We know this because in verse 15 he will go on to describe John the Baptist's ministry in the wilderness as a witness to the ministry of Jesus. Later, Jesus in John 17 will pray for the disciples to be a witness to the Light in the world. In fact, Jesus will call his followers in the great commission to be witnesses throughout the world, and go as far as to say that we are the light of the world because we contain the Light of Christ in us if we believe in him. I believe what John is doing is emphasizing in the very beginning of his Gospel, the truth that human witnesses to the light of Christ are always necessary. John Piper- "The Light has come into the world. But his light does not conquer this darkness the way a bolt of lightning brightens the night. His light is going to conquer darkness by lighting millions of cold, dead human torches with the oxygen [and fuel] of the gospel."² We serve a saving and sending God. God has always used human witnesses as his primary means of accomplishing His mission of reconciliation and salvation through Jesus Christ. The way this works is that when the gospel light comes on for us, that he immediately begins sending us to turn on the light in others' lives! We are God's plan A for his mission and there is no plan B. This ought to do two things in us if we truly have the light. It ought to motivate us to not hide it under a bushel but let our light shine. In our schools, work, home, neighborhood, everywhere we go, we carry the light, the question is whether or not we hide it. Does it motivate you?

Some simple ways to do that this season. You can be a witness to the light by: handing someone an invitation to our Christmas season events, or sending them a link on our Facebook page. You can tell someone the origin story of the Christmas Tree. You can ask how you can pray for them. You can invite them for a meal and share the hospitality of Jesus. You can host a Christmas cookie exchange or ornament exchange. You can share why you have hope when this world seems hopeless. We are the light of the world, shine your light.

This should motivate us, but it also ought to humble us, because John says, he was NOT the light, only a witness to it. He just pointed people to the light. John the Baptist said I must decrease and he must increase. This is the same humility the Apostle Paul had, 2 Corinthians 4:5-7 ⁵ For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. This is the posture I seek to maintain as your pastor. It is my goal to preach the light of Jesus, never the light of Nate. I might have the microphone, but I am an ordinary vessel, a jar of clay just like you. This Advent season, what a great opportunity we have to carry the light of Jesus into a dark world searching for hope! May we do so with eagerness and humility.

² <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/in-him-was-life>