

A World for God

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[0 : 0 0] It's in John chapter 1. We read these verses 4 and 5. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.

These opening verses of John's account of the gospel remind us afresh that it's not just the kids that when the Lord came amongst us in human flesh, as we saw it, see in verse 14, the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

This wasn't God's first action in the world. Jesus Christ has been God from all eternity. He became flesh in the womb of the Virgin, and yes, that is what so much of the world purports to have been celebrating in the past week.

But long before he was flesh, he was already God from all eternity. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, that is with the Father, and the Word was God, was God the Son.

And we know that this Word, capital W, is a reference to God the Son because it specifically tells us in verse 14, the Word was made flesh. Now, only God the Son was made flesh in that sense.

[1 : 1 9] So, this is a reference to Christ, Christ from all eternity. The same was in the beginning with God, that is with God the Father, and all things were made by him.

There is nothing in all creation which one person of the Trinity did without the other. All three persons of the Trinity were involved in the work of creation.

The creative power of God is in himself, and specifically is in his Spirit and in his Son. In the beginning was the Word. John the Baptist may indeed be the voice of one crying in the wilderness, and everything to which that faithful messenger testified was truly to Christ.

But Christ is himself not merely the voice, he is the Word itself. He is the one to whom John and all the other prophets and all the Scriptures testified.

All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made. Now, this reminds us again that all that God has done, he has done not primarily so that we will look at it and think, Oh yeah, not too bad, Lord, you did a good job with that.

[2 : 3 2] You made a nice job with the heavens and the earth, you made a nice job with the sky, and yes, okay, you borrowed my life reasonably comfortably, thanks very much. God does not act primarily for our good opinion.

He does not do what he does so that we will have simply a nice life. God does not act with man at the center of his universe. The universe is not man-centered.

It never was. It never has been. This is part of the skewing of our entire worldview. It is why it is so lopsided, why it is so back to front and upside down, because it is the oldest heresy and idolatry in the book, literally, to put man in the place of God.

God does not do what he does simply for our benefit. We do benefit, but God does not do it for us. God does it primarily for his glory.

And the sooner we in our individual souls recognize that the universe is and always has been God-centered, and that before the universe was, God was there.

[3 : 45] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. There was nothing else before God. All that there is, he made. Without whom there was not anything made that was made.

You see, it is not just a modern fallacy. That old well-created matter has always been, always. There's never been a time when it wasn't, and we try to work out how things came into being with big bangs, and goodness knows all what.

It is an ancient fallacy. All the ancient philosophers, and stoics, and so on, and Platonists, and goodness knows all what from the ancient world, all believed that matter was from everlasting to everlasting.

There hadn't been a time when there wasn't the world. The only people who thought differently were the Jews and the Christians. Those to whom the Lord had made himself known.

Those to whom he had revealed himself by means of his creation and providence, and by means of his revealed word. For those who knew something of the true God, they knew that matter was not from all eternity.

[4 : 56] Created things and beings had not always been there. There is nothing that was made that was not made by God. I will say that again, although it's mind-numbingly obvious.

There is nothing that has been made that was not made by God. All things were made by him. And without him was not anything made that was made. What God has made, he has made for his glory.

He has made all the heavens and the earth, all the stars and planets and constellations in the vastness of the universe. He has made to glorify his name.

He has made this earth, this one, the solitary, tiny planet that is inhabited. He has made this earth to glorify his name.

He has created man in his image, male and female, as the personification of what God is meant to be like. He has created us in his image to glorify his name and that we might have relationship with him.

[6 : 02] He has set all things before us, yes, for our good and blessing and benefit and pleasure, but primarily for his glory. And when man fell, as God knew from all eternity that he would, he had instituted the covenant of grace for his glory.

To demonstrate this is not only what God is like, this redeeming, saving deity, but also this is what the depth of his love is like.

It is beyond our comprehension. The darkness does not comprehend it. Evil does not comprehend it. It doesn't get it.

It does not overcome it. It cannot outshine with its darkness that which is light personified. And this is part of the thing which the word is declaring here.

An ordinary, mortal, fallen man cannot in and of himself unlock the secrets of God's glory. Cannot of himself unlock the truth which God only makes known of himself to those who will receive it.

[7 : 19] The Lord makes himself known to his people. No man hath seen God at any time, verse 18. The only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared it.

If there is any life at all in this world, it is because God has created it. Since there is life, it is because God has done it.

If there is spiritual life, it is because the Lord has planted his own spiritual life in the souls of those who will receive it.

In him was life. It was always the case from all eternity that only in God did life exist.

And only such life as God gives will ever come into existence. Of course, this has huge implications for humanity.

[8 : 14] The ease with which human beings extinguish the lives of one another, whether it be with, you know, vast numbers killed in war or with bombs or with, you know, euthanasia or the slaughter of the unborn or whatever it may be.

Each time an immortal soul, their life on earth, is extinguished, it is a life that God himself has brought into being.

in him was life and the life was the light of man. There is no life. There has never been any life in this world or anywhere else that God has not made.

When we extinguish a life in this world, we extinguish something which God himself put there. And there are consequences for that.

Thou shalt not kill as one of God's primary commandments because life and death and the issues from it are in his hands. If then we have life at all, it is because the Lord has given it to us.

[9 : 20] If we have spiritual life, if we are conscious of the Lord and his presence and of the gift of his son, Jesus Christ, it is only because he has made that known to us.

In him was life and the light was the light of man. The light shineth in darkness. That is part of its purpose. It is one of the first things, remember of course, that God ever did in the work of creation.

It is the first thing that he did. He said, let there be light. There was light. The light shines in the darkness. Jesus describes himself as the light of the world.

The light shineth in darkness. That's what it does. When it shines in the darkness, it dispels the darkness. We know that this is true. We know that if you switch on a light and the darkness vanishes and the only places where there might still be darkness is where the light doesn't reach me around a corner or behind a box or something like that that's hidden away.

If there's an accruciation on a pile of clothes and underneath that there's going to be darkness because the light doesn't penetrate there and wherever the light goes, it vanishes the darkness. darkness. Now, wherever the truth and the light of Christ goes, it banishes the darkness.

[10 : 38] Not in the sense that everybody will receive that light and everybody will believe it and joyfully respond to it. But once they are conscious of it, once the light has come, one has a choice.

You can either dwell on the light or you can choose to try and blot it out, cover it up, switch it off, blot it out, try and make it so the light cannot get there.

But one way or another there has to be a response. Wherever the light comes, people will respond in one of two ways. They will either receive it or they will reject it.

You might think, oh, well, wait a minute, no, there's more than two ways. You don't just either get converted or else just totally be an absolute enemy of the Lord. You know, you might be quite positive about the things of God.

You might say, yeah, I think it's good things what Jesus teaches. Good stuff, yeah, and Christianity gives a lot of good, you know, with being a homeless and the poor and the food banks and all these other things.

[11 : 40] That's good, positive things. Yeah, I'm very positive about that. I just don't feel the need to personally engage with this God that you worship. You know, that's okay for you, but it's not my personal choice, but I'm not against.

You might say, that's another option. That's a perfect and legitimate response, you might say. That is still rejection. That is still refusal of the Lord.

Those who, without wishing to put the Lord himself into the weak, helpless position of the man in the parable, if you think of the parable of a good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite, they may not have been negative towards the man.

They didn't come over and give him a new kicking. They didn't say, oh, what else can I steal from this poor guy that's lying on the ground here, sore and bleeding. They didn't rub salt into his wounds. They just looked and they went on.

Nothing to do with me. I'm not making things worse for him, but I'm not making them better. It doesn't matter whether they are amongst the rulers who had attacked him or the priest and the Levite that ignored him.

[12 : 41] It is still rejection. The only person who actually comes out of that parable with any credit is the one who responds positively. And likewise, when we think of our Lord Jesus Christ, of course, now he reigns in glory.

Of course, that is the state from which he will come again to judge the quick and the dead. But when we think of what he has endured for sinners, when we think of our Lord, not as the man bleeding by the roadside from Jerusalem to Jericho, but think of the Savior bleeding on the cross.

Think of all that he has endured for sinners. There are only two responses. We either respond to him in love and worship and repentance, or we either are on the other side rejecting with the priests and the Pharisees and the scribes and condemning and the Romans who helped put him to death or those who just watch from a distance and then indifferently go away.

It doesn't matter. They are all on the same side. They are all making the same response. That is, rejecting the Savior upon the cross.

When the light comes into the world, you either dwell in the light or you try to shut it out. And when the gospel comes throughout the world, those who follow other religions or false gods or prophets, they will either respond to it positively, they will recognize that this fills a need in their soul and all the other religions of the world never did and all the things they were taught and all the vain philosophies of the world do not satisfy or they will feel themselves threatened by it and react negatively.

[14 : 27] And both these things are happening in the world today as the gospel is growing and as more and more believers are being given that new birth, more people are being brought into the kingdom.

so the reaction against it is likewise tightening. We are seeing more intensity of persecution against the gospel than we've probably seen for centuries in the world.

But at the same time, we are likewise seeing greater numbers being saved across the world than has ever been the case at any time in history.

Now, again, we mustn't fall into the trap of being man-centered here. I'm saying, oh, well, you know, there's reasons for this. It's because people are finding, you know, the emptiness of one of the world or of other religions and they see something new and fresh and something they want to embrace in the gospel teaching.

They're following a trend. They're following a wave. No, they're not. Everybody who chooses for Christ does so at a cost. There's the cost of rejection, perhaps, by their families, by their culture, by their society.

[15 : 34] There may be violence. There may be outright persecution. There may be martyrdom. What is it that caused them? Oh, it's the internet. The availability now of these Christian teachings they could download at the click of a button that before they couldn't.

They'd have to wait for missionaries to go into their countries and learn their languages and make contact with as many people as they could before. It was laborious. It was slow. And when you think back and yes, it was, it's a miracle.

So many people were converted and saved by the old ways as ever were. But now, oh, you can flood the world through the cyberspace. You can send out all the downloads of the Bible and Christian teaching and so, well, that's true.

But you can also flood the world with an awful lot of darkness and evil and pornography and Satanism and all the other things. It's not the internet that's doing it.

It's not simply the labors of men. It's not simply the emptiness of all the vain philosophies and false religions of the world. These things were always the case. At the end of the day, it is God.

[16 : 38] Nobody else is converting these vast numbers but God through Christ, his beloved son. In him was life and the life was the light of men.

One reason it's in the past tense is not because he isn't still the life of men but it's in the sense of he always was. If anyone was ever converted it was through the grace of Christ.

If anyone is converted now, it is through the grace of Christ. In him was life, the life was the light of men and the light shineth in the darkness. Present tense. It's still shining, present and ongoing shining in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not.

You could interpret that word comprehended it in a number of ways. It doesn't overcome it. Can't get the victory over it. Can't obliterate it. Can't overcome it. Can't understand it.

Can't win against it. The darkness comprehended it not. It will never win against it. Although there will be greater violence against the gospel.

[17 : 42] Although there will be greater violence against the Lord's people. although the reaction against the gospel may be more severe than it has ever been. This is a war that the devil cannot win.

But as we see greater and greater multitudes being gathered into the kingdom than have ever been before, it ought at least to stop and make us think.

Can it be that things are drawing towards a conclusion? that every nation and tribe and tongue and people in the world are now beginning at last to receive and to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

Remember this is one of the things Jesus said had to be the case. The gospel must be preached to every creature. It must go right around the world before the end shall come. Paul wrote to the Romans, knowing the time that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.

for now is our salvation needer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armour of light.

[18 : 53] The light shineth in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. Christ is the only means by which anyone will be converted. He is the only means by which any life will be guided, any life will be given.

As Moses wrote long ago in Psalm 90, Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth or ever thou had spawned the earth and the world even from everlasting to everlasting.

Thou art God. In that sense, this new year which is before us is without wanting to be, you know, denigrating God's good gift or to be discouraged.

It's a blip. You know, sometimes you look back in history and see people all looking forward to such and such a new year and it was like 1972 or 1964. You think, well, we know what happened in 1972 and we know what happened in 1964, we know what happened in 66, 67, 68.

We can look at all the years since then and all the things that befell and for them that was all future and for us it's now dim and distant past and the year that is before us the Lord does not come back.

[20 : 04] Soon it will be the past, the dim and distant past and those who could say, oh yeah, I remember 2018. Be like, no, soon I can look back and say, oh, I remember 1918, oh, the end of the first world war and so on, 100 years ago.

It will very quickly become the past. It will very quickly be seen to be a blip. What is a big deal to us and a big celebration to the world?

It is a breath of wind, a moment in time, but God is from everlasting to everlasting. What are the things that might happen in this year?

We don't know as yet. We have hopes, we may have fears and anxieties, but the Lord will make known to us what it is that we need to know.

No man has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, which is the bosom of the Father, he hath declared it. Or, again, Moses was inspired to write in Deuteronomy, the secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

[21 : 18] What God reveals, he doesn't just reveal in a moment in a blip, he reveals it forever. Whatever this grace that is to be laid hold of in 2018 by all who will receive Christ or who will grow in Christ, it is a truth that is to be received forever.

Not just in this year. This may be our brief moment of time, this may be our brief opportunity, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation, but it is that which is to be revealed and received by the Lord's people forever.

forever. The light shineth in darkness, present tense, ongoing, continuous, present tense. It still shines, it keeps on shining, and the darkness is never going to get the head of it.

If you would have light, if you would have life, you will be found only in Christ. If you would seek the best guidance for the year ahead, you will be found only in Christ.

This new year will not be very new for very long. How quickly the 1st of January will become the 2nd, and before you know it, the 31st, and then February, and then March, and then throughout the year, and before you know it, you'll be turning the pages of the calendar and taking the old one down, and another new one will go up.

[22 : 42] And the question for us then will be not, oh my, how quickly have the years gone? But rather, what have we done with the days the Lord has given us? If we would want to look back on the days of our lives and say, well, I may not have done the best that I might have, but I know that I have given my life to the best possible cause.

I know there is nothing greater I could have done with my days. There is no greater purpose to which I could have turned. The gift of life, the gift of days, the gift of each week, each month of this entire 2018.

Give it to the Lord. Give your life to the Lord. And as that life draws to its close, whether it be in your youth or in your age, you will never have cause to think, oh, if only I spent my life better.

A life expended life for Christ is a life invested in the greatest future of all. In him was life.

It was always the case. It will always be the case. And the life was the light of men. Such light as men ever have, they have the gift of Christ.

[24 : 01] Such light as is ever in their soul, it is from Christ. such a light as they will know in eternity. It is because of Christ.

It is not for nothing that when Jesus tells the parables of what happens to lost souls who incur the wrath of the king or the household or whatever, he describes them as cast into outer darkness.

The furthest possible darkness where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. In other words, where the comfortable presence of God does not go.

I won't say cannot go because God can go anywhere he likes. There are no no go areas with the Lord. But where his comfortable presence chooses not to go, where there is no light, there is only darkness.

And where Christ is not, there is only hell itself. But for this day and for this year, and for this time upon earth, we dwell in a situation or a circumstance where yes, there is darkness and yes, there is much evil and that darkness does not get, does not approve, does not appreciate, does not accept the light that comes from Christ, but nor can it overcome it.

[25 : 29] Logically, the followers of Jesus ought to have been extinguished and exterminated 2,000 years ago. But they never have been and they have always continued.

Despite the persecutions, despite the apathy and indifference and weakness of so many of those who do follow Christ, we are flesh and blood with all the sins that go with it.

But the church of Jesus Christ does not endure because she is virtuous, but because rather, God is in the midst of her and she shall not be loved.

In whom was life and the life was the light of man. The light shineth in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not from all eternity.

When this year has passed and gone in a blip and a breath, he will still be God. And those who in Christ will still be his. And if their earthly life is expired in the course of this calendar year, it will still be his for all eternity.

[26 : 37] Friends, this is good news. This is what the life is about. The gift of a life that cannot be extinguished, that will never expire, which is ours for the receiving and for the asking, if we will simply recognize there isn't life in us, but there is life in him.

And there is life in us only so far as he dwells within us. This is free and it is offered to all, men and women and boys and girls and black and white and yellowskins and redskins and all manner of nations and tribes and types of people all over the world, criminals and drunkards and the bad and the good and the indifferent.

It is a gospel for sinners. It is a gospel for those who recognize their need because darkness is what we are in by nature.

Light is what the Lord offers. In him was life and the life was the life of men and the light is and keeps on shining in the darkness.

And the darkness does not get it, does not comprehend it. But we by grace may be enabled to do so if we will but ask and if we will but accept that which he offers and if we do, then we can go forward instead of back and then we need have no fear, no matter what the future holds, because from everlasting to everlasting, he is God.

[28 : 21] God bless the God bless.