

COMMENTARY ON JOHN

LESSON NUMBER 2

“ JOHN 1:4 *“In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. ⁵ And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”*

.....John 1:4-5)

IN HIM WAS LIFE

INTRODUCTION

In Genesis, Moses begins with the creation. John begins with the new creation in mind. That requires that he commence with the One commissioned to carry out the salvation, and who Himself is the heart of the message of salvation. John does not begin with the current status of the world, the beginning of which Moses chronicled. He does not even commence by focusing our attention on the need for salvation. **The fact that God initiated salvation is proof enough of its need.** There is no need to establish the spiritual poverty and depravity of men, for if they were not in that condition, there would be no need for such a marvelous and complex salvation. Men may debate about the extent of man’s fallenness, and postulate that he is free, has a free will, and can chart his own course. However, if that is the case, why would we begin by declaring a Savior? Is it remotely possible that all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God, without a single exception, only because they made bad choices? Can Satan really have dominion over a free person? Can men be dead in trespasses and sin (Eph 2:1), sit in darkness (Matt 4:16), walking according to the course of this world (Eph 2:1), and be *“by nature the children of wrath”* (Eph 2:3), and, at the same time, be free moral agents? Indeed, the human condition was hopeless, for those *“without Christ”* are described as *“having no hope and without God in the world”* (Eph 2:12). John will present Jesus in that hopeless context. He will present Him as having what men need, and fully able to bestow it upon them. He will establish that there is no point at which the Savior is not absolutely needed. He will confirm that sustinment is as necessary as obtainment, and both of these are met in Christ Jesus, and in Him alone.

Similar to Genesis, John will begin with light, for in the Kingdom of God, everything starts with light – illumination, enlightenment, understanding, comprehension, or awareness. In Christ, all appropriation and all advancement and growth take place in the light – within the framework of comprehension. Before the condition of men could be effectively addressed the state of ignorance must be dealt with. This perfectly accords with the announcement, *“This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all”* (1 John 1:5). Darkness cannot put out the light, but it can cause those in its grip to fail to see the light.

IN HIM WAS LIFE

John 1:4 “In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.”

Notice, John began by referring to *“The Word,”* but after accounting for the presence of *“The Word”* in the beginning, he has begun to use the word *“Him.”* He uses that pronoun twice in verse 3, and two more times in our text. When referring to the origin of the creation the evolutionist cannot refer to *“Him.”* He looks at the creation and thinks of an impersonal force or process. The

One of whom John now speaks is the same One he speaks of near the conclusion of this book: the Jesus who is *"the Christ, the Son of God."* It is the One whose last words in this Gospel are, *"If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee"* (John 21:25). John will now tell us why this One is qualified to be our Savior and Sustainer.

IN HIM. At this point John will speak of the Person of Christ – who He is and what He possesses. What Jesus IS was not derived, or given to Him by another. What was *"in Him"* was not the product of human ingenuity. It was not a reward for well doing. It was not an achievement wrought by Him when He came into this world. With the exception of His humanity, which involved Him humbling Himself (Phil 2:8), what Jesus is, He is by nature, and always has been.

WAS LIFE. For every other person that has life, it was given to them. However, life was *"in Him."* John frequently associates the Savior with life. *"For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself"* (John 5:26). *"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live"* (John 11:25). *"Jesus saith unto him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me"* (John 14:6). This is the Son of God, and is referred to as God. *"But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Thy kingdom"* (Heb 1:8). *"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ"* (Titus 2:13).

The particular point being made here is that Jesus has the power to confer life. Adam did not have this power. God had to create a wife for him. It is written that *"the gift of God is eternal life,"* but it is *"through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Rom 6:23). Much is said about this in the Gospel of John.

"Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you: for Him hath God the Father sealed" (John 6:27). Do you want to be receptive to God, willing in the day of His power, and be able to please Him? That is what life does – produces spiritual reciprocity. Why do people balk at the will and commandments of God, fail to draw near to Him, and dwell in aloofness from Him. It is because they do not have life!

"For the Bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world" (John 6:33). In order for anyone to be receptive to God, come to Him, and live for Him, someone had to come down from heaven and give them the caliber of life that is there. An angel could not bring it. It would be brought by the One who Himself gives it.

"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (John 10:28). This is the kind of life that does not wane and die. Where there is spiritual death, life has departed – it did not die. This is why those in Christ must *"lay hold"* on the eternal life they have been given (1 Tim 6:12).

"As Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him." (John 17:2). Before Jesus could save any man, He had to be over all of them. This is because eternal life is given with holy discretion. In this ext, it is given only to those whom the Father has given to the Son. He has the power to give life– the kind of life that causes one to be eager to serve the Lord, makes sin repulsive, God's word sweeter than honey, and holiness an unswerving objective.

THE LIFE WAS THE LIGHT OF MEN. Other versions read, *"light of all people."*^{NRSV} Light is what enables the people to have spiritual sight. The person who has light *"shall not walk in darkness,"* blundering, stumbling, making mistakes, etc., *"but shall have the light of life"* (John 8:12). Again, Jesus said, *"If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the Light of this world"* (John 11:9). He also said He came into the world that *"whosoever believeth on*

Me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46). Elsewhere it is written, *"But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7).

Here it is affirmed that the life Jesus possesses was *"the light of men."* Illumination, comprehension, enlightenment, and understanding are the product, or issuance, of life. Why do people remain in ignorance? It is because they are **not** alive! Why is it they cannot understand what Jesus says? It is because they are **not** alive! Just as there are different stages of death in nature, so there is also in the spirit. Jairus' daughter was dead, but she still looked alive, and had probably retained some of her natural beauty (Mk 5:35). The widow of Nain's son had been dead for a brief time, and did not look as good as Jairus's daughter (Lk 7:12). On the other hand, Lazarus had been dead for four days, and mortification had set in (John 11:39). No one wanted to see him. But all three of those people were dead. Even so, there are some who look like nice people, but they are dead toward God, having no life.

THE LIGHT SHINED IN DARKNESS

" 1:5a *And the light shineth in darkness . . .* "

THE LIGHT. Other versions read, *"His light,"* ^{LIVING} *and "the life-light."* ^{MESSAGE} **This is Christ's life** – the life that was IN Him, and *"the light of men"* – *"and the life was the light of men."* It is Christ's **life** that brought things to light – a life revealed in words and deeds, preferences and things that *"troubled"* Him (John 11:33; 13:21). His **LIFE** is what brought things to light, showing what they really were. His entrance among men was described as *"light"* springing up (Matt 4:16). It was the visitation God from on high, *"to give light to them that sit in darkness"* (Lk 1:79). Jesus was a Light, *"to lighten the Gentiles,"* shedding illumination on their condition (Lk 2:32). Jesus is referred to as *"the Light"* (John 1:7), *"the True Light"* (John 1:9), and *"the Light of the world"* (John 8:12). With Him comes an environment of illumination, where delusion is dispelled, and understanding is welcomed by the believer. This is not academic light, but moral and spiritual light. It is not a light encapsulated in scholarship, but light that promotes understanding, discernment, comprehension, and enlightenment. It is not dead light, but living light.

SHINETH. This word means to make things evident, cause something to come into view, or appear – particularly *"TO APPEAR TO THE MIND."* ^{THAYER} The English word "shine" includes the meaning, *"TO BE EMINENT, CONSPICUOUS, OR DISTINGUISHED."* ^{MERRIAM-WEBSTER}

Speaking of the life of Christ, it certainly was conspicuous and distinguished from all other lives. Prior to His ministry, God sent John the Baptist, who himself was *"a bright and shining light"* (John 5:35), standing out among men because of his absolute uniqueness in appearance, living, and speaking. It was his stark contrast with the religious leaders that moved the people from every quarter to go out to see and hear him (Matt 3:5; Mk 1:5). However, when Jesus commenced to minister He outshone John, being *"great light"* (Matt 4:16). Those who heard Him speak said, *"Never man spake like this Man"* (John 7:46). He challenged the multitude with something they could not answer: *"Which of you convinceth Me of sin?"* (John 8:46). Even scrutinizing Pilate was forced to say, *"I find no fault in this Man"* (Lk 23:4). This was the effect of His life – the impact of who He was. He did not walk about with an effervescence that could be seen with the eye. There was no halo suspended over His head, as some artists depict Him. Outwardly, He appeared as a mere man – someone with whom people could argue, threaten, charge falsely, and even turn a deaf ear to Him.

IN DARKNESS. Other versions read, *"goes on shining in the dark,"* ^{BBE} *"appears in darkness,"* ^{DARBY} *"through the darkness,"* ^{LIVING} *"continues to shine in the darkness,"* ^{WILLIAMS} *"is shining in the darkness,"* ^{MONTGOMERY} *"keeps shining,"* ^{CEV} and *"Life-Light blazed out of the darkness."* ^{MESSAGE}

Think of how the Spirit uses the word "darkness." *"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light"* (Isa 9:2; Matt 4:16); *"To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God"* (Acts 26:18); *"For ye were sometimes darkness . . . the unfruitful works of darkness"* (Eph 5:8,11); *"The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness"* (Rom 13:12).

"Darkness" is moral and spiritual night in which the things of God cannot be seen, and the devil works his will freely in the people. It is a domain dominated by *"the rulers of the darkness of this world"* (Eph 6:12). It is a realm in which men are held by *"the power of darkness,"* until they are delivered by the Living Christ (Col 1:13). There are certain *"works"* that can only be done in the darkness, and they are called *"the works of darkness"* (Rom 13:12). Further, darkness and light cannot be mingled, for *"what communion hath light with darkness"* (2 Cor 6:14). Those in Christ *"are not in darkness"* (1 Thess 5:4). They have been *"called out of darkness"* (1 Pet 2:9). Further, **professed** believers can *"walk in darkness,"* or a state of ignorance and insensitivity (1 John 1:6) – but such a walk negates their profession, proving they have not spoken the truth.

We see, then, that by shining in darkness, the light has not mingled with it. The life of Jesus and the carnal life cannot be blended. This also does not mean that Jesus Himself enters the domain of darkness. Rather His *"life,"* which is *"the light of men,"* shines, or casts light into darkness—like the rays of the sun irradiating into darkened space. In spiritual life, special eyes are required to see this light – *"eyes to see"* (Deut 29:4). Even then, however, these eyes are not functional in the dark. As it is written, *"in Thy light shall we see light"* (Psa 36:9). If a person desires to take advantage of this light as it radiates into the domain of darkness, he must *"come to the light"* (John 3:21), which is located outside of the realm of darkness itself.

This necessarily infers that we cannot influence people for Christ by identifying with them in their darkness. Seeking to adapt ourselves to the darkness will not result in having holy influence among the people. This is not the kind of thing Paul was referring to when he said, *"To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some"* (1 Cor 9:22). He was rather being close enough so that his life could cast some light, without him having to enter that dreadful sphere of moral and spiritual darkness. This is very difficult for our generation to see.

THE DARKNESS COMPREHENDED IT NOT

"1:5b " . . . and the darkness comprehended it not."

THE DARKNESS. Now John personalizes *"the darkness,"* speaking of it as a person or persons rather than an environment. Paul did the same thing concerning both *"light"* and *"darkness"* – *"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light"* (Eph 5:8). Men are identified by the environment in which they live, or take up their residence. If it is darkness, they themselves are darkness. If it is the world, they are worldly, or *"of the world."* John wrote, *"They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them"* (1 John 4:5). If it is the flesh, they are fleshly; they have *"fleshly minds"* (Col 2:18), and *"they that are in the flesh cannot please God"* (Rom 8:8). If the earth is where they are at home, then they *"mind earthly things"* and will eventually be destroyed (Phil 3:19). **The environment in which we choose to dwell determines who and what we are** – and the only acceptable environment is with Christ in heavenly places (Eph 2:6), *"in Christ Jesus"* (Rom 1), and *"in the body"* of Christ (1 Cor 12:13,18).

Here, *"the darkness"* is the people who are sitting there (Matt 4:16) – who reside there – who are abiding in the night of ignorance. They are the people who have been *"blinded"* by *"the god of this world, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the Image of God, should*

shine upon them" (2 Cor 4:4). These people "walk in darkness" (1 John 1:6), neither thinking of or comprehending the "mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt 13:11).

Jesus spoke of "the **day** when the Son of Man is revealed" (Lk 17:30), later referring to it as "that **night**," when a separation of men would be made (Lk 17:34). Jesus also declared, "if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him" (Lk 11:10). Paul wrote to believers, warning them to disassociate themselves from darkness and the night. "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 armor of light" (Rom 13:12). Now John confirms why this is essential.

COMPREHENDED IT NOT. Other versions read, "has not understood it," ^{NIV} "did not overcome it," ^{NRSV} "apprehended it not," ^{ASV} "not extinguish the light," ^{CEB} "has not suppressed it," ^{CJB} "has not mastered it," ^{NET} "could not overpower it," ^{NJB} "did not perceive it," ^{YLT} "can never put it out," ^{LIVING} "has not overwhelmed it," ^{MONTGOMERY} and "has never overpowered it [put it out or absorbed it or appropriated it, and is unreceptive to it]." ^{AMPLIFIED}

First, the more modern versions have, in my judgment, missed the point:—i.e. "did not overcome it," ^{NJB} "can never put it out," ^{LIVING} "has not overwhelmed it." ^{MONTGOMERY} Considering that the text is not talking about an environment, but people, these versions imply that they were aware of the light and attempted to put it out. But that is not the point of the text at all. Rather, it is that they were **unaware** of the light. They no doubt knew something was present, but they did not know what it was. When Jesus walked among men, even His enemies knew He was different, but did not know why. That is why some said He had a demon (John 10:20), while others said He was a Samaritan (John 8:48), and still others said His power came from Beelzebub (Matt 12:24). Why did these people react as they did? It is because the darkness did not comprehend the Light!

Jesus explained their situation. "Why do ye not understand My speech? even because **ye cannot hear My word**" (John 8:43). In His Gospel John observes, "Therefore **they could not believe**, because that Esaias said again, **He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them**" (John 12:39-40). Paul observes, "But the natural man **receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned**" (1 Cor 2:14).

All of this is briefly summarized in the saying: "**and the darkness comprehended it not.**" A person who is in darkness is incapacitated by that darkness. In fact, such a person becomes "darkness" themselves, and exude that darkness everywhere they go. Further, their deeds are "evil," for they are the result of them being darkness. As a consequence, in that state, they will not come to Jesus. As He Himself said, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). The person who follows Jesus does not, and cannot, "walk in darkness" (John 8:12). If someone who was at one time following Jesus, is found walking in darkness, it is because he ceased to follow Jesus – and, that being the case, there is no alternative but darkness.

God can set the total Answer squarely before men – Truth incarnate – surrounding it with might and incontestable miracles – and it will still not be comprehended by the darkness. Jesus further indicated that one must take advantage of the light while it is accessible: "Walk while ye have the Light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth" (John 12:35). Let every child of God take hold of the fact that "the darkness" does not comprehend, perceive, or take advantage of the Light. Have done with darkness! You are "children of the day" (1 Thess 5:5).