

[lighten the load]

:: john 1.1-14 ::

This morning we're taking a break from our verse by verse study through the life of David in 1st and 2nd Samuel and we're going to spend some time with Jesus in the Gospel of John.

You can turn there, to the first chapter, the first 14 verses.

Typically here at Calvary Hanford we refer to the New King James version of the Bible. We love it. It's a great version. An excellent translation to use.

However, I'm sure that if I polled us this morning, there would be a great variety of Bible translations represented. And that's great. We do not adhere to a belief that there is only 1 translation of the Bible that you're allowed to read. We do feel that historically and linguistically there are *some* translations that are truer to the ancient manuscripts in accuracy and context than others, but it can be very helpful and very refreshing to compare passages in different Bible versions so that we can get a greater understanding of the message that God is trying to deliver us.

We're so lucky to live in a time and place where you can literally carry dozens of Bibles in your pocket and reference them whenever you want. If you have an iphone or a blackberry, a laptop, a computer at home, you have free access to sites like youversion.com and programs like E-Sword. It can be very stimulating to take a passage, especially one you're familiar with, and read it in your translation of choice, then read the same passage in the ESV, the NIV, the Amplified Bible, the Old King James, the New King James. Those versions are a resource you can use to augment your personal study.

And so, this morning, we're going to do something a little bit different. We'll be referencing the first chapter of John in the New Living Translation of the Bible. The NLT was first published in 1996 by a group of 90 Bible scholars. It is very informal and readable while still staying faithful to the ancient manuscripts.

This chapter of John is familiar to many of us, but, hopefully, the New Living Translation will bring us a fresh excitement for what we read.

So, beginning in verse 1, John says:

John 1.1-14 - In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

God sent a man, John the Baptist, to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. ///

This text is often used to contend against teachings or groups that claim that Jesus Christ was not God, but was in fact a created being. We aren't going to really spend time on that today because we will very plainly see in verses 1 through 4 that Jesus was God, is God, will always be God. Therefore, anyone who rejects the Trinity or Jesus Christ as God is not receiving God's Word and needs salvation.

But this morning, I want to focus our attention really on 3 things. We've read the passage and saw how often one word in particular was mentioned, that is the word *light*. And so the 3 items to study, the 3 questions we hope to answer are:

First, what is the Light?

Second, what is the darkness?

Third, what do we do about it?

We will find that this passage presents to each of us a call and response. To myself and to each of you I challenge the question: ***what will you do with Jesus Christ today?*** He is calling to every person here, every heart that is listening. Will we respond?

So let's get into it with our first question: *What is the Light?*

John 1.1-3 - In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and He was God. He was in the beginning with God. He created everything there is. Nothing exists that He didn't make.

Again, it is very plain, very clear that Jesus Christ is God. He is eternal, all-powerful, a Member of the Trinity. He was not just a wise teacher or a peace loving prophet. He was and is God of Very God.

In fact, He was the Member of the Trinity by which everything was made. *Everything*. This is an interesting reminder to me, because I think that culturally speaking it's easy to assume that God the Father made everything while Jesus and the Holy Spirit were on a coffee break. But, we see here, that nothing exists that Jesus Christ didn't make.

That isn't only true of the earth and the stars and the Garden of Eden, but it is true of you and I as well. You were created by Jesus Christ, who *knows* you personally and *loves* you personally.

John goes on to describe this Jesus who He is referring to as 'the Word' and says:

John 1.4-5 - Life itself was in Him, and this life gives light to everyone. The light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

We find that Jesus Christ is not only the source of *life*, but He is the source of *light*.

Now, why light? Why did John use this term, this idea, instead of something else? Why not:

...Life itself was in Him and this life gives LOVE to everyone.

Or *HOPE* to everyone?

Or *KNOWLEDGE* to everyone?

The Lord provides *light* because the world is in darkness. But that brings us to our second question: What is the darkness?

In Genesis we read the creation account:

Genesis 1.1-2a - In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters.

In the beginning, God brought light into creation, then made a perfect world that was good and complete and sinless. Adam and Eve chose to break their relationship with God by going against the one command He put in place as a test of their love for Him. They chose to break that command, they sinned, and they plunged the world into *spiritual* darkness.

John 3.19 - And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil.

Spiritual darkness means separation from God. Because sin entered the world, because human beings chose evil and ruined God's perfect creation, we deserve judgment. Men are separated from God and are therefore doomed to an eternity in hell, a place described by the Bible as a place of eternal darkness and suffering, a lake burning with fire, created not for human beings, but for the Devil and His angels. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve chose to follow after the Devil instead of following the Lord. Now, every human being has inherited a sin nature, and therefore, we have inherited hell as our final destination after death.

God was not happy about this. He doesn't want us to be separate from Him in this life or in eternity. So, He decided to send His life and His light to the earth once again. He didn't stop at creation, but intervened on our behalf, on a rescue mission. His light shines *through* the darkness. but that darkness cannot overcome the light of God, the love of Jesus Christ that reaches out to every man, woman and child through all human history.

We know what the light is; Jesus Christ and His revelation to us. We know what the darkness is; our natural state of sinfulness and separation from the God who made us. So what is our response?

John presents it to us this way in verse 6:

John 1.6-7 - God sent John the Baptist to tell everyone about the light, so that everyone might believe because of his testimony.

Jump down to verse 12:

John 1.12 - But to all who believed Him and accepted Him, He gave the right to become children of God.

When you see the light and receive the life that Jesus offers to you, you become a child of God. A child of God receives an eternal inheritance from the King of the Universe. In fact, the Bible teaches that God loves each of us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to come and live a sinless life, to die on a Roman cross to pay for our sins, and then rise again 3 days later, winning victory over sin and death. God does not want human beings to reject Him and go to hell. He desires that we all should repent and believe and become His children, so that we can live life empowered by His Holy Spirit, live life full of His strength and His presence and then spend eternity with Him in heaven.

That's the deal. That's what light and darkness are all about. God stepping in to save us from ourselves. God intervening when we were on a path of self-destruction. God transforming lives and changing our destinies because He loves us personally.

So, we've seen the darkness, we've seen the light. Now what will we do? Will we re-enter into that relationship that Adam and Eve broke in the Garden of Eden? Will we individually choose to receive Jesus, to receive His light and His life, or will we reject that offer that He is making to us?

The choice is mine. The choice is yours. If you're not a Christian here today, if you've never accepted Jesus into your heart as Savior and Lord, then we are going to give you an opportunity to do so in a few moments. And I would encourage you to think about what would happen if you died today.

But first, for those of us who *do* have a personal relationship with God, for the Christians here this morning, there's more for us to learn. Because God's plan isn't *just* about believing. It's also about *becoming*. God's purpose in your life is not only to bring you from darkness to light, but then to transform you into His own image once again. His desire is for you to become His witness, His evidence of love and salvation in a world that needs His light.

Again, verse 6:

John 1.6-7 - God sent John the Baptist to tell everyone about the light, so that everyone might believe because of his testimony.

If you are a believer, God has sent **YOU** somewhere, to someone. Every Christian is called to represent Jesus Christ to the world. And He orchestrates your life and my life so that He can personally use us to impact the people around us. You are called and sent so that each person on the planet has opportunity to hear about what God has done for them, that they might be forgiven of their sins and saved for eternity.

If you are living passive Christianity, you are failing. If you are coasting through life not serving the Lord, not following after Him, not living out what you believe, then you are failing.

The Apostle Paul explains to us that the Christian life is like being in a race. He says, "I don't know about you, but I want to run this race to *WIN*, not to lose." There are a lot of good insights about how we should be training for our lives and preparing ourselves for tests and trials and opportunities and temptations, but the idea this morning is that you have already been sent. You're already in the race. The gun has been fired, the clock is ticking.

And, really, it's more than just a simple footrace. In reality, it's more like the running of the bulls. Because the stakes are very high. What God is dealing with here is life and death. And, as we see in this text, His desire is that *EVERYONE* might believe so that they would not perish, but receive everlasting life.

Christians, we have been sent to represent God to a lost and dying world.

How does this work?

John 1.8-9 - John himself was not the light; he was only a witness to the light. The One who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was going to come into the world.

Our job is to be witnesses of Jesus Christ. There are a couple of ways to think about that.

The first is the way that we most commonly use that word. Think of a courtroom setting. You're called to the stand to *testify* of what you know about the Lord. This is a verbal testimony, as you explain to friends, family members, co-workers, even strangers, about who Jesus is, what He has done and how they can know Him.

This is why God has given us the Bible. So that we can *KNOW* who He is, what He said, how He loves and what His plan is. We then go and deliver that message verbally to those around us.

But the word 'witness' can also be translated as 'evidence.' You and I are called to be *evidence* of Jesus Christ. In this regard, it's not about a verbal testimony, but a physical one. Where our lives are literally proof that God can do all the things that we say we believe.

Our lives should prove that God is a God of love because we show love to others unconditionally.

Our lives should prove that God is a God of power by trusting that He is sufficient to solve the problems we face day by day.

Our lives should prove that God is a God of patience and mercy as we show patience and mercy to those around us.

Our lives should prove that God is a God of forgiveness, as we are committed to forgive people who do wrong to us.

Our lives should prove that God is a God of peace, not confusion, as we demonstrate confidence in Him, not worry or anxiety or fear.

Our lives are evidence of God to the people around us. The question is: would that evidence hold up in court? Is our physical witness a true representation of the light and the life that Jesus Christ has provided? Does our action match our communication?

If a person examined our lives according to the things we believe, how would our testimony be?

"I've been sent to you to represent a God of love and mercy!"

"Really? Then where is your love and mercy?"

"I don't need it. YOU need it, but I don't. Because that's just how I am."

Our desire is that through our verbal and physical witness, God would be amplifying our lives supernaturally so that people would be coming to us, saying, "I want the peace you have. I want the hope you have. I want the confidence you have. I WANT it. How do I get it?"

That is our calling as disciples, as representatives, as ambassadors of Jesus Christ. To testify and be used by God as evidence of His powerful plan.

I like the point that John makes up in verse 8: ***John himself was not the light; he was only a witness to the light.***

As Christians, we do not minister so that **WE** can gain a following. This is an important principle for all of us, but especially those who seek to lead or go into ministry. The Christian life is not lived so that we can gain a following. It's not Twitter. Our service for God is so that **He** will be magnified. So that **He** will be glorified. So that people will be focused on **Him**, not on us. He must increase, we must decrease.

In verse 9, John said that the Light was going to come into the world again in order to reach out to save mankind.

John 1.10-11 - But although the world was made through Him, the world didn't recognize Him when He came. Even in His own land and among His own people, He was not accepted.

Whether you're a Christian here or not, the over-arching message this morning is the same: **Jesus Christ has come to you.** He's come to offer you salvation and, if you receive Him, He offers you light and life and strength and peace, power and forgiveness, purpose and eternity.

This is the opposite of every world religion, every phony system that says you must *earn* your way into good standing with God.

Jesus Christ comes to us!

An unbeliever doesn't have to climb a mountain in order to find God, he just has to turn around. That's what repent means. To stop and turn around. To change course. And when you turn around from the course of darkness, you will find that Jesus Christ is standing right there, offering you abundant life and heaven and direction for your day to day living.

Likewise, Christians don't need to be afraid in this life, we don't have to be afraid of the dark because the light is here. It has come to us.

And if we think about the analogy that God has given us here in this passage, it makes so much sense. Think of yourself in a dark cave. You don't know where to go. You don't know what's around you. You're trying to find your way to God. But, God doesn't want you to be separated from Him or His amazing plan for your life. So He decided to come to you and bring light into that dark place, light that cannot be extinguished by darkness.

God does this because He loves us, not because we've earned His light. Life is not like the Sword in the Stone, where only one person who is worthy enough is allowed to receive blessing or power from God. Jesus comes to each of us so that we can see. So that we can find a way out of the sin of this world and receive eternity with Him in heaven.

Think of darkness. Jesus comes here and says, "I am the lighthouse for the ship traveling on the dark and stormy seas." He says, "I am the light at the end of the tunnel. The escape where you can receive life." He says, "I am the light when you are afraid of the dark."

Do you recognize God? Do you see Him working in your life? He is.

Sometimes we fail to see God moving in our lives because we have our eyes closed to Him. You can be in a well-lit room, but if you close your eyes, what do you get? Darkness.

Sometimes as Christians, we close our eyes to God and we wonder why we can't see anything. Why we're not moving forward spiritually. It's a sort of self-imposed blindness. We stop listening to the Word of God.

Psalm 119.105 - Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.

Remember, Jesus Christ is the source of all life. All creation. And He is the source of light. In our lives, spiritually speaking, if we want to move forward, we need light. You can't navigate a dangerous cave without light. In our lives, if we want growth, spiritual fruit, we need light. Plants can't grow without light. We cannot grow as Christians without the light of Christ and His Word.

Jesus knows where you are in life right now and He has come to you with an offer that can't be compared. Whatever you're facing, whatever difficulty or suffering, whatever hurt or fear, that darkness cannot overcome the light of Christ. He is present. He is powerful. He is personal. He cares for you.

Our response is to believe and then become. To follow after Jesus. To take in His presence and take up the call to share the light with those around us. We are to join in the rescue effort and partner with God in bringing *others* from darkness to light.

John 1.12-14 - But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

The hope that we all desire, the wisdom we all need, the help for living and the promise of eternity only comes from God. We can only be reborn by His power. Not through our own works. Not through our own intentions, but through God's love and His salvation. Jesus became a man and dwelt among us. Because He is full of unfailing love and faithfulness, we are able to once again connect with God in a personal relationship and *THAT* is the only thing that can save us on either side of eternity.

Those words unfailing love and faithfulness can also be translated as grace and truth. **Unfailing love** was God's willingness to sacrifice Himself, as Pastor Greg Laurie says, Jesus paid a debt He did not

owe because we owed a debt we could not pay. **Faithfulness.** God continues to love us and care for us, even when we are unfaithful. While we were *YET* sinners, Christ died for us and He will not leave us or forsake us. **Grace,** to give us favor and endurance for this life as we serve and glorify Him. **Truth,** because we need answers in this world. We need hope. And God has a plan and He has revealed that plan very plainly so that people can be saved and transformed. So that men and women can have their eyes open to the fact that God is real and He is love and their sins can be forgiven.

Maybe this morning, you're a Christian who loves the Lord and is working to serve Him, you're committed to drawing nearer to Him day by day. To you I say: Keep going! Keep pushing. Keep serving. Keep moving forward in your walk with God. He has given you a light to shine in this dark world. Don't be tempted to hide it under a bushel. Let your light shine before men.

Ephesians 5.8-9 - For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.

Be strong in the Lord!

Perhaps you're a Christian here this morning, but you're on the sidelines. You're not really walking with God. You've settled in your relationship with Him. You don't talk much with Him anymore. You don't read the Bible, His letter to you, much anymore. You're not really serving Him, not really thinking about heaven, not living as a representative, not engaging in your spiritual life.

To you I say: Jesus Christ loves you and he has a special plan for your life. More than that, He has offered you power and hope to live in the light. To live above the struggles of this world and in His plan.

1 Peter 2.9b - ...you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

Respond to the call of God. Pair your belief with action. Follow God as a disciple. Apply God's word to your life. Believe and become a Child of God and be a part of His work on the earth. Don't subject yourself to that self-imposed blindness, but open your eyes to God and His Word and become a disciple who follows actively so that you can receive the fullness that God is offering you today.

This is an individual decision we all have to make. Will we recognize who God is and what He wants to do in our lives? Sometimes we get so self-centered that we often miss the things God is trying to do in and through our lives. We want to run this race to win the race because the the stakes are high and the rewards are marvelous.

But finally, perhaps this morning you're not a Christian. You've never believed that Jesus Christ came and died and rose again so that you could be saved. If that's you this morning, then I have something to say to you as well.

There is no one like Jesus. There is no plan like His plan. You can go elsewhere for wisdom. You can go elsewhere for hope. But you will not find it. Only Jesus offers life and light. Only Jesus offers forgiveness for your sins.

When He came to earth the first time, the world did not recognize Him. Even in His own land, among His own people, He was not accepted. It was a choice that they made.

You see, they didn't want a dying Messiah. They wanted a conquering one. They wanted someone who would come and throw off the Roman government. They had this earthly problem. It was real. It was rough. But they were just looking for help with this one issue.

Jesus came to conquer, but not the Roman empire. He came to conquer sin and death. He came to save us eternally.

Each of us has struggles and hurts. God knows about them and cares about them. The question He poses to you is: *What do you want?*

Did you know that is the first recorded phrase of Jesus in the Gospel of John? Some guys walk up to Him and He looks at them and says to them, "What do you want?"

What about you?

Do you want hope?

Do you want peace?

Do you want forgiveness?

Do you want everlasting life?

That's what Jesus is offering you. He's offering you salvation and a relationship with Him that ends in heaven. Without Him nothing was made, and without Him nothing can be saved.

If you're thinking, "Well, what I want is a better job. What I want is a solution to a problem I'm facing." To you I say, Jesus is offering you not one answer, but a whole package. A new life. A re-birth. A hope and an inheritance. Purpose in life. Help in life. Strength and peace in life. Forgiveness. And it all comes by knowing Him. By inviting Jesus into your heart and having a personal relationship with Him.

If you want to know Jesus, we're going to give you that opportunity right now.

Romans 10.9-10 - If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved.

Lord Jesus, I know I'm a sinner. I know I'm not worthy to enter into heaven. But I believe that you came to earth, and died on the Cross, for every sin I've ever committed. Forgive me for the wrong things I've done. I want to follow You. I want to love You, even as You have loved me. Jesus, I want to know you personally. I pray that you would come into my life. Be my Savior, be my Friend, be my King. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit and help me to spend all of my days, following after You. Thank You for Your love. In Jesus' Name I pray, amen.