

## John 1:6-18 Sermon – The True Light

Let's Pray: O God of all truth and light, grant us your Spirit as we open your word. Open our minds to understand your revelation. Release our minds from self-will and self-love that we may serve and love you. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Last Sunday we began our series on John's Gospel. We talked about why it was so necessary for John to start by confirming that Jesus, the Word, the organizing principle of creation, was God. What Jesus comes to do and say will not make sense if we do not see him as God. Our salvation will not make any sense if we do not see Jesus as God.

Knowing Jesus as the Word means that we know how creation is ordered. It makes sense of our lives like a blueprint makes sense of a building. If we feel hopeless or afraid, we can look to Christ, and see a God who cares for us and orders our lives for good. If we feel lost in suffering, we look to the one who suffers alongside us. Our suffering is not pointless, like his suffering was not pointless. This is what it means for our lives to see Jesus as the Word. He makes sense of our lives and points us to heavenly realities behind the world.

But our text this morning shows that there is a problem. That problem is that not everyone believes this about Jesus. Even the people that we would expect to believe Jesus was God, the ones who God had been preparing over many centuries to receive the Messiah, do not believe. The verses that we will be looking at will begin to address this problem. John says that because Jesus is God, we know him as that which everything that God has been doing in the Old Testament has been in preparation for his coming. Every other light is a preparation for the true light.

Let's hear God's Word, John 1:6-18:

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

<sup>9</sup> The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup> He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—<sup>13</sup> children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup> (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ")

<sup>16</sup> Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has

ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

This is the Word of the Lord.

In the second part of John's introduction, we see him starting to deal with what is the primary problem in the New Testament Church, namely, why did the Jewish people reject Jesus? God had been preparing a people to bring the Messiah, why is it that they didn't embrace Jesus for who he is? If Jesus is the creator and everything in the world makes sense through him as the Word, why would anyone reject him? This is not only a problem in that time, but is an ongoing issue. If Jesus is the truth, why do people have a hard time believing him?

### **Slide 7**

John began by zooming way out, showing how Jesus was somehow God. We remember, John feels he must begin with defining Jesus as God right at the beginning of his Gospel. If he did not do this, then we would not understand what Jesus is doing and saying. And now he starts to zoom in a little bit more in his introduction. The way that John begins to tie in his speaking about Jesus as God with the story of Jesus' life is through the person of John the Baptist. In order to understand why some reject Jesus, John starts to talk about John the Baptist.

First, we'll look at how John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus' coming, how his rejection shows why the Jewish leaders will reject Jesus too. Next, we will look at why the world also rejects Jesus, and why this is central to the gospel, the good news of our being brought into God's family.

### **Slide 8**

The gospel presents John the Baptist as a lesser light to prepare for the true light in Christ. He is "a witness to the light," as John says. To use a modern illustration, John the Baptist coming before Jesus is like how on a cold winter morning when you use your phone flashlight to find the room switch. Not only does the flashlight help to find the room switch, but also prepares your eyes for the big light. John prepares eyes to be ready for the big light, or else you might be blinded when it comes.

John here calls Jesus "the true light." We might tend to think that when John is saying something is 'true' that means the other is false. While there are definitely 'false' lights, and John is aware of this, he is here more speaking of the true and the lesser. John uses the word 'true' in several other places to denote what is true as what is full over against what is partial—what is an analogy versus what the analogy is illustrating. We see this in verses in

[6:32](#): ‘true bread’, [15:1](#): ‘true vine’, and he uses it here to stress that the Word, not John, was the ‘true light’. John is a light, but a lesser light in comparison to the true light. Think of the flashlight and the ceiling light illustration, the flashlight does what it can, but it doesn’t really light up the whole room. It is a light, but not the *true* light.

Understanding this is central to understanding why people reject Jesus, as often people reject Jesus because they confuse a lesser good for an ultimate good. This is the main ingredient of idolatry, where we confuse God’s creation with himself. When this happens the lesser good can become an evil, even if it might be good itself.

### **Slide 9**

Look down to the bottom of the passage we are looking at, v.16-18. It says, “Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”

Jesus here is called the “fullness.” Because Jesus comes as a fulfillment of what the Law was pointing to, he is called by John a “grace in place of grace.” That God gave the Law from Moses was an act of grace. Beyond the blessings that come with following God’s law, it was a huge blessing to be able to hear from the only true God about what his will is for our lives. It was also a great grace to be able to be born into God’s people, to be given the gift of circumcision.

John the Baptist and Jesus challenge what they might have taken for granted, that they are God’s chosen people by birth, and not by grace. If they feel like they are owed God’s grace because of who they are, they are mistaken. Really, they have created an idol of their own identity as God’s chosen people, rather than recognizing that as a gift of God.

### **Slide 10**

John’s baptism teaches the Jewish people that they are only who they are by God’s grace. We also have a baptism today, for little Noa. John’s baptism, we remember, was of repentance. It is not exactly like our baptism today, but it anticipates it. John’s baptism was a way for Jewish people to recognize that they had sinned, and that they needed to pass through the Red Sea and the Jordan River again. John here is shining a light on the Jewish people’s sin, just like Jesus would. If we want to know why the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus, this is a central reason.

Many Jewish leaders in Jesus’ day used baptism as a rite of initiation for gentile converts. This was a way for them to be cleansed as Israel was cleansed when they passed through

the Red Sea. To many Jewish people, especially the leaders, John's message that they need to be baptized like a gentile would be highly offensive. Imagine this man out in the wilderness raving about how all Israel is so lost that they need to be treated like gentiles. This anticipates what Jesus would say to them too, that they need to be born again.

We can see that John's baptism prepares Israel for Jesus' message, which states they too must be born again, just like John proclaimed. Jesus too would be rejected. John says, "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." This means that Jesus came to the Jewish people, "his own," as John calls them, but they didn't receive him.

For Jesus, it was not enough to be "children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God," as John says here. In the Old Covenant God's people were brought about by procreation, but now, in the New Covenant, all must be born again, born from above, from God.

For Jewish people, even today, there is some identity in being born to a Jewish home even if you don't practice anything religious. The "natural descent" is extremely important. This is not the case with Christianity. One must be born from God. This rebirth changes your faith, it causes us to see the true light and not simply the lesser lights.

The message of baptism that we heard today says the same thing. We are given the right to become children of God by his grace alone. It is only by being "born of God" that we can become children of the promise. This is what both John the Baptist and Jesus are saying.

### **Slide 11**

This is not simply a problem for the Jewish people of Jesus' time, notice John says in v.9, "the true light... gives light to everyone." Despite giving light to everyone, and even having the world "made through him" (as we discussed last Sunday in him being the 'Word'), "the world did not recognize him." This is true today too, even though Jesus created the world, the world does not recognize his fingerprints on creation. Calvin comments on this verse that, "from this *light* the rays are diffused over all mankind...There is no man, therefore, whom some perception of the eternal *light* does not reach."

### **Slide 12**

The Belgic Confession says, The "universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God." Paul in Romans 1 says much the same, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."

Nature clearly reveals that there is a creator, and that creator is beyond anything created, leaving humans without excuse before God. Creation here is a lesser light, one that reflects Christ, and points to him, and is made known fully when he is revealed. If our hearts were on the things of God, we would have recognized Jesus when he came. But, just as the Jewish people in Jesus' day, who created an idol of their identity as God's people, we often look to the goods of God's creation rather than what those goods should be pointing us to.

John the Baptist is a witness to the light for the Jewish people. God's creation, "the world [that] was made through him," as John says, is another witness to the light. These are good things, but they can only be appreciated properly when we recognize them for what they are doing, pointing to Christ.

### **Slide 13**

Seeing God, knowing him, means being given eternal life. John 17:3 says, "this is eternal life, that they may know you, the one true God, and the one you have sent, Jesus Christ." One of the lessons that God is teaching us is to always seek his face, and this means putting off the goods of this world and searching for him. This is very hard for us today, as we have so many goods in front of us.

Our place is among the witnesses to the Light. If we ever think that it is us that people should see when bring the good news to them, then we are sorely mistaken. The light is Christ, and we at best are reflections of that light, lesser lights pointing to his supreme light. We should always be on guard to make sure that we do not take our salvation for granted, to treat it as if we are owed it. Our baptism, our identity as children in God's household, are gifts that we do not deserve. If we think we deserve it, that we are owed it as natural children of God, then we will not recognize Christ or receive him.

We can see this light because of what Christ has done for us, allowing us to become his children. This is what we announced in the baptism of Noa today, that he brings even our little ones into his fold, saying, "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." If we believe, we are his Children. That belief is a gift of God, just as our baptisms are gifts from God. This is the central message of John's introduction. Being given this faith is the central desire that John has in sharing Jesus' life story.

And all God's people say, Amen.

Let's Pray, "One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord..."