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LIGHT AND LIFE TO ALL WHO BELIEVE (John 1:1-18)

God bless you all as you continue to serve in the General Assembly and the people of Maryland. I have looked forward to our discussions from the book of John and hope we will all find new insights to guide our lives. In this series, I have borrowed some thoughts from my colleague in Illinois, Shaun Lewis, who has a great ministry in Springfield and throughout the state.

THE AUTHOR OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

He was the disciple whom Jesus loved, an uneducated fisherman turned author who penned a Gospel, three epistles and Revelation. His name was John and, along with Peter and James, no one knew Jesus quite so well. These three formed our Lord's inner band of disciples. They had seen Jesus with their own eyes, heard Him speak, touched Him and lived with Him for more than three years (1 John 1:1-4). These men knew the Lord.

John's thoughts were wound around the spindle of a specific purpose—"...that you may believe" (John 20:30-31). Each chapter and verse weaves itself into a fabric that shows Jesus as the Christ. This Gospel is evangelistic in nature, wanting its readers to realize Jesus' identity and then place their faith in Him for salvation.

Who is Jesus? According to John, Jesus is the incarnate God who came bringing light and life to all who would believe. Out of this central truth flows the many branches that form John's Gospel.

*John 1:1-5—In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. **In him was life, and the life was the light of men.** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

John opens with the assertion that Jesus is the divine "word" or *logos*. Words give expression to thought. The Jewish mind would have remembered verses such as Psalm 33:6, "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made." The heavens were the result of the Lord speaking them into being; creation is an expression of divine thought. The word of the Lord had creative power throughout the Old Testament, and Jewish readers understood it as God's self-assertion.

The Greeks pursued an unending quest to understand the nature of the universe; John asserts that their quest has come to an end. The Jews knew the word which called the universe into being; John declares that this word became a man (John 1:14). If you want to know the Word who is the source of all things, holds them together and directs, look at Jesus. He is the embodiment of God Himself (Colossians. 1:15-17).

The Word, Jesus Christ, was not created but eternally existed as God and with God. John makes a distinction—Jesus is God and also with God. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three unique persons, each fully God and yet there is one God. This is why our Lord could say to Philip, "Whoever has seen Me, has seen the Father" (John 14:8-9). Jesus was and is the "exact representation" of the Father (Hebrews 1:3).

JOHN THE BAPTIST, THE WITNESS

*John 1:6-7—There was a man sent from God, whose name was **John**. He **came as a witness, to bear witness about the light**, that all might believe through him.*

John the Baptist (not the author of this Gospel) was the last prophet who foretold the coming of Messiah. He did not come to make a name for himself. Though the crowds increased to see him preach, the prestige never distracted him. At the high point in his ministry, John said, "He [Christ] must increase, but I must decrease"

(John 3:30). His disciples followed Jesus, his life ended tragically with a beheading, but the Lord recognized John's faithfulness and said, "there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11).

JESUS CHRIST, THE WAY

*John 1:10-11—There was **the true Light** which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.*

Perhaps the saddest verses in Scripture are John 1:10-11. The King who created the world condescended to enter it as a man. Rather than receiving honor, He was rejected and crucified by the ones He loved. His own people not only rejected Him... they didn't even recognize Him.

That doesn't have to be the response, however. There are those who do hear the message of the Word, the Light, and accept it. As sad as verses ten and eleven are, the next two are tremendous:

John 1:12, 13—But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

JESUS CHRIST, THE WORD

*John 1:14—And **the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.***

For more than 1,400 years God "dwelt" with His people in the tabernacle or temple (Exodus 25:8). Yet, the Lord did not literally dwell in these structures (1 Kings 8:27; Jeremiah 23:24). Each was a symbol of God's presence. Whereas God had always dwelt symbolically with His people; in Christ He came to dwell physically with them. John is eager to proclaim this truth and the fact that he personally witnessed it.

John 1:17—For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

When God came to earth, light and life came as well. The Old Testament brought a measure of true light, but as a candle next to the sun, it was not sufficient. The Law demonstrated the problem, but was powerless to provide a solution.

Man is by nature a sinner (Romans 3:10-18). Intellectually, physically, emotionally, volitionally, each of us has a sin nature profoundly permeating our being. Spiritually, the verdict of Scripture is that man is dead in his sin (Ephesians 2:1). The Law fulfilled its purpose in pointing this out, and the faithful Old Testament saint longed for a savior. He knew that temple sacrifices could not remove his sin and looked to a day when God would provide the ultimate sacrifice—the once-for-all sacrifice able to cleanse him both now and forever (Hebrews 9:24-26).

Christ did not enter our world as another light, but as **the** light and **the** life that all men need. He came to die and give eternal life; He also came to provide light. Knowing Christ enables man to rightly understand himself and the world around him (Proverbs 1:7; Colossians 2:3). Thus, divine light should pour into every aspect of a believer's life, affecting one's entire worldview.

CONCLUSION

The Gospel of John carries a clear message that begins by identifying Jesus Christ. God called John the Baptist to testify about Jesus, thereby preparing the way for our Lord's ministry. From John 1:19 through chapter 11 we are given an overview of Jesus' public ministry. As we move through these accounts, we will continue to see the claim that Jesus is the Christ as well as the substance for belief to rest upon.

BIBLE STUDY

Legislators and Staff (During Session)
Thursdays, 8:00 a.m.
Room 153, House Office Building