

The Eternal Word: Light for His People

Our New Testament Scripture is John 1:1-5. John begins his gospel by taking us back into eternity when there was no time. These first verses sound a lot like the first verses of Genesis: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Yet, John takes us even further back before the creation of the heavens and the earth. There was a "time" when there was nothing but the eternal Triune God.

Follow as I read:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.² He was in the beginning with God.³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

On this second Sunday after Christmas, we think about Jesus, Christ incarnate, born of Mary in Bethlehem, as the eternal Word. John uses the Greek word, *logos*, to express the nature and mission of Jesus. To the Greeks who would read this gospel, *logos* represented a philosophical concept of the essence of the meaning of life. The *logos* to them was the unity of all thought and the answer to all philosophical questions about life.

To the Jews, on the other hand, *logos* was a translation of the Hebrew word, *dabar*. The word to them meant the creative and redemptive power of God that moves at his divine will (Psalm 33:6). The Jews understood also that the Word was the source of God's message to his people through the prophets.

To first century Christians, the Word was the message and power of salvation through Jesus. John says Christ is the eternal Word, showing us the very nature and character of God. Jesus, the Word, is the Light that shows us God's nature, and Jesus is the Word writing on our minds and hearts all we need to know about God.

This past Christmas Season found the world in a condition of turmoil and uncertainty. In many parts of the world there is war, strife, social and economic turmoil and human suffering beyond our comprehension. In even the more stable parts of the world and within the more affluent nations, there's fear of terrorism and a sense of unease and of uncertainty about the future. How this world needs to hear the message of the eternal Word of God! In Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection, God sends forth his light into the darkness and writes for us a message of hope.

An eight-year-old girl expressed it well. When asked why Jesus was called the Word, she said, "Because Jesus is all God wanted to say to us" (Yancey). The message of these verses was explosive and exhaustive, and so it is for us today.

John says that the Word is the divine Co-Creator of all life (1-3). These opening verses leave no room for any understanding of Jesus that is less than the eternal and divine Son, equal in deity with the Father. Paul also wrote that "He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or

powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:15-20, NIV). He, with the Father, was the co-creator.

We are, as the crown of creation, fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14). We’re made in God’s image with the capacity to know Him, commune with Him, and obey, serve and glorify Him. The eternal Word spoke your life into existence, and your mortal life is precious in his sight. Jesus, the eternal Word, is the divine Son who creates all life and gives eternal life.

The Apostle Paul writes about the life-giving power of the Word, as he quotes Deuteronomy: “But the righteousness that is by faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?” (that is, to bring Christ down) or “Who will descend into the deep?” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Romans 10:6-10, NIV). The Word who gives eternal life, is Jesus Christ, who is near to all who will call upon his name (Romans 10:13). He’s already in our heart and mouth, so all you and I must do is simply call on Him to receive eternal life.

The Word, Jesus, is the One who has created in us the awareness of our sin and our need for him. He creates the longing to know God and to receive His forgiveness and to share His life. This eternal life He gives is not just the duration of this life ad infinitum, ad nauseum. It’s a new kind of life altogether.

Back in 1976 there was a stir on the part of scientists who thought they might be able to lengthen the average life expectancy to 400 years. At that time, our family was living in the Cleveland, Ohio suburbs and Dorothy Fuldheim was a popular columnist for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* newspaper. In an editorial she proposed that such an idea was dreadful. She asked her readers to try to imagine living 400 years and planning and attending family reunions; buying and maintaining automobiles; paying insurance premiums, saving for retirement, and being married to the same person for 400 years!

Eternal life is a new kind of life. It’s primarily a relationship with God in Jesus that changes our character and outlook. Jesus gave the parable of the need for new wineskins for the new wine of His life in the Spirit He gives us (Matthew 9:17). He changes us radically from the inside out, as He makes us His new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). Commitment to follow Christ doesn’t immediately erase all personality quirks and character flaws. Conversion is a process of continuous change.

It’s possible a believer in Jesus is still a bit obnoxious in disposition, or maybe inclined toward depression. But think how bad life would be apart from the grace of God! And remember that God is still at work, and a lot of “construction” needs to be done. The Word is still at work in doing His creation and new, re-creation. It’s a bit

irritating to have to wait in traffic slowed by construction. Just try to think of the nice new road that'll result. Our lives are under construction by the Word.

Let's note also that Christ is the eternal Word of life but also He is the eternal Word of light. John writes, "*What has come into being⁴ in Him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*"⁵ *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

Jesus Christ is the Light that explains God. To the Greeks, the logos/word meant the meaning to life, the "soul/essence" of the universe. The logos/word was that which explains life, solves mysteries, and explains the "what" and the "why" of life.

The great ancient Greek philosopher Plato was lecturing a group of his students/disciples and said wistfully that perhaps someday there might come forth from God a word, a *logos*, "who will reveal all mysteries and make everything plain." He was longing for the logos/the eternal Word. He was longing for Jesus.

As the little girl said, "Jesus is all God wanted to say to us." In Jesus Christ we see God perfectly. Jesus told Philip, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). In Jesus we see perfectly the character of the Father, in His holiness and love. We see God's love most powerfully in the cross (Philippians 2:5-11).

Jesus Christ is the perfect representation of God. He's God in the flesh. As Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). And to Philip Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

As the Eternal Word, Jesus is the light that explains God and also is the light that dispels the darkness.

John says, "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it" (or, "did not overcome it."). This verb (*katalambano*) can have a double meaning, to grasp with the mind, i.e. comprehend, or grasp with the hand to destroy or defeat. The world of darkness is the world under Satan's control and opposed to God's rule. It is the world of sin and unbelief that holds people in its grip and sway.

We hear the names of terrorists and dictators described as evil, and surely they and their cohort terrorists are in the grips of Satan, the evil one. But all people, regardless of how respectable and altruistic, are under the influence of the same power of evil that has terrorists and brutal dictators completely in its grip.

But Jesus has overcome and broken the power of the darkness. During his earthly ministry Jesus witnessed the overthrow of Satan and cast out demons and reversed the power of death (Luke 10:18). All these were signs of assurance that He would overcome and break Satan's stranglehold on the world.

Apart from grace, those under the spell of Satan and in a state of sinful rebellion cannot understand the light and truth of salvation in Jesus' name. Even their wills are in bondage apart from the grace of God who sends forth the Holy Spirit to convince and convict of sin. Apart from the initiative of our saving God, we're dead

in our transgressions and sins and are without hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:1-10; 12). We're dependent on the light of God's Word shining on our minds to give us understanding.

In my previous ministry, I often heard Belgium described as a spiritually dark place. Everywhere, apart from God's Word and light, is hopelessly dark. Even as a young child, I came to the awareness of my spiritual need and darkness. And God's light shone in me to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

As children of God we too become His lights in a dark world. Jesus said "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12, NIV). He also said of us, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden." And, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14&16).

One of the banners displayed by the citizens of Calcutta at Mother Teresa's funeral proclaimed, "Mother, you were a source of light in this world of darkness." Even though she experienced a veil of darkness over her spirit while she gave of herself so sacrificially, she radiated the love and light of Christ in the darkest streets and corners of Calcutta and wherever she ministered to the poor and dying.

The eternal Word of God creates life and conveys a light that is not understood by nor overcome by the unbelieving world. And the marvel is that God entrusts us with the privilege and responsibility of carrying his light and being his inextinguishable light to those around us.

Mother Teresa eschewed efforts to be interviewed by the media, and always preferred to do her work in obscurity. As she explained to a would-be interviewer, "I am a little pencil in God's hands. He does the thinking. He does the writing. He does everything and sometimes it is really hard because it is a broken pencil and He has to sharpen it a little more."

The Word has explained God to us, has written to us and caused us to reflect His light and write His truth so others can see God. And in this dark world we're called to let Jesus' the Light shine from us, and to write with the broken pencil of our lives the life-changing Word of God.