

## **Light Triumphs over Darkness**

November 29, 2009 - John 1:1-5

The Christmas season is upon us. Ready or not, here it comes. People respond in different ways to this time of year. Some love it. Some hate it. Some dread it. But everyone is affected somehow. My family doctor in Ottawa used to say, “December is one of the most stressful times of the year.”

You can understand why. Christmas pageants and special presentations pop up everywhere. They happen in churches, schools and communities and usually turn out wonderfully. But the days prior can be stressful.

College and University students face final exams. I remember during some intense terms, I didn't really think much about Christmas until my exams were done. Sometimes that was middle to later December. One year, I had an exam on Dec. 23.

Then there are office parties, community parties, care group parties, small group parties, banquets, hosting and meals to prepare. Oh, and did I mention shopping for Christmas gifts among the crowds. There is getting packages sent off in time, Christmas cards to send and a Christmas letter to write.

There's year end for some businesses and accountants. How about family gatherings? Some of these can be wonderful blessings. Others can bring stress and relationship tension.

But perhaps the biggest stressor or pressure at Christmas is the expectation of happiness. You're supposed to be happy; joyful and celebrating all the wonderful things. But what if you're not? What if things haven't gone well this year? If you've lost a loved one, Christmas can magnify that pain. They're not around for this year's celebrations. If a marriage broke apart this year, there's the pain of that brokenness. If things haven't gone well at work or with the business or in school or in life, Christmas can make it worse. Then if you turn on the news, Peace on Earth seems like a cruel joke in many corners.

If one or several of these factors converge in addition to the stress of December, we might believe darkness is winning. Is darkness gaining ground? Is life only about trying to escape or mask this reality? Or is there something that we're missing when we look at all these things?

Well the problems of this world and the challenges in our lives are real. But darkness will not win. In fact God through His Word brings us this message today: Jesus' light triumphs over darkness. Jesus' light has won, is winning and will win completely over the darkness. Today we are going to explore reasons why this claim is true and the difference it makes for our lives today; this week and this Christmas season. So here's the key statement: **Since Jesus' light triumphs over darkness, we must constantly find it and shine it.**

Every year this season provides us with an opportunity to revisit and reflect on the Christmas Story from the Bible. But which part of the story will we focus on?

Each of the Gospels, (the first four books of the New Testament), were written for a different audience. We get the details for the Christmas Story from 2 Gospels; Matthew and Luke. Mark includes none of the Christmas story. Then there is the Gospel of John. Most think John was written last. So John would likely have known that Matthew and Luke gave substantial details about Christ's coming to Earth as an infant. This may be why John chose a profoundly different approach to the Christmas story.

We will be studying John's account of Jesus' coming through the Advent season. It only fills 14 verses. It contains a simple yet deep message. In the first few verses John raises this light/darkness issue. Though written about 1900 years ago, John strikes a chord and a nerve. He identifies the reality of darkness but also God's provision to deal with the darkness. If some darkness or difficulty threatens your life right now, God's provision is for you. I hope that God will use this message to shape all our perspectives going into the Christmas season especially if we're dreading it. I believe that the truth about Jesus' light can bring us peace and joy not because everything's going well but because Jesus' light triumphs over darkness even in your life.

So we need to answer some questions to grasp all of this. What is Jesus' light? What is darkness? Why does Jesus' light overcome darkness? How must we live in light of Jesus' light?

***John 1:1-14 (ESV)***  
***The Word Became Flesh***

1:1 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 were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

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.

**Since Jesus' light triumphs over darkness, we must constantly find it and shine it.**

But where do I get that **Jesus' light triumphs over darkness?**

Verse 5. "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it."

"Well it doesn't say Jesus' light," Tom. "It says 'light.'" That could be any light!" True, so we need to find out about this light.

**What is this light?** Verse 4 – "In him was life, and the *life* was the *light* of men." So this light actually comes from life, not from electricity or kerosene or a candle wick or even the sun.

The light comes from the life from within *him*?. Who is this him? We have to go all the way back to verse 1 to find out who him is. "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*." So there's the him in whom there was life which was the light which shines and prevails over the darkness.

So who is the him? Someone called the Word or Logos in Greek. "Word" is the title John gives to God the Son as He existed before time. So the Word is the pre-existent Christ. The Word is Jesus even though it's technically not correct to insert Jesus' name here. The name Jesus refers to the God/man who walked the Earth 2000 years ago. But since you and I know the name "Jesus" better than the name "Word," I used Jesus to identify "him" in verse 4.

But I still haven't answered the question "what is this light?" **The light is the life of God the Son.** God the Son's life is this light. Jesus' life is the light.

**What is darkness?** The darkness is not simply the absence of light because verse 5 refers to some sort of conflict between light and darkness. So the darkness must refer to **Satan and his forces, sin and**

**death.** All these add up to an evil trinity that makes war on the world and people.

But I claim Jesus' light triumphs over darkness. Is that what verse 5 says? It depends which version of the Bible you're reading. If you have the NIV, your verse 5 says "the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not understood it." If you have the King James it says "the darkness did not comprehend it." Well that doesn't sound like conflict. It sounds more like a misunderstanding. Light shone and darkness didn't understand. Comprehend or understand *are* possible translations to that word.

But you're NIV bible will also note an alternative translation – overcome. "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." The ESV takes that translation and doesn't even give the "understanding" translation a footnote. Why?

Well, did the first few words of this passage remind you of anything? In the beginning. Where else do we read those words? The first verse of the Bible. Genesis 1:1 – "In the beginning, God created the heaven and earth." What was a critical factor in creation? What needed to happen for creation to even get going? Genesis 1:2 "The

earth was without form and void, and *darkness* was over the face of the deep." So what is the very first thing God creates? Genesis 1:3 – Let there be humans? No. Let there be animals? No. Let there be light. And there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness."

For any creation to even happen, darkness had to be overcome. Light had to dispel darkness or drive it back because without light, there's no life. So for that reason, I think John is doing something similar here. He draws attention to that first creation. It's like he's saying "remember in the first creation light came and the darkness could not overcome it? Well a new light has come and darkness has not overcome it.

Notice the tense of the verb he uses in verse 5. I know some of you are twitching. Grammar. "I'm out of school on Sundays. Or I escaped school when I graduated or dropped out. I don't even want to think about Language Arts or English." Then don't. But think about time – Past, present or future. In which time frame does John put this conflict?

Verse 5. The darkness did not overcome the light? Past tense? No. The darkness will not overcome the light? Future tense? No. The darkness has not overcome it. Present tense. The darkness did not overcome the light while John was writing this gospel on the parchment. It did not overcome the light when the churches first read this Gospel. It is not overcome the light while we read it. It is not overcoming the light today or in our lives. It's present tense ongoing triumph for Jesus' light.

If darkness doesn't overcome the light, the darkness has lost. It's not a tie. If light remains on, darkness loses. Where there is light, they're can't be darkness. So Jesus' light continually triumphs over darkness' attempt to overcome it. Oh this is good stuff!

This is right here and right now for believers in Christ. "In John 12:46 Jesus says, "I have come as light into the world that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness." So believers have passed from darkness to light. John 12:36 says, "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of the light." When you believe in Jesus, not only do you leave the darkness and enter the light; you actually join the family of the light—you become children of the

light. Paul said, "Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8).

But is this really true?

**Why does Jesus' light triumph over darkness?** Just a religious reality, inspiring words?

**Because Jesus is unlike anyone else or any other light in history.** This is not some abstract philosophical argument. John places this light into history. Jesus is unlike any other light in history. **How is Jesus unlike anyone or anything else?** John has provided a bunch of reasons why leading up to verse 5.

*1) This One was the Word with God and was God.*

We've already seen that the title "Word" refers to God the Son in his pre-existent state. But John reveals some key factors about the Word in these first phrases. These phrases correct some great errors being taught today. Notice first the Word was "with God." That means there was a relationship of close personal intimacy. It also points to a distinction in persons of the Trinity. There was the Word and there was God.

But the second phrase is the stumbling block for many. The Word was God. Not the Word was *a* god. The Word was God. So the Son was both God and Son of God. This is the glory and mystery of the Trinity. Somehow God is One and a unity of three persons; God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. More mind boggling than that, somehow God became human (verse 14).

One commentator writes “Language threatens to crack and strain under the pressure of this mind-boggling confession. Poet W. H.

Auden’s lines capture the paradox:

*How could the Eternal do a temporal act,*

*The Infinite become a finite fact?*

*Nothing can save us that is possible.*

In other words, yes, this is absolutely mind boggling. We can’t completely get this. Yet it must be this way. For if we could unpack God completely and figure out how everything worked, we would be God. God is like us and yet so unlike us. This Son of God whose life is the light is infinitely greater than anyone or anything. He is God.

Nothing is greater than God. Nothing can consume God. Nothing gains victory over God. Light triumphs over darkness because He is God and was with God.

Why else does Jesus’ light triumph over darkness?

**The One having this Light was with God IN THE BEGINNING.**

(2) He had no origin. There never was a time when He never was. He has always been. He was there when the first light appeared dispelling that first darkness.

When we want to deal with something, we call an expert—plumber, carpenter, paramedic, consultant. Experts have the most experience. Well who do you think has the most experience in history in triumphing over darkness? The Word – God the Son who was there “in the beginning.” He was with God in the beginning before there even was the light of creation.

Then John gives another reason why Jesus is absolutely unique. Not only was He with God in the beginning before creation. Not only was He present at creation. He was the agent of creation.

**Through him everything was created. (3) .**

Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made. One commentator writes “ So the point is this: the energetic, purposeful, growing, reproductive life that shines in the darkness is the life of the One through whom all things were made. The life that shines in the light is the life of the Creator. Colossians 1:16-17 describe Jesus as the agent of Creation. “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” So this light which darkness tries to overcome was with God in the beginning, is God, and created all things.

The final reason Jesus’ light triumphs over darkness is found in verse. **Jesus’ light is a living light that is completely independent of external force or source.** (4) Verse 4 – “In him was life.” The Son as well as the Father has life in Himself. He didn’t need to have life given to him and He doesn’t depend on some outside source to sustain Him. Later in John 5:26, Jesus declares “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.”

So Jesus’ light is not like traffic light that you can ignore. It’s not like a spotlight that can only shine where it’s pointed. It’s not like a lamp light that works only if it’s plugged into a source.

Jesus’ light comes from within Him. He is the source of life. From His life, new creation or new life flows; both the life of new creation and the new life of the believer. We see that this life is the light coming from One totally unlike any other.

Jesus life which gives light is not like a candle. A candle needs an external source to light it and certain conditions to keep lit. Candles cannot exist beyond the amount of wax they have. There’s no way we can adequately describe Jesus’ light. But perhaps Jesus light is a little like those candles you can’t blow out. They somehow regenerate light from within.

But Jesus also has an unlimited supply of wax. So this light cannot be snuffed out or blown out or doused. It is an invincible light from within Jesus. So light triumphs over darkness because light is the life of the Son of God. God the Son is absolutely unique and all powerful. All this add up to He was God, the Word, God the Son; God’s ultimate self-revelation. He was with God in the beginning. He created

everything. This can make a huge difference in our lives today when we remember this light triumphs over darkness.

Some of you have dealt or are dealing with the death of a Christian loved one. That's a dark situation. But because of Jesus' light you know that Death is not the end of the story. Death will be swallowed up in victory. As you rest in that reality, the darkness today fails to overcome the light.

Some have lost a loved one and don't know if they're in heaven. I corresponded with someone who showed me Jesus' light was triumphing over the darkness even in that situation. This person writes *"We are all doing well, food is on the table, heat in the house, plenty of work to keep us busy, and we feel that we are blessed with knowing our salvation. What more could I ask for?"* I don't believe you can write something like that apart from Jesus' light giving that perspective.

Loss, tragedy, difficulty; illness all have the potential to close in on us with darkness. But Scripture promises a God who works for the good of those who love him "in all things." (Romans 8:28).

Oh the darkness is real. One commentator writes "God's people have learned from bitter experience that the darkness still rejects the light, and threatens life itself (cf. 16:2). But does that matter? The Light shines on, more brightly than on the day of creation, and the life gives entrance to the new creation."

So when darkness closes in – when it seems like darkness is winning, it isn't. We must cling to this reality in John 1:5. The darkness has not overcome the light.

It didn't overcome the light at creation. It didn't overcome the light at the Fall. It didn't overcome the light at the cross. It doesn't overcome the light today. It will not overcome the light tomorrow. No matter what dark situation we face or find ourselves in, Jesus' light shines and the darkness has not overcome it.

### **How do we live in light of the light?**

**Constantly find it** – especially when darkness closes in. Look around; listen around; ask around; ask others. "Where have you seen Jesus' light dispel the darkness recently? Where have you seen darkness try to overcome the light and fail?"

If you don't know Christ, apart from Him, you walk in spiritual darkness. But you don't have to remain there. Later in this passage – John 1:12-13 – “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Will you come to Jesus' light?

**Shine it** – Live a life shining with Christ. Shine light into a dark discussion – no, there are not many ways to God; a dark decision – did we consult the Lord about this – let's bring this to the Lord; offer love to the unlovely; the wanderer; the stranger. Offer grace to those not walking with the Lord.

Yes, darkness is real and threatening. But it has not overcome the light. So cling to that truth and to Jesus. Then go into this season not faking happiness but resting in the reality that Jesus' light has triumphed, is triumphing and will triumph over whatever darkness we face!