

All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name

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The First Christmas Carols (Advent 2007)

John 1:1-13

John 1:1-13

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. 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 testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. 9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The beginning of the gospel of John has often been described as being like the overture or prelude a great symphony. An overture, for those of us who are non-musicians, and I am a non-musician, is designed to whet our appetites and to prepare us for the music that we're about to hear. Very often, the overture introduces us to the themes that the symphony is going to develop in more detail. And John 1 is like that. Various themes of the gospel of John are hinted at in John 1:1-13.

So, for example, the Son of God is presented to us as the "pre-existent one." And he is called God in John 1:1 and also later by the person we today call Doubting Thomas.

John 20:28

Thomas said to him [Jesus], "My Lord and my God!"

He is called the Light in John 1; and Jesus calls himself the "light of the world" in John 8:12,

John 8:12

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

He is called life in John 1; and, Jesus again calls himself “the life” in John 11:25,

John 11:25

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die;

In John 1 we see this conflict and struggle between light and darkness. And this theme is really one of the main themes in the gospel of John – a conflict between those who reject Jesus and continue to live in darkness and those who accept Jesus and are adopted into God’s family. Virtually every phrase in John 1:1-18 is developed and extended further in the rest of John’s gospel.

And what really stands out in the opening verses of John is how John piles up title upon title, description upon description, and name upon name in communicating to us who this glorious person, who we call Jesus, really is. So, for example, in v. 1,

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And in v. 4,

John 1:4

In him was life, and that life was the light of all people.

Why does John pile up title upon title, description upon description, and name upon name in speaking of the ways that the Son of God ought to be understood by us? By the way, John doesn’t stop with John 1. In other places Christ is called a Prophet. He is called the Messiah, the King of Israel, the King of the Jews, the Holy One of God, the Lamb of God, the Sent One of God, the Bread of Life, the Shepherd, the Resurrection, the Way, the Truth and the Life...on and on, title after title, name upon name. Why so many titles? Why so many names about this one that we know as Christ?

See, the Bible approaches the problem we human beings experience in a very different way than modern therapists and modern counselors do. Both the Bible and modern counselors see people as having multiple problems. We human beings are insecure. We are wracked by anxieties and fears. We are afraid of the future. We’re afraid of the present. We’re afraid of dying. We’re afraid of losing loved ones. We find it hard to change. We are often lazy. We are apathetic. We’re unmotivated. We often feel alone even in crowds. We struggle with guilt and regrets over our past. Both the Bible and modern counselors agree that we human beings have lots of problems.

But the Bible and modern counseling take very different approaches in dealing with the problems we have. Many counselors agree with this approach, especially those who are not working off of a biblical foundation. So they seek to pull their clients out of the mud by bolstering their clients' sense of self. A recent survey of Americans discovered that a majority of us – actually 56% of Americans say that in life crises we look within ourselves for answers rather than to an outside power like the Christian God. To an insecure person, a counselor might say, "Come on, you have a lot going for you. You have a college degree. You have so many talents. You are a wonderful mom. You have a great voice. You are successful in business. You are a really good cook."

To a person who feels lonely, or isolated, a counselor might say, "Well you need to get out more. You need to learn to be more self-assertive. You need to develop your capacity for intimacy." Modern counseling, in other words, often seeks to solve our problems by making much of people. Counselors will often make much of the client they are speaking to. "We need to help you to believe in yourself and to find within yourself the answers and the resources to cope with what you are feeling."

Now, the Bible takes a really different approach to healing our problems and the multiple causes for our unhappiness. The Bible, and especially the gospel of John, teaches that the way that your problems will be healed is not by making much of you, but rather you need to make much of Jesus Christ. The way out of the mud for you, friend, and for me is not to make a bigger deal about ourselves, but rather it is to grow in our understanding of Christ so that we make a bigger deal out of him. The resources that I need to deal with temptations, or crises, or disappointments in life not found within us. They are found in Christ. The more I make of Jesus – how big Jesus is; how smart he is; how in control he is; how his plan for my life and plan for the world is a good plan; the more secure I feel. The more confident I am that Christ hears my prayers and has the power to actually do something about my situation, the more at peace I feel inside. The more I make of Jesus, the more I realize how holy he is, how his eye is always on me, how he sees everything that I do, how uncompromising his standards are, and how obeying his will for my life will always result in greater joy for me, the more I am motivated to conform my life and my internal attitudes to his desires.

The Bible's main therapeutic approach to the healing of our psyches is to make much of Jesus. And when we do that, when we make much of Jesus, we find that we ourselves are comforted, and secure, and changed, and healed. The bigger and more awesome Jesus is to you, the better you will be able to navigate the various challenges of life.

Today, I'm going to continue in my Advent Series. Advent, as I've mentioned, is that season in the church's calendar where the Christian church worldwide prepares itself for the coming of the Son of God in the world at Christmas. I've mentioned that embedded in the text of the New Testament are early Christian

hymns and at least parts of early Christian worship songs. And it is particularly the case that when the New Testament writers contemplated the awesome and amazing person of Jesus Christ, they did so on their knees in worship. Today, we are going to examine one of the most famous early Christian hymns that is found in John 1. As I've said, John piles up title upon title, name upon name, in making much of Jesus. I've called today's talk, "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name." Let's pray.

John 1:1-3

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

The first thing we find in John 1 is that Christ is the agent of the new creation.

He is the agent of the new creation

John begins his gospel by echoing the first words of Genesis, which is of course the first book of the Bible. So we read,

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Now, no Jewish reader of John's gospel would have missed this echo of Genesis 1, particularly since the Hebrew name for the book of Genesis is literally, "In the beginning..." What John is saying in these verses is that Christ, the one he calls the Word, is the one through whom God created everything to begin with. v. 3,

John 1:3

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

And not only is Christ the agent of creation, the one through whom God created the universe, but Christ is the author of the new creation. See, God was doing something utterly new when he sent his Son into the world, something so new, so radical, that we need to call it a new creation. The apostle Paul speaks about this in 2 Corinthians 5:17,

2 Cor. 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

What is Paul talking about? What is John referring to? They are telling us that for those who enter relationship with Christ, there is a fresh start. You can begin over with a clean slate. The coming of Christ into the world meant a new start for

the universe; the beginning of the end of the reign of sin, death, and Satan's grip on the world. The Creator acted in a new way towards his old creation.

Let me ask you a question: Do you believe that God is the God of fresh starts and new beginnings? Do you believe that God can wipe the slate clean in your life and allow you to start over? That while you may need to live with some of the consequences of your past actions and your past sins, you do not have to live with the guilt of those past actions. Do you believe that you can have a new beginning?

That's why; by the way, our marriage restoration program here at Vineyard is called "Begin Again." Begin Again is such a biblical name. It is taken directly from John 1:1.

Through Christ you can begin again; through Christ your marriage can begin again; through Christ your family can begin again; through Christ your life can begin again. John makes much of Jesus by holding him up not only as the agent of the old creation, but through the gospel, he is the agent of the new creation.

You know, it is one thing for God to create. But it seems to me that it is a special and in some ways, more awesome grace when God recreates - when God brings out of the ashes a restored ministry, a restored church, a restored marriage, a restored life. I love the fact that God is in the business not only of creating, but also of recreating, of restoring, of offering new beginnings to people whose worlds have been destroyed either by others or by their own actions. God is the begin again God. He is the God who reissues callings to people. He is the God who is in the business of fresh starts – not only is he the God of Genesis, he is the God of re-Genesis. He not only makes worlds at the beginning, he fixes and mends broken worlds. He brings people back to places of wholeness and usefulness; issuing new calls and breathing fresh life into old calls. God is the God who allows people's failures to be stepping stones to future successes, and future accomplishments. Do you believe this? At some point in your life, you are going to have to, to continue on in your Christian journey.

And in making much of Christ, John tells us that,

He is the pre-existent one

v. 1,

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The apostle Paul said much the same thing about Christ's pre-existence when he wrote in Colossians 1:17 these words:

Colossians 1:17

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Let me try to explain the importance of this idea that the Son of God did not come into existence on Christmas Day – that he is the pre-existent one. What does that mean and how is it that we would make much of Christ because he is pre-existent?

The same author of the gospel of John likely wrote the book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible. When John wrote the book of Revelation, he quotes God in Revelation 1:8 and says this:

Revelation 1:8

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Now this is not Christ talking; this is Almighty God. Almighty God calls himself the “Alpha and the Omega.” Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. We would say that God is the A and the Z. In other words, in the Greek alphabet, you can’t speak of any letter than comes before Alpha; there is nothing before Alpha, and you can’t speak of any letter after Omega; there is nothing after Omega. What John is telling us in Revelation is there is nothing before God and there is nothing after God. He is ultimate reality, no matter how far back you go in time, you are going to bump into God. And no matter how far forward you go in time, you are going to bump into God. God is before time; God ends after time. God is.

Now, God makes this explicit in Isaiah 44:6 when he says:

Isaiah 44:6

“This is what the Lord says— Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.

It is this eternal existence that is a fundamental part of God’s uniqueness as God. The name that God chooses for himself, Yahweh, means, at least in part, “the one who is eternally, absolutely, and invincibly the existent one.” Before anything else was, there was God. God can’t be preceded by anything and God can’t be outlasted by anything. That’s what it means to be God.

So what does this have to do with Christ? It has everything to do with Christ because near the end of John’s Revelation, John quotes Jesus Christ as saying this,

Revelation 22:12-13

“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what they have done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

God the Son, in other words, did not begin his existence in the womb of the Virgin Mary; nor did he begin his existence on Christmas Day. There never was a time when God the Son was not. Jesus Christ takes the title that belongs to God uniquely. Jesus Christ called himself the Alpha and the Omega. You can't have any greater claim to Jesus' deity than that. Christ is saying that there is nothing before me and that there is nothing after me. No person, no divine being – nothing precedes me. I am Reality. That no matter how far you go back, you are going to bump into the Son of God; and no matter how far forward you go, you are going to bump into the Son of God. You cannot escape the Son of God, because I am existence itself.

Listen, there can't be two Alphas, or two Omegas. There can't be two firsts and two lasts unless the two are one. Christ in the book of Revelation is claiming for himself a shared being, a shared substance, a shared existence with God. That gives him a unique glory; that gives him a unique greatness. Christ is more awesome and more wonderful than any person who has ever walked on the earth. He is the foundation for all existence.

Do you think being related to someone that awesome could make you feel more secure or less fearful? Do you think that believing in this great person, who always was and who always will be, could give you a sense of security regarding this person's capacity to guide you through life? Do you think if you prayed to someone who was before everything and will outlast everything that would calm your fears of the future, or even your fear of death? Christ outlasts death.

Christ won't be outlasted by anything. If you turn to him in faith, he will grant you as a gift the eternal life that is in him.

And then in piling up the titles and names of Christ, John says,

He is the Word

v. 1,

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

What is the Son of God like? John writes, “In the beginning was the Word.” Why does John call the Son of God who came down at Christmas “the Word?” There are lots of explanations for this; whole volumes have been written just on this phrase, “In the beginning was the Word...”; great scholars have traced this

concept through Greek and Gnostic and Jewish philosophy. John, here, is speaking to every major philosophy and every religious system known to him in his day. And he's saying that the longings of every great religious system, the longings of the Jews, the longings of the Greeks, the longings of the Romans, all the great philosophical systems all find what they are looking for in this one called "the Word." In the beginning was the Word

John, in other words, is saying, "You Greeks, you Jews, you Romans, you already have developed a philosophical concept that you call 'the Word' in the case of the Jews, a religious concept that you call 'the Word' – let me use that concept that you already believe in and bridge to this incredible person named Christ. This bridge-building approach from the culture to Christ was the approach that the apostle Paul took when he was in Athens on Mars Hill in Acts 17. He bridged from the philosophers that the Greeks believed in in pointing to the person and work of Christ. He bridged from a tomb that was present in Athens in pointing to the person and work of Christ.

You see, whenever we try to share Christ with someone, it requires us Christian witnesses to find an idea, a concept, a longing, an interest that the person already believes in, that they understand, and bridge from that idea, from that concept, that longing, to a relevant faithful deeper understanding of the person and work of Christ. This requires real Spirit-led activity.

One of the best illustrations of this bridge building was done by a Christian missionary couple, Don and Caroline Richardson, as described in Don Richardson's incredible book called *Peace Child*. Don and Caroline were missionaries to a tribe in the western half of New Guinea, an area that today we call Irian Jaya. There are many different primitive tribes that live in Irian Jaya, this Pacific island. The tribe that Don and Caroline went to was called the Sawi People.

Now as Don and Caroline probed the Sawi language and culture, they discovered that they were living and working among a people who honored treachery and betrayal as an ideal. In many of their legends and stories that the Sawi people told to their children, the heroes were men who formed friendships with the express purpose of later betraying the befriended one to be killed and to be eaten. The Sawis' expression for this practice is "to fatten the friendship for the slaughter."

So when Don Richardson told the Sawi tribe the story of Judas betraying Jesus to death after three years of friendship, the Sawis believed that Judas was the hero of the story. And Don was looking for a way to communicate that no, Jesus was the hero. But what's going to be the bridge to this primitive tribe?

Lo and behold, the Sawi had a way of making peace when they were at war with another tribe. A father in the Sawi village had to make an incredible sacrifice.

He had to give one of his own sons as a 'peace child' to his enemies. And this peace child would be the offering that would bring the warring tribes together. And Don said when he and Caroline saw this happen, "and we saw the peace that resulted from a man's wonderful sacrifice of his own son," he was able to then say, "Jesus is the greatest Peace Child given by the greatest Father." And when the Sawi tribesmen heard this story of the great Peace Child Jesus, they turned to Christ for salvation and peace with God.

Every Christian is called to be a missionary to people at your jobs, in your class, or in our neighborhoods and apartment buildings, or in our families. There is no Christian who isn't called to be a missionary. The only question is where will you be a missionary – in Central Ohio, or New York, in Los Angeles, or overseas?

There isn't one correct metaphor, or one absolutely best jumping off point for you to share when you are trying to awaken an understanding in the heart of a person regarding who Christ is, or what Christ has done. But God's Spirit will often lead you to the exact right analogy, that if you learn to share your faith and you sensitively understand who the person is that you're talking to and what they need, the Lord may lead you to share a picture, or a metaphor, or something in contemporary culture through which you can share Christ. It could be a movie about self-sacrifice like *Schindler's List*, putting your own life on the line in order to rescue others. It could be a song like U2's "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For." I'm sure that those of you who are followers of Christ, and who regularly share your faith, you've experienced this Spirit-led creativity in bridging to the person that you're talking to about Christ. If you've never experienced that, pray, "God, give me the right words, the right concepts, the right pictures so that my classmates, my roommate, my co-worker, my parents, my siblings, my children, my spouse, my friends could come to know you Jesus Christ."

John, as a great evangelist, bridges to both his Jewish and his Greek audience by using a concept they already understand, namely the Word of God.

How do we find out what Son of God is like? John answers this just as the words of a man or woman help us to understand and to know that man or woman and that without a person's words they remain a mystery to us; so the Word of God lets us in on who the Son of God is. God tells us who he is through his Word. He tells us his story.

See, it is the nature of the Christian God to not remain aloof. It is the character of the God who came down to not remain silent. God doesn't force us to guess what he's like.

Words make a difference in our ability to have a relationship with someone. Let me use a silly illustration. Imagine if you came home one night and your dog greeted you at the door not by wagging his tail, but by speaking to you. And your dog looked at you and said, "How was your day? Was the traffic slow with all of

the rain?” Your relationship with your dog, no matter how close it is right now, and how much you think you understand your dog’s feelings and how much you think your dog understand your feelings – your relationship with your dog, if your dog spoke, would exponentially change. And our relationship with God is radically changed because God speaks.

Here’s the deal. A lot of people believe that the world’s religions, Christianity included, are just a bunch of blind people groping in the dark for some elusive God. A lot of people believe that God forces us to play hide-and-go-seek with him. That Christianity is just humanity’s attempt to try to explain the unexplainable, to try to express the inexpressible, to say something about God who is silent and hidden. But in the first phrase of John’s gospel, he blows this idea right out of the water. In the very first phrase he tells us something about God. He says, “In the beginning was the Word...” We are not forced into the position of being blind and groping in the dark for a God who is hiding.

What is God like? Our God speaks. God expresses himself. God reveals himself. He is by nature self-expressive. We human beings don’t have to grope in the dark for him. The Bible, in fact, teaches us that we are the ones who are hiding and God is the one who is seeking us out. That’s what God is like. That’s why we can be confident whatever we face because our God speaks. He doesn’t remain silent and tell us to find answers on our own. God speaks!

If you are struggling with your faith, if you are a person who really struggles to believe, why not ask Jesus to reveal himself to you?

What else do we learn about Christ? We learn that he is,

He is God

It says in John 1:1,

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Big G God. Here was the apostle John, one of Jesus’ original followers, calling his teacher, his Rabbi, his leader, his closest friend “Almighty God.”

It has become commonplace these days to take an evolutionary approach to Christian doctrine. It has become commonplace to suggest that the early Christians knew Jesus as a great teacher, as a prophet, as someone who embodied the best of humanity, but only after many, many years did this doctrine develop that would consider Jesus to be divine. This is the Da Vinci Code approach to Jesus. In other words, the view that Jesus was God was the product of multiple re-tellings and changes and re-shaping of the original Jesus by the

early church community over the course of centuries. Calling Jesus God is said to be a very late development in Christian history. If there is one point in which much of the criticism regarding Christianity turns out to be absolutely false, it is at this point that calling Jesus God was a late evolutionary development; that early Christians from the get-go didn't call him God. If there is any point at which we would say that the criticism of Christianity is false, it is at this point.

One of the most famous recent church historians, was a man named Jaroslav Pelikan, who taught for many years at Yale University. He points out repeatedly in his writings, this historian, this scholar, that the oldest Christian sermon that we have, the oldest account of a Christian martyr, the oldest pagan report about the church, the oldest liturgical prayer and the oldest Christian song, if you go back to the very earliest message by a Christian martyr, an account, a pagan report, the earliest prayer, earliest hymn, every one of them, interestingly refers to Jesus as Lord and God. If you dig down to the roots of Christianity, what you will find is not some discussion of Jesus being a great man. What you will find at the very roots of Christianity is that Jesus is Lord and God.

And as C.S. Lewis said what is most interesting, what we must remember, is that the people who were saying that Jesus is Lord and God are the least likely people on the face of the planet to have said it, if it wasn't true. The folks who were running around the Roman Empire proclaiming Jesus is God were Jews. The writer of John the gospel was a Jew. If ever there were a group of people on the face of the planet that were fiercely monotheistic, that believed in the unity of God, the oneness of God. If ever there were a group of people who would be by culture, by history, by their frame of mind disinclined to believe in the Trinity, it was the Jews. Every single morning Jews would get up and pray the Shema: Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

And yet, these were the people who were going around saying, "God came down. God came as a man. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is God." It's like God choosing a lifelong rabidly committed Buckeye fan to lead the pep rally at the University of Michigan right before the OSU-Michigan game.

Jesus comes on the scene and the same Jews who so disdained the Roman practice of emperor worship are now racing around the Roman Empire saying: We worship Jesus. Jesus is Lord and God. Jesus must have been quite convincing to take a jury who was totally biased against him and convince them of what they were disinclined to believe. Maybe it was his miracles over nature, like committing storms to stop or his claim to forgive sins. Maybe it was his resurrection from the dead.

You know, in America today we value being open-minded. You can have an opinion, but don't dig your heels in about your opinion. You need to be open-minded. Someone once said, "I view being open-minded like having an open window in the summer without having a screen. All the bugs and mosquitoes

come in.” It’s good, friends, to be open-minded, to explore, to dialogue, to listen, to admit that you don’t know everything, to discuss, to learn. It’s good to be open-minded so long as you have a screen on your mind to catch the bugs.

So John gives us a screen regarding Christ that allows us to discuss and dialogue and learn more about this great God and still filter out the bugs and the mosquitoes. What someone believes about Christ is of ultimate importance.

Many people think they are honoring God the Son, the one John calls the Word, the one we’ve come to know as Jesus, by piling up titles to him, but denying to him the one title that John gives him – God, the uncreated Creator. The Jehovah’s Witnesses who walk around our neighborhood and knock on our doors deny the title God to him. They call him a God – little “g” God. They say that Jesus was a creature and not the creator. They say that he is the Archangel Michael. And I say this with all reverence and all respect to the Archangel Michael because he is a creature, but truly the Archangel Michael is more like a gold fish or an earthworm than he is like the Creator Jesus Christ.

The great divide is between the Creator on the one hand and all creatures on the other. There is a Grand Canyon gulf between the Creator and all creatures. And then between all creatures there are just these little distinctions. There are little cracks starting with archangels and working their way down to single cell amoebas and viruses. But it is no honor to the creator to put him on the other side of the Grand Canyon, on the other side of the gulf, and call him the highest creature. That is a great dishonor.

The other heresy that arose in the early church was one that said there was no distinction of persons in the Godhead. This heresy, called Sabellianism, from a bishop named Sabellius, (also called modalism) taught that the one God just chose to reveal himself at different times as God the Father and then at other times as God the Son and at other times as God the Spirit. Oneness churches teach this heresy today. They deny the eternal Trinity, this eternal three Persons, existing in unity in the Godhead.

This second heresy got rid of all distinctions in the one God. But here again, John screens out the bugs and says, “and the Word was with God. And the Word was God.” He is saying there is a distinction between the Word and God and yet a unity. The Word was with God. There has to be some kind of distinction. The Word was God, there is a unity. It is interesting that he doesn’t say God was the Word. Because there is more to God than the Word. The Word makes up at least some part of God. He is one of the persons of the Godhead. But you have not exhausted all there is to God by the person called the Word. Careful study of John 1:1-3 could have avoided the errors.

When we talk about Jesus, why is it crucial to say we are talking about God? It is crucial because this is the only way we make much of Jesus. You don’t make

much of Jesus by calling him the highest creature, the most intelligent man, a prophet. You might as well call him a sand crab, a cabbage, an amoebae, or less. The only way to give proper honor to Jesus is to travel to the other side of the Grand Canyon and call him what he is, God the Creator. Not creature. God the Creator. These minor little distinctions between all creatures pale in significance to the distance between creature and creator.

Why is it important to call Jesus God? Because it is true. Because if you like to live in reality the way the universe really is rather than the universe of what you prefer, if you like life the way it is dealt to us, if you are a person who loves truth, then calling Jesus God is important because it is true. And by calling Jesus God you make much of him and it will change your life as you learn to find God in the face of Jesus.

What else do we learn about Christ? We learn that,

He is the Life

John 1:4

In him was life, and that life was the light of all people.

Life is not something we can get from anything in creation. Life is a gift of the Creator. Life is exclusively found in Jesus. Everywhere we go in America people are asking, "Where can I find life?" We look for life in so many different places. Some of you have looked for life in a bottle of liquor, a bottle of pills, or in cocaine or some other drug. You were looking for some zip, some lift, some high. Some of you have looked for life by entering one more relationship with a man or woman, having one more sexual experience, something that is just a little bit more exotic, a little more erotic. Some of you have looked for life in your careers – pushing, climbing, trying to succeed. Some of you have looked for life by exploring various spiritualities, by reading different philosophies, by checking out different therapies and different self-help books. But when all is said and done in our search for life, as we run down different alleys, we find ourselves feeling dead inside, not more alive.

A few years ago I read about a world-class American snowboardist visiting Japan who tried to snow board down the twisting railings of staircase of a five-story hotel building. As he slid down the railing toward the 4th floor, he tripped and fell head first to the ground where he died.

The biblical book of Proverbs says that "all the ways of people are right in their own eyes, but their end is death." We try so many ways to find life and the end of our search is death.

You know, the Bible gives us two different Greek words for our English word "life." The first Greek word is "bios"

Bios = biological life

Bios is biological life; material life. But there is a second Greek word that John repeatedly uses; he uses it here in v. 4, and it is the Greek word “zoe”

Zoe = spiritual life

Now it is the neglect of zoe – spiritual life – that makes Americans so unhappy. We constantly think that if we have more bios – more biological life – then we will be satisfied. Because the message that we constantly hear from every marketer and every advertiser is essentially you are just material. Every advertisement is about bios, about your body, pampering your body; adorning your body; comforting your body; relaxing your body; improving your body; clothing your body; strengthening; feeding; satisfying your body. It is bios, bios, bios.

And the message that we get from America is so long as you cater to bios, your material life, your biological life, you will be a satisfied human being. Yet we find wealthy people taking anti-depressants and Hollywood stars checking in and out of rehab. What’s going on?

The Bible tells us that you need more than bios. You need zoe – spiritual life. Jesus says this to us over and over again. In Matthew 4 when Jesus was tempted by the devil, one of the temptations was all about this distinction between bios, material life, and zoe, spiritual life. The devil tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread and Jesus responds and says in Matthew 4.4 these words:

Matthew 4:4

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘People do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

You need more than food to be satisfied. The poor need more than food and the wealthy need more than new cars and bigger homes. People need to feast upon God’s Word. To a woman who kept looking to men and sexual relationships for life, Jesus points out the distinction between bios and zoe when he tells her in John 4.13, 14 these words:

John 4:13-14

Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Here is what I’m saying. C.S. Lewis, the Oxford English professor, who wrote about zoe in his wonderful book, *Mere Christianity*. I find myself quoting Lewis a lot in this talk. Lewis said,

God created us. He invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on gas and it doesn't run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on himself. God himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That's why it's just no good asking God to make you happy in your own way without having to bother about Christianity. God can't give you happiness and peace apart from himself. There's no such thing.

The problem is people try to pour into their engine something other than God. That's why the engine conks out. Let me ask you a question. What have you been pouring into your engine recently? More material? More stuff? More sexual thrills? Another relationship? Where other than in God are you trying to find life? Making much of Jesus means you have come to a place of realizing that you only feel fully alive when you are close to him; Christ is not only your Savior, he is also your satisfier.

Finally, John tells us that,

He is the Light

V. 4,

John 1:4

In him was life, and that life was the light of all people.

And in v. 5 we read that the world is a dark place.

John 1:5

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Now, people blame God for darkness in the world. John says "the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness hasn't understood it" – or better translated, the darkness hasn't overcome it. Many people complain. They say the world is so dark. There is so much evil and suffering and pain. Everything is so crazy – Iraq, the Darfur, Somalia – shootings in churches and in shopping malls and in schools – more suicide bombings, more terrorism. Why doesn't God reveal himself more? Why doesn't God show himself more? Why isn't there more light in this dark world?

Do you understand what John is saying? Friends, he is saying that the light is shining, present tense – not just in the past – but the light shines and keeps on shining. You can't blame God that while the sun was up you choose to run into a cave and hide in the dark. You can't blame God if the sun is shining and the world put duct tape over its eyes and put its head in a sack. You can't blame

God and say “Where is the light, God?” The reason the world is so dark is not because God’s light is not shining through Christ. The reason the world is so dark is because people oppose the light, hide from the light, reject the light, and run from the light. But John says the darkness will not win out over the light. V. 5 properly translated states: “The darkness has not overcome the Light.”

Be honest, surely there are areas of your life in the past that haven’t worked. For some of you it is in your relationships with your spouse or with others; your relationships with former boyfriends or girlfriends; or maybe its with respect to your kids or your parents. Be honest, wherever you have experienced significant relational pain, can you blame any of that pain on God? Wouldn’t it be more truthful to say not that God’s light wasn’t shining, but that you or this other person sometimes both of you were choosing, or are currently choosing, to live in the dark. You or this other person chose to simply put duck tape over your eyes. You didn’t want God’s will; they didn’t want God’s will. Or maybe you both together were pursuing something other than God’s will.

But when two people decide to come out of their caves, I don’t care how dark things have gotten for you in a relationship, or in a marriage; when two people decide to come out of the cave that they’ve been hiding in and pull the duck tape off their eyes and live in the light, I will tell you, friends, that transforms everything.

Well some people accept the light and other people reject it. The light is not forced upon us. John says in vv. 10-11 these words:

John 1:10-11

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

We can reject him.

With each phrase, John underlines the great tragedy of our rejection of Christ. John writes in v. 10

John 1:10

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

The Creator came to visit his own creation. It isn’t as if Christ is some alien, some Martian visiting Planet Earth. The Creator came down to his own world; the world that he made. Yet, John says that the world did not recognize its own Creator. The world didn’t know him.

And more tragically, in v. 11,

John 1:11

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Christ came to his own people, to his own nation, to his own community, to his own family. But his own didn't receive him.

How many of you today would say that you have been around Christ. That you have been around the truth. That you have been near the truth in your own home. It has been presented to you through your own parents. It has come to you by Sunday School and by growing up in church, and through messages of different friends and things you have heard. You have been around the truth and near the truth, yet you have not received it, taken it in, and followed it. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

When I read that he came to the world, but it didn't receive or recognize him, it reminds me of soldiers coming back from fighting a war on behalf of their country and got a very poignant letter recently from a Viet Nam vet who did a tour of duty in Viet Nam. The Vietnam vet who put himself in the line of fire, decided to do something for his country, and then came home. Not only was there no welcoming parade like other veterans in history had received, not only were there not people waiting for him and cheering his arrival, but when the vet came home he had kids his own age who cursed him, who spit at him, who called him a baby-killer. Kids his own age who lied their way out of service to their country, pretended they had bad knees, fled to Canada or Sweden, and yet considered themselves superior to him. He said, "I did my duty; I did what I was supposed to do for my country and I wasn't recognized or received; instead, I was rejected and spit at."

That is what happened to Jesus, the Creator, the Son who stepped off the throne in heaven to come down to us. No welcome. No parade. Why should we follow you? Who are you? Why should we listen to you? He was also spit upon. Among his many trials, we read this in Mark 10.32-34,

Mark 10:32-34

They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. 33 "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, 34 who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

If you've ever been spit on, know this happened also to the Son of God. He came to his own home, and his own did not receive him.

But there were some who received him.

We can receive him

Compare the Viet Nam vet's reception with the first Gulf War. I remember when the men and women returned from the Gulf War, and I remember those shouts from wives and little children, babies being held by the wives and husbands. Old men, dads, gray-haired moms, lining up on the docks as the ships were coming in with their sons, daughters, husbands and wives, daddies and mommies. I remember watching family members lining up and straining to see their loved ones coming home. I remember watching those young men and women racing down the gangplank and having family members run into their arms weeping, wives throwing themselves into the arms of their husbands. And in the background they played that patriotic music. I remember watching those scenes on the news after the Gulf War and I just cried and cried. I love welcoming scenes. I love watching people receive loved ones.

To believe according to the Bible means that as a result of trusting God's Word, you take some action. In this case, receiving Christ. The Bible doesn't know anything about belief that is simply intellectual study, or discussion, or simple academic interest. John writes, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." That's why God came down to make us his children.

Not everyone in the world is a child of God. Everyone is a creature of God, but not everyone in the world gets the wonderful title of God's son, or God's daughter. You are not born as a child of God according to the Bible. You must do something to become a child of God. You must do something to be adopted into God's family.

How does a person get to be called a child of God? From the human side, a person must receive Christ and believe in him. How does a person become a child of God? From God's side, we would say it is a miracle. Verse 13, and we close with this: "Children born not of natural descent, nor of a human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." Children of God are not made by human planning, human engineering, human material. They are made by the will of God. You don't get born into God's family by your power, your strategy, your plans, your trying to be a better person. Spiritual life in you is created by God.

The new birth is a sheer miracle. You can't produce it on your own. This life has to be received. We receive Jesus. We believe in him. And God works a miracle in our souls of the new birth where light breaks in. We come crawling out of our caves and say, "I get it. I understand." By receiving Christ, we get to be part of God's family. By receiving Christ, we get brothers and sisters in the church and get connected to God the Father. By receiving Christ, we get to experience his

love for us and eternal life and forgiveness. That's why God came down. Let's pray.

All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name

Rich Nathan

December 15-16, 2007

The First Christmas Carols (Advent 2007)

John 1:1-13

I. Making Much of Ourselves or Christ?

II. The Many Names Given to Christ

- A. He is the Agent of the New Creation (Jn. 1.1, 3)
- B. He is the Pre-Existent One (Jn. 1.1, 2)
- C. He is the Word (Jn. 1.1)
- D. He is God (Jn. 1.1)
- E. He is the Life (Jn. 1.4)
- F. He is the Light (Jn. 1.4-9)

III. The Response We Offer to Christ

- A. We can reject Him (Jn. 1.10, 11)
- B. We can receive Him (Jn. 1.12, 13)