

A Light from God

Christmas Light, Part 2

John 1

Whenever I've gone to the Mall at Christmas season, I have always appreciated those people who wrap your presents for you at that Gift Wrap Station. That's one job I really appreciate but one I would never want to have!

My objective is to take enough paper and scotch tape to disguise what the gift is – and that's good enough.

I read recently about one British Supermarket company who literally hires and then offers for free to customers, a – here's the job title – Christmas Light Untangler.

The company's website offers the following job description for the 36-hour a week job: "This position offers you the chance to show that every little helps, by running the unique-in-store service with a friendly, flexible approach and making a genuine difference to the little things that matter to our customers this Christmas." And the skill set required for this job? Here it is: Candidates for the job should be able to untangle 10 feet of Christmas lights in less than three minutes as well as check the bulbs for signs of breakage."

Can you imagine the burnout rate? But then again, the job only lasts a couple of weeks – and a year of counseling afterward, I imagine.

I mean, it's a great idea . . . kind of like the Christmas Gift Wrapping Station . . . but what a chore.

I found out recently that there's evidently a battle going on – it's being monitored by the Guinness Book of World Records. In 2001, the Richards family of Canberra, Australia, set the Guinness World Record for the most Christmas lights in a residential setting – 331,000 lights.

Their record stood for more than a decade. But in 2012, Tim Gay and his family from New York outdid the record by hanging 346,000 lights.

The following year, the Richards family retaliated by stringing up 502,000 lights.

But the family from New York refused to surrender and this past year they created a display on their property that involves 601,736 lights. They were awarded the Guinness World Record.

It took them two months to put it all together; it covers the house and their 2 acres of land, and it's all synchronized to more than 200 Christmas songs.

And listen to this: the entire display involves more than 40 miles of wire.

Can you imagine untangling 40 miles of Christmas lights?

Neither can I!

I couldn't help but think – the most amazing display the world has ever seen, was the shining of only one Christmas light, so to speak.

Just one.

This display of infinite, brilliant glory is introduced to us in John's Gospel at chapter 1.

This opening paragraph is the revelation of the true Christmas light.

And He is described first as *the Word*.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word – the logos – the explanation (if you were with us last Lord's Day), ***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 by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.***

Note that – ***Apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.***

In other words, when the first words of Creation were spoken in Genesis chapter 1 – the first recorded words of God were ***Let there be light*** – those words were spoken by God the Son – identified here by John in John chapter 1.

The words of Creation came from the Creator, who is God the Word.

Let there be light! In the Hebrew language – simply, "Light be!"

Light!

It's as if God the Son pulled back the curtains in time and space and revealed the splendor of who the Godhead is – and before God the Son spoke into existence the physical sources of light for earth on the fourth day – the ***sun, moon and stars (Genesis 1:14)*** – He literally filled the universe with the light of His presence.¹

Let my glory be seen – which is impossible to describe in any other term than glorious light.

David wrote in *Psalm 104:1, 2, O Lord my God, thou art very great; Thou art clothed with splendor and majesty, covering Thyself with light as with a garment.*

John writes in *1 John 1:5, “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.*

The unbeliever who comes to faith in Christ is described as someone who has been *called out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).*

Christians are exhorted to put on their *armor of light (Romans 13:12)* as we *walk in the light (1 John 1:7)*, knowing that we are heading for an eternal *kingdom of light (Colossians 1:12).*

In fact, Jesus promised His followers that we will one day *shine with the light of the noontday sun in the kingdom of our Father (Matthew 13:43).*

And how is any of this possible for us?

The One who said, *Let there be light* happens to be the Light of the world.

It’s possible because the eternal Light has come to earth.

When John changes his metaphor from describing Jesus Christ as the eternal Word, to the eternal Light, he’s effectively telling us that Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, repeated in *Luke’s Gospel* where we read that Messiah will *shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:79).*

Jesus Christ has come to earth to turn effectively on the light – and show us the way Home.

Now, John the Apostle gives us several different reactions by the world of darkness and unbelief to this Divine display of Light.

1. First of all, we’re told that the light is resisted

Notice *John 1:5. And the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it.*

The darkness did not comprehend it. That verb translated *comprehend* has a range of meaning, depending on the context, and doesn’t have a direct English equivalent.ⁱⁱ

It can mean as we would express it – to fail to understand, but it can also mean to try to overpower it; Phillips translates it, to put it out.ⁱⁱⁱ

Given the reactions that John is going to reveal in this chapter, it seems most likely that he’s referring to the ongoing reaction of the world to try and snuff out the light.

And John says – it can’t be done!

World magazine awarded their annual Daniel award to the 21 men who were martyred a few months ago on that sandy Lybian beach – 21 believers who would not recant, our news reports somehow failed to report; 21 men dressed in orange jumpsuits, flanked by ISIS soldiers dressed in black, wearing black masks. These 21 Egyptian believers died for their faith – and the testimony leaked out that every last man remained calm and composed to the very end, with the last words of many of them overheard – Oh Lord Jesus . . . Oh Lord Jesus!

Their light was not extinguished – it was multiplied.

In fact, John writes in *verse 5, And the light shines in the darkness* – you can amplify the tense to read it this way – and the light shines on . . . the light continually shines . . . and the darkness can’t put it out.

Let me illustrate the meaning of this text with a simple little candle – in a sense, there’s a lot more darkness in here than light – but it can’t overpower this light. In fact, if we multiplied this auditorium by a thousand – or a million – or a billion more auditoriums in size – none of all of that darkness would ever be able to put out this little light.

The bad news is that we live in a world of darkness – the good news is the darkness cannot overwhelm the light.^{iv}

Well, if people can’t put it out, or silence the light; maybe they can just argue it away . . . deny the existence of light . . . maybe they’ll come up with special glasses to wear, so to speak, so that they can’t see the light.

2. And so – secondly, not only is the light resisted, the light is refuted

Notice *verse 10 of John chapter 1; He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.*

The world did not *know Him* – John is referring here, not so much to intellectual knowledge, but desire – “a desire to be in right relation with.”^v

There is the sense of knowing something or someone because you have a relationship with them.

So John is effectively saying, the world doesn’t want the light –they want the darkness.

They don’t want to have a relationship with the Light that exposes sin and demands repentance; they’d rather you turn out the light because it messes up their relationship with the darkness – and besides, it hurts their eyes!

That's the idea here.

However, instead of outright denying the existence of the Light:

- they choose to downplay the Light
- they redefine the Light
- they say that the Light is found in every religion
- they say that you don't need Jesus to have light – you can have light any number of ways
- which effectively strips the Light introduced here in this text of any divine meaning.

Let's try and find out a way to find a way around Jesus Christ – and the God of this Bible.

Biologist Richard Dawkins, a rather well-known atheist and critic of Christianity, revealed his own lack of certainty in his 2006 book entitled, *The God Delusion*. On a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is certainty that God exists, and 7 is certainty that God does not exist, Dawkins rated himself a 6: and I quote him, "I cannot know for certain, but I think God is very improbable, and I live my life on the assumption that he is not there."

Another recent admission effectively cuts to the core issue in rejecting the Light – Thomas Nagel, who authored a popular introduction to philosophy book entitled, "What Does It All Mean?" wrote: It isn't that I don't just believe in God . . . it's that I hope there is not God . . . I don't want there to be a God . . . I don't want the universe to be like that."^{vi}

The Apostle John reveals the actual heart of these humanist philosophers – they existed in his day as well – and this is the real issue – he writes, *the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, because their deeds were evil (John 3:19)*.

The Apostle Paul explains it by writing that ungodly mankind suppresses the truth by unrighteousness – and God gives them over to the lusts of their hearts to impurity (Romans 1:18 & 24).

Listen, our world this Christmas season will celebrate the supposed birthday of someone they would rather entirely ignore. And they will miss the meaning of this season because they miss the meaning of Jesus Christ – and John effectively says, the world will miss Jesus Christ on purpose. Let's pull down the shades and lower the blinds – and maybe we won't see the Light.

Augustine, the fourth-century theologian and great church leader wrote, "It is no advantage to be near the light if your eyes are closed."

The light is resisted.

The light is refuted.

3. Next, the light is rejected

Notice *verse 11 – He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.*

That's another way of saying, "His own people – His own nation, don't want Him."

However, you can understand this in a broader context – Jesus Christ came into a world He created . . . and nobody put out the welcome mat.

He came into His world, and the world put out a "Do Not Disturb" sign.

Even His entrance into the world as a newborn baby stands as an amazing act of humility – that the Inn of Bethlehem couldn't spare a room for him.

If we were God and we decided to take on humanity and be born of a virgin, we'd make sure that all the arrangements had been worked out so that we landed on soft sheets and pillows and baby lotion and warm blankets and attentive physicians and safe surroundings.

Not here . . . there is no room!

That's not a coincidence . . . there is still no room in nearly every human heart you encounter today.

In one way or another they will tell you to leave them alone . . . in the darkness of their sin and unbelief.

And by the way, when people do not make room for you – when they remove the welcome mat – when they don't return your calls anymore, and it's because of your faith in Christ – because you believe in Christ – because your life has been changed as you walk with Christ – take heart – you are actually experiencing the fellowship of His sufferings.

The Light is resisted.

The Light is refuted.

The Light is rejected.

But for some in here – the fourth and final response to the light –

4. The Light is received.

Notice verse 12, But – oh, I pray this is the hinge point in your story – the world is resisting Him and refuting Him and rejecting the eternal Light – and the Eternal Word – **But! But!**

John writes, For as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His name.

Here's how you become a child of God. Here's how you become a Christian.

But not so fast, John writes – notice how you do *not* become a child of God.

Notice verse 13. *Who were born, not of blood.*

In other words, you're not a child of God just because you're a human being; you're not a Christian just because you're related by blood to other Christians – or because you were raised in a Christian home.

Listen, I was raised in a godly Christian home with missionary parents, and if I'd died before I turned 17 years old, I would have ended up in Hell.

You're not going to heaven by your blood relations – your human birth – the fact that you're an American and maybe even a Baptist.

You don't get into Heaven because of the blood that runs through your veins, but because of the blood, Jesus Christ shed on your behalf when He died on the cross for your sins.

John continues telling us how we don't become children of God – **verse 13 again – not by blood, nor of the will of the flesh.**

In other words, you do not become a child of God by doing things in and with or through your flesh – your hands – your mind – your voice – your actions – your good deeds.

You're not a Christian because of the good things you've accomplished or what your hands have done for God – you might have given money away, fed the hungry and clothed the poor – you might even sign a church membership card and sing in the choir.

You aren't born into the family of God by the will of your flesh.

John continues – not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man.

What John means here is that you don't go to heaven just because you've decided you want to go there.

You don't get into Heaven one day because you want to, or you've made up your mind that this is where you want to be.

Who won't want to be in Heaven one day?!

Can't I join something to get in . . . or sign something . . . or pledge something . . . I'm serious about this – I mean, my mind is made up – I believe I'm going to heaven.

So did the religious leaders of Jesus' day.

Talk about religious passion; talk about keeping the rules; talk about dedication; none of us in here could match the dedication to observances and rules and rituals and order of the Pharisees.

And Jesus said to his audience, ***Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not inherit the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20).***

In other words, nobody is getting in – like they thought they would.

It's not by the will of man – notice, but of God.

You get into the family of God by the will of God.

And what has the will of God revealed about how to get in?

Go back to **verse 12 – 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. Those who believe in His name.**

What does that mean?

In the ancient world, someone's name was more than just a personal designation. A person's name was a reflection of which they were – their character, their attributes.

If you go back to the generation of Jesus Christ, people often took on different names to reflect a character or trait they admired. Jesus Himself changed the name of His closest disciple, Simon, to Peter – pebble.

Saul chose to go by another name, Paul, which means little or small – perhaps as a constant reminder of how small he was compared to the greatness of God.

The name Jesus referred to His person – who He was – to get into the family of God, you must believe in who He is – and Who is He?

John tells us – He is the eternal, preexistent Word – equal to God the Father – the second person of the Godhead – the Creator God, as we learned today, creating all that is; He is the Eternal Light – and His exposure and revelation your sin brings you to repentance and hope in Him alone – you accept the light he sheds on your path as you walk now in a different manner.

When you believe in the name of Jesus, you believe in the One, who is the eternal Word and the Everlasting Light.

You are trusting in Him as your Redeemer – and you are trusting in Him alone.

There is nothing to sign . . . there is nothing to join . . . there is nothing you can pledge to earn your way in - there is only to believe in Him.^{vii}

Beloved, the Christmas message is a message of light and life.

What a privilege it was this past week to meet with a young couple and to be able to share this

simple gospel with him; a young man raised in religion, uncertain of heaven only because he was trusting in himself and in Christ to get in.

I explained to him that if it were possible for us to earn our way into heaven, Jesus Christ would never have needed to enter a world that never wanted Him; and die on a cross – and all according to His plan because He wanted us.

With tears streaming down his face, this young executive gave God his sin and trusted in Jesus Christ alone for his salvation.

J. I. Packer once wrote, this is the Christmas message; the Christmas message is that there is hope for a ruined humanity [living in the dark] – hope of pardon [and forgiveness] and peace with God.^{viii}

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/20/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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i Charles R. Swindoll, Insights on John (Zondervan, 2010), p. 28

ii Ibid.

iii Quoted by James Montgomery Boice, The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary (Zondervan, 1985), p. 45

iv Kenneth O. Gangel, Holman New Testament Commentary: John (Broadman & Holman, 2000), p. 22

v Fritz Rienecker/Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 218

vi *Jim Spiegel, "Unreasonable Doubt," Christianity Today (2-10-11).*

vii Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, John (Crossway, 1999), p. 20

viii Adapted from J. I. Packer, Knowing God (InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 63