

“The Life that is Light”

(John 1:1-13)

September 11, 2011

Pastor John Bronson

Order of Worship for September 11, 2011, Communion

Pre-service Song

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: Michelle Cagnacci for Women of Faith; Joel Cook

Call to Worship: Psalm 121:1-8 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“Come, Now is the Time for Worship”

“Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise”

“I Exalt Thee”

“Send the Light”

Overhead

Song # 33

Song # 31

Song # 437

Offering and Offertory

Special Music

Message:

“Life that is Light” (John 1:1-5)

by Pastor Bronson

Closing Song:

“All Creatures of our God and King”

Song # 63

Parting Word of Grace

Sunday Evening in the Word
Hebrews 12, Preparing for the Coming Kingdom
5:30 to 7:00
The Henneker Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

September 4, 2011

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

1. **Joel and Virginia Cook, AWANA Missionaries:** (Marjorie, ask the Cooks to fill this in and alert them to have a Ministry Moment on 9/11)
2. **President Obama:** that the Lord will enable him to choose public service over political gain; that he will be an effective father to guide and protect his family; that he will be convicted of his need for Christ
3. **AWANA:** that the Lord will call out a full staff of volunteers to meet the program’s potential for ministry this year; that moral amongst the staff will be strong as they rely on the Lord; that AWANA will reach many of the unchurched families of our community
4. **Military or Policing Personnel of the Week: Captain Dave Samson, Sheriff** (Husband of Tammy): for safety on duty
5. **Young Adult of the Week: Sarah Angle** (daughter of Rusty and Laura Angle): that she do well in her classes; that she focus on her studies and the Lord.

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Today we continue our study of John’s Gospel. I encourage you to open your Bibles to John I and you will notice that it is 1-13. We are moving along, although I wouldn’t get too excited about it! Let me read this portion and you follow along as best you are able.

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

There was a man who was sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. (vv. 6-12)

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 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.” (vv. 9-13)

Jesus Christ was first the eternal Word of God, the Logos, which the Father spoke and by which the Father created all things. The Word is the eternal reason of God. God created all things and anything that was made was made by the reason and reasoning Word of God. The Word, John says was with God and was God from the beginning. The Word stood with the Father and launched creation.

Jesus Christ the Logos of God and co-creator with God, was also John says in verses 4-5 – and this is the title of the message – “Life and Light”. More precisely what John says is that the Word has life in himself and this life is the life in Jesus. This is the life that was the life of men. The light, John says, shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

What have we just heard? First, take note that John does not actually say at this point that Jesus has life in Himself. What he does say is that the Word has life. Second, he is not saying that the Word is alive. That is true, but that is not what he is saying. When he says that the Word has life in Himself what he means is that the Word is in its very essence and has as an irremovable property, Life. In other words he is saying the Word is life. Later in this Gospel, John 10:18, Jesus will make this statement about Himself. He will say, “I have the authority to lay down my life and I have the authority to lift it back up again.” That is an extraordinary statement. You and I cannot do that. When we are dead, we are dead. Dead people don’t do anything. But when Jesus lays down His life – a reference to the Cross – He is able to take it back up again. He can do this because the life that is in Him is the Word of God. That is why we understand and say that Jesus is both God and man. As a man Jesus could lay down His life. As the Word Jesus could not, for He could not die. But He could take up that life again. Jesus obviously was not your average man! Jesus was all things human, and then some.

Next, [John] introduces us to the notion that the Word of God is light. Again, light is not an additional quality of the Word. What he says is that the life that is eternal, the undying life of the Word is the light. The Word is life, and the life is light. The nature of this illumination is important. We gain an understanding of this from Jesus’ comment in the upper room recorded in John 17:3. “*This is eternal life, that they know . . .*” (Get that?) “*This is eternal life, that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*” Jesus’ comment joins the idea of life with knowing God and the “anointed-man-who-is-the-Word” whom the Father sent: the life which is the light of truth-knowing. We are alive when we know the truth. We are alive when we are rightly oriented to reality according to the revealed truth of God. When that is true of us, we are alive. It is almost as if at that moment there is a plug that plugs into the undying life of God. Reflecting on these words of Jesus, we note that

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what ensures life to the converted sinner is belief in Jesus as the Son of God. It is important for us to recognize that the converted sinner does not have life in himself or herself. That is not the case. The converted sinner only has life as a gift from God as they believe in the revealed truth of God. Now if you think about Jesus' words to Martha, this is what He said to her in John 11:25-26, He said very much the same thing, but notice how it goes: *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me though he die, yet he shall live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”* So the sinner who places faith in Jesus Christ will never die, because he has received life as a gift from God. And though the body may fall, yet life remains.

In contrast to the words that Jesus spoke to Martha, however, John's Prologue speaks of matters long before that conversation with Martha and it has broader application. Martha was coping with the death of her brother. She needed reassurance. “Someone whom I love has died. What am I to think about the one I love?” Jesus gives reassurance. Jesus says, “If you believe in me, you are not dead. Even if the body dies, you are not dead. Be comforted.” That was Jesus' intent in the recorded verses in John 11:25-26. But here in the Prologue, John is trying to help you and me come to an understanding of the nature of reality such that we are able then to go on and have a full belief in what God has done. In the Prologue is concerned with giving the reader an understanding of reality which will enable the reader to go on to believe the redemptive work accomplished by God through Jesus Christ, the Word sent by the Father.

In the fourth verse, John does not say that the life was the light of some men. What he says is that the life was the light of men, all men. It is a general statement, a universal statement. Look at verse 9. In verse 9 he repeats it. *“The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.”* We know that Jesus is not here – or John here – is not speaking of the enlightenment that saves, the understanding of the gospel of truth, for Jesus knew from the beginning that some of the “everyone” in the world would not believe and so not be saved. Further in the Gospel of John it is one of the dominant themes of this whole Gospel that the gospel separates those who believe from those who do not believe. So both Jesus and John know from the outset that the word of salvation is not going to save all men. What, therefore, is this light that enlightens all men? The implications of the universality of the Word as that which enlightens everyone are far reaching. You hear this in verse 10, “The Word which came into the world was the very Word by which the world was made.” All true knowledge is with the Word. [The truth or true knowledge] is actually only known through or by means of the Word, for there is no way to know anything else or other than by the Word of God. To know anything, you must know it through the Word of God, for nothing else is true. This is highly significant. We do not create truth; we discover it.

Now I suspect that that statement is strange to the ears of some, perhaps many of us, for that is not what we are taught in school. We tend to think of “truth” s being proper or right thinking according to “facts”. And what is a “fact”? Facts are pieces of information or data about the world around us which are essentially passive until we take them up and start thinking about them. This view of research and knowledge is a reflection of how scientists know things. It is a reflection of the scientific method. How many are familiar with the scientific method? The scientific method has brought huge benefits to all of us and we are rightly grateful. However one of the consequences of this method is that it tends to view the world around us as a sort of dead given. It just is. Knowledge comes when we start poking stuff and forcing it to talk to us and answer our questions. You don't know this, but in my household we have a science type. When Nini and I were dating her approach to things was, “Well, let's tear it to pieces and see how it works!” My approach on the other hand reflects a “higher sensibility”! When Psalm 19 says “the heavens declare the glory of God...” most of us immediately remind ourselves, “They don't do any such thing. They don't talk.” However, for the artists, the poets and for prophets, they do talk. The world itself in its various parts and its scenes talk to us. For the scientist and the man of action, all the “talking” goes on in our heads. It rarely crosses our minds that it may well be that we have ceased to know how to listen.

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The ability to not listen is a very important ability to think about. In Romans 1:18 Paul writes, “*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness silence the truth.*” The ability to not listen. It is true that Paul’s concern in Romans 1:18 is primarily moral and reflects spiritual realities. The truth which is suppressed is of God’s goodness and faithfulness along with humanity’s sin. But the principle is applicable more widely simply because all truth ultimately is one. [If] any of you who have been involved in the Truth Project [by Focus of the Family] you will recognize this: Dr. Crick, who was one of the scientists who cracked the genetic code for human DNA told his students, “I know that examining all of these things looks like an intelligent made it, but don’t think that way!” Shut God up, is what that amounts to. The ability to not listen: every husband and wife knows it. The ability to not listen. Every kid knows it: “You asked me to come down to breakfast? You couldn’t possibly! I didn’t hear anything!”

The world is filled with desperately ignorant people who know a great deal about many things. The Bible refers to these people as blind. It also describes them as those who live in the kingdom of darkness. John actually refers to this in verse five of the Prologue: “*The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*” There is a dramatic kind of conceptual distance that separates verses four and five of the Prologue. In verse four you will notice that the life of the Word is the light of men. [This is] exalted, high, philosophically symbolic and abstract. In verse five, however, the light is as it were engulfed in darkness while at the same time it goes on shining. The word John uses here is ambiguous. The word that is translated for us as “overcome” can also be translated as “comprehend”, or “understand”, or “grasp”. The word has all of those meanings simultaneously, nuances, and is used in various ways in the New Testament in that same manner, so we can be reasonably sure that John wants us to think about the whole range of potential meanings in the relationship between light and darkness.

John intends, you see, for the reader to recollect here the opening words of the Bible, Genesis 1:1-3. What do we find in the opening section of the Bible? I imagine any of us who read this, if you are biblically literate, whenever you read the first few verses of John’s Gospel you think of Genesis 1: “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.*” The imagery is absolutely stunning!

It is difficult for us today, I believe, to understand either the oppressiveness of real darkness or the splendor of light. We have so much light around us that we have to put curtains on our windows to shut it out. However in the ancient world darkness was pervasive. We have an intimation of this, or a hint of this in Exodus 10:21-22. This is the ninth plague, the ninth time when God is going to impose the weight of His judgment upon Egypt. This is the one before the last, and they are I an ascending intensity of God’s judgment. So darkness: what does he say? He said, “*The Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt,’*” then he qualifies it, “*A darkness to be felt.*” How many have been in a place where it was so dark you couldn’t even see your own hand. It was that kind of darkness. On the other hand we can recapture something of light’s splendor if we are far from the cities in the depth of night and we look up at the stars. I can remember the first time that happened with me. We were in the California deserts and we look up and the stars were like a haze of light.

In the opening of Genesis we see the connection between light and order. The darkness was part of an earth without form and void. It was empty of both light and life. Sin, however, moral and spiritual darkness, death and a return to the void, to futility or emptiness, the place of neither light nor life. Surely this is some of what John would have pass through our minds, for John would have us hunger for salvation, that is, for light and life. What he is saying here at the beginning of the Prologue is that today, in the present age, after the sad and terrible advent of sin brought darkness into the heart of creation, the Light, God’s light, the creative and ordering life-giving light of the Word still shines and darkness cannot overcome it, neither does the darkness comprehend it: the same word.

The darkness of men’s souls does not comprehend or understand the light. That is when you come to verse 6. *“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.”* I want you to think about this. First off, before you get used to it the transition from verse 5 to verse 6 is surprising. In the first five verses John speaks of the light and the Word. You come to verse 6 and John talks about an historical event in which the Word is given by a man who has his head chopped off. That should draw our thoughts and our considerations to the question that begs to be answered from those verses: what does it mean to bear witness to the light? We know what it means to bear witness. To bear witness is to give evidence. God sent John to give evidence or to testify regarding the light. That is written for us in verses 19-34 of this chapter and we will get there. But why does light need to have a witness? How can it be that the Word which is light, the Word which is the inner reason and logic of all things, the Word which is the creative and preserving presence of God, the Word which is all around us and is itself light, how can you possibly need to have somebody say, “Look, there’s light”, which actually forces us to deal with the question, “How dark is the darkness, and where is it?”

This carries us to the next paragraph, verse 9-13. It says, *“The true light, which enlightens everyman, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the 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.”* John at this point is about to introduce the incarnate Word of God. That is verse 14, the next verse and the essential subject of his Gospel. But before he does that John sets before us in the starkest of terms the drama of salvation. It has to do with the shattering reality of sin and what it takes to save men who are lost in the dark. The true light which created the world and which illumines the world and is the light of all men and which shines in the darkness, this light comes into the world. Notice that John does not yet say, but he does say that the light which enlightens everyone is known by no one. That is simply Romans 3:9-20. You can cross reference.

The implications of that detail are profound indeed. One of the dominant themes of John’s Gospel is spelling out both the failure of the Jews to receive the One whom God sent, and the consequences of that failure. Do you notice what it says? It does not say that the Jews did not know who Jesus was; what it says is that they did not receive Him, they rejected Him. Isn’t that interesting! Meanwhile John says there were some who did receive Him; they were the ones who believed in His name.

What this does is it forces us to recognize there is a distinction between knowing and believing. Often what we call our beliefs are actually the things we know about what is good and right and so on and so we say we believe in that and in that. “I believe in good mothers and I believe in apple pie.” Do you all believe in good mothers and in apple pie? Who could possibly not believe in good mothers and apple pie? Everybody knows good mothers make apple pies. But what if you don’t like apples? Knowing these things does not mean we act according to them. We know that good mothers make apple pies, but we may marry a woman who does not make apple pies. Consequently we know we are marrying a woman who will not make a good mother: right?

Here are some less contentious examples. I know that I will be happier and life will go well if I always record my checks and balance my check book and never go into debt. But I do not always record my checks and I do not always balance them. Why don’t I do that? Because I don’t believe what I know! What I believe is that I can get away with it; that is what I believe. I’ll do it later, or Nini will! I will be a lot happier not recording stuff in my check book; I will be happier if I go on to my next happy event. I will be much happier that way; that is what I believe right now! I know the Bible says the Lord will take care of me and I am to be anxious for nothing and not be afraid. I know that. If you ask me I would say, “I believe that.” However I am often anxious and at times even

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fearful until I say to myself, “John, remember?” It is not what we know, it is what we believe that governs our thoughts and our words and our actions. The reality for most of us for a lot of the time, for some of us all the time, for none of us never, is that our operative beliefs are irrational. Humanity is a mess. You see it every day and around you. If God were not a God of mercy, we would be finished.

There is another application. Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth (I Corinthians 10:4-13) that even though the Israelites under Moses in the Exodus from Egypt enjoyed many great blessings, and even, “. . . *drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ, nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things,*” Paul says, “*took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.’ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*” So here are three concluding questions, whether or not you have already placed your faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord or whether you are still hesitating and unsure. The issue is primarily between you and God, and it is not primarily one of knowledge. It is primarily one of faith. 1) Do you receive Jesus as your friend, daily? 2) Do you receive, daily, His advice and counsel, as something you rely upon? 3) Do you receive His help?

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Questions for Understanding and Application

1. It is often said that it is one thing to know and another to know about someone or something. It is further said it is more important to know than to know about. What do you think you need to know about God if you are going to know Him?

2. God's promise to us as Christians is that we will live eternally. What impact does this promise have on your daily life?

3. How would you describe the difference between scientific analysis or research, poetic inspiration and aesthetic or artistic insight and appreciation?

4. “The world is filled with desperately ignorant people who know a lot about many things.” Do you agree? Comments?

5. What is the darkest place you have ever been? Do you have any fear of or in the dark?

6. What is it like to see the sun rise or for sunlight to come out after a storm? How do these compare with a “truth discovery”?

7. In what situations have you been a witness? What sort of evidence do you find is most convincing or persuasive?

8. What are some examples of knowing something to be true yet believing we can away with acting contrary to that truth?