

John 1:1-12

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[0 : 00] So I've noticed something this Christmas, maybe more so than I've ever noticed it before, and I've noticed it at this period in the year, and I expect that it's never better displayed at any other point during the year.

Do you know what I'm about to say? It's the phenomenon of our incessant desire for the whole rather than the part.

Have you noticed this with Christmas? No matter what it is, whether the gift that you've got to run out on Boxing Day and gather up all the accessories that weren't in the package, or the video game that you just can't put down and you have to beat the entire thing in one night, or maybe it's the turkey that it's just not satisfying to have the one piece on your plate.

Even if that piece encompasses the entire breast on one side of the turkey, it's just not satisfying. You have to go back for more.

You know that pudding is on the way, but you have to go back to finish the bird. We have this incessant desire, maybe better displayed here at Christmas, for the whole rather than being satisfied with the part.

[1 : 46] It's one of these all or nothing moments. Give me everything, or I don't want to celebrate it at all.

But if you stop to consider Christmas itself in this light, it's perplexing that our desire for the whole is where it matters most, often dismissed as we settle for what amounts to only a part.

Here's what I mean. Christmas comes upon us in the rush of the holiday season, appearing on the scene of our yearly lives.

A lot of times we can't even catch our breath to reflect on the significance of what we are celebrating. Sure, out of necessity we take the day off, perhaps even attending the Christmas Eve service.

We might even find ourselves bowing before the babe in his manger. We bow with the wise men and the shepherds, sometimes out of nothing more than convention.

[3 : 14] But too often we end up missing the identity of this one we crown as king. Crown or not, we frequently lose sight of where this child came from, and to where this child was going.

We think of him only as a baby. Satisfied with the still frame of that manger scene.

Satisfied with the part rather than the whole. In the next 25 minutes or so, it's my hope that the Lord would take this desire for the whole and dissatisfaction with the part and center it on Christmas' most important figure, seeing three characteristics of this one who took on flesh to dwell among us.

First, his being creator. Second, his being redeemer. And third, his being victor.

All wrapped up in this baby in a manger. It is a hope that even now, in Christmas' wake, we might better gain a perspective on the significance that lies behind the manger as we seek to gain a better understanding of the babe who laid in it.

[4 : 53] First, we ought to understand that this babe is none other than the creator of this world.

He is the creative agent used by God to create everything that has been made. And here we'll look at verses 1 to 5.

But first, remember with me the opening lines of the Bible where the stage is set on which history would play itself out.

Remember with me the verses that open the Bible in Genesis 1. Do you know how the Bible begins? Many of you, I expect, do.

Some, perhaps not. If we were to turn to the first page of this book, we would read, In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

[5 : 48] 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 into this formless and void world, into this darkness, God spoke. Fourteen times over the course of the six days in the account of Genesis 1, we find God speaking and naming and blessing His creation.

We find His Word effectively and powerfully going out from Him, forming the formless, filling the void, and lighting the darkness.

And against this backdrop, John introduces us to his Gospel. Against this backdrop, He introduces us to the origins of Christmas.

He picks up on the creation account in Genesis. But where Moses wrote, In the beginning God, John tells us, In the beginning was the Word.

[7 : 03] Before God ever spoke it, the Word was there. Before time as we know it, was ever put in motion, the Word was there.

And this Word, it existed in the beginning, never having been created. And though it was instrumental in creation, it existed before God's creative acts ever began.

But what was this pre-existent Word? What can we know about it? What was its significance? We have to listen to John. We're told a few things. First, we're told that this Word was with God. Rather than being off alone in some corner of the uncreated universe or separated in any sense from God, the Word was with God, existing alongside of Him in an intimate and eternal relationship. We're also told, though, that this Word was God. Not God in the sense that there was no distinction between the two.

[8 : 20] John just told us that the Word and God were together in the beginning. And to be together requires that each be a distinct entity. No, the Word, though, was God in the sense that the Word and the God with whom the Word was shared in the same essence.

They share in an essence like you and I share in an essence. You and I, we're both human. God in this Word, John says, they're both divine.

The difference, though, is that our being human doesn't determine in every aspect of who we are. Within being human, there's variety. Yet being divine, they were singular.

They were singular in not only who they were, but what they did and their purposes. You and I, we can be at enmity with one another.

We can be at enmity in who we are. We can be very distinct. We can be at enmity. But in what we do, you do one thing, and I can do it at home and cleaning up after Christmas, and Emmett comes in and just wrecks the place afterwards.

[9 : 39] Right, Emmett? I don't even know where he is. We can do different things, and we can have different purposes. My purpose is to clean and get things in order and put things back together again after the holidays.

And Emmett and Aletheia are enjoying nothing more than just ripping everything out again and seeing everything new and fresh. But the Word and the God with whom the Word was share in an essence that determines their being, their doing, and their purposes be the same.

Being God, the Word is, as some of our creeds state it, very God of very God.

Divine in the sense that it shares in the essence of God at every point of its being with the Father.

Doing what the Father does and sharing the very purposes of the Father.

And this Word there at creation, with God, in intimate and eternal relationship, and sharing in the divine essence, John tells us, was nothing less than a person.

[10 : 55] In verse 2, John says of this Word, He, He was with God in the beginning. And I hope you catch what John is saying.

This is a pretty bold claim to make. It's very difficult to comprehend a world in which two gods have existed forever, battling each other, a sort of dualism, good versus evil.

But what about a God whose singularity of being and action and purpose is known in two persons, if not three?

That's a pretty bold claim. John's saying, the Word God spoke at creation wasn't just a powerful and active force or a Word spoken into static existence, but a being spoken into dynamic action.

Through Him, all things were made. And nothing would have been made without Him. He was God's chosen commissioner of creation.

[12 : 02] The Word went forth and the world came into being. God spoke and it was. And in Him, this eternal Word, personal and divine creation, found its voice, was made, became alive.

For in Him, John says, was life. And this life was the light of mankind. Life described as the light dawning on what was up until that point, formless and void and dark.

A light dawning before even the sun shone for the first time. In the creation account, God said, let there be light, and day broke on the world that He then fashioned and filled.

And here, John gives us fresh eyes to see that it is the Word that dawned on the blackness of the world.

Enlivening creation and giving light to all men that they might live as they were intended to live. This is the Word.

[13 : 23] You can't live. You have to understand. You can't live the way you were intended to live unless God, the God who created you by His Word, reveals Himself to you in His Word.

And if you want to know what you were meant to be and how you can get back there to being what you were meant to be, you have to know who this Word is.

John's focus on the words place in creation concludes with verse 5. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not understood it.

Or you'll see in a footnote the darkness has not overcome it. God spoke and the Word that was the light shattered the darkness of creation.

Yet the darkness John speaks of was not only the darkness that covered the face of the deep, but it's the darkness of this world that you and I know all too well.

[14 : 43] the darkness it's the darkness that John will later speak of when he speaks of a man Nicodemus who would come to Jesus at night in the dark to hide his intentions of finding out who this Jesus was.

Not willing to be ashamed of being identified with Jesus. It's the darkness that John will talk of that Judas went out in to betray Jesus.

And it's the darkness that has surrounded each of us at some point during our walk in this world. It's a darkness that surrounds each of us unwilling in some sense to walk openly with this light this Word and even going as far often times of betraying him in our own hearts.

The physical reality of darkness you see at creation is mirrored in the spiritual realm ever since. It has been mirrored ever since and to this John says the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

on this world that has in every sense pitted itself against its creator a light John says has dawned brighter even than on that first day of creation.

[16 : 29] The pre-existent Word who was with God and was God the person who was with God in the beginning through whom all things were made and enlivened and through whom also all can be remade and made alive once more through new birth.

the Word has shown in the dark and it will not be overcome. See darkness darkness the darkness that we know will either bend to the light bend before the light or it will break beneath it.

This is what John says but darkness cannot ultimately withstand him. As we celebrate the birth of the babe we bow before understand that what we celebrate is not the beginning of this babe's existence.

What we celebrate is that the creator of this world decided to make himself known to us available to us in a way unlike ever before.

We celebrate the creator becoming a creature as one of us dawning on the darkness of our lives in its most definitive sense.

[18 : 13] This light is where true life is to be found. And as John reminds us all darkness will either bend before it or break beneath it.

When you bow before the manger if you've caught yourself out of convention bowing before the manger this season with the wise men or the shepherds or Mary or Joseph understand that this creator become creature has come to recreate you and intends to shed his life on the darkness in you that you might have life that is not available by any other means.

You're going to go home tonight and some of you will roll around in bed not having hope and you'll wonder why some of us will roll around in bed having lost sight of hope and this is the only place it can be found in a manger that has more behind its veil than meets the eye.

Twice in this opening John uses John the Baptist as a means of transition.

The first happens in verse 6. He says 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.

[20 : 05] He was not the light but came to bear witness about the light and with this he shifts from the word's agency and creation to his ministry and redemption.

As we pull back the veil of the manger we find that this babe while being the creator of the world is also its redeemer.

And where the word's work in creation gives us insight into the origin of Christmas his work in redemption gives us insight into the importance of Christmas for our own lives.

And some of you maybe have traveled through this season and have said what does this have to do with me besides the turkey besides a present or two.

But Christmas means much more and it means it for you. Off of his description of John the Baptist as a witness to the light not the light itself John continues to contrast the two in verse nine when he says the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

[21 : 23] The light that shone into the darkness of creation was entering his world to shine into the darkness of his creatures with the express purpose that all men might be enlightened through him.

that they might see the light and be conformed to it. This true light, the light that epitomizes every ounce of God's character came into the world to stand as God's objective revelation of the world's need for light and life.

Some of you know this, but my wife, Catherine, before we got married, she worked in a beauty salon, and she put in the hours of training to become certified to run her own salon, and she'll tell you, this is one of the things she picked up, and she's always picking up these sidebar type of applications from whatever she's learning in whatever realm it happens to be.

It all comes back around to Jesus, and she'll tell you, very interestingly, that one of the most important issues in a salon, one of the most important aspects to get right, if you're putting one of these places up, you're walking down Union Street, you see a ton of these things, one of the most important aspects to have in place, if you want your salon to be successful, is the lighting.

Now, I didn't know this personally, but I've been told, you see, fluorescent lighting is the worst lighting to stand in when you're trying to look good, fluorescent lights.

[23 : 19] It's the worst. So decking out a salon in soft lighting is actually a great advantage to the salon owner who is trying to convince its customers that coming to their salon will make them look the most beautiful they could possibly look, right?

This is what they want to convince their customers of. My salon is better. And one of the ways you do that is with soft lighting because it covers up your blemishes.

it hides your imperfections. But the problem is, the problem is that you may think in soft lighting that you look good, but when you step into fluorescent light, every imperfection, every hair that's out of place, every dab of makeup that wasn't put on right, or splash of nail polish, that mist the fingernail, is exposed.

And that's why in a hospital, there are no soft lights, no attempt to cover up one's brokenness. some wish Christ would have dawned on our world, dawned on our lives like a soft light of a beauty salon.

[24 : 51] But he comes as the light that shows us how dark our world really is. He reveals our blemishes, he uncovers our deep need for a savior.

There is no corner in which one might hide from his beams. He cannot be ignored or turned off or snuffed out.

He will not be overcome. That babe that we crown as king was God's revelation that the world is in need of a savior.

He is the light that shows the darkness what it is. But thank God, he's also God's answer to the problem.

He's also the savior himself. He's also the light that gives light. The tragedy of the whole bit is that though, as verse 10 says, he was in the world having come to it and remained for a time, the tragedy is that though he was in the world and though the world was made through him and should have recognized him and had regard for its maker, the world did not recognize him.

[26 : 18] It consciously is what it's saying and intentionally rejected him to remain in the darkness. darkness. And what's more is that he came to his own, verse 11 says, and his own people did not receive him.

His own people, the Jewish nation, who had the scriptures foretelling of his birth and pointing to his significance, the Jewish nation who had been chosen by God to be his treasured possession. They rejected him as well. Though the light came into the world with the purpose to enlighten all people, not all, received him.

You see that? The tragedy of Christmas. Yet to all who did receive him, verse 12 says, to those who believed in his name, to them he gave the right to become children of God, born not of natural descent as if to claim their kinship to him through their bloodline, nor of human decision as opposed to a spiritual decision, nor of a husband's will as if to say that the decision was finally based on the whim of a created being, but ultimately they are born of God.

In verse 14 John says, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Not in the word became man, as if to say that there was some dignity retained in the matter, and not the word took on a body as if to say that there was some level of separation preserved by the word, like you can imagine a minister dressing up in a Santa suit who afterwards can say, oh, it was only a job, it was only a job, and if they do this year in, year out, David, thank you.

[28 : 17] Not like that, but the word came and took on flesh. He became flesh in all the messiness, in all the frailness of what it means to be human.

He took it on. the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Literally, it says that he set up his tent in our midst as God had pitched his tent in the midst of his people with the tabernacle in the wilderness.

In Christ, John says, God has to an even greater degree made his dwelling among us and the glory that was then only seen from a distance, abiding in the holy of holies.

And in an innermost room of that tabernacle, that temple separated from the people by veil after veil after veil, by one courtyard after another and another, now has appeared to us in human form.

We have seen his glory. The glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father full of grace and truth. truth. And as you look, as you look at the manger, you must see not only the Creator become creature, but that here God the Father was offering his one and only Son to make his light available to all.

[29 : 58] This life that is light is only to be found in him. You can't find it anywhere else. You can't go looking for it and expect to come to it somewhere else.

You have problems too big to find an answer outside of the word that became flesh.

if there is any hope, if there's any hope that darkness is not the end, it is in the one who shows us both our need for a Savior and offers us himself as that Savior.

Salvation is not found in the pleasures of this world, the presents that we receive at Christmas. It's not found in our search for significance in our jobs or in the company we keep.

The life this baby lived shows us how far we each fall short of attaining life on our own true life. We cannot get to it.

[31 : 16] It's only in him as we believe in his name and receive him as Savior. and that's the importance of Christmas for you, for me.

It's personal. It's heart centered. It's necessary. For a second time then the John turns his attention to the Baptist to break this up.

He says in verse 15, John testified concerning him. He cried out saying, this is the one I spoke about when I said, he who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me. Behind the veil of the manger we find the creator become creature, the offended stepping in to become the defender of his people, and lastly that this babe is the one who will ultimately be the victor.

I don't know if you can see this in a baby, the picture of a baby in a manger, but this baby there is aimed at victory. The purpose of Christmas is that through him, through this one who laid there in that trough, that through him all would be made right.

We pick up in verse 16, it says, out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. That's how the New International Version translates.

[32 : 57] Grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God, and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Out of his fullness, his being full of grace and truth, out of the fullness that constitutes his glory, we have all received grace in place of grace already given.

The grace of Christ in place of the grace of the law that came through Moses. Watch this. What does John mean by grace and truth?

In the framework of the story of Moses, which is where this last section pivots, it's all about Moses. In the framework of the story of Moses, where it seems that all these verses stem, at one point God reveals his glory to Moses. And what he has shown is a faint glimpse of the train of God's robe.

[34 : 10] Do you know this story? He's shown Moses, hidden in the cleft of a rock, says, show me your glory. And he's shown the faint train of God's robe because the Lord knew Moses could not bear the sight of his unveiled glory.

And as Moses watched this train pass by him, the Lord declared his glory verbally and he named himself the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

See, steadfast love and faithfulness. Steadfast love is a gracious display of God's unending loyalty to his people.

And faithfulness, God's true and utter devotion to his character and plans. Steadfast love and faithfulness, grace and truth.

Is how it's later translated into John's language. Grace and truth, steadfast love and faithfulness, finally made known to us in this word made flesh.

[35 : 25] Come to dwell among us that we might see his glory as of his one and only son. Grace and truth, a fullness from which John says we have received grace upon grace, a new grace which covers a former grace.

The grace of Christ which covers the lesser grace of the law. You see, the grace of Christ is given to us with the power to transform us from the inside out.

It's a grace that comes to dwell in our midst and sends its spirit after it to transform our hearts.

We're not left on our own. And it covers the grace of the law which was given and merely could show us how much we could not follow it.

It showed us what was right, what it meant to be in relationship with God. But the law is no good to those who cannot keep it.

But Jesus comes to cover that grace with a new grace. A grace that can change us from the inside out. But where is the glory?

[36 : 46] I think that's the central question of Christmas. Where is the glory in a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a feeding trough?

And if we were going to unravel this in a more significant way, we'd see that John's answer to this is stretched out over the pages of his gospel.

The word became flesh that we might see his glory, a glory that is only gradually though made known. See, it was concealed at first.

It was concealed at first in the humble beginnings of Jesus. And it was glimpsed as the story unfolded only little by little in the signs that Jesus worked and the wonders that he performed that pointed to the dawning of a new age, the dawning of a new light on the world.

But it is a glory that is finally understood, John would tell you, if you read through from this beginning verses to the end of his gospel, it's a glory that you would see most fully manifest when the Son is only finally lifted up.

[38 : 19] When the Son is only finally exalted. When the Son is only finally pedestaled as the King. when he reigns from a cross.

You only see, John says, the glory of this one and only Son of God when he hangs there in shame, bloodied, and battered on a cross.

With the plaque nailed above him, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. The glory of God, John says, he wants you to understand, is only understood, is seen clearest in the cross of Christ.

Where God became man, was born to die, and so paved the way by which even you and I who have rejected him, might be made alive even though we are in and of ourselves dead.

The aim of Christmas, the aim of Christmas, his purpose in God's plans, is ultimately to display his glory for the world to see, to show all mankind, the level to which he will stoop to save those who have rejected him.

[40 : 02] From the moment he was laid in the manger, this baby was pointed towards the cross.

he was set towards the hour at which he would reign as king on his crucifixion, the symbol of death that was transformed for us into a symbol of life.

Their creation, redemption, and victory were finally bound together. John ends his prologue then with these words, no one has ever seen God, not Moses or anyone since, but he who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, who is at the Father's side, he made him known. The question is, do you want to understand God? Do you want to understand what he thinks of the mess that we've made of his world? Do you want to understand amidst all the suffering what he's doing about it?

Are you at your wits end? Has darkness encroached on your life so that you cannot see beyond it? Do you want to understand what God thinks about you and where you're at?

[41 : 42] Do you want to understand the extent that he will go to change that? Do you want to understand the significance of Christmas? Look to Christ and find in that manger the creator of the world who has dawned again on his creation, the redeemer of mankind who has offered himself on your behalf and the victor over all who will one day make it all right again.

Over a crowded beach one bright sunny day flew a plane, first inland and then out again and only a couple hundred yards offshore it crashed and burned.

And all who saw it, all who saw it standing on the sandy beaches underneath this blazing sun were perplexed at what they witnessed until the following morning when they read in the paper this headline, Pilot crashes to save many.

And the story beneath explained how the engine had malfunctioned but rather than eject himself and risk the lives of all those on the beach, he died that they might live.

Now I imagine looking at Christmas for some of us is a bit like watching a plane fly overhead and then crash in a burning crucifixion of flames.

[43 : 21] It perplexes us and I think makes us and the world in which we live want to minimize Christmas to the still frame of a manger.

But without telling us of the angels and the shepherds, the wise men and their star, the birth in Bethlehem or the baby asleep on the hay, John wants us to see that what we need is not to reduce Christmas to the nativity, but to understand it in light of eternity.

An eternity past, an eternity future. This is the Christmas we celebrate. This is the baby we bow before. This is the answer that the world is waiting for.

We'll stand and sing then from Psalm 118 in Sing Psalms. It can be found on page 156 and we're going to sing verses 15 to 16 as we sing about God the victor.

We'll stand and sing to the tune of Warrington again. Psalm 118 verses 15 to 24. Would you stand and sing?

[44 : 47] triumphant shall so joy resound in places where the righteous dwell.

The Lord's right hand is lifted high, his mighty hand does all things dwell.

I shall not die, but I shall live. The Lord's great words I will proclaim.

The Lord's severely chastened me, but rescued me from death's domain.

Through wide the gates of righteousness I enter and give thanks to God.

[46 : 18] This is the gate of God through which the righteous come before the Lord.

You answered me, I will give thanks. Salvation comes from you alone.

in As you know, as It is a marvel in our sight.

This is the day the Lord has made. In it let us take great delight.

Amen. Some of you are hurting today and nobody knows it.

[47 : 59] The world beyond these walls is hurting because they don't know Jesus. My prayer for you and hope is that this week, even in the wake of Christmas, you would know its significance.

That in the manger, the Creator came to shine on the world and remake it. And provide hope in the darkness that each of us knows.

But it will be overcome. Go in peace.