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to DAVID

John 1 v1-14, Jesus, the light of the world

Remember the holiday journeys to the seaside? When you were young, it was all about who would see the sea first and then suddenly there it is in all its glory! The beginning of John's Gospel speaks of gargantuan themes. He immediately takes his readers back to Genesis 1 and before the creation of the world. The Word WAS God, but also the Word was WITH God. The Word was at creation doing God's command and bringing order from chaos, bringing light out of darkness. Greek philosophers of John's Day wrote of the rational principle behind creation as 'the Word,' but John declares that this is not only a principle but a person- Christ, the Word of God.

Long dark evenings frustrate, depress-some get SAD-seasonal affected disorder. In Vladivostok they have 3 months darkness and have to use UV lamps for their health. I know that there are some people who really struggle to get enthused over Christmas, but at the very least it brightens up the long dark days of winter! Think of the lights in town centres, the homes which have lights strung all over their roofs and walls and the lights on the Christmas trees in homes! Our grandson Otis loved lights from very early days, peering up our shades from when he was very small. Light is attractive.

God showed that He can't be accused of being the great manipulator of history because he entered the human condition, became vulnerable and exploited by Romans and Jewish leaders. So, the darkness of the pre-creation world was broken by the light of God's

creating Word and the darkness of man's evil was challenged by the light of Jesus Christ. The image of light is used many times in the Bible; for example, in Psalm 27 it describes God's presence and favour-'The Lord is my light and my salvation', in Isaiah 9, quoted in Matthew 4, we read, 'The people walking in darkness have seen a great light'. Christ was called the light of the world and God's holiness can be expressed in terms of light and we are called to become who we are, children of light. Ephesians 5v8: 'For once you were darkness, but now you are children of the light. Live as children of light.'

But how is Jesus the light of the world? There are some when they first become Christians that talk of a light being switched on, but they aren't talking of a sudden brightening of the room necessarily! With Paul's conversion he was struck down in the middle of the day by a bright light. When Jesus was born the sight of the host of angels must have almost blinded the shepherds that Bethlehem night! He is called the 'bright morning star' in Revelation 22v16 when John's prophetic vision tells us of the last days when He appears again. Most of us, when we receive Jesus into our hearts it's like a light is switched on to our moral outlook, our conscience-we view things differently, beginning to see beyond the razzmatazz into the darkness that is so often at the world's heart. What pleased and excited us before because we only took it at face value, we now begin to understand the different issues beneath it. This is the world as Jesus saw it when He entered into it-greed, lust, hatred destroying what should be good. You may be thinking: 'Yes, I have believed in Jesus as my Saviour and I have welcomed Him into my heart, but sometimes it seems that nothing has changed. I'm still the same person and I still mess up, and I don't see this transformation in my life or heart.' Well, firstly, how long had you lived before accepting Jesus? All that stuff, not just the bad behaviour but the bad attitude and the condemning yourself all the time, this has to cease, as Lizzie was saying last week. **Jesus is totally on your side!** How do we know? Well, His arms outstretched at Calvary, His birth and life here on earth. All that tells us that God is completely for us!

"For God so LOVED the world that He GAVE His one and only Son'. And yes, the work of the Holy Spirit in us is thorough and He is patient, but He loves us too much to allow us to remain the same! That childhood when maybe things were said or done which made you feel insignificant, blame-worthy, less loved and cherished than others, Jesus calls you 'My Beloved!' He welcomes you in to sup with Him, He delights in you! God sees us as His masterpiece-Ephesians 2 v 10. NLT.

One of the signs of God's working in someone's heart is in the recognition of our sinfulness. We cannot stand before the holy God and see ourselves as good! Isaiah 6- 'In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple' followed by "Woe to me!" I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.' The great thing is that we do not have to stop at condemning ourselves as great sinners-Jesus came into the world to be the light of the world, not to bring God's wrath, but His mercy and grace. I was just trying to think of a good illustration. Maybe when your ears are full of wax and you buy some oil for them. When you pour that you're your ear you can feel it crackle and pop as it works through the wax build up. That is what God is doing in our hearts. Removing the build up of so much sludge!

Grace in this context is something that is God-given, made possible only by Jesus Christ and none other. It is God's gift of hope granted to sinners for their salvation. The Christian teaching is that grace is unmerited mercy (favour) that God gave to humanity by sending his son to die on a cross, thus delivering eternal salvation. It is vital to recognise that we have done NOTHING to warrant salvation, we can never think of ourselves as better people than anyone else. We are only here because of Jesus; we owe it all, everything to Him. He is our Lord, our Master, our Saviour, the author, and the finisher of our faith.

The Holy Spirit enters a person upon conversion and clears his vision and begins to transform him. He has lit the lamp and now he lifts it up to shine in every corner of our being. We are called by God to reach out and grasp hold of all that He has for us, but also to take

hold of personally holy lives without which we cannot become complete in him! This can mean pain for us; we may well not like the things in us which the light brings out into the open and some believers' growth is halted because they cannot accept what they see. We are dark and potentially evil people. God has shone His light into our hearts so that, unlike those who do not have the light, we can see the right way to go.

Talk about going for a walk in Wrington when I got home one evening to find that I had forgotten my keys and Fi was out. Everything was fine until I got to the edge of the village: complete darkness! We need light to show us the way, but the decision to go the right way is still ours to make, we can decide to go the wrong way (perhaps the right way is too painful or not spectacular enough for us?) We begin to drift away from God and His light becomes less clear. 1 John 1 v5: 'This is the message we proclaimed to you, that God is light and in him, there is no darkness at all'. So, we are called to be holy, set apart, our lives devoted to following Jesus and in order to do that, seeking always to live pure, transparent lives. This is our vocation, our calling, He has shone His light into our hearts and from then on nothing can be the same. This Christmas then remind yourself that in Christ God broke into human history. He didn't come to condemn or to punish, but to bring hope and freedom. Whatever chains people are bound in- addictions, imprisonment, mental or physical suffering; Christ can bring the freedom of overcoming or the strength to persevere. Remember the first Bible passage He preached a sermon on according to Luke? Luke 4v18, 19: *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*