

The Light of the Season

John 1:1-14

OPEN: A Nashville grandfather took his four-year old grandson out in the woods to select a Christmas tree. They tramped all over, but to every tree that grandpa suggested, the boy said, "No that one is not right." They couldn't find a tree that suited him. Finally, it began to get dark and cold, and the grandfather shook his head and said: "We'll HAVE to take the next tree." he said flatly.

The boy looked up in bewilderment: "Even if it doesn't have any lights either?"

It's little wonder that boy was confused... Christmas is a time of lights.

Tradition tells us that Martin Luther decorated his "Christmas tree" with lights as far back as 1510. But the idea took several centuries to really catch fire (if you will).

- At first people glued small candles to the tree branches with melted wax or attached by pins.
- Around 1890, candleholders began to be used to hold those Christmas candles.
- In the early 1900's, people started using small lanterns and glass balls to hold their candles.

On December 22, 1882 Edward H. Johnson (an associate of Thomas Edison) had the first string of electric lights created for his tree. There were 80 red, white and blue electric incandescent light bulbs about the size of a walnut hand-wired together. However the lights were so expensive that it took over decade for stores to use them and nearly 50 years for them become popular in the general populace.

But once they became accepted around 1930 - for the past 80 years or so electric Christmas lights have been commonplace. So we tend to take them for granted. And we'd have a hard time thinking about Christmas without them.

Now, all thru December, the evenings are lit up as homes, businesses, and city streets fill the night with beautiful colored lights and decorations. Some communities even have competitions to see who can put up the prettiest and most colorful light displays.

And that seems fitting - because the Birth of Christ was also decorated with lights.

- There were the Angels who lit up the night for the Shepherds.
- And the Star in the East which led the Wisemen to find Jesus.

Christmas is a time of lights. And that's only right... because Jesus is the light of the world. That's what it tells us here in John 1.

John 1:4-5 **"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."**

In John 8:12 Jesus said, **"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."** And again in John 12:46 Jesus declared **"I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness."**

That's what the prophets had predicted about the coming Christ:

Malachi 4:2 for example declared: **"But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings..."**

The Prophet Isaiah described Jesus' coming this way: **"The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined."** Isaiah 9:2.

And Colossians tells us God the Father "...**He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.**" Colossians 1:13.

It's a repeated theme:

Jesus is the light of God to a people filled with darkness.

ILLUS: One atheist admitted to being puzzled by that.

Hemant Mehta became the "eBay atheist" when he posted his soul on eBay... and later he began accepting bids to visit churches and then share his thoughts.

"I didn't want anyone to be able to tell me that I was just an atheist because I had never even thought about Christianity," Mehta says.

Mehta observed:

"At one church I visited, some people were asked to write down how they felt before and after becoming Christian. They said things like 'dark and light,' 'lonely and befriended,' which got me wondering: Is being down or lonely or desperate a prerequisite to finding God? ...Do I have to go through some sort of trauma or crisis before finding some ultimate meaning?" Outreach Magazine Newsletter, February 2007

I can understand his confusion, because I've seen people who've made dramatic changes in their lives. They've turned from darkness to light... from lonely to befriended... from bondage to sin to freedom in Christ.

BUT, you don't need to make such a dramatic turn around to become a Christian. Ten and 12 year old kids have rarely had the time to experience the darker sides of life. Most of them haven't lived with darkness. They haven't tasted it, or felt it, or suffered from it.

But they do understand enough of their own personal darkness (sin) to want Jesus. They can still believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God. They can still understand their sin and their need to repent. They can still confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior and be buried in the waters of baptism and risen up to walk in newness of life.

The people who caught Mehta's attention were those who HAD lived with darkness, and tasted it, and felt it, and suffered it's pain and sorrow. For them, the contrast is obvious because their darkness was so black and empty.

And when Mehta looked at these folks... he missed the real genius of Christ.

You see, it's the lives of people who've lived in the depth of the blackness of despair that proves the power of Jesus' light. They're the kinds of people which "polite society" would cast aside as 'undesirable'.

Many people in this world think that only the "good" deserve acceptance. And that's one of the bizarre mindsets of Christmas.

You remember the phrase from that song (sing it with me if you know it).

"You better watch out, you better not cry
You better not pout I'm telling you why
Santa Claus is comin' to town

He's making a list, checking it twice
gonna' find out who's naughty, who's nice
Santa Claus is comin' to town

He sees you when you're sleeping, he knows when you're awake
He knows if you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake"

Cute little song isn't it? Yeah, cute song... but if you think of God like Santa, it's really bad theology.

Think about it. Who does the song say deserves to be accepted and receive Santa's gifts? (only those who've done good) In other words: "Only the righteous deserve acceptance. Only the "good" will receive their Christmas gift"

Lewis Sperry Chafer once said:

"Anyone can devise a plan by which good people may go to Heaven.

Only God can devise a plan whereby sinners, who are His enemies, can go to Heaven"

Only God could devise a plan by which people who've made terrible decisions in their lives could receive hope, mercy and forgiveness.

That's what frustrated the Pharisees of Jesus' day. Here was Jesus spending His time with those who'd been naughty... not nice. Jesus ate with prostitutes, and tax collectors/ sinners. These were the folks that deserved a lump of coal in their sock.

And then He had the gall to condemn the ones who thought they were so "righteous" that they deserved the "good Christmas gifts."

In Luke 18, Jesus told the story of two men who came into the temple to pray

One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **"The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men— robbers, evildoers, adulterers— or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."** (Luke 18:11-14)

The message of the light that came into a dark world was this: You can't be good enough to be good enough to be acceptable to God.

If you think your life is "righteous" without depending upon the blood of Jesus, your vision is darkened... you've failed to shine the light of God on your life.

Because IF you DID shine God's light on your life you'd recognize that Jesus is the light. He is the standard of righteousness... and you'd realize that neither you weren't going to measure up... and neither would I.

You see: Jesus came for both for those who were OBVIOUSLY unrighteous AND for those who have mistakenly thought they were righteous enough on their own. HE is the light for ALL the world.

(pause...)

Now, I want you to notice the other focus of this passage

Look with me to John 1:6-7

“There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.”

Who was this John? (John the Baptist). John the Baptist had one specific purpose in his life: He had been sent to be a witness to light. His life's goal was to point the way Jesus.

John lived his life pointing people to Jesus. He lived his life bringing God's light into people's lives.

Did you hear the story about the 92 year old woman who preached to the man who robbed her?

92 year old Pauline Jacobi had just returned to her car with her groceries, gotten into the driver's seat and a man with a gun opened the passenger door and sat down beside her. He demanded all her money.

She said “No!” (no????) In fact, she turned him down 3 times.

She told him “As quick as you kill me I'll go to heaven and you'll go to hell.” And then she witnessed to him for the next 10 minutes.

By the time she was finished, she had the man in tears, and she gave him \$10 – all the money she had – telling him not to spend in whiskey. He kissed her on the cheek and walked away.

She witnessed to a man who walked in darkness. A man who carried a gun. A man who might very well have hurt her. But she witnessed to him anyway because, as she said “Jesus is in this car and He goes with me everywhere I go.”

Lastly, I want you to notice what John 1:9 says about Jesus –

He is “the true light.”

You go down to a local mall you'll see “Santa”... in fact, you might even see 2 or 3 St. Nick's. The kids probably figure he gets around real fast, or that these are merely representatives of the “Real” Santa Claus. Thus, as far as kids are concerned... one Santa is as good as another.

Similarly, some people have come to the conclusion that one Light is as good as another when it comes to pleasing God. They'll say “all religions lead to the same destination.”

The idea that there would be only ONE true light that leads to God offends some. YET... that is the precisely the message of Christianity

Jesus said: **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** John 14:6

And the apostle Peter told the Sanhedrin **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”** Acts 4:12

1. Jesus is the light of the world
2. There is no other “light” that will change people's lives like Jesus can
3. There is no other “light” that will lead people to be acceptable to God
4. AND you are the one who can bring that light into the lives of other people.

But... there are people out there who think they can be acceptable to God without Jesus. And that's why the next few verses are important. Look again AT John 1:12-13

“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

Now, let's break that down.

You can't become a child of God by “Natural descent”

Under the Old Testament, you were a Jew because you were born of Jewish parents...but you can't become a Christian that way. You have to make a personal choice to become a Christian.

And You can't become a child of God by “human decision”

In other words... you can't just decide that you're good enough to be acceptable to God. Jesus came to drive home what God has always said:

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23

There's no way that you or I could ever be good enough to be good enough for God so Jesus was sent

To take our place.

To cover our sins with His blood.

To cleanse us from all the things that shame us...

And to bring us to God as pure and holy new creations.

And lastly You can't become a child of God by a “husband's will”

In the days of Jesus, families were patriarchal – the fathers made decisions for the family. But I can't decide for my child or my wife. Nor can I make that decision for you to become Christians. You have to make that decision yourselves.