

To Give Life

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[0 : 00] Very good morning everybody. As Sarah said, my name's Craig. I'm a pastor in training here at Brunfield and it is a real pleasure to open up God's Word today.

So we're doing a short series in John chapter 1 in what's known as John's epilogue. But first I wondered, when you woke up this morning, maybe not this morning, Sundays are usually a little bit of a lie-in, but I wonder if you woke up and it was still dark this morning. I wonder during the week when you got up for work, I wonder if it was still dark when you got up. I wonder if it was dark when you left work and headed home.

I know that often happens during this time of year. And the darkest day of the year is coming. It's in about two weeks' time. And some people really struggle with the darkness of winter.

It can be a dark time in our hearts too. And there are other factors in our lives that can make our lives feel dark. I wonder how you felt as you came to church this morning.

Maybe it was a mission to get the kids along to church. Maybe you felt a little bit reluctant to come along for whatever reasons. Maybe you're feeling weary this Christmas.

[1 : 27] Maybe you're feeling a little bit at your limit. Maybe you can't see past all the things that you need to do before Christmas comes. Maybe you're feeling really stressed.

Maybe exams are coming and you're feeling a bit behind. Maybe you're feeling sad at this time of year. Maybe there's someone in your life who's not around anymore.

And this time of year makes you think of them. Maybe you're feeling your mortality this morning.

Maybe you're feeling weak. Maybe you're struggling with physical or mental health.

Maybe you're suffering silently. Maybe you're feeling a bit disillusioned with work or with university. Or maybe you're feeling flat, dulled, emotionless.

Or maybe you're feeling discouraged as you look out and see the world around us. Disheartened because you've heard some bad news. There's so many ways that we could be feeling the darkness of this world pressing in on us this morning.

[2 : 35] But the Bible hasn't remained silent on the suffering or the sin or the weariness or the hopelessness that we can sometimes feel. So the Bible tells us that something radical has come and should give us hope.

When the Apostle John wrote his gospel account, we've just read from John, John's gospel. When John wrote this gospel account, he wrote at a time when Christians were feeling the darkness. Death was the theme of the day. Christian persecution was on the rise. Christians were facing arrest. They were facing punishment from the establishment, expulsion from their communities, and separation from their families.

And like us, they were feeling weary. They were suffering silently. They were bereaved, discouraged, disillusioned.

And they had to be encouraged to keep on going. But what did God want the people to know as the ink dried on John's gospel? God was wanting people to hear that he himself had chosen to intervene in our dark world.

[3 : 52] Not leaving us to suffer without hope. God wanted us to know that he himself had personally stepped down into the darkness of our world.

So as I said, over the next few Sundays that lead up to Christmas, we're going to be spending some time in John's prologue. The first 18 verses of this gospel. Now, John's prologue is not the Christmas story that we are expecting.

There's no manger or shepherds. John doesn't tell us how Jesus was born. But he really wants us to know why Jesus was born. Why did God come to the world as a man?

God wants us to know the answers to these questions and how this is wonderful, wonderful news. So whether you're feeling the darkness of the world pressing in today, or maybe you're abounding in joy as you excitedly look forward to Christmas, however you're feeling, what John has to tell us about Jesus' coming should make us sit up and take notice.

Now, the apostle John was perfectly placed to tell us about who Jesus is. He was one of the first disciples that Jesus called.

[5 : 14] He was part of Jesus' inner circle, along with James and Peter. And he got to witness some of the things that the other disciples didn't get to witness. He got to see the raising of Jairus' daughter, for example.

He got to see Jesus' transfiguration, and he got to witness Jesus' agony in the garden. And it was John who Jesus gave the special responsibility of caring for his mother, Mary.

So it's fair to say that John knew this Jesus pretty well. And he wants everybody else who reads his gospel to know Jesus too.

And he says so in chapter 20 in the Gospel of John. And at this point, he gives us his reason for writing his gospel. And I'm just going to flick it up because it's helpful for us this morning as we look at John's gospel.

And it says that Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

[6 : 23] John wrote this gospel to tell the world who Jesus is and what he came to do so that we might believe that he is the Son of God and we may have life in his name.

So that was the end of John's gospel, chapter 20. But at the beginning of the gospel that we're looking at today, he makes a blockbuster start. But this is no, are you sitting comfortably?

This is no once upon a time in a land far away. John begins his gospel by making some massive claims about who Jesus is and what he came to do.

So I think we'll just spend a little bit of time looking at who he says Jesus is. So if we look at verse 1 that Sarah read for us earlier on. Verse 1, in the beginning was the word.

Let's just think about that initially. What do these words remind us of? In the beginning was the word. Well, they remind us of the very first words of the Bible.

[7 : 31] John has taken us back to Genesis 1 here. And in Genesis 1, we're told, In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. John is deliberately taking us back there with these words to show us that the word, which is another name for Jesus here, the word was there with God the Father at the beginning of time.

And most importantly, that Jesus, present with God, is himself God. Jesus was present at the beginning with God.

And we're told here that Jesus is God. This is the clearest statement in the Bible that Jesus Christ, the man born in Bethlehem, is God.

He's not a God. He's not a man that looked like God. Jesus is God. Now, if Jesus was with God and is God, that's a little bit confusing if we just think about it like that.

If Jesus was with God and is God, this reminds us that God is Trinity. God is one being. He's of one substance, but he is three distinct persons.

[8 : 49] God is Father, God is Son, and God is Spirit. Jesus is known as the Son of God. He is a person of this Trinity. He isn't the Father, but he is equally God with him.

Likewise, Jesus is not the Holy Spirit, but he is equally God with him. Jesus, Father, and Spirit are inseparably united and undivided in their actions.

They are one, and there are many, many books that are written on these truths alone in the first phrase of John's gospel. But he continues in verse 2. He was with God, as God the Father, in the beginning, and through him all things were made.

And just in case that isn't clear, without him nothing was made that has been made. John has taken us all the way back to the creation story here in Genesis, and he tells us that Jesus is the creator. All things, that is, all things, were made through Jesus. Genesis chapter 1 again, we learned that God made the cosmos.

[10 : 03] He made the earth, the sky, and the sea. Then he filled the cosmos with stars and planets. Then he filled the sky and the sea and the land with life. And there is glorious order in his creation.

Jesus is the great designer and craftsman of all creation, and we are told that he made it very good. But Jesus himself was not created.

Jesus had no beginning. There is no timeline of Jesus' existence. Jesus has always existed. That's the next thing we learn about him. Jesus is eternal.

And John describes Jesus elsewhere in some of his other writings in Revelation, that Jesus is the beginning and the end. He's known as the Alpha and the Omega. Jesus is eternal.

So to sum up these things about who Jesus is, John has told us emphatically some of these things about who Jesus is. He is God.

[11 : 05] He is one with the Father and the Spirit. He has no origin. He is eternal. Jesus is the source of all creation. But most of us know these things about Jesus, right?

We nod our heads and we say, uh-huh. We know these things. We've heard them lots of times before. How could we become numb about these incredible truths about our Savior?

These things should cause us to fall on our knees in wonder and worship. These are amazing things about who Jesus is. But John doesn't stop there.

He wants also to tell us what Jesus came to do. So we've had the who and now we have the what did Jesus come to do. So we'll look at verse 4 again now.

And it says, What are we told about Jesus here?

[12 : 11] Why did he come? Because he is the source of life. We've already seen that Jesus is the source of all life in creation.

For he created it all. But I think John is referring a little bit more just than the life that we see in this world. John is talking more than our three score years and ten.

John is talking about an eternal life. Jesus is the source of eternal life. An everlasting life with God that we were created for.

We find out later in John chapter 3, Jesus meets with a man called Nicodemus. And he tells Nicodemus that he is the son of God who has come to pay for the sins of the world.

And that all men and women may have eternal life with him by believing in these things. By believing in Jesus. Jesus is the source of eternal life.

[13 : 12] A glorious life that goes beyond this physical life that we are experiencing in our planet. Which often feels so dark. The good news is that we can begin to experience this glorious life.

This eternal life today. If we put our trust in him. And if we look to him. We can experience that life. Next, John describes this life as being the light of all mankind.

This is a little bit confusing. He's talking about light and life. He says, And that life was the light of all mankind. What does that mean?

That the life sourced in Jesus is a light in the darkness. Jesus' eternal life is hope for humanity in a dark, dark world.

Jesus' eternal life is a light in the darkness. And this light is shining in the darkness today. We read that next.

[14 : 21] It's hope for humanity in a dark, dark world. Darkness is the absence of light. When you flick on the lights at night or first thing in the morning.

Everything becomes visible at once, doesn't it? You flick the switch. You can see everything in the room at once. Everything is illuminated. And where's the darkness gone? It's evaporated.

It's an image we all understand. Light. But what else does Jesus say? Sorry. What else does John say about this light and this life? Well, that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

The sentence could also be translated, And the darkness has not understood it. You might see that in the footnotes in your pew Bibles there. The darkness has failed to defeat the light.

This darkness that we feel in our world. It has not overcome this light. And how can you overcome an enemy that you fail to understand? The darkness has not understood the light.

[15 : 34] The darkness of death will never consume the light of life or blow it out. Jesus' eternal life will never be consumed.

The light sourced in Jesus is undefeated. It is indestructible. It's inextinguishable. And so that eternal life that Jesus has brought is also indestructible, incorruptible, and everlasting.

Jesus' life is indestructible that he brings to us today. I wonder if you remember those trick candles. I saw them a few times as a kid.

That you would put on your birthday cake. And no matter how hard you would try and blow these candles out, they would always reignite. I don't know if you ever saw that. You would blow the candles.

You think you got it. And they would just reignite again. So infuriating for the person trying to blow the candles out. So infuriating for our enemy Satan, who no matter how hard he tries to blow out the light of Jesus, he can never do it.

[16 : 48] He will never do it. Even Satan's deepest, darkest, airless smog will never cloud the dawn of light and life that Jesus brings.

And it's why we sing about light all the time at Christmas. It's why we decorate our trees and our houses and even our pets with Christmas lights. Did you notice in the words of the first song that we sung, Hark the Herald, that in the third verse, it sums up what Jesus came to do.

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace. Hail the Son of Righteousness. Light and life to all he brings. Risen with healing in his wings.

Today, let us not misunderstand who this man Jesus is and what his mission is. John has told us clearly who Jesus is and what he has come to do.

He is the Word. He is the eternal Son of God. Jesus is God himself. Jesus is creator of all things. And in him there is eternal life.

[18 : 01] And this life is inextinguishable. And it is the hope in this dark world. When Jesus was betrayed and arrested by his enemies and found guilty of blasphemy by claiming to be the Son of God, which he had a right to say, didn't he?

He was sentenced to death on a cross. And as he hung on that cross about to die, it looked like a sure victory for the darkness. The source of light and life himself was about to be extinguished. But Jesus' death and resurrection were in fact all part of God's plan to emphatically conquer the darkness of sin and death.

Jesus died to suffer the consequences for our sins and was resurrected to a new life, showing that death had no power over him.

So the light of life that he offers us now, as he lives and reigns in heaven, this light and life can be ours today if we likewise lay down our lives of sin and choose to follow him in his new resurrected life.

[19 : 21] The Apostle John has taken us to Genesis today to show us that Jesus is much more than the carpenter from Nazareth. He is the one who spoke light into the dark void at the beginning, into the nothingness.

Jesus spoke this incredible light into the nothingness. And today he speaks light and life into our lives from the Bible. He hasn't left us here to rot or suffer in the darkness alone.

Again from Genesis, he is the serpent crusher. He was struck on the heel by the serpent, by Satan when he died on the cross, but he has crushed that serpent's head by rising victorious from the dead.

And now he extends his forgiveness and eternal life to all this Christmas time. So as I bring us to a close this morning, I want to remind us that all our hope this Christmas, our hope is not found in the joy of family time, as wonderful as that is.

Our joy isn't found in well-earned time of work. Our hope isn't found in good food and Christmas movie reruns.

[20 : 39] There is real hope for those struggling today in the darkness because he has offered light and life for the weary.

He's offered light and life for the suffering, the bereaved, the disillusioned. That is a hope which is inextinguishable, indestructible, and we must hold on to it as we wait for Jesus' return.

Those of us who are Christians, we need to hold on to this light and life that he has given us. Jesus knows well our struggles at this time of year, but he wants our minds and our hearts to be full of that light and life.

He doesn't ask us to be cheery. Jesus never asks us to be cheery, but he asks us to trust him. He wants to switch on that light in our hearts and cause the darkness to flee away.

Will we accept his offer this Christmas time, this light and life? Now, maybe you're feeling glad this Christmas time. Maybe you're not feeling the darkness pressing in, maybe as others are.

[21 : 47] Maybe your heart is rejoicing because Jesus has come. And if we are rejoicing in the mountaintops this morning, that is wonderful. But we do have a duty to help those who are weeping

in the valleys.

How is our sister doing today who is struggling with health challenges? How is our brother doing who's recently lost a family member?

How is our sister doing who's finding it such a challenge to get ready for Christmas? How is our brother doing who's really struggling to get the kids along to church? Those who call ourselves Christians have Jesus' light and life within us.

We are the light in this dark world. Perhaps we can go out of our way this week to point our brothers and sisters who are struggling with this darkness back to Jesus again.

Now, perhaps you wouldn't call yourself a Christian here today. Might I challenge you to take seriously this historical eyewitness account of Jesus' life, this Gospel of John?

[22 : 55] Will you take a look at what John has said about this man, Jesus? Will you take seriously the witness testimonies? This is a man giving testimony in court, a witness.

We haven't spoken about verses 6 and 7 yet of our passage. But in these verses, we read about another John, not the Apostle John who wrote the Gospel, but John the Baptist.

John the Baptist was sent by God to testify to who Jesus is and to what Jesus had come to do.

John the Baptist was an exceptional human being.

He was a blood cousin of Jesus and he was anointed by the Holy Spirit even while he was in the womb. But he was not the light. He was an exceptional man, but he was not the light, we are told.

He came to pave the way for Jesus, to point us to the true source of the life and the light. And John the Baptist testified that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and he testifies to Jesus' eternal divine nature.

[24 : 02] He says these same things that we have seen already about who Jesus is. So that through him all might believe. So the two Johns, the Apostle John and John the Baptist, they're the two star witnesses in the case.

They're the witnesses that are going to convince us, the jury, that Jesus really is who he says he is, the Son of God. And that by believing in their testimonies, by believing in the things that Jesus has come to do, namely dying on the cross and raising from the dead, that we might have life in his name.

How could we live without the light? A flower cannot grow in a dark closet. And we are spiritually dead without Jesus' life.

In the beginning, as we've seen, Jesus spoke the light into the utter darkness of the universe, into the nothingness, this incredible light he spoke out into the nothingness.

But today he speaks this incredible light and life into the utter darkness of fallen human hearts.

Jesus is the light to whom all dark souls must cry out to.

[25 : 21] So whether you're trusting in Jesus today or not, will you believe these witness testimonies and grab hold of the light and the life that Jesus offers us today?

Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending Jesus to the world at Christmastime. And we thank you that he wasn't just a man that looks like God, that in actual fact Jesus is God.

He is part of the Trinity. He is one with the Father and the Spirit. We thank you for these incredible truths about who Jesus is. And we thank you that he wasn't content just to walk around and show us who he was.

But in actual fact, we thank you that he went to the cross and suffered and died for our sins for all the times that we've turned our back on you. And we thank you that he didn't just stay dead but he rose again victorious over death and darkness forever.

And we thank you that he holds out this light and this light to us today. Lord, we appreciate that there are many amongst us who are struggling with different things, Lord.

[26 : 35] Whether it's just with health issues, Lord, or with people that we miss or whether it's stress or weariness or depression or other struggles, Lord.

Lord, we thank you that Jesus holds out this light, this incredible, inextinguishable light and life to us today. And I just pray that you would help each one of us to behold this great light and life found in the glorious Jesus today as we walk out and that we would cling to him this Christmas time and forget to appreciate and be glad of the good things of Christmas but to see what they represent, the glorious Jesus who has come for us.

And we pray all these things in his name. Amen.