

Sunday November 26, 2023

## Lesson 13: When Your Host is the Living Word

Scripture: John 1: 1-14

### Context:

Today we end our fall curriculum, “God Provides.” The final unit is titled “Shelter,” with lessons which have focused on shelter and what physical security means theologically. Today’s lesson is set in the gospel of John in the New Testament. The focus of today’s lesson will be to learn how to live in the light.

The gospel of John is perhaps the most unique of all the gospels as many of the narratives and stories in John do not match up with the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke.) Today’s lesson on the gospel of John focuses on what is generally known as “the prologue,” the beginning which oscillates between the origins of Jesus of the Triune God and the events in the life of the apocalyptic prophet, John.<sup>1</sup> While the other gospels like Matthew and Luke focus on the birth of Jesus, John goes straight to the cosmic nature of Christ’s identity. The Bible’s opening in Genesis is about the creative hand of God; the beginnings of “the Word” of Jesus begin in God.<sup>2</sup> The author is making a point by starting off the account of Jesus as the one who is over the world and is light. The gospel of John is going to be all about Jesus and the mission he is on.

To emphasize the point with a witness to Jesus’ glory, the writer introduces the evangelist, John. This serves for several purposes. One, the memory of the prophet John was still strong in Palestine (and farther east) at time the gospel was written.<sup>3</sup> There were most likely camps of the early church trying to figure out who was who as a prophet and who was the Messiah. The technique here by the writer is to make John a witness to Jesus. The second purpose is to have another credible account of what God was doing as prophets were respected as those sent by God to lead the people.

John’s focus will be to give testimony to the Light, “that all might believe through him”(v.7). Even though the world did not recognize him, his purpose was still there. Jesus came so the darkness might be dispelled as he shined through the forces and chaos surrounding the world. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” (vs. 14a) gives an image of God actively at work with humanity. The verb chosen means “pitched his tent,” reminiscent of God’s desert dwelling with Israel (Numbers and Joshua), combined with descriptions of the cloud of glory over meeting (Exodus).<sup>4</sup> The rest of the gospel will be about how Jesus brought life and light to those he encountered. His ministry was a part of the larger covenant of God for the glory of the Lord to always be at work in the lives of those who call upon his name.

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<sup>1</sup> Sloyan, Gerard. “John.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 19.

## Application

I will never forget during the first few days of 2022 of a strong windstorm which came through my area. It was cold and near the pesky line of right above freezing, yet in true Alabama fashion, there would be no snow. It was in the evening, and I was watching a show to decompress from the day when the power suddenly went out. Everything in the house was pitch black. Even my brave golden retriever/lab mix began to whimper just a bit as the wind continued to howl and there was no way to see.

I made the sad discovery of the batteries of my nearest emergency flashlight were out. I cautiously got up and made my way to where I keep the candles as all the other flashlights were further in the recesses of the dark house. I remember noting the eerie nature of how dark it was as it seemed all the power was out, not even a guide of the stars or moon to shine. I fumbled around in the buffet and grabbed the first candle I could find. When I lit the candle, I discovered I had accidentally grabbed a candle from my Advent wreath I had just put away. And lo and behold, of all the candles, it was the Christ candle. I could now see, just faintly, of how to guide my steps and navigate in the pitch darkness.

I carried around the candle to get the other flashlights and other candles around the house, and light was brought to each home in the room. The power was restored within a few hours, yet something had happened in this moment. The verse to ring through my mind was the very one from this passage from John 1:5: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Jesus had shone as the light and even in the darkness, there was someone to walk with me.

I do not know about you, but it seems sometimes there is so much darkness around us. Just a few weeks ago, we turned our clocks back and now as we sit at our office desks or even outside, we look to see the skies turn dark at as early as 4:00 p.m. We turn on the news and hear of the violence in the Middle East, people denying the Holocaust, and then are told of the rise of both antisemitism and then islamophobia where everybody hates someone because of their beliefs. We already begin to hear the pundits of the upcoming election and there is a silent, yet still present groan of the arguing which will soon arise across the country.

Yet it is not just in these places we see the darkness. It is the ongoing sickness of a friend or family member who just cannot get better. There is the grief of a loved one we still miss who we wish we could sit and talk to about life and meaning. There is corruption everywhere whether it is the supervisor who dismisses your concerns or the nomination of corrupt leaders in various arenas of life because of the political ambition of others. It is very easy to believe the world is dark and scary, and we cry out the words of "Maranatha," which translated from Aramaic means, "Come, o Lord."

It is very easy to get trapped in the darkness, believing the present things we see, or experience are the end of it all. Yet the scripture passage from the gospel of John tells us something. We are told the Word has been made flesh and is among us. We are promised of how Jesus will be with us. Because God loves the world, the light will shine in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.

One of the reasons I love Advent is because we are reminded even as the world seems dark, there is a light which shines in the darkness. Evil, sin, and death do not have the final say because God is with us in both the goodness and the pain of this life. God comes to us and lives in a messy world with messy people, reminding us of no matter what we face or who holds power, Jesus is the one who is the light in our darkness.

From time to time, I still light the candle whenever the power goes out or when I need a

reminder of how the darkness cannot consume the world. For Jesus will come again and again because he loves us and because the world needs good news. For even if it is dark and we cannot fully see, there is one who will show the light and one who will be with us as we fumble around. Jesus will be the light who grows stronger and stronger, reminding us of how his truth and goodness will prevail.

Why do you think it is easy to get trapped in the darkness? When is a time, whether physically or metaphorically, things were dark in your life? How did you find Jesus as the light to guide and be with you in times of darkness? What spiritual disciplines/practices do you use to help remind you of Jesus' light in your life? How will you look for Christ in the dark?

Rev. Dr. E. Hunter Pugh  
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge  
PO Box 71  
Brantley, AL 36009