

15 December 2013

Christ Church

The Word of Salvation

John 1:1-14

1. Not the Nativity story

Well, it's 10 shopping days to Christmas - if you include today and next Sunday as well, that is. We are well into the silly shopping season and if you can face the crowds you might still be able to make that purchase you still need to make.

I wonder just how many of those people rushing around really know what Christmas is about? I remember reading an article in a magazine many years ago where the writer was complaining bitterly about Christmas. One of his complaints was directed at the Church. The trouble with the church, he said, was that it tried to bring Jesus into everything. For many people, I guess these days in particular, Christmas is about buying presents, eating too much, Father Christmas and pantomimes.

There may be some who vaguely remember something about a baby being born in a stable, about shepherds and sheep, about kings with expensive gifts.

There will be some who will know there is more to the story than that. They will know that it is a story in the Bible, and that the baby was Jesus who had a special place in the world. They will be familiar with the stories from Matthew's and Luke's gospels. But John starts in a very different way. Straightaway right from the beginning of his gospel he is telling who Jesus really is.

He uses the imagery of the Word. It is perhaps not a way of thinking that is familiar to us, indeed I have heard it suggested that to understand what John is saying it is easier to read 'Jesus' when John writes about 'the Word'. It is useful, but we need to see just what John is saying about the Word to see what he is saying about Jesus. The key verse in the passage is at verse 14: *'The Word became flesh and lived for while among us'*. What God had to say to us was not only or mainly what Jesus said, but who Jesus was and what he did. (John Piper) And boy are is it a powerful Word! There is no way that we will be able to do justice to it this morning. All we can do is pick out some of the big ideas.

2. In the beginning

We start at the very beginning - a very good place to start! And John goes back literally as far as it is possible to go. 'In the beginning' he says in verse 1. Exactly the same words that we have at the beginning of Genesis 1:1. That is no accident. In Matthew's gospel, before he tells us about how Jesus was born, He takes us back through Jesus' family tree, past the exile into Babylon, past King David, right back to Abraham. John, on the other hand, goes right back to the dawn of time and the events of creation. He is telling us that Jesus was not limited to a human life lived for just a few years about 2,000 years ago. He is telling us that he is eternal, there at the dawn of time and so will continue to be for ever. He is telling us that the word was not created, but was there before creation. So we have in the Nicene creed the words 'We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father.'

This is staggering enough, but John goes further.

3. The Word was with God, the Word was God

So, says John, there has always been a close connection between the Word and God. You may have seen the programme Mr & Mrs. In it, couples are in turn asked questions about their partner and if their answers match what their partner says they may win prizes. The programme works on the premise that when we are close to someone then we get to know how they think, what they might do in particular situations. John is saying here something like that. He is saying, Jesus has always been connected with God. He is as intimate with Gods as it is possible to be; if you like, there are no secrets between him and God. He is the one person who can reveal to us what God is really like.

John goes even further still. Not just was the word with God, but the Word WAS God. So John wants us to be under no misunderstanding. Jesus, the Word was not just with God he was God. Not even just identical with God, but so perfectly the same as God in mind, heart, being, that in him we can see absolutely perfectly what God is like. This is so much a part of John's message, so he says in 14:9, *'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.'* And in 14:6, *'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'* So John's message is this - If we want to see what God is really like, we just have to look to Jesus. But there is another side to this. Sometimes we think of Jesus as being in contrast to God the Father. Jesus is full of love and compassion, whereas it seems that God the Father is an angry God who has to be appeased for our sin. Nothing could be further from the truth. God has always been a god of love and compassion. The coming of Jesus is not

God's attempt to put right a ghastly mistake. It is the natural expression of a love constantly at work, revealed in history, declared through the prophets, and finally lived out in flesh and blood. John's testimony calls us to reflect on all God has yet to do in the **light** of everything he has already done.

4. The Word the Creator

Then John says something else about the Word. He tells us what part the Word had in creation - and it is huge. *'Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.'* v3 There is no moulding out of clay, just God's Word and it all happens! What amazing power is that.

Haydn's Creation -....And there was .. LIGHT! Sudden blast of music, enough to make you jump out of your seat!

Perhaps the most significant event there has been from a scientific point of view - the Big Bang. And for us it is God's Word that is behind that. What an amazing, creative power is that. And what John is saying now is, if you want to know how great is that creative power, then look to Jesus! This weak defenceless baby whose birth we are about to celebrate, is that same power that was at work in the creation of all that is. Not a creation but the creator come to earth. Graham Kendrick gives us this wonderful picture: 'Hands that flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered'.

But John carries on. *'In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind'*. v4 This is the result of the Word's creative power. This is the main purpose of John, that we should have life, that life that comes from Jesus. In 20:31, John says, *'But these*

are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.' And in 10:10 Jesus says, *'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.'* Here is another of John's great themes - that Jesus has come to bring us life, life as it is meant to be by God. In a sense, this is what salvation is about - about having our lives completely transformed through the light of Jesus in our hearts. The creative work of the Word is the creation of light and of life. In Jesus, the Word made flesh, is the light for the world. Paul says this in 2 Corinthians 4:6. *'For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.'* The God of the universe has made his light shine in OUR hearts. Don't you find that staggering? Only giving him all our adoration can possibly begin to be enough. Just falling off your chair simply will not do.

But when Paul speaks of God shining a light in our hearts, what does he actually mean? It's not just that the truth of God dawns on us in our minds, although it is partly that. It is more, though, that we are brought into a living relationship with God in the person of Jesus. It is not a new relationship that we receive through Jesus, but a restored relationship, a relationship that is as it was originally created to be before it was distorted by sin. 'It is about being able to talk with Him and slip our hand into His hand as we walk through life. It is about pouring our heart out to him and burying our head in His chest without any words. It is about knowing he is with us in the valley of the shadow of death, in a den of lions or even in martyrdom. It is knowing we never walk alone.' (Michael Baughen)

5. The choice

But here John introduces an element of choice. There is a struggle going on between the light of Jesus and the darkness that sin brings. But it is a one sided struggle - or at least there is only one outcome. The question John starts posing now is about judgement. Not about God's judgement on us - his judgement is that the Word should become flesh and it has been since before time began. The judgement is ours. Which side are we on. Are we in the light or do we remain in darkness?

'Where does the darkness go when you turn the light on?' Perhaps the scientists among you will be able to answer that question. But what John says in verse 5 is, *'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.'* The thing is here that John is saying no matter how hostile the darkness might be to the light of the Word, the light can never be defeated. It can hate the light, but it can never destroy it. We may see the contrast between light and darkness as a spiritual one. But it need not be so. It is as much about people, people who may reject Jesus and remain in darkness, and people who accept him into their hearts and enjoy the light.

The interesting thing is that John says nothing about what it means to choose the darkness rather than the light. Perhaps it is because if you choose darkness you will not notice anything different in your life. He does say though that some will prefer the darkness to the light. *'He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.'* vv 10-11. He did not come amongst people to whom he would have been a stranger. He came to that which was his own. But before we get too judgemental about the Jews of Jesus' day, we need to ask the question, do we recognise Jesus in the world around us?

Do we realise the God-given potential for our lives, or do we ignore it because we are afraid, or because we think it would be too difficult for us? The thing is if we never even recognise that potential we won't miss it when it does not happen. What a crying shame that is. Because what John does do is tell us what those in the light have that those in darkness do not have. *'Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.'* v.12 This is the promise for all who place their trust in Jesus and only for those - the right to become children of God. It's not something we can do for ourselves, it is God's gift to us. We cannot make ourselves children of God. We can only enter into a relationship which God himself offers us, and we can only do that through Jesus. We can only enter into that relationship with God if he opens up the way for us and John tells us that he has done through his son, the Word made flesh.

So the choice is ours. We can stay in the darkness and our lives can remain dead and we won't know any change. Or we can allow God to pour his light into our hearts, and place our trust in Jesus, the Word made flesh, full of grace and truth., the Word that was with and an was God in the very creation of all that there ever will be and know that restored life which God intended for us from the very beginning of time. What will your choice be?