

“Pointing People to Jesus, the True Light” — John the Baptist

Text: John 1:6-9 **Sub-texts:** Matthew 3:4-12; 5:14; John 1:27; 29-30, 34; 8:12; 10:40-42

Series: “The WORD Became Flesh and Made His Dwelling Among Us”

Rev. Dave Sattler December 8, 2019 North Shore Alliance Church

Sources: Bible Gateway, NIV Life Application Bible. Commentaries: Gary Burge, David Carson, Leon Morris, & R.V.G. Tasker. Book: “A Visual Guide to Bible Events” by John A. Beck. Online: camha.ca (SAD), Wikipedia: “Christian Martyrs”, “Divine Light.” Songs: “Here I am To Worship” by Tim Hughes (c.2001) and “O Holy Night” by Adolphe Adam (c.1847). Sermon: Mark Peters (NSAC, 12/1/2019).

I. Review & Introduction

- **<Slide>** Good morning, everyone! I’m Dave Sattler, one of the pastors at North Shore Alliance Church, today continuing our Series into Christmas, “The WORD Became Flesh and Made His Dwelling Among Us.”
- We are looking at the brilliant prologue to the Gospel of John — arguably the theological high point of the entire New Testament.
- Q: ‘Jesus, God the Son, has no origin,’ John begins Chapter 1 (1:1-3). ‘Active even in creation, Jesus, The WORD has been there, before the beginning and will be present on into endless eternity.’
- **<Slide>** And, like a campfire at night, mesmerizing, capturing the attention of all who surround it, Jesus radiates “life” and “light to everyone” (1:4).
- The power of the Christian story is highlighted in the Christmas narrative: no manner of darkness can ever defeat **the inextinguishable light of Jesus!** — Sermon, MP (NSAC, 12/1/2019)
- Light plays a vital role in the subsistence of the human race.
- **<Slide> We need light.** Mentally. Emotionally. Physically.
- ILL — You’ve likely heard of Seasonal Affective Disorder, SAD.
 - A type of “depression”, in the mental health spectrum, common here on the West Coast. Researchers think SAD, Q: “is caused by changes in [our] level of exposure to sunlight.” — camha.ca
 - And, the main treatment for SAD is light therapy.
- Spiritually, we are drawn to light.
- That’s why on brilliant winter days we rush to our snow-capped North Shore mountains ... and why, on sunny days, we flock to the West Vancouver seawall to capture our piece of glorious sunlight. Our spirits are lifted by light!
- [I’m even pumped about the new lighting in my office and the new lights here in our auditorium ... after a dozen years of darkness!]
- And light characterizes God and His people.
- Jesus says, “**I AM the light of the world**” (cf. John 8:12) and, to His followers, “**You are the light of the world**” (cf. Matthew 5:14).
- **<Slide>** Here’s a fun fact! Did you know that the Gospel of John was symbolized in the early church by a soaring eagle?

- Well, me neither, till my research this week! Likely it was because this book **takes its audience to “lofty heights.”** — Burge, p.51.
- So we come again to Chapter 1 ... where John pitches the historical, philosophical, and theological bedrock that sets the stage for the incarnation, the coming of Jesus, God-With-Us.
- <Slide> Our movement, the Christian & Missionary Alliance, this church, holds to a high view of the Divinity of Jesus.
- Jesus’ significance is not so much in His mighty deeds, or His kind heart for all people, or His inspirational teaching. But first and foremost, Jesus’ greatest significance is in His identity as God-In-The-Flesh.
- This is History’s Game-Changer! Jesus wasn’t merely God-like.
- We believe, that, in His very essence, in His DNA, in His nature, Jesus is God.
- So, beyond the words of a wise prophet, or a great teacher, or a charismatic leader, the words of Jesus are God’s words to us!
- Back when the Christian Church began to formulate its classic doctrine on the Identity of Jesus, it began right here in John 1. [Which, may well have first been an ancient hymn.]

<Slide> John 1:6-9 (NIV)

- Just 4 verses, let’s stand and read together.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. 9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

- <PRAY> ‘Lord, move me out of the way. Come, speak to us by Your Spirit. Open our hearts to what You have for us. We’re hungry to hear from You.’

II. Text Outline

- <Slide> Note there are two Johns prominent in the scripture narrative.
- One is, of course, John, the Apostle.
- Disciple, friend of Jesus, eye-witness to the life, ministry, and death of our Saviour. Evangelist, and author of five New Testament books including this, the Gospel of John — though his name is conspicuously absent from the text.
- That John, is not to be confused with ... another John — John the Baptist.
- A relative of Jesus, who plays the role of forerunner to the life and ministry of our Saviour. And, too, is a major part of the biblical story. So much so, John the Baptist even makes a cameo in John the Apostle’s lofty prologue.
- Begs the question, what in the world is he doing here?! Right in the middle of the Christmas Story! More on that later.

1. <Slide> **John: A Unique Man Sent From God (1:6)**

- ILL — I’ve long been fascinated with the character of John the Baptist.
 - His wardrobe ... “clothes made of camel hair.” Living off the land, John’s eating “locusts and wild honey.” [He’s on the Keto diet!]
 - And, he’s fearless. To their faces, John calls the Jewish religious leaders of his day ‘a bunch of snakes!’ ... repudiating their claims of bloodlines as their rightful path to salvation.
 - APP — Okay, I just gotta say, if you think God could never use you ‘cuz ... you’re not a ‘polished Christian,’ or you don’t fit the mold, or you don’t smell right, look right, or dress right, that’s hogwash!
 - If God can use a quirky, rough-around-the-edges, outlier, perhaps even homeless man, like John the Baptist, He can use you!
 - And, if you’re willing, God will employ you in His mission in a unique way ... like He can use no one else!
 - And, the Baptist’s unique mission? Says, crowds came en masse; and, “confessing their sins ... they were baptized.” — cf. Matthew 3:4-7
 - I love the two-fold nature of John’s ministry: calling people to repentance of the heart; and, baptizing them — a ‘get-your-feet-moving,’ public act of obedience.

2. A Witness To Testify Concerning That Light (1:7/8b)

- In v.7-8, we’re introduced to an important word the Apostle John’s clearly fond of; he uses it 14 times in his Gospel and 30 times overall in his 5 books.
- <Slide> ILL — “**Witness**” ... it’s the Greek word, *marturas*.
 - Coined “martyr,” in later years, to describe Christ-followers willing to die for their faith. In fact, most historians say it was the martyrs who were a catalyst for the rapid growth of the early church.
 - Under intense Roman persecution, their powerful witness prompted many to convert to Christianity in the first centuries. — Wikipedia, “Christian Martyrs”
- John doubles down; to “witness,” he adds the descriptor verb, “to testify.”
- <Slide> It’s courtroom language. And John the Baptist is the first material witness in the court case to decide the identity of Jesus.
- Later in his Gospel, the Apostle John furthers the story.
- The Baptist provides corroborating evidence in cf. John 1:34.
- Q: “I have seen and I testify that this is [Jesus] God’s Chosen One,” John says.
- Cf. John 10:40-42 goes on, Q: “Then Jesus went ... to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. There [Jesus] stayed, 41 and many people came to him. They said, “Though John never performed a sign, **all that John said about this man [Jesus] was true.**” 42 And in that place many believed in Jesus.”

- John the Baptist's role? Like us, he's a witness. Taking the stand to identify and glorify Jesus in this world. And, wow, what an impact!
- V.7 concludes, "through [the Baptist's] testimony, all might believe."
- Since John the Baptist was the first human to point people to Jesus, in a sense, all Christ-followers have been brought to faith through John's witness!

3. <Slide> John the Baptist Was Not The Light (1:8)

- Yet, John the Baptist is not the light — v.8.
- Back to the question. Why in the midst of all this high theology is John the Baptist included here in John's Gospel Prologue?
- ILL — There is some historical evidence ...
 - That some of the Baptist's followers believed John was the Messiah.
 - [Happens often. Dynamic leaders in religious circles can cause people to entertain grandiose ideas about them.]
 - Decades after the Baptist's gruesome death [beheading by Herod], there are stories of John the Baptist's followers still meeting as far away from Palestine as ... Ephesus, on the west coast of modern-day Turkey.
 - And, we know that John the Apostle spent the final years of his life in Ephesus. Writing, listening to the 'word on the street' in that city.
 - It's likely Apostle John included the Baptist in his prologue for 2 reasons:
 1. To draw John the Baptist's followers back into the Christian Movement.
 2. And, more importantly, to set the record straight. John the Baptist had an honoured and important role, yes. But, **he's not Jesus**. — Morris, p.77
- ILL — Which reminds me of a funny story.
 - About ten years ago I was at a soccer match watching the Whitecaps play at old Swangard Stadium. And there was a player on the other team who looked like Jesus. <Slide> [Or, at least, our white western interpretation of what Jesus should look like!]
 - Anyways, during the game this particular player, who looked like Jesus, shanked a shot way over the crossbar — out for a goal-kick.
 - And, did the fans let him have it?! Insults flew out of the stands.
 - But, the funniest and most profound shout I heard out of The South-siders, directed at the player that night was this ...
 - <Slide> Q: 'You're not Jesus!'
- APP — The Baptist's inclusion in the prologue ...
 - Pokes at our tendency to pin our hopes on people.
 - When, in reality, even the most unique, gifted, successful human leaders always fail us. Only Jesus can truly lead and deliver.
 - This also confronts our own 'Messiah-Complexes.'

- o I have often felt a bit sorry for John the Baptist. Called by God. Lots of attention. Crowds of people coming. Then, all of a sudden, Jesus shows up, and boom, it's all over! He's 'chopped liver' ... after all those years of being 'the man.' I can relate ... perhaps.
- o <Slide> And, I'm convicted by the Baptist's humble response.
- o Q: "John saw Jesus coming ... and says, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 The man who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me 27 '... the straps of His sandals I am not worthy to untie.'" – cf. John 1:29-30; 27.
- o APP — And, I am reminded that I can't save people!
- o Or, be the man! Or, change peoples' hearts! Only Jesus can.
- o 'Sattler, you're not Jesus!' And thank God for that! That's a good thing. Frees me. Takes the pressure off. Leaves power in the rightful hands of my Saviour. And, that's the best place for it to be.

4. <Slide> Jesus, The True Light For All (1:9)

- The Apostle John makes it clear: "the True Light" has come.
- ILL — And John's careful to define this one "true Light."
 - o It's not "illumination of the intellect" achieved through intense philosophical study. It's not a "mystical light" encountered through guru or yoga meditation. It's not the discovery of one's own "inner light." And, it's not any light constructed by human hands!
 - Wikipedia, "Divine Light."
- <Slide> No! John declares, Q: 'A True Fire, a Luminosity, for all people, for all time, a True Light that can never be extinguished, is here!'
- In the Christian Story, this True Light is wholly wrapped up in One Person, and One Person only — Jesus.
- Why when Jesus appeared, "the [human] soul [finally] felt its worth."
 - "O Holy Night" by Adolphe Adam (c.1847)
- He is the True Light Who brings what every person on the planet so desperately needs and hopes for.
- In Jesus, salvation has come, for all who believe!
- Why Tim Hughes pens these powerful song lyrics about JESUS, God the Son:
 - o Q: "Light of the world. You stepped down into darkness. Opened my eyes, let me see. Beauty that made this heart adore You. Hope of a life spent with You. So, here I am to worship. Here I am to bow down. Here I am to say that you're my God."
 - "Here I Am To Worship" by Tim Hughes (c.2001)

III. Application

- Time to 'land the plane' now on a few application points.

A. <Slide> Stepping Into the Light of Jesus.

- A sad reality of the human condition is that we often become content with darkness. Later, in cf. John 3:19, John issues this verdict, Q: 19 “Light has come into the world, but people [love] darkness instead of light because their deeds [are] evil.”
- ILL — Why is this? Seems we all, like Gollum and his ‘precious’ ring ...
 - Become satisfied, even comfortable, in sin and darkness.
 - There are parts of sin, ‘benefits’ so to speak, we come to really ‘love.’
 - Sometimes we even trick ourselves into thinking we can control the darkness; and the thought of stepping out of our sin and into God’s light can even be scary.
 - Why addiction is so hard to break. Why convicted criminals so often re-offend. Why we continue in our dark sinful patterns of behaviour and hurt people around us all the time. When, this only leaves us feeling more and more broken inside.
- And the Apostle John stops us dead in our tracks.
- In John’s mind, the LIGHT of creation is also the LIGHT of redemption. It’s precisely the fact that Jesus brought light at creation that John believes Jesus can, and will, shine His light of **redemption** now to us, His fallen creation. — Carson, p. 119.
- APP — Life’s greatest decision, we all must wrestle with, is this:
 - How will we respond to God’s ‘rescue mission’ to come to earth to save us? **What will we do with Jesus? <Slide>**
 - If you’re new to church, or just exploring Christianity, great!
 - Research the historical Jesus, read the Bible, join an Alpha group, talk to people. And, may I also suggest praying this simple prayer? Q: ‘Jesus, show yourself to me.’ And, keep stepping towards Jesus.
 - Sadly, many flee His light ... for fear of being exposed.
 - But, here’s the thing: there’s nothing to fear!
 - Jesus already knows all about you, the good, the bad, and the ugly, ... and He still loves you more than you could ever imagine. Even when we’re fully exposed, Jesus never rejects us. His mercy and grace are always extended to you and to me. In loving relationship.
 - Don’t sit and become comfortable in your sin and darkness.
 - It will not satisfy!
 - **Step into the Light of Jesus today.** Simply surrender your heart, put your faith in Him. And allow Jesus the space and time, in your life, to redeem your brokenness. And He will!

B. <Slide> Pointing People to Jesus.

- DQ: Who in your life has pointed you to Jesus? With people around you.

- All of us have been influenced in our faith journey by others.
- ILL — God’s put many great people in my life who have pointed me to Jesus.
 - I’m grateful for my parents, and my ‘Grannie,’ who, when I was 5, encouraged me to ‘ask Jesus into my heart.’
 - There’ve been countless others too: teachers, leaders, coaches, friends, even pastors!
- John the Baptist saw it as His life-mission to point people to the Saviour.
- In a world hostile to the Christian Story, John the Baptist ‘took the stand’ to give a non-neutral, unpopular testimony of the truth of Jesus.
- <Slide> This too is our calling, and it is not easy.
- Q: “You are the light of the world,” Jesus says. Do you see yourself as “one sent from God, on mission for Jesus in your world?”
- APP — So I ask, AQ: Where is your witness stand?
 - Your school? Your workplace? Your neighbourhood? Your art club? Your gym buddies? Your family? Perhaps your own home?
 - The light of Jesus lives inside all Christ-followers.
 - ILL — I’ve seen it the world over, in Africa, in Europe, in Latin America, it’s so cool when you sense the light of Jesus in someone. When, beyond culture and language, Jesus shines through!
 - And, like Moses after being in God’s Presence, when we spend time with Jesus we have a certain luminousness [is that a word?] to us.
 - That God has chosen us to be ‘reflectors’ of His light in this world, that we get to **point people to Jesus** is remarkable.
 - ILL — In my 50+ years on the planet, I’m not sure I’ve experienced all there is, but one thing I do know: there is nothing greater than the sense of being used by God to reach others!
- Now, as we prepare for communion, it’s worth highlighting another key aspect of what’s really happening. Here, at the cross, we see ...

C. <Slide> Jesus Entering Our Darkness.

- Reality is, as Christians, our fears, our pain, our life-circumstances, can block the light of Jesus from shining through us. Or, cloud our view of His light.
- Truth is: sometimes it’s really difficult to feel God’s presence. When we experience trauma, when a ‘bomb’ drops in our lives that we never planned for, when something happens to us that we didn’t sign up for.
- Boy, a lot of times, I find it just plain hard to see the light of Jesus.
- And I want you to know, the highfalutin theology about which the Apostle John is speaking here, was not a mere ‘pie-in-the-sky’ idea for John.
- John’d been there ... in the darkest hour.

- <Slide> When most had abandoned our Saviour, John the Apostle stayed there. Experiencing darkness with a capital ‘D.’ And, with Jesus, surviving crushing defeat at the cross.
- So, when John says, “The True Light that gives light to everyone has come,” he truly meant it. It was part of his lived experience.
- APP — Some of us may be approaching a ‘Blue Christmas’ this year ...
 - As we battle mental health, sickness, loneliness, sadness, loss ... it’s hard imagine light penetrating our darkness.
 - No, Jesus doesn’t want us to ignore our struggles, stuff our pain, or pretend it’s not there.
 - <Slide> However, the message of the Christian Story is we don’t sit in darkness forever. And, we never sit in darkness alone.
 - **Jesus, our Saviour, enters our darkness.** Fully. Intimately.
 - And, He even comes out the other side, and, brings us with Him!
 - I know this to be true: **with Jesus in the picture, there is always reason for hope. Amidst the darkness. No matter the circumstance.** Even as you face your ‘Blue Christmas.’
 - And, this gives us reason to celebrate!

IV. <Slide> Communion

- So we come to the Lord’s Supper where all are invited to participate in communion with the Saviour.
- You can come alone. Or, you can come in groups ... with a friend or family member. Come forward row by row, starting from the back.
- Your server will hold out the loaf. Please tear off a piece of bread.
- Your other server will hold out the cup. Please dip your bread in the cup.
- To remember Jesus’ sacrifice, His body and blood given for you. JESUS, the True Light enters our darkness ... to forgive our sins, restore relationship with our Creator, and offer us His hope. In every circumstance. Amen.
- Servers, worship team, people, please come!