

JOHN 1:6-18

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive 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. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

THE NEW YEAR INEVITABLY BRINGS EXPRESSIONS OF HOPE FOR THE DAYS, WEEKS, AND MONTHS TO COME.

EVEN THOSE WHO FEEL THEY HAVE JUST LEFT A GOOD YEAR BEHIND THEM-HOPE FOR AT LEAST AS GOOD OF A YEAR THIS TIME AROUND.

AND THOSE WHO HAVE NOT HAD A GOOD YEAR HOPE THE NEW YEAR WILL BE A BETTER ONE.

IT IS NATURAL TO SEE THE TURNING OF THE CALENDAR YEAR AS A REASON TO HOPE OR AN OPPORTUNITY TO BEGIN AGAIN.

MOST OF US ENJOY SEEING THAT THE EARTH HAS COMPLETED ANOTHER FULL CYCLE OF ITS ORBIT, AND WE CELEBRATE THE NEW YEAR.

OF COURSE, AS WE KNOW FROM EXPERIENCE, WHAT WE HOPE FOR IN A NEW YEAR OFTEN FAILS TO MEET OUR GREATEST EXPECTATIONS.

FOR EXAMPLE, I LOOKED ONLINE TO SEE MANY EXPRESSIONS OF HOPE, EVEN FROM CHRISTIANS, FOR THE NEW YEAR AND NEW DECADE 2020 PROVIDED.

WE ALL KNOW HOW THAT TURNED OUT FOR THE WHOLE WORLD!

SO, WHILE THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH CELEBRATING AND LOOKING FORWARD TO NEW THINGS IN THE NEW YEAR, CHRISTIANS SHOULD ALSO REMEMBER TRUE HOPE IS FOUND ELSEWHERE.

JOHN THE BAPTIST WAS BORN TO TESTIFY TO THIS HOPE, BY POINTING TOWARDS THE TRUE LIGHT THAT CAME INTO THE WORLD-JESUS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

IT IS IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S GRACE JESUS' BIRTH, LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION BRINGS THAT THERE IS HOPE FOR ALL LOST IN THE DARKNESS OF SIN.

DARKNESS, BOTH PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL CAN BE DIFFICULT TO ENDURE, AS WELL AS DANGEROUS AT TIMES.

IT IS HARD FOR US TO SEE IN THE DARKNESS, AND EVEN WHEN A LIGHT APPEARS, OUR EYES NEED TO ADJUST TO IT, SO WE CAN REALLY SEE.

POOR EYESIGHT CAN INDEED MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN HOW WE PERCEIVE THINGS.

THE OLD MR. MCGOO CARTOON OFFERS AN EXAMPLE OF THIS. AND FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOT FAMILIAR WITH HIM-- MCGOO DID NOT SEE WELL INSPITE OF HIS THICK GLASSES.

HE MIGHT WALK INTO A TREE OR LAMPOST AND SAY "EXCUSE ME MA'AM."

BUT THE REAL TROUBLE WAS- HE DID NOT USUALLY ADMIT HE SAW THINGS DIFFERENTLY COMPARED TO OTHERS.

THIS IS NOT UNLIKE WHAT HAPPENED SPIRITUALLY WHEN JESUS LIT UP THE WORLD WITH HIS PRESENCE, ESPECIALLY AFTER HE BEGAN HIS MINISTRY.

THE GOSPEL PASSAGE SAYS MANY OF THOSE TO WHOM JESUS HAD COME TO BRING THE LIGHT AND TRUTH OF GOD'S GRACE WERE BLIND TO HIS IDENTITY.

THEY SAW JESUS BUT THEIR VIEW WAS DISTORTED, THEIR SPIRITUAL SENSES HAD NOT ADJUSTED TO THE LIGHT OF CHRIST.

AND SOME OF THOSE WHO DID NOT REALLY "SEE" HIM WERE AMONG THOSE WHO BROUGHT ABOUT HIS CRUCIFIXION.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT OTHERS WERE ABLE TO FOCUS THEIR SPIRITUAL SIGHT SO THAT THEY DID PERCEIVE JESUS WAS SENT FROM GOD.

AND TO THOSE WHO ARE ABLE TO SEE HIS LIGHT, JESUS PROVIDES NEW LIFE AS CHILDREN OF GOD, WHOSE SIN IS FORGIVEN.

JESUS, THEREFORE, IS THE ONE WHO PROVIDES A NEW BEGINNING FOR US, NOT JUST ANNUALLY BUT WHENEVER WE NEED IT.

REPENTANCE, REAL HEARTFELT REPENTANCE THAT CARRIES WITH IT A DESIRE TO TURN BACK TO GOD, TO CHANGE OUR WAYS, PROVIDES US WITH A NEW BEGINNING EVERY AND ANY DAY.

THIS IS THE OLD MESSAGE FOR THE NEW YEAR. THE LYRICS OF AN OLD HYMN PUT IT THIS WAY:

"TELL ME THE OLD, OLD STORY OF UNSEEN THINGS ABOVE, OF JESUS AND HIS GLORY, OF JESUS AND HIS LOVE..."

TELL ME THE STORY SLOWLY, THAT I MAY TAKE IT IN -THAT WONDERFUL REDEMPTION, GOD'S REMEDY FOR SIN..."

SO LET US LOOK MORE DEEPLY INTO WHAT THIS STORY, AS IT IS FOUND IN TODAY'S GOSPEL READING, MEANS FOR US AS WE ENTER INTO 2022.

THE BIBLE TELLS US, AS DOES OUR EXPERIENCES IN LIFE, THAT ALL PEOPLE, INCLUDING OURSELVES, HAVE SINNED AND FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.

FALLING CAN HAVE SERIES CONSEQUENCES, WHETHER WE ARE SPEAKING ABOUT FALLING INTO SIN OR A PHYSICAL FALL.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF FALLING CAN MAKE US CAUTIOUS, WHICH IS A GOOD THING, AS LONG AS WE DO NOT BECOME SO AFRAID THAT IT INTERFERES WITH WHAT WE NEED TO DO.

FOR EXAMPLE: WHEN THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE WAS BEING BUILT OVER SAN FRANCISO BAY- SEVERAL MEN FELL TO THEIR DEATHS.

NATURALLY THIS CAUSED THE OTHER WORKERS TO BE VERY CAUTIOUS, WHICH ALSO SLOWED DOWN THE PROGRESS OF THE PROJECT.

A SOLUTION WAS FOUND BY PLACING AND SECURING A HUGE NET UNDERNEATH THE WORKERS, SO THAT WHEN ANY FELL THEY WOULD NOT BE HARMED.

THIS WORKED PERFECTLY BY SAVING THE LIFE OF ANY MAN THAT FELL, AND SO THE PACE OF THE CONSTRUCTION PICKED UP.

JESUS, WHO CAME INTO THE WORLD SO THAT THE WORLD MIGHT BE SAVED THROUGH HIM, IS OUR SAFETY NET FROM THE ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES OF SIN.

YES, WE STILL FALL INTO SIN, BOTH ACCIDENTLY AND SOMETIMES WILLFULLY, BUT THE FORGIVENESS HE PROVIDES IS THE NET THAT CATCHES US.

HOWEVER, THE GOSPEL OF JOHN SAYS THAT IN ORDER FOR THIS SPIRITUAL SAFETY NET TO WORK FOR US, WE NEED TO BELIEVE IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

BELIEF IN THIS SENSE MEANS IN JESUS HIMSELF, WHO HE IS, AND IN THE SALVATION, HE PROVIDES THROUGH THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR SIN.

THE EVANGELIST JOHN, PUT THIS MORE ELOQUENTLY, WRITING:

“FROM HIS FULLNESS WE HAVE RECEIVED GRACE UPON GRACE. THE LAW INDEED WAS GIVEN THROUGH MOSES. BUT GRACE AND TRUTH CAME THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.”

GRACE, IS GOD’S FAVOR WHICH WE HAVE NOT AND CANNOT EARN, BECAUSE IT IS A GIFT.

AS IT SAYS IN EPHESIANS 2:8 “FOR BY GRACE YOU WERE SAVED THROUGH FAITH, THIS IS...A GIFT FROM GOD.”

SADLY, GRACE IS OFTEN EITHER OVERLOOKED OR VIEWED SUPERFICIALLY AS SIMPLY A SMALL BLESSING GOD GIVES.

BUT THE KIND OF GRACE SPOKEN ABOUT IN THE GOSPEL READING IS MORE PROFOUND.

IT IS OUR REASON FOR THE TRUE HOPE WE HAVE NOT JUST IN A NEW YEAR, BUT ALWAYS.

GRACE HERE IS GOD REACHING OUT HIS HAND TO US THROUGH JESUS HIS SON, AND INVITING US INTO HIS FAMILY AND PRESENCE- NOT JUST IN THE FUTURE BUT RIGHT NOW.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS GRACE WAS VOCALIZED BY CHRISTIAN AUTHOR C.S. LEWIS.

HE WAS ONE OF THE ATTENDEES AT AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CHRISTIAN LEADERS WHEN HE ENTERED A ROOM WHERE A DISCUSSION WAS TAKING PLACE.

THE TOPIC BEING DEBATED WAS: “WHAT MAKES CHRISTIANITY DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER RELIGIONS?”

WHEN HE ENTERED THE ROOM LEWIS WAS ASKED HIS OPINION, AND HE RESPONDED: “THAT’S EASY, IT’S GRACE.”

WHAT HE MEANT IS THE GRACE OF GOD GIVEN THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, PROVIDES US WITH WHAT NOT EVEN THE MOST RIGHTEOUS PERSON CAN EARN-SALVATION.

THIS IS THE TRUTH OF GOD’S LOVE FOR THE WORLD AND DESIRE FOR US TO LOVE HIM THAT JESUS EMBODIES.

THE GOSPEL EXPLAINS THE MESSAGE BY SAYING THAT- “IT IS GOD THE ONLY SON WHO IS CLOSE TO THE FATHER’S HEART, WHO HAS MADE HIM KNOWN.”

THERE IS AN OLD STORY THAT PUTS THIS IN FAMILIAR TERMS. IT IS ABOUT A YOUNG BOY WHOSE FATHER OFTEN HAD TO GO AWAY ON BUSINESS TRIPS.

UNFORTUNATELY THIS MEANT HE SOMETIMES MISSED IMPORTANT DATES OR EVENTS, LIKE BIRTHDAYS.

ONE DAY, WHEN THE MAN WAS AGAIN OUT OF TOWN, THE BOY’S MOTHER FOUND HIM LOOKING AT A PICTURE OF HIS FATHER.

HE THEN TURNED TO HER AND SAID HE WISHED HIS DAD COULD STEP OUT OF THE PICTURE AND BE WITH HIM RIGHT NOW.

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN MANY OF US MIGHT WISH SOMEONE IN A PHOTO COULD BE WITH US PHYSICALLY.

THROUGHOUT THE AGES PEOPLE HAVE LONGED FOR GOD'S PRESENCE, EVEN THOSE WHO DID NOT REALLY KNOW THE LORD OUR GOD.

IN FACT, TWO FAMOUS GREEK PHILOSOPHERS- SOCRATES AND PLATO BOTH EXPRESSED A DESIRE THAT GOD WOULD COME TO EARTH AS A MAN.

OUR FAITH TELLS US THAT THIS DID HAPPEN WHEN JESUS WAS BORN.

HE DID NOT STEP OUT OF A PHOTOGRAPH, BUT OUT OF HEAVEN TO EARTH, TO LIVE FOR A WHILE WITH US, AS ONE OF US.

COLOSSIANS 1:15 DESCRIBES JESUS BY SAYING, "HE IS THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD...."

CHRIST'S INCARNATION IS THE MEANS BY WHICH JESUS STEPPED INTO HUMAN TIME TO PROVIDE, BY HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS, THE GRACE OF GOD FOUND NO WHERE ELSE.

A COMMENTARY ON JOHN'S GOSPEL SUMMARIZES FOR US THE OLD MESSAGE FOR THE NEW YEAR, AS IT IS FOUND IN JOHN 1:14-18.

"THE GOOD NEWS WHICH JOHN (THE BAPTIST) IS ABOUT TO TELL IS THAT THE LIGHT, THE ONLY LIGHT THERE IS, HAS COME INTO THE WORLD, THAT THE WORD OF GOD HAS BECOME FLESH IN THE MAN JESUS CHRIST, AND THAT HERE...IN THIS LIFE, GOD HAS MADE HIMSELF FULLY KNOWN...."

A SIMPLER WAY OF PUTTING THIS IS TO SAY THAT IF WE WISH TO SEE GOD, WE NEED TO LOOK AT JESUS.

UNFORTUNATELY, JESUS DID NOT REMAIN AMONG US PHYSICALLY AFTER HIS RESURRECTION, BUT INSTEAD ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN.

WE HOWEVER CAN SEE HIM IN THE PAGES OF SCRIPTURE AND THROUGH THE EYES OF FAITH, ESPECIALLY WITH THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

AND IN THE PARABLE OF THE GOATS AND SHEEP, JESUS SAID HE CAN BE FOUND AMONG THE HUNGRY OR THIRSTY, STRANGERS, THOSE SICK, AND THOSE IMPRISONED.

IN OTHER WORDS, JESUS IS WHERE HE IS NEEDED THE MOST, AND THAT AT INCLUDES WITH US.

BUT WE CAN ONLY SEE HIM IN THEM OR OURSELVES, WHEN WE ARE WILLING TO LOOK THROUGH THE EYES OF FAITH.

OUR CHALLENGE, THEREFORE IS TO OPEN OUR SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL EYES SO WE CAN SEE JESUS NOT ONLY IN THE WORDS OF SCRIPTURE, BUT ALSO IN THE WORLD TODAY.

TRULY, IT IS FAITH IN JESUS THAT OFFERS US A HOPE THAT WILL NOT FADE AS THE DAYS OF THE YEAR MARCH ON, EVEN IF OUR EXPECTATIONS FOR THE NEW YEAR ARE NOT MET.

LET US PRAY:

LORD, YOU ARE OUR HELP IN AGES PAST, AND OUR HOPE IN THE PRESENT YEAR AND IN THE YEARS TO COME.

WE PRAISE YOU BECAUSE YOU CAN MAKE ALL THINGS NEW, YOU EVEN REDEEM AND TRANSFORM US.

THANK YOU FOR GRACE YOU HAVE GIVEN IN THE YEAR THAT HAS PASSED AND FOR THE NEW YEAR WHICH HAS BEGUN.

KINDLE WITHIN US, WE PRAY, THE FLAME OF FAITH IN CHRIST SO THAT IT WILL GROW STRONGER, AND THE LIGHT OF THE GRACE AND TRUTH ONLY HE CAN PROVIDE SHINES THROUGH OUR WORDS AND ACTIONS.

ALL GLORY, HONOR, AND PRAISE WE GIVE TO YOU O GOD, FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: JOHN 1:6-18

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