

Light Has Entered

Sermon Notes 12/31/17

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. **4** In him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of men. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Christianity is very unique amongst world religions in its assertions about light coming into the world.

Christianity alone, from every other religion of the world, proclaims that God himself walked the earth, amongst and as one of his creations.

This historical claim is not so well documented, that scholars now basically unanimously agree that Jesus Christ was a real man, who lived a real life sometime between 7 BC-35 AD, who had real followers and was really put to death by the authorities in Jerusalem. They may argue about who He was but they do not question his existence.

John especially the rest of the New Testament authors often equates the coming of Jesus with the coming of light. Throughout John's gospel Jesus often uses light as a description of himself and his work.

- John 8:12 - Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the **light** of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the **light** of life."
- John 12:46 - I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

But before we continue talking about the incredible reality of the coming of the Light, we're going to stop and take a closer look at darkness.

But we aren't going to start with the biblical definition and understanding of darkness. We are going to start with some of the various views of darkness and evil that come from the cultures that surrounded the Bible.

Why? Because when we take a moment to understand how other cultures and religions saw darkness in their belief systems, it helps draw an even clearer distinction between them and Christianity, and only increases the profound proclamations that come with the Gospel.

Darkness and Chaos

Our first cultural example is the Enuma Elish, one of the oldest examples of writing from anywhere in the world. Written between 1800-1600 BC by the Sumerians, the first great civilization to appear in the Middle East, the Enuma Elish tells the creation story of Sumerians. It

depicts the cosmic battle between the chief god Marduk, who destroys the primeval goddess Tiamat, an embodiment of ancient chaos. He then takes the two halves of her body and creates the entire universe.

- Biblical Contemporaries – The ancient Sumerians predate Moses and the Old Testament by about 200-400 years give or take, however, the events of Abraham’s life most likely took place during this time, as well as the life of Job.
- While the later Babylonian Empire of Nebuchadnezzar was not the exact same as the ancient Sumerians, they held the same basic belief systems as their ancient ancestors, meaning Daniel would have been quite familiar with Babylonian and Sumerian mythology.

Another prominent culture that the patriarchs of the Bible would have had a great deal of interaction with was the ancient Egyptians. One of the most prominent of the ancient Egyptian myths, especially during the time of the Hebrew captivity, was that of the sun god Ra. Ra was one of the chief Egyptian deities and every night he would ride his sun chariot around the dark side of the earth. But his nightly travel was not a serene one. He had to spend the entire evening trip fending off the chaos-dragon-god Apophis, who was intent on devouring both Ra and the sun and plunging the entire world back into the chaos and darkness from which it came.

- Biblical Contemporaries
 - o Abraham
 - o Joseph
 - o The Hebrew Captivity
 - o Moses
 - o Throughout the kingdom period of Israel and Judah, Egypt was always a regional power.

Our final culture to take a quick look at the Canaanite culture that Israel had to contend with once they returned to the Promised Land. Baal was one of the chief deities of the many different Canaanite cultures that lived in the land both before and during the kingdom period of Israel. Much like Marduk in Babylon, Baal also slayed a terrible chaos monster in order to bring order to the universe.

- Biblical Contemporaries
 - o Various Judges
 - o Elijah the Prophet
 - o Various kings of Israel and Judah

All three of these major cultures hold some very key beliefs about evil, chaos, and darkness:

1. Chaos is inherent in the creation of the universe and the some of the gods themselves.
2. The gods bring and uphold the order in creation.

3. Mankind is created by the gods to serve the gods and help them in upholding creation by their worship.
4. Chaos and darkness are always a threat to return.

However, the Bible makes very different claims concerning the same ideas.

1. Creation was ordered by its very nature because of God's own orderly nature.
2. Creatures brought chaos to creation.
3. Man's worship or lack thereof does not affect God's ability to uphold his creation.
4. Evil is contained by God's sovereignty and incapable of his overthrow.
5. With the New Testament, Christianity asserts that the darkness has been defeated and will remain so forever.

Christianity relegates evil and darkness from a central, cosmic force of chaos to a secondary, created forces, that only corrupts that which was originally created perfectly. Christianity has no place or understanding for evil that has power relative to God himself. While evil certainly exists, and certainly expresses itself throughout the created sphere, it remains firmly under the foot of God himself, never extending beyond its limits.

This is one of the reasons that the Christmas season is so incredibly important to the Christian faith. It marks the beginning of the end of evil's reign. With the birth of Christ, God's promise to Eve in Genesis 3 was finally fulfilled. The Son of Man had come, the one who despite being struck by the serpent, would finally crush his head.

The Gospels are full of accounts of Jesus exerting his authority over the powers of darkness. He resists and prevails over Satan in the wilderness, exorcises demons from the possessed, cures the sick, gives sight to blind, and raises the dead. As far as the curse could be found, Jesus went out and laid down the final authority of heaven's kingdom. Darkness may have had its day on earth, but its days were now numbered.

A fantastic example of this can be found in Matthew 16:13-20:

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock^[b] I will build my church, and the gates of hell^[c] shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed^[d] in heaven." ²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Here we find Jesus and his disciples in a very curious place. The city of Caesarea Philippi was a pagan city north of Galilee that was renowned for its pagan worship sites. It was the Vegas Strip of the promised land. The most prominent feature Caesarea Philippi was a grotto known as the Gates of Hades, which was dedicated to the god Pan. The pagans believed that fertility gods like Pan went into the underworld during the winter, and sacrifices were made to them during that time to placate them while they rested. Worship during these times, and over the rest of the year were raucous occasions, so full of debauchery that good Jews didn't go anywhere near it.

This makes Jesus presence there very interesting, and perhaps even more interesting that he chooses this place, surrounded by pagan gods and worshippers to ask his disciples the incredible question of who do you say that I am. Peter's answer revealed to him by the Father carries amazing weight as they are so near to temples dedicated to gods who had their own sons and daughters, yet none could claim the title of Christ, the son of the living God. When Christ tells Peter that upon this rock he will build his church, it is possible that Christ isn't just referring to Peter's proclamation but also the place upon which Christ would establish his church. Christ church was going to be placed upon rocks on which the temples of the Greeks stood. The message of Jesus Christ would go out into all the world, seeking out the places of darkness, and against the Gospel none would prevail.

I know this to be true because I got to stand there last summer with 40 more fellow students from a Southern Baptist bible college upon the ruins of pagan temples. They worship there no more. No more water fills the gates to the underworld. But people worshipping the same Christ who once proclaimed the victory over it still visit it today.

So let us understand Christian the amazing power of advent of Christ. Christmas marks the beginning of the end to all things dark and evil. For the Christian, darkness no longer has any power, the old age has passed away and the new creation is being ushered in. We can stand in full confidence of our victory because Christ has won the victory for us. His cry of It is finished was not mere hyperbole, but a resounding cry of victory, declaring the completeness of his work on earth to deal the final blow to all things evil, chaotic, and sinful. All of this followed by the beautiful punctuation of his resurrection signifying the pleasure of the Father with his Son.

So Christian as we come into this new year, may we celebrate the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we celebrate with joy and hope in the victory of Christmas. Immanuel has come and he came to bring light into the darkness. Though we may still live in a world that is marred by evil, it is only the death throes of a defeated enemy, determined to go down with a tantrum. But his defeat is sure and certain, and there will come a day when its defeat will be utter and final.

1 John 2:8 - At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because^[a] the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

Oh, the mercy our God has shown
To those who sit in death's shadow

The sun on high pierced the night
Born was the Cornerstone
Unto us a Son is given, unto us a Child is born
He Who is mighty has done a great thing
Taken on flesh, conquered death's sting
Shattered the darkness and lifted our shame
Holy is His name