

**Emmanuel—God With Us**  
**Jesus: Light in Darkness (John 1:1-18)**  
**December 20, 2009 by Kevin Haah**



I. Introduction

There's something magical about the Christmas.

- Particularly white Christmas.
- Before Grace's parents moved out to Carlsbad, California, we used to go to Minnesota every Christmas and spend about a week there.
- It was absolutely like a story book.
- It was cold, but it was snow covered and beautiful there.
- The fire was always going inside.
- Lots of carol singing.
- Christmas tree
- Christmas dinner, stuffing, and all the fixin
- Christmas lights, presents.
- It's been a while since I had a white Christmas.

A couple of years ago when I was living in Santa Clarita, I woke up and look out the window and was shocked at what I saw. The house across the street from our house had snow on it. I quickly realized that they put fake snow all over the house.

- Some people really go over the top at Christmas.
- For some, it looks like they're having a contest to see who can be more elaborate with Christmas decorations.
  - They've got lights all around the roof,
    - they have lighted deers,
    - huge inflated Santa Claus, Snow Man, Snow Man with snow in a huge inflated circle, lighted candy canes, fake snow on the roof and ground.
    - They go all out.
    - I felt peer pressure to do something ourselves.

- So, a few years ago, we bought this huge neon light nativity set on the front lawn. Now, we don't know what to do with it.
- The first day of the Christmas shopping season, the Day after Thanksgiving, Black Friday, was absolutely crazy this year. This year, stores opened at midnight on Thanksgiving Day.
- In downtown, a lot of people party away.
  - Christmas is a holiday where people drink away and party.
  - Every bar in downtown has Christmas decorations up.
- For some, there is a danger of overspending: buying things you do not need with money you don't have.
  - One little girl wrote to her grandmother: "Thank you very much for the nice gloves you sent me for Christmas. They were something I wanted--- but not very much!"
- It's also a time when children can become over-demanding.
  - One little boy kept going on to his parents about a watch for Christmas, and eventually they got fed up with it and said, "Look, if you mention the watch again, you're not going to get a watch, you're not going to get anything for Christmas.
  - At a meal, he said, "Can I pray?"
  - They said, "Well, if you want to pray, that's fine."
  - "Before I pray, I'd like to read a verse." "Okay." He said, "I'd like to read Mark 13, verse 37. 'I told you once, and I tell you again, watch.'"

So, Christmas is a time when some go over the top.

But while some go over the top, others go under.

- For many, Christmas is one of the worst time of the year.
- It's one of the loneliest time of the year.
- The suicide rate goes way up
- More people die of "natural causes."
- Marriages and relationships fall apart
- People have breakdowns

- There's a lot of family feuds that cause stress level to sky rocket.

With all the magic, the stress, and the hype of Christmas, are we missing the point?

- It's amazing how Santa Claus has taken over Christmas.
- Grace and I have discussed what to tell our kids about Santa Claus. I remember when Kaetlyn was 2 or 3, she actually thought Christmas was Santa's birthday. She had forgotten what she learned the year before and was going by all the hype on the TV.

What is at the heart of Christmas?

- In the words of C.S. Lewis, the author of the *Chronicle of Narnia*: at Christmas, we celebrate the “central event in history of the earth—the very thing the whole story has been about.”
- It's the supernatural event that shatters any other event in history in its importance.
- What is the true meaning of Christmas?
- I want to read John 1 to see what it tells us about the meaning of Christmas.

Read John 1:1-18

I would like to focus on three things from this passage: (1) the darkness—the human condition; (2) the light—the incarnation; (3) and the gospel—truth and grace.

II. First, this passage tells us the fundamental problem of human condition: we are in darkness.

Verse 5 says “The light shines in darkness but darkness has not understood it.”

This imagery of darkness is all over the Bible. The image of darkness is spoken about over 200 times in the Bible. In a great passage prophesying about the coming Messiah, in Isaiah 9:2, right before the famous passage “For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, the government will be on his shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,” the passage says:

<sup>2</sup>The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of the shadow of death  
a light has dawned.

To understand the true meaning of Christmas, we have to understand the fundamental problem of human condition. **We walk in darkness.** Apart from God...apart from His presence and goodness...we walk in darkness. It's a picture of life apart from God. We are confused. We don't know where we are going. We are lost. We can't save ourselves.

There are two ways to walk in darkness. One way is to live a bad life. Get in trouble and messed up. Like the younger brother in the story of the prodigal son.

The other way is to live a good life and try to get out of darkness on your own. You try to live a morally upright life and save yourself. [more]

Do you remember a few years ago when Michael Jackson put together a collaborative song called "We are the World?" The idea is that if we all come together we can solve the world's problem. We can do it. We are the world. I remember thinking Bob Dylan looks really awkward singing that song. In fact, he was. He said afterwards at a press conference that he was uncomfortable with the song because "we can't save ourselves."

We all know about the darkness of human life.

Intellectually, human experience is extremely dark. Bertram Russel, a famous atheist, tells us to get real about our reality. We are just a chance in the universe. There is no purpose or meaning to our lives. If you don't believe in God, that is the logical conclusion.

- One option is to kill yourself because life has no meaning what so ever.
- The other option is to enjoy yourself as much as possible. Do what makes you feel good. Eat, drink and be merry. But, when the emptiness of all those things comes to you, just repress it. Just ignore it. Think positively. Forget everything is just an illusion. Just live in the Matrix. Don't deal with the reality. Just cover up reality.
- Neither is a very good choice.

Human life is full of darkness. The more you think about it, the darker it gets. Let's face the reality of its darkness. The message is Christmas is that unless God has sent his son into the world, there is no light in the world.

When I was in law school, I was in a relationship with a girl that was full of jealousy and envy. I didn't really like her that much and we didn't even get along that well, but after we broke up, she started to go out with my roommate. That really got to me. I was totally confused, jealous. I tried to get her back. At one time, things got really out of hand, and there was a really bad argument, and there were some verbal insults, and we ended up in a physical struggle and I ended up hitting her. Not hard, but I actually hit a girl. I had never done that before and I have never done that since. But, I remember feeling the reality of darkness inside of me. I remember coming to realize that I am not a nice guy. I have line. If a situation crosses that line, I can get violent.

I walk in darkness. I am filled with false ambitions. I am sometimes envious. I am sometimes deceitful. I try to make myself look more mature in the Lord than I am. I am a hypocrite. I struggle with some bad thought patterns. I like to pretend like I am smarter than other people. If you mess around with my rights, if you are a Sprint PCS agent, I would never tell you that I am a pastor. I don't want to put a fish sticker on my bumper because I don't want people to curse God for the way I drive. I am addicted to selfishness and often ignore other people in my life because I am too busy taking care of my stuff. Sometimes, I come home and tell Grace all about what happened during my day, but forget to ask her how her day went.

I compare myself to others and often think that I am better than them. And I catch that thought and wonder where that came from: there is darkness inside of me.

I know what the right things to do are, but I have a hard time doing them. I try and try but I keep falling and falling. Then, I feel guilty. And I don't even want to try.

When it is dark, it feels scary. It feels empty. It feels depressing.

There is darkness in the world. You don't even have to read the headlines. There is a lot of violence. There is child slavery. There is sex trafficking. There is rampant abuse of women. There are drugs and dealers. There are killings everywhere. There are racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia everywhere. There is so much hate in the

world. I was shocked this week as I read about the news of a woman named Eun Kang (she had the same name as Grace's maiden name), who was raped and stabbed this week in Venice.

We kind of get used to it. If our own lives are going well, we get used to living with darkness. *But God doesn't get used to it.*

Then there's the darkness of people who know that things like that are going on in the world, but they say,

That's somebody else's problem. I really don't want to read about it, and I really don't want to think about it, and I really don't want to do anything about it, and I don't want to give to that. Too bad that there is that darkness out there.

That's just the human condition apart from God.

Maybe you think your life is going pretty well, but I'll tell you a secret. There is darkness in you, and it is called Sin. It's a big deal to God. The ultimately, sin is putting things ahead of God. If we create any idols in our life, we are separating ourselves from God. That's sin. That's darkness.

It's a big deal to God—the darkness on this earth—and it leads to isolation and guilt and loneliness and pain. We get hurt by others and by ourselves.

Then death enters the picture. You have somebody you love and they get sick, and that's scary. You are betrayed by somebody you thought you could count on, and that is dark. We walk in *the valley of the shadow of death* and the fear of darkness. God says, "I know." God sees that. There is a God who knows and cares and says,

### **III. I'm going to do something about that.**

This Christmas, remember God saw the human race—you and me—stumbling around in the dark. We're confused. We're ignorant. We're afraid. We're stained with sin right through. We are.

God sees this. He sees our world, and He sees our souls.

He doesn't send a warning.

He doesn't send a rebuke.

He doesn't send a punishment.

He doesn't send an idea.

He doesn't send a religion.

He sends a person.

He sends his Son.

He sends Light into Darkness.

John 1:1-5:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning.

<sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and that life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

Darkness cannot solve its own problem. We can't solve our own problems. We can't. We are not the solution to the world. Bob Dylan was right, we can't save ourselves. Darkness can't solve its own problem.

The only way the problem of darkness is solved is if light comes in. That is the only hope. And that's what happened. Light has come into the world.

Jesus said (John 8:12): "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

There is so much emphasis on Jesus being the light. I think that's why we have so many lights during Christmas. Candlelights. Advent candlelights. Christmas Tree lights. Hanging Christmas lights. When you see lights this Christmas, think of Jesus as the light into darkness.

Verse 9: "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world."

How was the light coming into the world? By God becoming flesh and dwelling among us. We call this incarnation. God has taken flesh. God has forsaken the glory of heaven and came down here to shine his light upon us.

The passage talks so much about who this Jesus is. He is God in human flesh. He is the glory of one and only God. He is the representation of God. He is the creator of the universe. He is as prophesied, Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace, Mighty God! This God, the Creator, has humbled himself and became a human being, born in a barn, in weakness, with vulnerabilities, killable. He took upon himself our sins and paid the

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<sup>a</sup> Or *darkness, and the darkness has not overcome*

cost of sin on the cross so that we can receive his position as a son of God. He gave himself away to us so that we can find ourselves in God's lap.

Are you struggling in darkness? Is there emptiness in your life? Do you feel a sense of meaninglessness? Are you filled with fear of darkness? Uncertainty?

Christmas means that God cares for us so much that he came down to save us from our darkness!! There is hope. There is joy! There is finally peace! If you have a hard time believing in God's love, just look at Christmas! Just look at the cross! That's how much he loves you!

Verse 12-13 say: "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." He loves you so much that he wants us to live in a relationship with God--actually to commune with God in our daily lives. It's not just any relationship, but it is a relationship with rights as sons and daughters.

It is to gain a new identity as a son or daughter of God. It is to come into his life and enjoy the pleasure of his presence in our lives.

IV. Now, what does the Light of Jesus bring to us? The gospel of Jesus Christ. There is one phrase that repeats itself again and again in this passage:

- In Verse 14: The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, **full of grace and truth.**
- In Verse 16: From the **fullness of his grace** we have receive one blessing after another.
- In Verse 17: For the law was given through Moses; **grace and truth** came through Jesus Christ.

At the center of the coming of Jesus is that he brought both grace and truth.

When we think about the light, it's scary. It shows us all of our faults that we have been hiding. It shows the blemishes. It goes beyond our defense mechanisms. It shows us. [go into the scariness of seeing the truth of the light when there is no grace]

He brought the truth that we are more sinful than we know. We live in darkness. That's the truth. He spoke the truth. That's why some of Jesus words are harsh. But he also brought grace, which literally means a gift, an unearned, undeserved gift. So, it means God loves us unconditionally even if we don't deserve it. He loves us more than we can ever imagine. He brought the twin turbo truth of the gospel: one the truth of our darkness and two the gift of God's love unconditional for us, at the same time.

The law came through Moses, but Jesus brought truth and grace. Sometimes, people reduce Jesus to his ethical teachings, to his dos and don'ts. Jesus didn't come to give us new laws. He didn't come to give us a new moral code. He didn't come to lobby the government to pass stricter laws regarding moral value. He came to show us that we have all failed. We have screwed up. We are all broken and messed up. We are all in darkness **but** God has made a way for us to be healed, reconciled, forgiven, and empowered to live a new life in Christ. There is a way to live in the light.

He was the good news of God's grace. That God loves us so much that he became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory. And we saw that he lived a perfect life and sinless life. Then, he was separated from God on the cross to pay for our sins.

You know what this means?

This is the end of the religion as we know it. It is the Light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ! [See the religion vs. Gospel chart]

You don't have to earn your righteousness. You don't have to earn your self-worth. You don't have to earn your standing. You don't have to be good enough. You don't have to be pretty enough. You don't have to be smart enough, rich enough, nice enough. You just have to come to accept the reality of our darkness and the gift of his forgiveness and acceptance.