

*John 1:1-18*

On Christmas, we give gifts to one another, because we remember and are thankful for God's greatest gift, His Son Jesus Christ. Only in part can we know what it is that God gave us with the gift of Jesus. We give presents to one another to remember Jesus, but nothing can really compare to the gift of Jesus. The world is blind to the gift of Jesus. Even when you believe God's Word, you can only begin to understand the nature of the greatest Christmas gift of all.

Here in the first chapter of John, God speaks to us in such simple words. Bible students who are learning to read Greek begin here in this chapter, because it is one of the easiest to read and translate in all of the New Testament. But even when God uses these very simple words to describe His Son, our minds are too small to contain their full meaning. How wondrous that God can speak so simply, and yet so deeply at the same time! We can barely scratch the surface of what God has shown us about His Son. When we read these words and believe that they are God's own words, we know that God is unveiling deeper truths than we can understand, but yet they are so simple and plain that even a child can believe them. Yes, a child can believe them better than can we, who think we know so much. In Jesus Christ, is everything. Everything that is good. Everything that is pure. Everything that is holy. Everything that is love. Everything that is life. Everything that is wisdom, and Everything that is light.

In Jesus, is God Himself, in all His fulness, in a humble human body, yet He is meek and lowly. In this plain and simple looking child, we find Jesus, without whom we are utterly lost and without hope. Therefore let us become little children, and learn that in the Christ child, we have God's love, life, and light come down to men.

We would not know that God is love, if we did not have Jesus. Without Him, the only thing we could know about God is that He hates us, because we are sinners and He is holy. We could know that the only man whom God loves is the man worthy enough to receive His love. But without Jesus we would never, ever learn that God loves those who are *unworthy* of His love.

Jesus reveals God's grace for us, and unless we know of God's grace, we do not know God rightly. We do not know him in truth. God tells us in our lesson, "The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (v. 17). God puts grace and truth together, so that they are like the two sides of a coin. You cannot have one without the other. It is not only in this place, but all over the Bible that God joins mercy and truth. The Psalms are full of this blessed pairing. In the most beautiful of them, Psalm 85:10 says: "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Mercy and grace are the same thing: God's com-

passion for unworthy sinners. Without the knowledge of His grace, our understanding of God is distorted. Only when we know His grace do we have the truth about God. Only then can we see His heart. Unless you know God's grace, you do not know the truth about Him, and only Jesus brings God's grace and truth to men.

But when the grace of God came to men in Jesus Christ, men did not want it. They turned the gift aside, refusing it. They could not deal with this sort of love, because it asked too much of them. Indeed, it truly asked nothing at all, but was a free gift. If they could have purchased God's grace in some way, earned it for themselves, well, then they would not have turned God's grace away at all. They would gladly have received it. No, God's grace asked too much of them *because* it was freely given, because they could do nothing to earn it, because by definition they were unworthy to receive it. It required them to receive the love of God, not as something they deserved, but as the mercy which they did not deserve. For this same reason, men turn away the grace of God in Jesus Christ every day. They have too much invested in their self worth. As far as they are concerned, the gift of God's grace offers them nothing, because it requires them to be nothing but lowly sinners, and to find all of their worth in Christ Jesus.

Yet His love remains so constant that this same Jesus Whom men despise, went to his death to redeem even those who ultimately deny and reject Him (2 Peter 2:1). And His love indeed must go that far, for only then can we be certain that His grace is sufficient for us. Which of us has not also rejected God's love at this or that time in our lives? If Christ did not die also for those who deny Him, then none of us could be saved either. Therefore we cannot deny that the love of God in this Christ child is for us, because it is for everyone.

There is a gift that every man has in this world, be he a child of God, or a servant of the devil. Every man is given life. This life is a passing thing. It is like a shadow which only lasts so long as the sun is casting its light. Once the sun sets the shadow is no more, for it has merged into the darkness. So is the life of every man in this world. The gift of life which is common to us all, is soon gone.

It was not always so. When the Son of God first spoke and gave life to the world, it was abundant and enduring life, but when Adam sinned, he brought death into the world, and death passed upon all men (Rom. 5:12). Now life does not endure, but death follows life like night follows day.

The Christ Child brings us the gift of new life. It is new not because it is young, but because it is eternal, always young, always energetic. He restores the life in us that the world knew at the creation. He gives us eternal life, that does not fade into the shadow of death. Is there any greater gift that we can receive? Who would turn such a gift away?

But men love death rather than life, and not because they want to die, but because they are blind and stupid, drugged and deceived by their own sinful nature. The corruption of the human heart which took place at the fall brought a kind of insanity upon the human race, where they are literally hell-bent upon their own self-destruction. They prefer to abide in death, rather than have true life, because they believe that the short life they have right now is more real than the life which God offers them in the gift of His Son. Once more this is because to have the true life, they would first have to count their present life as a loss. All they they have and hope to do, God declares is nothing, for in death none of their works on earth will have value. They fear death, because their conscience tells them that they must account for all the evil that they have done. Therefore they cling to this fleeting life with every power they have. Imagine how grieved the heart of our Father in heaven must be to see so many children who refuse the life which Jesus brought into the world.

But men are what they are because they do not understand sin. They deny the true hurt which their deeds have inflicted upon their loving Creator, and they cannot admit that their nature is no different, in truth, than the worst murderer. And yet, this is what they are forced to admit if they would truly receive the life which the Christ Child brings, for the Christ Child brings life in no way other than by giving His own life into death. The Christ Child forces all men to face their true nature, for in His cross of pain and grief and shame we see a reflection of ourselves, of the true nature of our crimes against God. If the remedy to our sin is so severe as this, then how great indeed must the original offense have been? The implications of the death of Jesus are so great, that men prefer the death which awaits them, rather than admit to the death that is within them.

Yet still the Christ Child brings God's life to all men, and by the grace of God, some receive Him. And to all those who receive Him, God grants new life. He makes rebels and outcasts into dear children. They are born again, not by human flesh and blood or human will and action, but entirely by the power of God. The Christ Child is God's gift of Salvation from eternal death, unto eternal life.

When God grants such life, He grants it in a most wondrous way. Since no human will or deed can give a man new life, God Himself must create it. He does so by pouring His light into the darkness of our souls. The Christ Child is the gift of God's light, to men. Isaiah (60:1-3) said: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." And again (9:2), "The people that walked in darkness

have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." To walk in darkness means to be without truth. To be lost in error. That is the condition of all men by birth.

Yet how arrogant men are! We think we know so much, because we have done so much with what we know! Yet, for all our discovery and invention, we still do not know the truth. We do not know God's love. We do not have His life. We have only darkness and death. We dwell in the shadow of death, but the Christ Child brings us light. He brings us the glory of God and offers it to us. He offers to make us glorious.

He is the Word of God, the one in whom all truth in the universe exists. He is the source of this world's light, and He alone can dispell our darkness. If any would be lightened, they must be lightened by Him. He is the true light of God.

Jesus told Nicodemus: "Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Men love darkness more than light, because light uncovers the true nature of their sin and deeds. Therefore the men who love darkness refuse to lay hold on the light of the Christ Child, to take it as their own, to know the truth, and to be set free.

But we have received His light, We have received His life, and We have received His love. We have received of His fulness, the fulness, the glory, the unending majesty, all of this God offers to us in His Son! He wants to fill us with Himself, so that in every way possible, we will be like Him. What a wondrous gift indeed! What a wondrous hope! What a wondrous Child! Amen.