

New Year's Message

A New Day to Begin Life

John 1:1-18

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January 3, 2010

A New Day to Begin Life¹

Scripture

The Advent and Christmas season focus on the coming and birth of Jesus Christ. We read and sing about the baby Jesus, angels, shepherds, infancy stories, and wise men. It is all marvelous stuff, but what does it really mean?

Today's Scripture text for the sermon explains it. John 1:1-18 is one of the most magnificent pieces of literature ever written.

John 1:1-18 is often called "the prologue," and it is. It is an introduction to the entire Gospel of John. But John 1:1-18 is also like an "overture," in the sense that it introduces some key themes and words which John will use over and over in the course of his Gospel. And yet, like many musical overtures, it also stands alone in its own right, and is heard on many different occasions.

Let us read John 1:1-18:

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, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of

¹ The material for this message is from Derl G. Keefer's "A New Day to Begin Life" in *Preaching*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Nov/Dec 2009), 64-65.

the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) ¹⁶ And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known. (John 1:1–18)

Introduction

Do you like sunrises?

Early risers who see the rising of the sun see great beauty as darkness turns to light. Sunrises are glorious reminders that God has given us a new day to begin life. Sunrises speak to us about a new beginning with potential, possibility, and a positive future.

We can never undo the previous day’s actions and happenings. Unlike filming for a scene in a movie, we don’t have the opportunity to have two, three, four, or a dozen “re-takes” in order to get it right. We must move into a new day knowing that yesterdays blunders, mistakes, and sins actually took place.

But a sunrise is a reminder to us that we can begin each new day with optimism. A sunrise reminds us that it is indeed a new day to begin life, a new day to begin again, a new day to begin afresh. A sunrise reminds us that while we have breath God delights to turn darkness into light.

Lesson

The Gospel of John states that God has sent the Word to us in Jesus. In him is the originator of good news about what life can be when we receive it on his terms.

I. The Beginning of Life Is in the Word (1:1-5)

First, the beginning of life is in the Word.

John says in John 1:1-5, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”**

Have you ever tried to give directions to someone who speaks another language? It can be very frustrating for both parties. In an episode of “I Love Lucy,” Lucy tells Ricky she won’t let him talk to their baby until little Ricky is 25 because big Ricky will have the poor kid confused with his mixed-up Spanish and English.

The Apostle John was having a rough time communicating to his readers just who Jesus. He bridges the Greek and Jewish worlds with his concept of **“the Word.”** In essence, John tells them that if they want to see God, then they need to look to Jesus.

Now, John could not have been any clearer than he was in this passage. He is saying, as clearly as he can, that Jesus is God.

If you have ever talked at some length with a Jehovah’s Witness, at some point you will come to this passage. Jehovah’s Witnesses claim that the phrase, **“the Word was God”** (1:1), merely identifies Jesus as *a god* rather than identifying Jesus as **God**, because the Greek word for God, *Theos*, is not preceded by a definite article. However, in Greek grammar, Colwell’s Rule indicates that the translation of “a god” is not required, for lack of an article does not necessarily indicate indefiniteness (“a god”) but rather specifies that a given term (“God”) is the predicate nominative of a definite subject (“the Word”). This means that the context must determine the meaning of *Theos* here, and the context clearly indicates that this “God” that John is talking about (“the Word”) is the one true God who created all things.

Furthermore, if one were to use the Jehovah’s Witness prin-

ciple of saying that when “God” appears without a definite article it should be translated as “a god,” then we should do the same in verses 6, 12, 13, and 18. However, in each of those verses, they correctly translate the passage as “God.”

Clearly, as I mentioned, John is saying that Jesus is God. And John wants us to know that the beginning of life is in the Word.

II. The Beginning of Life Is in Radiant Light (1:4-9)

Second, the beginning of life is in radiant light.

John says in John 1:4-9, **“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.”**

Jesus is the brilliance of the light of God. John’s audience was acquainted with the religion of Zoroastrianism. The followers of this dualistic religion believed there were two opposing powers of the universe, the god of light (Ahriman) and the god of darkness (Ormuzd). The universe was their battle ground in this eternal, cosmic conflict.

John understands that the eternal cosmic conflict is occurring. The Creator God, the Father of mankind has sent his eternal Son into the world to be the light that shines in the darkness.

When darkness dominates our lives, we stumble and fall because we cannot see the truth, understand love, experience hope or openly share with others. But when the light of the Son of God rushes into our sinful lives, we receive Christ, receive his forgiveness, experience his redemption, and our lives are completely transformed! We can walk confidently into any shadow of life because the light will dispel the shadow.

So, the beginning of life is in the Word. And the beginning of life is in radiant light.

III. The Beginning of Life Is in Faith (1:7, 10-18)

And third, the beginning of life is in faith.

John 1:7, 10-18 says, **“He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. . . . He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, ‘This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’) And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

God calls us to respond to the light with faith. We are to believe that Jesus is indeed God, that he was sent by God to save us, and that salvation is found in no one else except in Jesus.

Sadly, the people to whom Jesus came, the Jews, for the most part rejected Jesus. They refused to believe that he was the light. They refused to believe that he was God in human form who came to take away their sin. And because they rejected him, they did not enjoy salvation.

“But,” as John so marvelously declares, **“to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God”** (1:12-13).

William Cowper wrote a number of marvelous hymns. His hymns were not written in a vacuum—his life was haunted by

problems. On one occasion he decided to commit suicide by jumping off a bridge.

When he got to the bridge, it was crowded with people milling around talking and laughing. Dejectedly, he walked home.

He decided to attempt it again—at home this time. Going to the attic, he took a piece of rope and tied it to a beam, put the rope around his neck, climbed onto a chair, then kicked the chair away—only to have the rope break! He failed again.

Again he tried to take his own life. This time he entered his study and took down an old sword hanging on the wall. He held it to his chest and fell on it. One would think this would have killed him; but no, the point nicked his rib and broke off! Again he survived.

Later in the evening he wrote, “I was suddenly overwhelmed by God’s presence and love. I fell on my knees and cried out, ‘Oh Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner. Save my immortal soul.’”

He wrote that he felt a surge of new life and hope as his faith soared to God. He said he was a new person! Cowper’s life—just like our lives—begins in faith in the living God through Christ!

Later, Cowper wrote “God Moves in a Mysterious Way”:

God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform; he plants his foot-steps in the sea and rides upon the storm.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace; behind a frowning providence faith sees a smiling face.²

Come to the light of a new year—and face it with the light of Christ!

Conclusion

May God grant us a new day to begin life in the Word, in radiant light, and in faith. Amen.

² Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1990), 25.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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New Year's Message

PRAAYER:

Our Father, we thank you for 2009, and we look forward with anticipation to 2010. Help us to begin a new day in the Word, in radiant light, and in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Have a Happy New Year! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.