

“Logos, Creator, Life and Light”
Pastor John Bronson

(John 1:1-5)

September 4, 2011

Order of Worship for September 4, 2011, Communion

Pre-service Song

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: (none)

Call to Worship: Psalm 111:1-10 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“All Heaven Declares”

Overhead

“Jesus Saves”

Overhead

“Christ Alone”

Overhead

Offering and Offertory

Sharing in the Lord’s Supper

Preparing our Hearts in Song: “How Deep the Father’s Love”

Overhead

Invitation and Prayer

Dedication and Distribution of the Elements

Response: “Behold, What Manner of Love”

Song # 708

Message:

“Logos, Creator and Light” (John 1:1-5)
by Pastor Bronson

Closing Song:

“All Creatures of our God and King”

Song # 63

Parting Word of Grace

Sunday Evening in the Word
Hebrews 12, Preparing for the Coming Kingdom
5:30 to 7:00
The Henneker Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

September 4, 2011

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

1. **Steve and Carol Lyons in Tanzania:** that they will lean on the Lord and not their own understanding; they will be effective in teaching English at the Teachers’ College; that the Lord will draw many to himself through the Biblical narrations used in the classes.
2. **President Obama:** the Lord will shield his body from disease and his mind from deception; the Spirit will guide him into all truth; the Father will lead him away from personal ambition to true humility as a servant
3. **Women’s Ministries:** the leadership team under Barbara Conley will enjoy unity of mind and spirit; the women’s luncheon will effectively call women together in faith and service; many women will respond to the Zebra studies
4. **Service Personnel of the Week: Butte County Deputy Sheriff John Ryan** (husband of Michelle Ryan): for safety on duty and for rest at home
5. **Young Adult of the Week: Sandra Griffin** (daughter of Larry and Patti Ott): to be able to balance home life and homework, that she will be able to focus on what’s important, and that her finances will improve and not distract her.

The title for today’s message is “Logos, Creator and Light”. You might say, “I think I have read those before.” And indeed you should have read them in the text in what is now the third week [of our study], which is John 1:1-5. We are going to visit these verses again. I was in conversation with a friend of mine who lives up in Oregon. We were talking about preaching and I mentioned that I am on my third sermon [on these five opening verses]. There is so much, there is such profundity, such depth of meaning in these verses that it is difficult to shake free from them! Hopefully we can do that today as we take the opportunity to reflect again on this way that John begins the Gospel.

“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.”

We have already looked at and been introduced to the idea that the opening section, these eighteen verses at the beginning of John’s Gospel, are a prologue, the word that comes before. He gets on into the rest of the meat of what he wants us to look at in the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [later]. Here John’s interest is in giving the credentials of Jesus. The credentials are, if you will, an explanation of why we should listen to or pay attention to Jesus. Most often, and reasonably or understandably, we say that the reason we pay attention to Jesus is that he demonstrated His love for us and laid down for us and he died on the cross for us. That is what we today talked about and celebrated [in the communion], that remarkable fact. Our redemption has been accomplished by Jesus. But that is not how John begins.

We cannot rightly understand or appreciate Jesus’ act of love and its effectiveness in accomplishing our salvation if we do not know who he was and is. That is what John is putting in front of us. It is not easy for us to absorb. The man Jesus, born to Mary, who walked the hills of Galilee in the north and the hills of Judea in the south and all the pathways between, the man who performed these miracles and disciplined men and taught the multitudes for three years: this man, John says, was the Logos. He was the Eternal Word of God. Beyond that, he was the Creator in concert with the Father and the Spirit. He personally has fashioned every individual with whom he spoke, and didn’t speak. Lastly he was both the life and the light of men. This was Jesus.

What, again, about the first of those credentials? The first of the credentials, as John says, is that Jesus was the divine Word. We came at this idea last week by asking why did the Savior have to be divine? I want us to look at that briefly again: why did He have to be divine? Why was it necessary for God to become a mortal man – that is the opposite way of asking the same question – in order to accomplish the redemption of sinners from the condemnation of the law? The first thing that we know is that sinners cannot accomplish their own redemption. The demand of the law is that we die for sin. And if we are dead, we are dead! So if we die for our own sin, we are finished. That is obvious. Satisfying the law’s demand requires a sinless sacrifice. That was symbolized through-out the entire Old Testament with the purity of the lamb, the bull, the cow, the calf. It had to be pure. That purity was a symbol of the sinlessness that needed to be true if we were going to have a sacrifice for a sinner. But there are no sinless people, none. Consequently in order that there would be an adequate sacrifice for sinners, God had to intervene and create a sinless man.

Let’s grant that. That however does not satisfy the problem that we and God face in saving sinners. This should be obvious. What is obvious? Let’s say we find a sinless person. Now, let’s say that this sinless person agrees to voluntarily surrender their life. What is their life worth? One, that’s all. So when God contemplates – we have to think this way. God doesn’t do this. He is God and is incomprehensible to us but we say, “Well, God says, ‘I want to save...’” How many sinners? Lots! It is not enough to find a sinless person. “I cannot just create a sinless person. I have to create a Person whose stature, whose standing, whose worth is infinite.” God Himself becomes the sinless

man. Why? He does it so we can be saved. He does it so that He can pour out a sacrifice that is sufficient not just to cover all the sins of any one of, but of all of us together.

Now let's shift our focus. We are getting the picture here. If we shift our focus from the human to the divine side of this issue, we have another question. It is this: why is God a unity and not a unit? “We don't talk about God like that; what are you trying to say?” If you were a Muslim or a Jew, you would be consistently outraged at Christians. Why? For the Jew and for the Muslim, both, the insistence is that God is one: one, only one. No more; one, without internal division. There is a problem: I mention it last week. If God is only one, and it requires a divine sacrifice to save many, what happens to God? He is dead.

Generally we just ride over this sort of thing, but we shouldn't. Only a divine sinless sacrifice of infinite value can redeem vast numbers of sinners. What we are doing here is we are dealing with understanding something about the mind of God. Something cannot both be and not be in the same way at the same time. (Oh, good heavens; the pastor is losing his mind!) I'm not! How many of you know this song: “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”? Do you like that song? It is a deeply moving song. I would sing it but you would all be moved! It was written by a man named Isaac Watts. Isaac Watts, for many years, taught in the church. He taught young people. He wanted them to become sound, solid believers. He wanted them to understand the salvation we have received. Therefore he wrote a book to help young people. Guess what the title of this book is. The title of the book is “Logic”. “Logic!?” Well yeah, “Logic”. Paul says, to the Ephesians, that under the impact of the Holy Spirit of God, and through the Word of God, we are to have transformed minds. Our minds should be capable of laying hold of the truth and thinking consistently according to what it says. But we are not good at that. But we need to be good at that. You see, it was in no small part the superior ability of Christians to reason and think and address the issues of their day that Christianity supplanted paganism. “I thought it was just the power of the Holy Spirit!” It was. That is correct. It is the power of the Holy Spirit helping your minds to think correctly. Amen.

Of what consequence is it to have the law of non-contradiction? That law is foundational to every moral system and every system of justice. It is part of the reason why Western jurisprudence used to be – what did I just say? That is right, “used to be” – the envy of the world. But we have abandoned this standard, and part of the crumbling of Western civilization is because we have abandoned the clear standards of reason which are rooted in the Word of God. God cannot both be alive and dead at the same time, in the same way. In order for God to be both Judge and sacrifice, in order for God to be both the Father and the Son, there has to be a distinction in God. God's salvation, the means by which He saves us, is not as it is in Islam, the fruit of His power. How many of you know how you are saved if you are Muslim? You can keep all the rules, do everything perfectly: are you saved? Not necessarily, because God in the Islamic religion is defined by power. That is why Islam is the religion of submission. I bow before the Omnipotent One, and if the Omnipotent one has mercy on me, then I have received mercy. If he doesn't, there is nothing I can do. That is not true with the God who has saved us. When I step into the presence of the Divine, all I have to do is say, “O, Jesus shed His blood for me; I am not here on the basis of my righteousness. I am here on the basis of His righteousness. It is His righteousness that covers me, not my own. And the Father will say, “You are my child.” That is why in John's first letter, the fifth chapter the twelfth verse he says, “I write these things that you may know you are saved.” You can know it! Why can you know it; because God doesn't play double tricks on people. When God says it is this way, it is that way. He does not contradict nor does He deny himself. Therefore you and I are saved.

How can God both be alive and dead at the same time? Only because God is the Father and the Son. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”* That should blow your mind. That is the first credential.

The second: John gives this second credential for Jesus – always remember that this whole introductory section hinges on the fourteenth verse: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. . .”* and that of course is Jesus. He says in verse 3, *“All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.”* That is the end of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. There are a number of places in the Scriptures, the New Testament, that highlight that Jesus is a co-creator with the Father. I am going to give you three of those. I Corinthians 8:6, this is what [Paul] says, *“...for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”* Again, in Colossians 1:16, *“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.”* Are you your own? Normally we answer that question, “No, no, I am not my own. I understand what Paul said. Paul said, Jesus died for me and I have been bought by His blood: I am not my own.” But Paul could also have said, “You are not your own because you were made for Christ.” You were made for him. From the womb and indeed from before the foundations of the world you were made for Christ, for He is the creator with the Father. Hebrews 1:2 says, *“...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”* That God is the Creator is one of the fundamental teachings of the Bible and the Christian faith. It has wide implications and is fiercely contested in the world today. [Has] anybody heard about the debate between evolution and creation? Understanding that the universe was created by God rather than being self-created by an almost immeasurably long series of evolutionary changes is a clash of worldviews which alters our perception of everything that is and happens. The Christians says the universe manifests or demonstrates intelligent design of such magnitude and complexity that the human mind has only scratched the very surface of it. The secular evolutionist says the universe is the product of an incalculable series of chance occurrences, including the emergence of something from nothing, which is probably the most chancy thing you can imagine. What John’s Prologue teaches by affirming of the Word or Logos that all things were made through him is not only that universe is created, but that it is created by a fully rational agent and is therefore rationally ordered and structured. That is the meaning of “logos”. We therefore consequently live in a lawful universe.

There are implications to this which run counter to most of the intuitions of our own culture today. I need hardly say that this order and orderliness of creation is both obscured, hidden from our view, and also in some decisive ways distorted. The fourth questions that I ask on the little sheet that I put in your bulletins to help you follow along in my preaching; I ask this question. “In the light of such things as the drought and wild fires in Texas, or such storms as Katrina and Irene, or the horrific earthquakes of Indonesia and Japan with the tsunamis that followed, do you agree or disagree that we live in a lawful universe, and why is the question important?” “Well, I don’t know. Two hundred and fifty thousand people were killed when the earthquake happened in Indonesia. You call this an orderly universe?” Well, do we? Has it ever been the case that your personal witness for the righteousness, goodness and justice of God was compromised by your uncertainties regarding whether or not the world reflects His justice, righteousness and goodness? You know, salvation is often likened in the scriptures to a marriage. When you are married, guess what: you’re stuck! So you should have compassion on my wife, right? Every place she goes. . . So when we are saved, we are married to God, and we are stuck. “Oh no, no you don’t understand. There are lots and lots and lots of people who marry God, but they are not stuck, because they rewrote the Book. They redesigned God!”

If God is God, and He is the Creator, he is the Ruler, is He just? Creation itself has somehow gone awry; it is sick. This is due to sin. Though we understand and we speak of this far less than we do of the salvation of people’s souls, still we should be very clear that the plan of salvation includes the salvation of creation. This is brought home to us in some passages. The one that I think the clearest and somehow the most startling is Romans 8:19-22. This is what Paul writes there:

“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will

be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together. . . .”

Similarly, [in] one of the earliest sermons recorded, found in Acts 3:19-22, Peter says this: *“Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord – that is what we were doing this morning [during communion], by the way – and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.”* Rarely do I prefer a different translation from the English Standard Version, which I am preaching out of, but I came across this in the Moody Bible scholar West’s “The New Testament: An Expanded Translation”, and I thought you might like to hear this. This is the same verses: listen to the way he says it. *“Therefore repent at once, instantly changing your attitude, and perform a right-about-face in order that your sins may be obliterated, in order that there may come epoch making periods of spiritual revival and refreshment from the presence of the Lord, and in order that He may send off on a mission to you Christ Jesus who has been appointed, this appointment being in the interest of your well-being; whom it is a necessity in the nature of the case for heaven indeed to receive until times when all things will be restored to their pristine glory, things regarding which God spoke through the mouth of His holy prophets who lived in bygone times.”* Amen.

The next time you recite that most beloved of verses, John 3:16, recognize that when it says that, *“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world. . . .”* that is exactly what he means: you, me, and every creature that lives, and the whole creation will be restored. Why? Because God never changes His mind: He intended something in the beginning and He will accomplish it in the end. Amen.

Now there are some significant implications for our understanding of the way life works if we really think through what we have just looked at in terms of what is true and real about the world we live in. The first is that the world is not random or by chance. The world is structured according to a rational plan and operates according to laws. Consequently, we know that the world is not only knowable, the foundation of science of which spoke before, it is also extremely unlikely, to put it mildly, that human creativity arises from disorder or chaos any more than the universe itself does. Creativity is the disciplined process of discovering the divinely given reason or orderly or pattern of relationships amongst created things and thereby of the beauty as well as the use of things. We do not create truth; we discover it. I do not know how many of you realize that what I am saying at the moment is in direct opposition to the dominant philosophical presuppositions that govern most of what anyone who goes to college will run into, and I am doing this on purpose. Why? Because I want any young person who is a Christian to survive the maelstrom of false teaching and to have the strength to stand fast on the truth of God’s Word, not in embarrassment, but in the recognition that it is the triumph of reason over unreason, and in that manner there may be hope for us all.

By contrast, a significant and eventually dominant aspect of the Romantic Period – if you don’t know what I am talking about don’t worry about it – in Europe in the eighteenth century was the idea that creativity thrives on disorder and even chaos. Joined to this, and most improbably, the Romantics held to the notion that people are basically good. These are the people who tell you, “Don’t discipline your two year old; let him naturally express himself.” I have a name for those people, but it is not nice, and I am not going to say it right here. Human creativity was to be released by removing the restraints of civil society and tradition. Did you hear what I just said? You and I have drunk deeply of this cup. You and I are very suspicious of and condemning of tradition. We are very much of the mind that somehow or other we are capable of discovering today and creating today the sum total of human wisdom, and therefore we can afford to ignore the sum total of human wisdom for the last three to four thousand years. Do you know what the name is for that? It is called arrogance. It is an arrogance that is rooted in a rebellion against the God who superintends the life of humanity.

Human creativity was to be released by removing the restraints of civil society and tradition. Where have we gotten to now? Naked people running in the streets. Ultimately, of course, this became a rejection of Christianity with its emphasis on truth revealed to us by God. Paul wrote this to the Galatians, and it has to do with freedom and truth. Galatians 4:9, *“But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?”* When Jesus said, *“...you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”* He was not referring to the discovery of the elemental building blocks of the natural order discovered by science, but to the moral and spiritual truths revealed to us by God.

It is true that at any point in time for the creative person, the process leading to new breakthroughs in understanding is likely to require what we might call creative destruction of established patterns of thinking, structures of knowledge and even whole systems of thoughts. This is not however an endorsement of disorder or chaos. Rather what we have is the needed tearing down of a preliminary understanding of reality which has achieved an idolatrous standing. That is what happened with ancient and then with Medieval science and philosophy, and it happened again with Newtonian science. This is a problem with us all. Premature conclusions as to the nature of reality necessarily exclude and contradict portions of reality still to be discovered. Let me read something to you. This is in a “Christianity Today” on-line interview (September 1, 2011) with Mark Noll, a Christian historian. This is what he said.

“My appeal is that following Christ means having an open mind that can be fruitfully informed by what we experience in the world. Scientists do this through the experimental method. When responsible examination of nature takes place, the examiner discovers not just nature, but nature as created by the Son of God and sustained by Providence. From a basic Christ-centered focus, the attitude toward the study of nature requires great openness and willingness to learn. The relevance of Christ for science is to realize that everything that exists in nature comes from Christ, but also that the life of Christ gives us a way of exploring nature that involves openness to what we experience. So [Jesus says], “Come and see.” Noll continues, “Many of the problems that have taken place in the so-called conflict between religion and science come from hasty conclusions. Right back to the Middle Ages, we have a long series of purportedly new discoveries in nature. The response by church leaders has often been, “This can't be possible.” Only a little while later would Christian people say, “Here's how it is possible.”

Neither Martin Luther [do you remember who he was?] nor John Calvin [do you remember who he was?] was at all willing to believe that the earth might move around the sun. [How many of us believe the earth goes around the sun? Well then you all disagree with Martin Luther and John Calvin and you all disagree with the Pope of that time!] But two generations later, all Lutherans, Calvinists, and Catholics agreed that in fact the earth did move around the sun. It would have been ideal for people to respond to the ideas of Copernicus and Galileo by saying, “Well, let's take our time and evaluate this apparent contradiction with Scripture as carefully and as patiently as possible.” What took place instead was an unnecessarily dogmatic reaction.

Intellectual pride leads to rigid ignorance, a pre-mature closing of the mind to new information and knowledge. This is an idolatry of human self-sufficiency. Now I have written down on my paper two words: how do you and I respond to “climate change”? I have read numerous blogs and articles, and I am almost consistently embarrassed by those who claim to be Christians. Climate change, whether it is or isn't a result of human behavior, is a matter of scientific inquiry, not dogmatic yelling. If the Christian community is going to claim to speak for the God of righteousness and truth, it must learn to speak with the grace of the God who saves us. What is the difference between evolution and climate change? Evolution is a theory which runs directly contrary to the entirety of the Biblical revelation. Climate change merely irritates us. I believe that we need to recapture the humility of God, who himself was willing to die for those who needed to be saved.

We will stop here. This is not an easy place to stop because it is when we go on and understand Jesus as the life and the light of men that we come to appreciate fully these credentials. I want to quickly lay out four applications.

1. The first application is that we live in a God-saturated world. More than that, it is Christ saturated. We are right to look for the evidence of His wisdom, His goodness, His delight in the endless diversity, astounding complexity and breathtaking beauty of the world. Psalm 19 says the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament displays His handiwork. You and I should look for God in every evidence around us.
2. Secondly, all truth rightly understood will lead the mind to God, not necessarily willingly.
3. Thirdly, no system of science or philosophical thought or aesthetic or so on should ever hold us captive to its conclusions. In this as in all other things of the world, we need to hold them lightly. In so far as they support and deepen our knowledge and appreciation of Christ we should be thankful. But they should never supplant the centrality of our love and faith in Christ.
4. The last of the applications: nothing else, no other study should ever come before or be more precious to us than the study of God’s word. Therefore in conclusion, my beloved, I commend to you the Word of God and His grace.

Please stand with me. I have run over again, and so we won’t sing the last song! Now may the grace of God that never fails of its purpose find its purposes fulfilled with joy in your hearts. May you with gladness embrace all that he has designed for us and given to us and may you speak in the accent of His grace and mercy of all His goodness. Go in peace. Amen.

1. What is the difference between knowing how someone benefits you and knowing them? Does this apply to God as well?
2. Jesus was more than a sinless man, he was the Son of God who became a man and lived a sinless life. Is this important to know?
3. Why is the law of non-contradiction important for understanding the nature of God and for how we live our lives?
4. In light of such things as the drought and wildfires in Texas or such storms as Katrina and Irene, or the horrific earthquakes of Indonesia and Japan with the tsunamis that followed, do you agree or disagree that we live in a lawful universe, and why is the question important?
5. What is the relationship or “balance” between what we learn from studying what others (including God) have said and what we learn from personal experience?
6. Are there things in your life that you thought you knew and have had to “unlearn”?
7. Does faith in Christ and the Bible become more open minded or less so as it becomes more “serious” in a person’s life?
8. What is good and what is bad about being open minded?