

Sunday, February 18, 2007 Notes:

Order of events:

1. Opening prayer.
2. Praise God with song.
3. Praise God with corporate prayer.
4. Praise God with study of His Word.
5. Close with blessing and reminder of the Gospel.

Three quotes (I love quotes... "A word is worth a thousand pictures." E. Abbey):

"I have no special gift – I am only passionately curious." Albert Einstein
"Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary." St. Francis of Assisi
"Of what value is learning that does not turn to love?" St. Anthony of Padua

Read John 1:1-13

This week we transition from Jesus the eternal one, existing before all, creator of all, to Jesus among us and His purpose. Here we are in John's prologue reading his description of the indescribable: how the infinite God took on a life among us. We left off at verse 4; let us transition from there:

The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. (John 1:4 NLT)

And His (Jesus') life brought Light (hope, revelation, understanding) to men. Jesus, God with us, was and is the source of true understanding of reality – the basis of the knowledge of the truth.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome [katalambano] it. (John 1:5)

Here we see that there is light and dark, understanding and not, belief and unbelief, good and evil. And the two do not mix. Jesus, the way the truth and the life came to this dark, confused world. We human beings live in darkness – we *are* the darkness. The "Dark Ages" do continue on.

"In contrast, we human beings are the darkness. The world, the race of mankind, is in darkness. We find that very hard to understand. We are proud of our achievements. We point to our impressive technology, our amazing and brilliant achievements in the realms of communication and of travel, and when we think of people who live in darkness, we think of the savages who live in jungles, not civilized people like ourselves who live in the full light of human knowledge. ... Yet, despite these impressive achievements, as we think about life and the struggle to find solutions to the problems that afflict us from generation to generation, we have to admit that these words are true. We do not know the answers. We are like children lost in a dark wood, feeling around, hoping to recognize something. ... We are like men in a dark room, bumping into furniture, not knowing what we are running into; we grope around, feeling things to see if we can understand where we are." [2] Acts 17:27 says, "...that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him..." Any doubt that we live in darkness? The human race is so lost.

"... and the darkness has not overcome it." Let us examine the Greek wording here to help make sense out of the differing translations. *Katalambano* – some translations say "overcome," some say "comprehend" or "understand." The word, as we discussed, means to grasp, possess, apprehend, lay hold of. One can lay hold of something in a hostile way, or to understand it, or to possess it. We might say in today's vernacular, "the darkness didn't get it." It alludes to all three, but based on the context, we would say "possess" or "receive" or "understand" the Light. The darkness could not possess the light.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. (John 1:6)

So God graciously sent John the Baptist to help us understand who and what the Light was. Two obvious things we see in this verse, one, his name was John, which means “God is gracious,” and two, John was sent by God. I refer you to a tremendous account of John the Baptist and his mission in Luke 1:59-80:

(Luke 1:59-80 NIV) On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, {60} but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.” {61} They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.” {62} Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. {63} He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” {64} Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. {65} The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. {66} Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him. {67} His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: {68} “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. {69} He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David {70} (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), {71} salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us-- {72} to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, {73} the oath he swore to our father Abraham: {74} to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear {75} in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. {76} And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, {77} to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, {78} because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven {79} to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” {80} And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.

And John echoes that mission in verses 7 and 8.

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. (John 1:7,8)

John the Baptist came to bear witness or testify concerning Jesus; to tell about the amazing One who was coming. Nothing more fully shows the darkness of men’s minds, than that when the Light had appeared there needed to be a witness to call attention to it. John came to explain, to dumb down if you will, Jesus to us. Someone to “step down” the truth and to make it less of a shock for the darkness.

John the Baptist came to identify Jesus, the Light, and tell men who He was because Jesus did not burst on the scene like a politician. In fact, the Baptist himself would not even have recognized Jesus except that God the Father “elbowed” him right after Jesus was baptized.

I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ {34} And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:33,34)

In other places, the Bible tells us that John the Baptist came to “prepare the way of the Lord,” to “make straight His paths.” John was a witness. John the Apostle uses the words “witness” and “testify” extensively throughout his writings, more so than any other writer. And he particularly attaches these terms to John the Baptist. John the Baptist was a witness sent by God. Jesus Himself was a witness (John 8:13-18 et al). God the Father is a witness. The Apostles were called to be witnesses even after all Jesus had done (Acts 1:8). Nature is a witness. Being a witness is a primary activity for the Kingdom of God; and, we are *all* to be witnesses. What exactly did the Baptist do as a witness?

“...but was sent that he might testify about the light. (HNV)” “Testify.” Open your mouth and tell what happened, what you saw, and what you know. Based on what we see throughout scripture, the Baptist appears to have been a veritable blabbermouth about Jesus; he could not keep quiet about Him. (John 1:15, 19, 20, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32-34; 10:41; 5:33; Acts 19:4; Luke 3:3-20 is a good description)

In fact, in Luke 3:20, we see that his testimony even got him in trouble. That’s what a witness does, they tell others about Jesus, about their relationship, every aspect from their personal point of view. It’s always to be lurking around our conversation somewhere.

John gave the people “knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.” But with all that “preaching” from John also came the application: “What should we do?” his listeners would ask. Their hearts were “cut” and awaiting the treatment (Acts 2:37). All of this testimony is so that it would be possible for them to believe (“that all might believe through him.”) when the true Light arrived. Believe very simply means to accept/grasp/understand and respond. John opened their eyes to their need and then let them know that salvation was on His way. We will see a thread beginning to take shape with these thoughts soon.

And John very purposefully made it evident that he was not the Light, Messiah, but only the messenger (John 3:27-30). A witness of Messiah makes clear who the light is and encourages belief in Him.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. (John 1:9)

Jesus is referred to as the truth, the true vine, the true light, true food, true drink: Jesus is the real deal, the genuine article, the real McCoy! Referring back to verse 4, “and the life was the Light of men,” His life brought true Light – true hope, true understanding, true revelation. And He was about to be revealed – He’s coming. Christ was the true Light; that great Light which deserves to be called so. By his Spirit and grace he enlightens all that are enlightened unto salvation; and those that are not enlightened by him, perish in darkness. He makes clear the meaning and destiny of human existence.

It’s interesting to note, that the Bible makes reference to a Light that enlightens every man or everyone. Rom 1:19-20 says that we are without excuse because of the testimony of “the things that have been made” (nature is a witness too!). The Creator of that light, of all creation, came and dwelt among us as the true Light.

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. (John 1:10,11)

The basic flow of these sentences is God/Jesus à world (His creation) à Israel (land, home, place) à Jews (His people, relatives) à He was not known. These two little sentences are John the Apostle’s version of the Christmas story: boom, no beating around the bush. The Creator of the entire universe was here and no one (perhaps Mary and a few others) even knew it! No one recognized Him. This strange darkness of un-recognition and unbelief is still true and here today. “Jesus came to the place where God indelibly wrote His name, and they received Him not. The land promised to Abraham, the Temple dedicated to His Father, His own chosen people, whom He personally taught and instructed for centuries, especially about Messiah, and they did not know Him.” [2] Would we know Him? So, we are confronted right away in John’s gospel with the darkness of the world, the blindness of men – both Jew and Gentile alike – that cannot see the Creator when he demonstrates his power right in their midst, and cannot see Messiah when he fulfills all the prophecies of the Old Testament. Let’s read the prescient words of Isaiah:

(Isa 53:1-2 NIV) Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? {2} He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

Or maybe Zechariah...

(Zech 13:6 KJV) And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.

“... receive Him.” So, the darkness did not, and could not, lay hold of or grasp or possess the true Light. John came that all might believe. Now, we see that Jesus was not received by His own. Lay hold, believe, receive. Seems to indicate that we hear and understand the truth, then appropriate it (accept it as our truth, believe it, trust it), and respond or act on the reality presented to us. Is there a pattern here? Possibly what is called *ordo salutis*, “the order of salvation”? The generally accepted *ordo salutis* in reformed teaching is this:

**election à predestination à gospel call à inward call à regeneration à
conversion (faith & repentance) à justification à sanctification à glorification.**

Some teach that several of the steps happen essentially simultaneously. Also, there is some high minded discussion about where Creation and the Fall fit into this order of events. Nevertheless, God opens our spiritual eyes (regeneration) and we see ourselves as we truly are, which leads *infallibly* to belief – faith and repentance – which results in our justification or receiving Christ: His righteousness is credited to us. Was this text planned?

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, (John 1:12)

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: (John 1:12 KJV)

Clearly, if we believe and receive Christ, we have the right, authority, power to become God’s children. And that right and privilege does not come from anything or anyone except God. “...gave he power”: privilege, honor, dignity, or right. He who is made a child of God enjoys the greatest privilege which the Divine Being can confer this side of eternity. Those who accept Jesus Christ, as he is offered to them in the Gospel, have, through his blood, a right to this son-ship; for by that sacrifice this blessing was purchased; and the *fullest promises of God confirm* it to all who believe. [6]

And those who are engrafted in the heavenly family have the highest honor and dignity to which it is possible for a human soul to arrive. What an astonishing thought is this! The sinner, who was an heir to all God’s curses, has, through the sacrifice of Jesus, a claim on the mercy of the Most High, and a right to be saved! Even Justice itself, on the ground of its holy and eternal nature, gives salvation to the vilest who take refuge in this atonement; for Justice has nothing to grant, or Heaven to give, which the blood of the Son of God has not merited. [6]

who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:13)

Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:13 KJV)

Our “blood” or distinguished human ancestry or family does not get us into God’s kingdom. I’m quite proud of my Scotch-Irish heritage, but it does me no good here. Christian parents do not earn us a pass. Having Abraham and Sarah for our parents does not entitle us to the blessings of the new covenant.

Our “will” does not earn us a spot in heaven. We cannot make ourselves or talk ourselves or study ourselves into being God’s children. Our works do not get us there. No will of the flesh – anything that the corrupt heart of man could purpose – will make the grade.

Third, it is not the “will of man.” It is not the efforts of others that make us Christians. No one can make you a Christian: no Bishop, no Priest, no Pope, no Preacher, no friend, no friend of your cousin’s, no relation, no one. You cannot come to God by ceremony, baptism, going forward, going backward, standing up, sitting down, signing a card, raising your hand, kneeling at an altar, or any other machination of man.

It – our adoption, our salvation – is done by God Himself alone. It is truly a new birth. And this new birth must come through the will of God – through his own unlimited power and boundless mercy, prescribing salvation by Christ Jesus alone. Read the text again, slightly modified.

(John 1:12-13 NIV) Yet to all who received him, ... he gave the right to become children of God ..., born of God. (abbreviated)

Real children of God, born of Him! *Pinocchio* raised to the billionth power. “What is impossible with men is possible with God.” (Luke 18:27)

One last thought: what does that little phrase “he *gave the right* to become children of God” or “*gave he power* to become sons of God” mean? Are we not instantly transformed into God’s children? Or is this something yet to come, a future event? Can we choose not to exercise that right, not RSVP? I think this subtle point is really neat. From the nearly inspired Westminster Confession of Faith we read:

Section IX:IV When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, He frees him from his natural bondage under sin;[Col 1:13] and, by His grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good;[Phill 2:13] yet so, as that by reason of his remaining corruption, he does not perfectly, or only, will that which is good, but does also will that which is evil.[Gal 5:17]

Section X:I All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, *effectually to call*, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ: enlightening their minds, spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; *renewing their wills*, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good; and *effectually drawing* them to Jesus Christ; *yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace*.[Rom 6:16-18; John 6:37]

God the Holy Spirit applies regeneration, (opening our spiritual eyes and ears and renewing our affections), such that it *infallibly* results in faith. This “right” and “power” to receive is an “offer we cannot refuse.” It is a \$10 billion winning lottery ticket offered to you freely. Can you say no? Theoretically... maybe...

So, here we are. This time and place right now is a divine appointment. God has put us here for a purpose. If you have surrendered the keys to the kingdom of your heart to Christ, take these verses and rejoice that you are a *real* child of God: born of God. Apply that knowledge and let the mercy and message of Christ flow through you, as He did, to this dark world around us.

If you have never understood, never believed, never received Christ as your Savior, today can be the day of your salvation. You were made by God for God. He loves you intensely and is calling you to come to Him. If you are one of His, He will continue His pursuit – His call is effective, He is relentless. John wrote this gospel to help you believe. This church is here to help you believe. My fellow believers and I are here to help you believe. Can we help you? The key to Heaven, to eternal life, is faith. Not head knowledge or a feeling that everything will turn out okay, it is a transfer of trust receiving Christ as Savior. If you have never truly trusted and received Christ, if you would like, please come and see me or any of the Elders or Deacons and talk to us about it. We would love to help you take that walk of faith right now, today. (<http://www.azwalker.com/gospel.htm>)

References:

1. Halley, Henry H., *Pocket Bible Handbook*, 1951
2. Stedman, Ray C., *Hello Darkness*, 1983
3. Guideposts, *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1986
4. Zondervan, *The NIV Study Bible*, 1985
5. <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/topic/ordosalutis.html>
6. <http://godsvision.com/>

Biblical References:

1. *Listed within the text. References are English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

Questions:

1. What was John's baptism and what did it mean? And why was Jesus baptized?

2. What is *ordo salutis*?

Some Answers to the questions:

1. John's baptism was with water and a baptism of repentance. Jesus baptized with the Holy Spirit. "Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our in-grafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's." Baptism with water of John used as a way to identify with something: a sign of sincerity and earnestness.

When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John asked the same question. Why should he, a sinful man, baptize the Messiah? He tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized saying, "I need to be baptized by You and You are coming to me?" (Matthew 3:14). The baptisms that John performed symbolized repentance, and he saw this as inappropriate for the One he knew to be the spotless Lamb of God. Jesus replied that it should be done because "it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Christ was here identifying Himself with sinners. He will ultimately bear their sins; His perfect righteousness will be imputed to them (2 Corinthians 5:21). Therefore, this act of baptism was a necessary part of the righteousness He secured for sinners. His was a perfect righteousness in that He fulfilled all the requirements of the Law which we, for whose sin He would exchange His righteousness, are not capable of fulfilling. He is our perfect substitute.

This baptism was a very public one and was recorded for all generations to know about and understand, and it is important for several reasons. First, it pictures His death and resurrection. Second, it symbolizes the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Third, it marks His first public identification with those whose sins He would bear. Fourth, the event was a public affirmation of His Messiahship by the testimony that came directly from heaven (Matthew 3:17).

Water baptism is used as a way to identify. In Jesus' day, when a Gentile would convert to Judaism, he would have to be publicly baptized to identify him as a convert. Obviously, Jesus was not converting to anything. Jesus' baptism was an identification of Jesus with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus was baptized to publicly announce Himself as God's Son, and to pronounce the beginning of His ministry with the Holy Spirit's power. Jesus did not "need" the Holy Spirit. However, to set an example for us, Jesus emptied Himself (Philippians 2:7) and relied upon the Holy Spirit's power. Jesus' baptism and reliance upon the Holy Spirit is an example that we are to follow in our own lives.

2. <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/topic/ordosalutis.html>

Latin, "the order of salvation." The *ordo salutis* is the theological doctrine that deals with the logical sequencing of the benefits of Salvation worked by Christ which are applied to us by the Spirit. This first thing to remember is that we must never separate the benefits (regeneration, justification, sanctification) from the Benefactor (Jesus Christ). The entire process (election, redemption, regeneration, etc.) is the work of God in Christ and is by grace alone. Election is the superstructure of our *ordo salutis*, but not itself the application of redemption. Regeneration, the work of the Holy Spirit which brings us into a living union with Christ, has a causal priority over the other aspects of the process of salvation. God opens our eyes, we see. God circumcises/ unplugs our ears, we hear. Jesus calls a dead and buried Lazarus out of the grave, he comes; In the same way, the Holy Spirit applies regeneration, (opening our spiritual eyes and renewing our affections), infallibly resulting in faith. All the benefits of redemption such as conversion (faith & repentance), justification, sanctification and perseverance presuppose the existence of spiritual life. The work of applying God's grace is a unitary process given to the elect simultaneously. This is instantaneous, but there is definitely a causal order (regeneration giving rise to all the rest). Though these benefits cannot be separated, it is helpful to distinguish them. Therefore, instead of imposing a chronological order we should view these as a unitary work of God to bring us into union with Christ. We must always keep in mind that the orders expressed in the following articles occur together or happen simultaneously like the turning on of a light switch or a faucet. But God turns on the light/faucet, so to speak. All aspects of the work of God continue together throughout the life of a Christian.