



Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

CHRISTMAS DAY SERMON

JOHN 1:1-14

DECEMBER 25, 2022

“A CHRISTMAS CREATION STORY”

In the ancient near east – basically the Mediterranean rim of North Africa, Palestine and the southern regions of Asia and Europe, two very distinct world views existed. On one hand the Jewish people did just about everything they did because of something called “Torah”, or “*the Law of Moses*” which meant instruction or enlightenment. The Jewish people believed Torah came to them exclusively from God through Moses. On the other hand were Greeks who exported their culture over most of that region and while they too had gods, their thinking was shaped by philosophers who taught that a man could become enlightened – a better man, a happier man, through wisdom and knowledge.

To both groups however, John 1:1-14 would have gained a fair hearing but for one tiny little phrase right at the very end. I’ll get to that in a minute. Both Jews and Greeks would have nodded in agreement like bobble head dolls when John talked about light and life coming from God. Both believed God was the source of wisdom, and that to train one’s mind according to “the word” – conveyed in our lesson from John by the Greek term “logos” was the way one held evil at arm’s length and walked into the light of truth, beauty and goodness.

They even believed that if you walked in the light of “logos” your eternal destiny was to live forever in fulfilled happiness rather than languishing in the shadow world of ignorance, doubt, death and hell. They both believed one way or another that one’s deeds followed them into the afterlife, or rather led them into whatever afterlife they would experience. “Logos” was thought of as the creative and imaginative word of God - it was eternal, uncreated, “from the beginning.”

Is there a shred of John 1:1-13 that contradicts that thinking – including the part about a special messenger – in this case the Baptist named John who “*was not the light but came to bear witness to it*” – like Moses...or Plato perhaps? Not really. So, what makes John 1:1-14 a uniquely “Christian” Christmas lesson? It is that very last phrase in verse 14 – the one where John blows the minds of both Jews and Greeks by saying “*the word became flesh and lived among us.*” That was the dealbreaker. For John to suggest that grace, truth, life, light and enlightenment did not come through instruction in the law of Moses or training in the philosophies of Plato or Aristotle was where the party ended for these folks.

John becomes a uniquely Christian story precisely at this point not because Christians don’t think God is wise, or good – we most certainly do - but because we believe God took on the foolish and sinful - became

like us, fragile like us, tempted like us, subject to pain and enticed by pleasure like us, and yet without instruction of any sort did so without sin. We believe “the word became flesh and dwelt among us.” We believe “enlightenment” comes through faith – we don’t follow a written code or a philosophical path in order to become better people, we trust in the sinless Son of God and so become children of God.

We become children not because of ancestry, or personal decision or disciplining our bodies and wills – we are “made” children because we believe as Philippians 2:5 says, “*Jesus was in the very form of God*” or Colossians 1:15-16 which says “*he is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created through him and for him.*” What John promises to those who believe this extraordinary – we are made descendants of Jesus – heirs with Jesus of eternal life.

But John also throws in a note of caution – about our natures. He says, “*though the world was made through him, the world did not know him...he came to his own and his own people did not receive him.*” This too would have been understood by Greeks and Jews of the time. Greek philosophers believed humans were generally unaware of the divine, as inhabitants of a dark cave know nothing of the light outside. Jews believed you could only know God through his law – people who lived in accordance with it knew the Lord – those who didn’t “*walked in darkness.*”

The “enlightenment” Jesus brings according to John is of an altogether different sort, strange – even unwelcome by us. To be enlightened by Jesus means being exposed by Jesus. It means our character is brought into the light of his holiness. John says not all who encounter that light want to live in it. St. Augustine, the great 5th century teacher of the church, said of John 1:1-14 “*word, light and darkness are familiar to me from the writings of the philosophers, but that the word became flesh and dwelt among us I did not read there. And that it was this incarnate word who gave believers power to become children of God I did not read there.*” Because it was not there - in those writers, in that law, not in any way was something like that there.

But it is “there” in John’s Christmas message. John says enlightenment became human and that believing is seeing. In John chapter 9, Jesus comes upon a man who was blind from birth, he makes some mud, puts it on the man’s eyes and tells him to wash in a nearby pool. Believing what Jesus has spoken to him, he washes and receives his sight. Pressed by others to “explain” how he a sinner, apart from the law of Moses, could have been shown grace from God - the man simply says “*I don’t know. All I know is that I was blind, but now I see.*” Believing is seeing.

A question I hear often as a pastor is “*What is God like*”, and a second is “*how can we know God.*” To the first I usually say something like, “*well, God is the creator of all – including you, and yet, God is also your loving Father.*” How do we know that? I could talk till I’m blue in the face trying to give proof or suggest some method of gaining that knowledge – but it escapes me. I say, ‘you either believe, or you do not’, when Jesus says...“*whoever has seen me has seen my Father.*” I hope on this Christmas Day that is precisely what you see – by believing that God your creator has a Father’s heart. That heart beats in Jesus, and that heart longs for nothing so much as you. Merry Christmas to you all. AMEN