# **LIGHT HAS COME**

"Light of Revelation" John 3:1-21

# THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

#### **Jesus Christ**

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs."

Hebrews 1:1-4





How does light enable sight?

Sight does not work without light. As we age, sight may become more difficult due to a number of factors: glaucoma, cataracts, macular degeneration, retinal issues or simply loss of degrees of vision, often referred to as "low vision." Someone can be declared "legally blind" with limited capacity for sight. Total blindness is diagnosed as the "total loss of light perception." We cannot see if we cannot perceive light.

Working with small print in documents and on computer parts, I have found it increasingly difficult to read text in poorly lighted conditions. Text on motherboards or assembly instructions can no longer be read without assistance. If I do not have a pair of reading glasses nearby, I have found that if I shine a bright light on indistinguishable print, it will often come into focus. More light often means more sight.

What works with our natural eyes is frequently similar in our spiritual perception. We often struggle to understand spiritual truth because of the darkness or evil around us. We can try to "squint spiritually" by trying harder to be more moral or righteous in order to understand what God is trying to communicate to us. Our efforts at spiritual self-perception often fail. Just as our physical eyesight can fail us, so our spiritual sight can be limited if we try to understand truth solely by our own efforts. What is often needed for spiritual perception is more spiritual light. Spiritual light comes ultimately from the Father of Lights (James 1:17), God himself. Jesus, as the "radiance of God's glory" (Heb. 1:3), is the Light who has come into the world to reveal to us the person and character of God. As he shines in this dark world, Jesus invites us to turn from our own darkness and to meet him in his glorious light. We are blind spiritually if we cannot perceive the light that Jesus brings.

Spiritual light is not only a matter of perception. Unfortunately, sometimes we do not want to have the light of God shine upon our darkness. Sometimes we make excuses to avoid the light of God in our lives. We often avoid God's light so we can continue in the darkness that is more comfortable. God's light can be piercing,

leaving nothing uncovered. John writes of this love of darkness and this hatred of light in John 3:19-21. "Why did those who do evil not come to the light? Because all who make a practice of wrongdoing hate the light. John does not hesitate to use the strong term 'hates,' a verb he employs 12 times, almost a third of all its New Testament occurrences. This is accounted for largely because he so often sees the sinful world as hating God or Christ or, as here, what they stand for. The strife between good and evil is no tepid affair, but one that elicits the bitter hatred of the forces of evil. One reason for this is brought out here. To come to the light means to have one's darkness shown for what it is, and to have it rebuked for what it is. No one likes this uncomfortable process, persistent wrongdoers least of all. The fear of salutary reproof keeps them away from the light. There is a moral basis behind much unbelief" (Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 207).

We cannot see spiritually if we move away from God's light. God's light reveals the glories of himself and the horrors of our own contaminations. Light can also serve as a disinfectant. Water, air and food purification systems are now using certain types of UV light to kill microorganisms such as bacteria and viruses. In a similar manner, the light of Christ and his Word can keep us clean from sinful contamination. If we consistently expose ourselves to the God's light, we can experience less failure in temptation and more success in righteousness. The light of God can make us clean from things that defile us. Paul spoke of Christ cleansing his bride, the church, by the "washing with water from the word" (Eph. 5:26). God's light not only helps us see but can also make us clean.

Light is more than decoration. We need God's light to reveal truth. We need God's light to rescue us from darkness. We need God's light to live clean from sin's influence. More light means more sight. More light means less darkness. More light means hope for victory over darkness. Lord, give us more light!

# **EXAMINE GOD'S WORD**

#### Read John 3:1-21

1 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

- 3 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."
- 4 "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"
- 5 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."
  - 9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.
- 10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? 11 Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle the name "Nicodemus" and draw arrows to phrases used to identify him.
- Draw arrows from the word "night" in Jn 3:2 to similar words in Jn 3:19-20.
- Double circle each use of the word "God" in the passage.
- Underline each reference to "birth" or being "born" in the passage.
- Place a box around each mention of the "Spirit."
- Double underline each word used for speech or testimony in Jn. 3:10-12.
- Place brackets around each occurrence of "believe" in Jn. 3:15-18.
- Circle each use of the word "light" in Jn. 3:19-21.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What is one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about \_\_\_\_\_\_."

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Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1.	How do the details mentioned in John 3:1-3 set the stage for Jesus' comments that follow?
2.	Nicodemus was confused (John 3:4) by Jesus' statement about being born again. How did Jesus further explain his meaning in Jn 3:5-8?
3.	According to John 3:10-12, why did Nicodemus not understand what Jesus was stating?
4.	Jesus introduced the word "heaven" into the conversation in John 3:12-13. What did Jesus suggest by mentioning "heaven"?
5.	To what did Jesus allude in John 3:14-15? How does this allusion advance Jesus' claims to Nicodemus?
6.	How does the use of "Son" change from Jn. 3:13-15 to Jn. 3:16-18? What does this reveal about the "Son"?
7.	What is the "light that has come into the world" (John 3:19) and what does this "light" do?
8.	Why do people love darkness rather than light (John 3:19)?
9.	How does the phrase "lives by the truth" (John 3:21) relate to being "born again" (John 3:3, 5)?
10.	How do God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit work in the miracle of being born again?

# **EXPLORE RESOURCES**



## **Commentary On The Text**

After a Passover (Jn. 2:13-22) with some excitement in the Temple, Jesus spent additional time in Jerusalem and "many people saw the signs he was performing" (Jn 2:23). Some believed, yet Jesus did not fully "entrust himself" to the people because he knew what "was in each person" (Jn 2:25). Nicodemus (Jn. 3:1-3) most likely had seen some of the miracles of Jesus and was "in the wings" interested in Jesus, but not yet fully believing.

Nicodemus is described as "'a member of the Jewish ruling council' that is of the Sanhedrin. The use of the expression is doubtless intended to let readers know that Nicodemus stands as the representative of the old religion. We hear of Nicodemus only in this Gospel. He comes before us raising a hesitant (and apparently ineffectual) voice on behalf of Jesus when he is being discussed by the authorities after an abortive attempt to arrest him during the Feast of Tabernacles (7:50-52). He is not recorded as saying anything at the trial of Jesus, but he helped Joseph of Arimathea at the burial (19:39)" (Morris, 186). Nicodemus was Jesus' superior. He likely would have shared some Temple wisdom to temper Jesus' rough Galilean sentiments. Nicodemus did come to Jesus at night, perhaps out of fear of what others might think of him associating with Jesus.

Jesus immediately escalated Nicodemus' compliments into a higher spiritual challenge (Jn. 3:3). Nicodemus conceded that Jesus was a God-endorsed teacher. Jesus pushed beyond platitudes and commanded that the religious ruler experience a new spiritual birth. This command would pose a significant affront to such an esteemed rabbi. According to Jesus, failure to be "born again" would mean exclusion from the "kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:3, 5). No wonder Nicodemus, a ruler from the Sanhedrin, was confused at the startling claims of Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus answered Nicodemus' "born again" objections with two lines of argument. First, Jesus spoke of being "born of the Spirit" (Jn. 3:5-8). This Spirit birth was distinct from natural birth (Jn. 3:6). Jesus used the illustration of "the wind" being an unseen but powerful influence. Those that wished to be part of the kingdom of God would need to experience more than just religious disciplines. The Spirit of God would have to reveal another realm of spiritual life to those who wanted to be part of God's kingdom.

Jesus' second line of argument addressed Nicodemus' inability to fathom the logistics of a spiritual rebirth (Jn. 3:9). Jesus moved from a discussion of the Spirit to details regarding the Son of Man (Jn. 3:10-15). Just as being born of the Spirit was being "born from above" (see note on "born again"), so understanding of "heavenly things" required belief in the "one who came from heaven – the Son of Man" (Jn. 3:12-13). Jesus referenced a story that would have been well known to Nicodemus. In Numbers 21, the people were plagued with venomous snakes. God instructed Moses to lift up a brazen serpent on a pole. All were instructed to look upon

the pole in order to survive snakebite. Those who looked upon the pole lived. Those who did not believe and did not look died. In like manner, those who believed in the Son of Man, Jesus, would too be born again and receive eternal life (Jn. 3:15). In the completion of Jesus' mission, he too would be "lifted up" upon a cross and all who believed in his sacrificial death would be saved from condemnation (Jn. 3:16-18).

Many scholars suggest that Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus ended with verse 15 (hence the closing quotation marks in the NIV at Jn. 3:15). It is suggested that John the Apostle/Evangelist provided continuing commentary on the implications of being "born again" in Jn. 3:16-21. John highlighted the "born again" work of God the Father in Jn. 3:16-18. God's loving sacrifice of the gift of his Son made the new birth possible. The willing participation of the Son in this sacrifice paved the way for those who believe in him to not perish but experience eternal life. Those who do not believe in the Son are condemned already (Jn. 3:18). Some like Nicodemus, who was sympathetic to Jesus but may have not yet believed in Him, risk eternal condemnation, even if they are religious experts.

John's final statement regarding being "born again" is delivered in Jn. 3:19-21. Just as the Spirit is above the natural (Jn. 3:5-6) and heavenly things are from above (Jn. 3:12) and the Son of Man is from above (Jn. 3:13), so the Light has come into the world from an external and higher source (Jn. 3:19). This Light was mentioned earlier in Jn. 1:4-14. Jesus explicitly claimed to be this Light (Jn. 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). The Light that came also revealed something unfortunate: the love people have for darkness (Jn. 3:19). This darkness included evil. Many who encounter the Light of Jesus will reject him because they do not want to separate from their love of darkness. This love of darkness can turn into hate of the Light (Jn. 3:20). But those who genuinely seek truth, will move toward the Light and seek to have all they do visible plainly in the sight of God (Jn. 3:21).

If a God-honoring person like Nicodemus sincerely desired to follow the truth, then he or she would seek the new birth of the Spirit by believing in the Son of God who was lifted up as a sacrifice, as the Light which saves from darkness, and the gift of eternal life to be enjoyed forever in God's kingdom.

Have you been "born of the Spirit"? Have you believed in the Son of God who has been lifted up on the cross as the sacrifice for your sins, the provision of your eternal salvation? Are you trusting in him alone for a life that is eternal in the Kingdom of God? If not, there could be nothing better this Christmas than for you to accept God's love gift of eternal life through placing your faith in Jesus Christ.

If you already have received this astounding gift, consider sharing this Light with someone this Christmas. There may be a "Nicodemus" waiting in the wings, nearer than you think.

# **Word Studies/Notes**

- v. 3 *born again* Can be "again" or "from above." "The phrase 'born from above' (*anōthen*) recalls for the reader the elaborate characterization of God's 'children' as those born 'not of blood lines, nor of fleshly desire, nor a husband's desire,' but 'born of God' (1:13). It is not a matter of physical birth, but of divine rebirth or transformation. The reader can recognize, therefore, that 'from above' means simply 'of God,' or 'from God'" (J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament, 180).
- v. 5 water and Spirit "Suggests that 'water and Spirit' form a unified concept to express the eschatological renewal promised in the Old Testament. The prophets in particular described a coming era when the transforming Spirit of God would be poured out generously on all people (Isa. 32:15-20; Joel 2:28). Sometimes this renewal is described metaphorically as water. Isaiah 44:3: 'For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.' Note how water and Spirit are easily joined as the lifegiving gifts of God. This figurative pair appears again and again in the Old Testament, and no doubt Ezekiel 36:25-27 is the most important eschatological image of all. Here Israel's heart will be transformed: 'I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws'" (Gary M. Burge, John, The NIV Application Commentary, 116).
- v. 13 heaven "Jesus' descent from heaven involved incarnation, his conception by the Spirit in the virgin Mary. Referring to himself as the Son of Man, Jesus identified himself as the heavenly figure of great sovereign authority who came down from heaven, and he was therefore qualified to speak authoritatively of heavenly things. When he said, No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven, he rejected all Jewish speculations about other 'revealers' who were thought to have ascended to heaven (e.g. Abraham, Moses, Enoch and Isaiah) to return with revelations for those on earth" (Colin G. Kruse, John: An Introduction and Commentary, 2nd ed., Vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 119).
- v. 14 *serpent* "Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness (Num 21:8f.) and the salvation of those who looked on it is an image and precursor of what must happen to Jesus (at this point the narrator returns again

- to the perspective of the earthly Jesus). The Son of man must be 'exalted,' crucified, 'that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.' In this way it becomes evident that the presupposition for being born from above is the death of Jesus on the cross. In fact, the risen Lord first gives the Holy Spirit to the disciples, according to John 20:22, and 7:39 expressly says that the Spirit had not been given during Jesus' earthly life because Jesus was not yet glorified. In this reference to Num 21:8f. one sees how the Evangelist has conceived the witness of the OT for Jesus (cf. John 5:39)" (Ernst, Haenchen, Robert Walter Funk, and Ulrich Busse, John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Hermeneia a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, 204).
- v. 16 *Son* "Because John 3:16 is sandwiched between vv. 14–15 and v. 17, the fact that God gave his one and only Son is tied both to the Son's incarnation (v. 17) and to his death (vv. 14–15). That is the immediate result of the love of God for the world: the mission of the Son. His ultimate purpose is the salvation of those in the world who believe in him. Whoever believes in him experiences new birth (3:3, 5), has eternal life (3:15, 16), is saved (3:17); the alternative is to perish (cf. also 10:28), to lose one's life (12:25), to be doomed to destruction (17:12, cognate with 'to perish'). There is no third option" (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, 206).
- v.19 verdict "In terms of the cosmic framework of the divine lawsuit with the world, Jesus' mission is seen as the focal point of the struggle between light and darkness and the whole process of judgment is provoked by Jesus as the light coming into the darkness of the world—the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. If above and below, heaven and earth, provide the spatial co-ordinates for the lawsuit, light and darkness, determinative categories from the prologue (1:4-9), symbolize the moral and spiritual distinction that colors the spatial contrast and characterizes the relationship between the two parties. The coming of the light makes apparent people's ultimate allegiance, whether they love darkness or light, and in doing so puts their whole lives under scrutiny" (Andrew T. Lincoln, The Gospel According to Saint John, Black's New Testament Commentary, 156).
- v. 21 *lives by the truth* "'doing the truth' means just what it did in the Hebrew-speaking world: acting faithfully as one who gives allegiance to God. But the point of Jesus' pronouncement here is that the person who truly acts in faithfulness toward God will eagerly and willingly 'come to the Light [that is, to Jesus and the new community], so that his works will be revealed as works done in the power of God.'... To 'do the truth' is to do what is right by acknowledging to all the world who we are and to whom we belong" (Michaels, 209).

### **CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT**

Be born again by believing on the saving work of Jesus, the Son of God, who died on the cross to give you eternal life and rescue you from the eternal consequences of sin.

Share this Light with others often.

### **CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE**

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



# **3 LIVING QUESTIONS**

The "Living Questions" are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



# **FAMILY TALK**

We're all following something. We follow our calendar and diet plans. Budgets, kids' schedules, and rules top the list. We even follow our dog on the leash when we take little Fluffy on a walk. We know we should first follow Jesus, but how? And how do we teach our kids to follow us following Jesus so that they will do the same as they grow up? In His abundant grace, God gave the wise men a star to follow to seek the King. I've always been a little jealous of the wise men because they had an obvious sign in the sky. Wouldn't life be so much easier if we just had a star marking our way? God's gift to us is even greater than that star, however. We have His Word. His eternal Word never fails and is a lamp guiding our path (Psalm 119:105). In learning to follow Jesus, let's "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" (Matt 6:33). The Children's Ministry team recently finished reading the Bible in a year. I was excited to finish our plan, not so I could be done, but so I could start again. There were so many pieces of God's story that fell into place and a million gentle reminders and nudges of how a follower of Christ should live their life reflecting the character of God. This holiday season, don't get bogged down with your to do list and calendar. Instead, seek God's Word, asking Him to open your eyes so you can see wonderful things in His law (Psalm 119:18). Let your kids see you pursue His Word and teach them to do the same.

### What Does The Bible Say?

Read Matt. 2:1-12 & John 3:1-21

- 1. What alerted the wise men (or magi) that the King of the Jews was born?
- 2. What did Herod want the wise men to do?
- 3. How did the wise men react when they met Jesus?

# What Do You Think?

Make a list of all the things that light does. How is Jesus the Light of the world?

### What Do You Do?

Play flashlight hide-and-seek. The person who is "it" finds people by shining the flashlight on them. Play for several turns. Talk about how people try to hide in darkness but light exposes truth.

# **CORE COMPETENCY:** Jesus Christ

I believe Jesus Christ is fully God/perfectly man and died for my sins.

#### **MEMORY VERSE:** Isaiah 9:6

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

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# **OUR CORE COMPETENCIES**

#### **CENTRAL BELIEFS**

**Authority of the Bible** (2 Timothy 3:16-17) *I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.* 

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)

I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

**Identity in Christ** (John 1:12)

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)

I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

**Salvation by Grace** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



#### **CENTRAL VIRTUES**

Love (1 John 4:10-12)

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

**Peace** (Philippians 4:6-7)

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

**Kindness/Goodness** (1 Thessalonians 5:15) *I choose to do the right things in my relation-ships with others* 

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)

I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)

I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)

I choose to esteem others above myself.



#### **CENTRAL PRACTICES**

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)

I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

**Biblical Community** (Acts 2:44-47)

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)

I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)

I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)

I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

**Generosity** (2 Corinthians 9:6-11) *I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.* 

**Prayer** (Psalm 66:16-20)

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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