

The Light of Glory — An Exposition of the Prologue of John's Gospel

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John's profound simplicity

John's Gospel is a book at the same time utterly simple and deeply profound. It can be read by the humblest believer and the absolute beginner in the faith and be a source of infinite comfort, encouragement and challenge. It is no accident that so often it is to John's Gospel that we turn in time of crisis and need, and our hearts are so wonderfully touched by the words of the Lord Jesus we find there—'I am the resurrection, and the life' (11:25); 'Let not your hearts be troubled' (14:1-3); and, perhaps the best known verse in the Bible, 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life' (John 3:16, AV).

Yet, as Leon Morris comments, 'there are unplumbed depths in the limpid clarity of this writing'.¹ The deeper in we go, the more we see, the more our minds and hearts are opened; but at the same time, the more we see, the more we feel there is always more to see! It has been well said that John's Gospel is a pool in which a child may wade, and an elephant can swim. Certainly when we turn our eyes to the prologue we are struck by a feeling that we are in the realm of the wonderful and the profound.

The prologue has been called the 'foyer' of the Gospel, which draws the reader in, and introduces the major themes which will be expanded throughout the book. I like to think of it as the opening bars of a symphony, in which the main themes of the tune are announced. Then, as the music progresses, we are encouraged to discern the unfolding strands of harmony and counterpoint as these key themes are developed, and to hear these tunes again and again as they appear and reappear in variations, as distant echoes of the leading melody, until at last all is finally caught up and brought together to climax in the crashing chords and sonorous harmonies of the great finale.

John's Gospel is a subtly orchestrated work, with many deep harmonies and, just as with a piece of music, the better we get to know his tune the more

sensitive we become to picking up the harmonies and the richer seams of the message. The more we read John, the more we realise that he means his Gospel to be read and re-read, and the more attuned our ear becomes to what he is saying through subtle hints and asides to the reader throughout the book. We need to approach reading and preaching John with this in mind.

John's purpose

But in turning to John's Gospel we must also keep in mind John's purpose in writing. The key is found in the words at the end of chapter 20, before the epilogue of the Gospel.

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31).

John's purpose is not an academic one. His book is not just a biography. He is not primarily interested in setting down a chronological account of Jesus' life, nor in simply recording some of his sayings and teaching to be studied dispassionately as some may study, say, the philosophy of Aristotle, Plato, or Jean-François Lyotard. No, he is not just recording, but preaching, and preaching with a definite purpose—expecting a verdict, and a commitment to follow Jesus.

Furthermore, the fundamental question he addresses is not so much 'Who is Jesus?' but 'Who is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God?' This is vitally important. It is not an attempt to begin with what is known of the historical Jesus, and try to give him some kind of special place among the Jewish prophets, or religious teachers of the world. It is not an attempt to try to persuade people that this man had some sort of divine qualities, or was in some way one who, among others, could point them to God, or increase their religious awareness. Rather, it is the crucial question of the identity of the one true God. John begins his Gospel with the absolute reality of the eternal Word of God, the eternal Son of God who is the beginning and source of all things, the source of all life and light in the world and in humanity, and the source and the giver of life that is eternal. Page after page of his Gospel bears witness that it was in the flesh and blood of Jesus of Nazareth—and none other—that this eternal reality broke into the world of time and history, so that the glory and grace of the eternal God might be revealed uniquely, perfectly and ultimately for ever.

The fundamental questions John is answering, then, are exactly those ultimate questions that gnaw away at the hearts and minds of all people everywhere, when some crisis or other jolts them out of the superficiality of day to day existence. Most people manage to live lives that pay absolutely no attention whatsoever to the eternal or the spiritual realm; and when such uncomfortable thoughts do on occasion arise to disturb them, they are quickly put away because they are too disturbing to contemplate.

But John in his Gospel majestically declares these ultimate realities. His answer is that the meaning of life, the meaning of the universe, and the way of salvation and eternal life is found in one place only, and in one name only, the name of Jesus Christ, who is the very eternal God incarnate, the Word made flesh.

In the opening bars of his ‘symphony’, then, these great themes are announced, and form the text on which his whole message will be orchestrated in all its pregnant richness and wonder.

1. The absolute eternal reality proclaimed (1-5)

In the first five verses of the prologue, John proclaims the absolute reality of the eternal Word of God. ‘In the beginning’ immediately resonates with Genesis 1, where it was by the Word of God that all things were created—‘And God said...and it was so’. But there is more than this. The word beginning (Gk. *arche*) means also root or origin. John loves to use double meanings, and here he is saying that not only was the Word the temporal beginning of all things, but that he is the cause of all things. He is the explanation of all things. He is the answer to the great ‘Why?’ question.

Is this not a timeless word, which speaks to our day as clearly and as relevantly as to John’s first readers? We live in an increasingly relativistic and pluralistic culture, where the belief that there can be any kind of objective truth—morally, or philosophically, or spiritually, or any other kind—is increasingly denied, and where the only absolute we are allowed is that there are no absolutes. So these first five verses bring the Christian gospel into a head-on collision of world-views with our twenty-first century culture. But this is a collision course which cannot be avoided, and indeed which we as the Christian church must not be afraid to confront and defend as absolutely integral to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The whole message of John’s Gospel is that it is an exclusive gospel and this is, of course, the one religious idea that cannot be tolerated in our post-modern age of tolerance.

Just recently I heard two consecutive pieces on 'The Today Programme'. The first was an expression of outrage at a Christian minister for daring to insist that the praise sung during a marriage service in a Christian church should be specifically Christian in character, and not merely sentimental nationalistic poetry more fitted for 'The Last Night of the Proms'. Immediately following this, "Thought for the Day" focused on the plight of a 'well meaning but deeply misguided' group of Christians being held prisoner by the Taliban in Afghanistan, under threat of the death sentence for seeking to win converts to Christ from among Afghan Muslim men and women. Their 'foolishness' was in failing to see that such efforts were misplaced, that the refugees' problem was not Islam but poverty, and that the cause of Christianity would only be seriously damaged by their failure to concentrate on the 'genuine Christian mission' of feeding and housing the homeless. This was trumpeted up as being surely plain for all to see—(absolutely plain, indeed!). So intolerant, then, is the western pluralist liberal of the exclusive claim of Christ, that he finds himself taking sides with the fundamentalist Taliban militia! Strange alliances indeed 'against The Lord and his Anointed One' (Ps. 2).

Don Carson is surely right, 'One cannot fail to observe the crushing irony: the gospel of relativistic tolerance is perhaps the most "evangelistic" movement in Western Culture at the moment, demanding assent and brooking no rivals'.² (The Gagging of God) And not only in the popular sphere, but increasingly encroaching into the church, pinning its hopes on inter-faith projects, or bibles and liturgies which are 'politically correct' so as never to dare offend the sensibilities of any one group's particular notion of what God and Christianity should be like. Even the church has capitulated to the notion that God is in the dock, feebly pleading for a favourable judgment from post-modern man. Is it not deeply pathetic?

John's opening words ring out the unchangeable and undeniable truth that the beginning and the cause of all is the Logos, the eternal Word of God (v. 1-2). There has been much scholarly debate about the meaning of this word logos, and why John used it. Certainly the terminology was in use among the Greek stoics as meaning the 'eternal principle of reason'. But surely of more significance for John, it also translates the Hebrew for Word (dabar) in the Greek Old Testament (LXX), where it so often indicates the living, powerful creating Word of the Living God. Psalm 33:6 proclaims that by this 'Word of the Lord were the heavens made'. This Word of God is also personified as the Wisdom of God who was 'appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world

began'. (Prov. 8:22). Again and again it is the Word that effects salvation and deliverance for his people when in distress and facing calamity—'He sent forth his Word and healed them, he rescued them from the grave' (Ps. 107:20). So here, this Old Testament personification of the Word of God as the agent of all creation, revelation and salvation makes it an eminently suitable title for John to use to introduce the fullest and ultimate self revelation of God in his one and only son.

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...' (Heb. 1:1-2).

But whatever the background, John goes further and endues the term with a new and ultimate meaning. The Word is not only with God (Gk. lit. towards—and always of a person with a person), He is himself God. In a single verse John refutes so many of the heresies which have sprung up since the beginnings of the church, and continue today in various forms: the Arianism of Jehovah's Witnesses, with an inferior created Christ; or the Unitarians who also deny Christ's divinity, and hence the Trinity; or pluralists like Don Cupitt, for whom Jesus is merely 'the man who, by mirroring God, shows what the world is meant to be'.

John's message is categorical and sublime. The Word is eternal, the Word is himself God, and indeed the Word is the source and the creator of all things that are. In verse 3 the force of the Greek is 'not any one single thing that exists or has ever existed came into being apart from him'. Some take verse 4, 'in him was life', as simply referring to creation—all created life. Calvin sees it as his continuing sustaining providence of all things he has created; others still as referring to spiritual life. But John's subtle and pregnant use of language in the prologue surely allows for all of this to be intended. He is saying that all life and light that ever there has been or shall be emanates from the eternal Word. The Psalmist says, 'For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light' (Ps. 36:9), and John is preparing for the message of his gospel that Jesus is the Life—'I am the way, the truth and the life' (14:6).

However, he is also the true light of men (cf. 8:12, 9:5). Whether they see it or not, and whether they walk in it or not, all the light that men and women have comes from the eternal Word. So when the sneering columnist musters all his literary dexterity to articulate with caustic wit his solid 'belief' in atheism, he owes every scrap of ability and talent and intellect to the very eternal God he is trying to argue out of existence! If only he could see he is sawing off the

branch he sits on. But, for all his endowment, he is stubbornly blind.

This brings us to the masterful and yet enigmatic statement which Carson calls a ‘masterpiece of planned ambiguity’—‘The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not mastered it’³ (v. 5).

In the context here, which resonates Genesis 1, this could certainly refer to creation. By God’s Word, light shone and darkness was unable to overcome it. The notion of Greek dualism understood equal forces of light and darkness as battling throughout the universe, and today our western consciousness remains deeply indebted to such ideas. Just think of films like ‘Star Wars’ and the many other novels and fantasies which view good and evil as battling equals, the hero desperately seeking to tip the scales in favour of right. But no! The light has shone, effortlessly and unequivocally. Darkness is utterly overcome; put in the shade.

However, light and darkness in John’s Gospel have deeper meaning. Darkness is a clear metaphor for evil and opposition to Christ, and light for salvation and acceptance of Christ. So the light of God that has shone out from the beginning of time into the hearts of men, and mankind has perpetually refused to see and understand. The darkness has not understood it.

The whole of the scriptural revelation bears witness to the tragic reality that despite all God’s revelation in creation, in the law and the prophets, despite God’s generous and gracious ‘fountain of light’, men have ‘loved darkness rather than light’ (3:19). They have rejected God’s call, and they do so to this day. Neither has the darkness ever been able to totally overcome or extinguish the light. God has always called out from among the people those who would remain faithful and true witnesses to his name. John the Baptist came for witness, to testify concerning the coming into the world of the Light of Life himself (v. 6-8).

2. The eternal reality appears—the true light shines (9-13)

Having proclaimed the reality of the eternal Word, the source of all life and light, John now focuses on the appearance of that light itself into time and history; the eternal reality appears—the true light shines. Verses 10-13 encapsulate the entire message of John’s Gospel, and are at the heart of the solemn truth he is proclaiming. It is as though the first 12 chapters of John expound the text in verses 10-11, ‘The world did not recognise him...His own

did not receive him’, and the second half of the Gospel expounds verses 12-13, ‘yet to those who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God....Born of God’.

What does he mean by ‘the light that lightens every man’? v. 9.

1. The word ‘lightens’ (Gk. Photizo) can refer to inward illumination. In this case it is possible to take its meaning in two ways -

- a. Calvin takes it as meaning the light that shines on every man alive without exception, the general illumination of all mankind that leaves all without excuse before God. This is of course true, (as emphasised by Paul in Romans 1), and would also point back to verse 4, and the creation theme.
- b. It can mean that it is the sense in which the Word gives light to all who believe without distinction; i.e., to Jew and Gentile alike - which is also true.

2. In the context here, it seems John is not so much speaking of inward illumination, but of outward, objective illumination - ‘to shed light upon’; ‘to light up’; ‘to bring to light’, or to ‘make visible’. This is the primary meaning of the verb, and it is used in this way in Luke 11:36 - ‘Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you’. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 4:5 - ‘Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts...’.

This second quotation in particular is a close parallel, and brings out John’s meaning here very clearly indeed. Throughout John’s Gospel, light is a prominent theme, and it has a great discriminating function. It is a solemn and sobering message. The light which has shone out in the darkness from the beginning is a divisive light. It not only shines forth the glory of God for all to see so that all are without excuse, it also shines upon all men, lighting them up, showing what they are, and making abundantly clear what is deeply hidden in darkness, and the motives of their hearts. It sheds a decisive light on whether they are truly lovers of the light, or lovers of darkness who hate the light.

John bears solemn witness to the fact that when the true light, the ultimate light, the eternal Word invaded the world of darkness and came into the world of men, it showed up that division more acutely and more starkly than ever before. This leads him directly into verses 10-13.

Those who hate the light respond as the world does. They do not recognise him; they do not come to know him (Gk, v.10). The word 'know' is one deep with associations for God's people. Throughout the Old Testament it is used of intimate relationship, close union, love relationship as in marriage. Adam knew his wife, and she conceived (Gen. 4:1). It is used of the special, intimate relationship between the LORD and his covenant people. The tenderest words of forgiveness to an adulterous people promise a restoration whose zenith will be this kind of intimate 'knowing' God again—'I will betroth you to me in faithfulness, and you will know the LORD.' (Hos. 2:20).

Even among his own people, those who should have above all known and loved and cherished him, they refused to 'know' him. It was a willing refusal; they 'received him not'. (Again, in context, the word speaks of taking into intimate relationship—cf. Matt 1:24 where Joseph took Mary unto him as his wife). They refused an intimate relationship with him, because they loved the darkness rather than light. Rather, they will have nothing to do with him, because—and John makes this very clear for us in 3:20—they fear that their deeds will be exposed by 'the light that sheds light on every man'. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

On the other hand, there are those upon whom the light shines, and who receive this revelation, who believe in his name, and who are born of God into the very intimacy of the family of God. These come into the light (3:21), and testify that what has been done has been done through God, not by natural birthright, or by the natural effort of any kind, but born of God (1:13). The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

As we read the pages of John's Gospel, we see before us the evidence of the light repeatedly shining on all, and forcing a distinction of eternal proportions. In chapter 9 after Jesus proclaims, 'I am the light of the world', John contrasts the opening of the blind beggar's eyes with the refusal of the Pharisees to see the light.

Jesus said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind'. Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, 'What? Are we blind too?' Jesus said, 'If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains (John 9:39-41).

As C.K. Barrett puts it, ‘This light shines on every man, whether he sees it or not’.⁴ What John is saying about the distinction that is forced by the light of the presence of Christ, the Living Word, is also true wherever and whenever the Living Word of the gospel is made known. It is true today and every day for every man and woman. It will be true until the end of time. Just think of the effect that a new and living ministry of the Word has when it begins in a church that has not known it before. The reaction is almost palpable! You can see and feel the different reactions—some warming to the light, drawing closer; others bitterly resenting it and refusing to come into the light, furious in their rejection. The light of the gospel is a dividing light.

This is why John wrote his Gospel: that people today ‘may believe, and have life’. It is a message which is held out to all, and all are urged to believe and in believing come into the light, and find eternal life. And there is a pressing urgency in his Gospel, as there must be today and always, a pressing urgency in evangelism and Christian mission.

It is not a question, as an increasing number of so called ‘theologians’ would have us believe, of it being ‘all the same in the end for everybody. Everything will work out alright’. It just will not do to try to maintain that ‘Christ is of course the Redeemer, but there can be redemption apart from Him’. We cannot with any integrity proclaim ‘of course we must take the Bible seriously, but God will never condemn anybody’. Nothing could be further from the truth than the assertion of pluralists like John Hick, that ‘the revelation of God’s love in the human Jesus is one of many mutually supporting pointers to God available to mankind in the great religious traditions of the world’. John’s message is clear and it is unequivocal. In chapter 3 he does indeed proclaim ‘God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned...’. But, unlike many today he did not stop at verse 18a (as he does not stop at 14:6a). Rather, he speaks the grave and unavoidable truth, ‘...but whoever does not believe in him stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son’.

It is stark, and solemn and powerful; but this is not just John’s message, it is the message of the whole of the Bible. In his commentary on 2 Thessalonians, James Denney writes,

If the gospel, as conceived in the New Testament, has any character

at all, it has the character of finality. It is God's last word to men. And the consequences of accepting or rejecting it are final; it opens no prospect beyond the life on the one hand, and the death on the other, which are the results of obedience and disobedience. Obey, and you enter into a light in which there is no darkness at all: disobey, and you pass eventually into a darkness in which there is no light at all. What God says to us in all Scripture from beginning to end is not, Sooner or later? but, Life or death? These are the alternatives before us; they are absolutely separate; they do not run into one another at any time, the most remote....If there is any truth in Scripture at all, this is true—that those who stubbornly refuse to submit to the gospel, and to love and obey Jesus Christ, incur at the Last Advent an infinite and irreparable loss. They pass into a night on which no morning dawns.⁵

Is it not a failure to grasp the awful seriousness and reality of this in so much of the church in our day, alongside a lack of confidence in the gospel of Jesus Christ as the power of God for Salvation that calls men out of darkness and into light—and the only power that can call men out of darkness into light—that has brought about such a decline in mission and in interest in mission, both at home and abroad? Let us be honest. How often have we and our congregations been physically overcome by the momentous eternal implications of what John's words really mean? How differently we would live our lives if it were so, and how different our church synods, assemblies and conventions would be.

It was such a deep and painful understanding of the over-riding importance of these matters of eternity above all else that so gripped the hearts of the apostles that they endured all the world could fling at them if only the message of Christ could be preached to men who were in darkness, and stood condemned already. It was this very same deep conviction which caused men like Robert Moffat to sail for the Southern Cape of Africa in 1816 at the age of twenty-one, and spend his lifetime among the unreached people of Bechuanaland, translating the whole of the bible into Sechuana, though he had only schooling until the age of eleven. The same could be said of Alexander Duff in India, Hudson Taylor in China, of Whitfield and Wesley in England and hundreds besides. But what of today? Even within the church, and the evangelical church at that, it is increasingly becoming 'politically incorrect' to speak about the absolute priority of the issues of eternity. People are far more concerned with the temporal; with Christians

gaining credibility by being involved with the world, and by changing society for the better and so on. All this is important, yes, and no doubt needs to be taken more seriously in many quarters than it has been. But in the light of the solemn message of John, the issues of eternity are not only more important, but infinitely more important, however politically or ‘evangelically’ incorrect that may be.

3. Only opened eyes can see true glory (14-18)

Why does the light of the gospel bring such division? Why is it that all do not see and believe? Ultimately this is indeed a deep mystery. But, perhaps John gets near the heart of it in the final few verses of the prologue. In verses 14-18, He speaks of the surpassing greatness of the Incarnate Word. It is a greatness of supreme paradox. The Everlasting Word who is the cause, the beginning, the sustainer of all, and the source of all life, became flesh. It is so stark it is almost vulgar. What kind of glory can reside in flesh?

The glory of the LORD God was a vast and awesome thing for the believing Israelite. Exodus tells of the elaborate cultus surrounding the tabernacle, and what lengths of ceremony had to be observed to protect the people from the presence of the fearful glory of God’s dwelling. John’s language clearly echoes these things here. ‘Made his dwelling’ in verse 14 (Gk. *skenoō*) could be rendered literally ‘pitched his tent among us’ or ‘tabernacled’ among us; and from the same root for tabernacle (*shakan*) derives the word which came to signify the visible presence of the glory of the LORD—the ‘*shekinah* glory’. So when John says ‘we beheld his glory’ he is clearly recalling this glory, the glory of the one and only LORD God in theophany, as in the fire on Sinai and as in the tabernacle.

What John is saying is that even all this is superseded and made fullest in the human flesh of Jesus Christ. The final and utterly complete revelation of God’s glory was not in the majesty of Sinai, but in the majesty of his one and only Son.

This glory is the absolute fullness of Grace and Truth. This is what the curious phrase in verse 16, ‘From his fullness we have all received even Grace for (in place of) Grace’ means. It is poorly translated in most modern versions, but what it means is that the grace of the old covenant, mediated by the Law, is replaced by the fullness of the grace of the new covenant in the flesh of Jesus Christ. Carson points out that in Exodus 33-34, where God gave the law at

Sinai and revealed his glory to Moses, it was his great goodness which was at the heart of it: 'he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love [hesed = covenant love, grace] and faithfulness [emet = truth]"'⁶ (Ex. 34: 5-7). It is the same grace and truth John is proclaiming, the same covenant love and faithfulness, but now, in the flesh and blood of Jesus it has been revealed fully and completely, made perfect in Christ, the One and Only; but not just in his incarnation per se. Here is the very heart of John's message, for in John's Gospel the great climax is in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. That is the grand finale; that alone is where everything points from the very beginning; that is where the fullness of the glory of the Eternal Word is seen—not just in the flesh of Jesus, but in the crucified and risen flesh of Jesus. 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified,' said Jesus as he entered Jerusalem for the last time (12:23); 'Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him' after Judas has gone to betray him; 'God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once' (13:31-2).

This is why John deliberately gives no account of the transfiguration, although we know that he was there. It is precisely because he wants to point everything to the supreme glory, the grace and truth of the LORD God of heaven and earth revealed with absolute finality in the cross.

The exquisite irony in John is that it is only when nailed to the cross, that his true kingship is proclaimed. But proclaimed it is, in the languages of all the known world, by the titulus above his head: 'This is the King of the Jews'.

This is the kind of glory that men despise. That is why so many refuse to recognise him, and 'receive him not' today. The Jews wanted a great King to exert earthly power. Even the religious Jews wanted their kind of glorious God, and men—how often religious men—perpetually thirst for the wrong kind of glory and power. Glorifying in asserting strength; Orange Men marching their glorious protestant colours through their territory; Serbs triumphantly rebuilding churches, after ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia. The triumphalism, and the Corinthian competitiveness and rivalry that we are sucked into so easily as evangelical preachers and teachers building our own churches (empires?). John tells us that here is true glory; glory of glories—in the epitome of shame, in the cross.

‘No one has ever seen the Father. But the One and Only, himself God, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made him known’, has expounded him, expounded him—fully, perfectly, and for ever, in his death and resurrection for men’s sin. The word that ‘in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son’ (Heb. 1:2) is the fullest, deepest and final revelation not merely because it comes through the Son, for the Son has been the sole mediator of all knowledge of God from the very beginning. It is the last and final word, the climactic word, because it is the word that speaks of the beloved Son, the eternal Word, maker of the heavens and earth, and King of the ages, hanging naked and filthy upon the cross for our sin. ‘Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him’. To see that, is to see the Kingdom of God, and to be ‘born of God’.

Behold, This is your God! cries John in his Gospel. We beheld this glory, the true meaning of the Father’s glory expounded in the cross. Beheld (v. 14) really means to see in the flesh. John himself didn’t see that true glory at first. There was a time when he coveted the glory of strength, of being at the right hand of Jesus in heaven. But later when his spiritual eyes had been opened, he realised that he had seen with his own physical eyes the ultimate revelation of glory, the fullness of grace and truth, when he stood at the foot of the cross.

There is a hiddenness about this display of the glory of God. It is only when eyes are opened in faith, as Jesus tells Nicodemus (3:3), that men can even begin to see the Kingdom of God and its true glory. It is when we bear witness (another great Johannine theme) to the glorious message of the gospel that eyes are opened to see the glory. Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians. 4: 5-6;

We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

4. John the perpetual witness—still speaking today (6-8,15)

Little mention has so far been made of John the Baptist. We see more of him in the rest of the chapter, but here we have passed over him because this is what he seems to ask us to do. We are told John came literally only ‘for

witness' (not 'as a witness', as NIV has it). There is no mention of anything else. He is only 'a voice' (1:23). John the evangelist still hears his cry ringing in his own ears as he writes his Gospel, as clear as the day he first heard it, and it changed his life (1:38)—'Behold the lamb!' He didn't really understand it then, but now, as he writes in his old age, he knows.

John the Baptist, superseded, content to be forgotten—'I must decrease, He must increase'. But his word, his witness, remains, resounding down the years. He being dead, yet speaks. He cries out, saying, 'This is He!' (v. 15).

What a witness! Is this our witness? Is this the message that burns upon our hearts? Have we really seen the light of this glory?

In him alone is life. These things are written that men and women may believe that the Christ, the Son of God—the eternal source and cause of all—is this Jesus; and that in believing, they may have life in his name.

May God give us eyes to see, and hearts to burn with the burden of John's Gospel, to make that glory known to those who yet stand in darkness.

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ENDNOTES

1. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans 1971 p 7
2. D A Carson *The Gagging of God*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan 1996) p23
3. D A Carson *The Gospel According to John*, (Leicester, IVP 1991) p 119
4. Quoted in Carson, *John*, p124
5. James Denney, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London, Hodder and Stoughton 1892) p 299-300
6. Carson, *John* p 129