

# The Divine Break-in

**John 1:1-18**

**Sunday December 19<sup>th</sup>**

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Many people have a kind of vague feeling that there is some supernatural power, or force, behind the universe, but quite what it is they do not know. The very existence and apparent design of the world around them seems to need an explanation that is beyond the power of natural processes to explain. The universe to them is not self-explanatory; it raises too many questions. And then, deep within them is an uncanny and nearly conscious perception that there is some kind of ultimate reality behind what we sense with our five senses. This is what many call a spiritual insight. And for many, on top of this, there is an inner longing for contact and engagement with this ultimate other dimension. There is a desire to connect into some ultimate reality that will make sense of life and enable them outlive this physical existence of a mere few decades of decay. But there are always more questions than answers, and so it is all pushed to the back of their consciousness, like a half-forgotten puzzling dream. There is an inarticulate hope that something, or someone, is out there, and that everything will all end alright in the end. So they stare out at the world around them and long for some meaningful connection with the real essence behind the universe – and perhaps, they think, this might even be what many have called God. But if there is a God there, why doesn't he make himself clear? Why doesn't he reveal himself? If only God would make himself known; if only he would speak; if only some word from him would reach us.

John, the writer of one of the four gospels in the bible, was one of the closest friends of Jesus and an eyewitness to the events surrounding his life. He opens his personal account of what he saw and experienced with these words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (1-2).

## 1. The Word

You know someone and what they are saying from their words. In conversation, or in writing, you know them through their words. Their words are in a very real sense them; these words come with their ideas, conveying their character, with their emphases. The words are distinct from the person, but they emanate and represent the person. The word 'Word' in John's gospel is Jesus Christ in another dimension, a divine dimension, before and beyond space and time, before and beyond creation. The description 'Word' is an image or metaphor. This Word, this out flowing of God, has always existed, before anything was created.

And then God spoke and his Word brought our dimension into existence. Everything was made by this out flowing of God, this Word.

This Word stands separate from our existence, in an eternal divine dimension. But two thousand years ago he broke into our dimension, into our reality. John writes, "He came to that which was his own (that is his creation) . . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (11; 14).

Why did the Word come? Well, why is any word spoken? A word is given to communicate something, to reveal something from the one who spoke it. What is communicated by this Word of God? Later in this personal account John recollects Jesus saying, "No-one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father . . . Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father (6:46; 14:6). The Word reveals God the Father. Jesus reveals God the Father to us.

What specifically are we told the Word reveals about God? John tells us that the Word, that is Jesus, reveals the Father's glory, the Father's grace and the Father's truth (14).

We now know that the Father is full of glory. This is an idea beyond our wildest dreams. Here is someone stronger, larger, more intelligent, more righteous, purer, more powerful and more creative than it is possible for us to conceive. He is beyond and above even the magnificence of the universe with all its resplendent wonders. He is of another dimension.

But God is also gracious. This means that he comes to us to stoop to our level, to enter our dimension, to come to us in all our coldness and lostness and unbelief. And he comes with the offer of forgiveness and friendship. This is something we do not deserve, but that is the very kernel of grace. Grace brings what we don't deserve. And what else is revealed by the Word?

We are told that he is full of truth. Later, John writes that he heard Jesus say that if people held to his teaching, "[they] will know the truth, and the truth will set [them] free" (8:32). What is implied here is that we are more ignorant than we know, that we are misled; we are blind and we are bound. We are bound by conscious and subconscious thoughts beyond our control, which twist and hold us, binding us in a web of self-delusion. And more than this, the Bible clearly reveals, and most cultures affirm, that there are spiritual beings, devilish ones, who are bent on our personal destruction, who grip and manipulate us. The Word brings truth that cuts through the cords and sets us free. Sometimes it is only when we are set free that we realise that we were bound.

So, the Word comes to reveal the Father to us, to show us his glory, his grace and his truth.

## 2. Light

But there is another metaphor used here, and that is the metaphor of light. John tells us "In [this Word] was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it . . . the true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world" (4-5; 9). John tells us that Jesus is the light of the world.

We only know and feel the sun because of the light rays that reach us from it. The rays that reach us are in a very real sense the sun, they are the sun stretching out through space, but in another way they are distinct from the sun, distinct from its central furnace. They are the same essential energy as the nuclear reactor in

the sun's core, but transformed to a form of energy that illuminates our planet without destroying us. No one could stare at the centre of the sun and live, but we can perceive sunlight that illuminates our world. In a like manner no one has seen God (18; 1 John 4:12), but we can see Jesus, the light of the world. This is exactly what John later tells us he heard Jesus say (8:12; 9:5). John records Jesus saying, "I am the light of the world."

This light shines into our darkness and confusion. In what way are people in the dark? In two main ways: in knowledge and in morality. We do not know about God unless he reveals himself to us. If we were born and bred in the deepest caves on earth we would not know what the sun was like. This is the state of humanity at large. As a race we have fled from God's sunlight into dark places, where we make up our own rules and values, and dream our own dreams, which turn into grotesque nightmares. We carve out our own existence, independent of sunlight. In our caves we stare at the walls, share our ignorance and discuss the legends handed down to us that tell us there was once life on the surface in the sunlight. But we turn away in disbelief; now we are too busy making up our own stories and studying our caves. We find the concept of a sun and sunlight simply unbelievable as we have personally never seen it. But occasionally we meet people who say they live above, and who tell us strange tales of life above ground, above our world where a peculiar supernatural sun shines. Humanity at large no longer knows what is really true. We are in darkness. But light does shine, and that light is Jesus. He is the light of the world.

### 3. Life

But there is another thing about light and it is this: light brings life. John tells us that "In [the Word] was life" (4). And later in his gospel he records Jesus himself saying that he is "the life" (11:25; 14:6). On our planet all life comes from the sun. All our energy for food comes from the sun. Plants use the sun's energy to make food and we either eat that plant food, or animals that have eaten that plant food. The sun's energy literally permeates the chemicals of every cell of our bodies. It is only by connection to the sun that we can live at all. The sun is the source of all energy for life to us. Spiritually it is exactly the same: any spiritual life comes from God the Father and is communicated to us through Jesus, the light of the world. If we are separate from Jesus we are spiritually dead and physically we are dying. It is only if we come out into his sunlight that we can wake up spiritually. The apostle Paul writes, "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you" (Phil. 5:14). We have to come out of hiding; we need to come out of our caves.

But how do we do this? John tells us quite clearly. He says, "To all who received him (that is Jesus), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (12-13). New life is possible, new spiritual life. The imagery here is still of life, for John tells us that if we receive Jesus and believe in Jesus we become children, children of God. This is connected to what John says later where he talks of Jesus saying that people must be born again (3:3-16). When a person receives Jesus they become a new being, the divine life is implanted into their hearts and their sins are forgiven and washed away. To receive Jesus means turning from our own plans and purposes where we live underground, out of the sunlight, and deciding to follow Jesus into the light, basing our lives on his teaching. When we get up and do this he gives the right for us to become children of God (12); this is a divine gift; it is free and undeserved. The word 'grace' (17) carries the fundamental idea of a gift. All this results in spiritual birth; this is being born again.

When this spiritual life begins in us we must remember that it is only a beginning. The Lord has much to reveal to us, much to teach us, and there is much we must unlearn. What starts at that this point is new life,

and from then on we are called to grow and mature and become strong. This is the adventure of faith. And there will be many adventures in front of a person who takes that step.

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