

John 1v1-5
Christ Church 4/12/5

As I was preparing this talk yesterday, I came across the following words:

"He was a man of grace.

Now he is gone, but his spirit remains with us all. He was with us only a little while, but his life was a light to us all."

Well, you might be forgiven for thinking that those words were spoken about Jesus. You might even recognise them as being quite religious-sounding and very like what the Bible says about Jesus.

But no. Those words were spoken yesterday, about George Best, by his family, at his funeral.

George Best, for those of you didn't know, was one of the most brilliant footballers the world has ever seen.

And it's true that he was, by all accounts, a charming a gracious man, who always had time for people.

And it's true that his life was like a light to many people. He brought joy and happiness to millions.

And his spirit does remain with us all, in the sense that we can remember him and watch all the old video footage of him.

But as I watched his funeral yesterday morning, and heard people say those things about him as I was looking at this passage, I have to admit that it had me in floods of tears.

Because at the same as his family were saying those things, I was reading verses 4 and 5 of this passage. As they said "his life was a light to us all", I read "In him was life, and the life was the light of men".

As they said "but now he is gone, now he is dead", I read "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

The irony - that someone who was said to be light, died not knowing - as far as we know - the true light.

His life of light ended and was overcome by death, yet these verses teach that life does not need to end at death, that there is a life, and a light, that is inextinguishable. That has not been and will not be overcome.

I found it just heartbreaking. Tragic for George Best, for his family who have no hope themselves. And tragic for anyone who dies without knowing the true light. Perhaps for people here this morning.

And what we see in this passage is that it is in Jesus, who John calls the Word, that there is life and light that will never be overcome. In him there is true life, in him death is not the end.

Well we'll come back to verse 4 and 5, but in verses 1-3 John lays the foundations for those amazing truths, for why Jesus is light and life.

And it's all because of who he is.

So firstly, verses 1 and 2, **Jesus is eternally God.**

There has never been a time when the Son of God did not exist.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God".

We need to think first about what John calls this person. John calls him "the word". It's a slightly odd name.

Well the word itself suggests something to do with communication, doesn't it? It suggests somebody speaking, giving information.

Back in the Old Testament, the word of God is seen to do various different things. We won't look up any examples of these, but:

God's word creates – it's as God speaks that the world is created.

God's word delivers and heals, it saves.

And God's word reveals. How many times do we read "the word of the Lord came to such and such a prophet".

As one of the commentators puts it "God's word is his powerful self-expression in creation, revelation and salvation".

Now we know from verse 14 that this word is none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God. So Jesus, **the** Word, with a capital W, is the perfect and ultimate self-expression of God. He isn't a messenger, he is the message. Anything that God wants to say or reveal about himself, Jesus is it.

And just as God has been speaking and acting and creating and saving since time began, so the Word has been in existence from eternity.

Right from the beginning of time, right from the creation of the world. It's striking how John starts off his book, isn't it? - using the same language as the very first words of the Bible. Genesis chapter 1, "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth".

So he's giving his own angle on the very origins of time and life, the very foundations of the universe. And right from that time, the Word was there. The word was in the beginning, he was with God, he **was** God.

John wants to get one thing straight from the start. Jesus, the person who I'm telling you about in this gospel, is God. He is God, and always has been God.

Yes, he's also **with** God, and we're being introduced here into the mysteries of the Trinity. But he is and always has been, God.

So Jesus is eternally God.

Secondly, though, there's another extraordinary fact about the Word that John wants us to know.

In verse 3, we see that the Word is the **creator of the world**. "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that has been made".

It's not surprising, is it, that if the Word is God, the Word is also involved in creation.

John is making it doubly clear, if we didn't get it from verses 1 and 2, that Jesus is God. He is not a created being.

He can't be created because he existed in the very beginning, and because he himself created every thing. John says it twice, doesn't he, to emphasise the point, once positively and once negatively – "all things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that has been made".

No doubt you have heard people trying to argue that Jesus was just a very holy and special man, a prophet, specially chosen by God to do great things. So, Jehovah's witnesses believe that Jesus was a great man through whom God chose to do all sorts of wonderful things through, and then exalted and gave him rule in his kingdom.

Muslims believe he was a special man, a prophet – but **just** a man.

Your average person on the street believes he was just a man, if they believe anything at all.

But no, Jesus is not God's favourite human being, he's not a mere prophet – he is God, who created everything.

All of us at some time in life or other, ask the big questions of life - who am I, and where did the world come from.

I wonder, when someone asks you that question, or you ask it yourself, what answer do you give?

Who created the world? God? Yes, God. Everything came from him. But more specifically, everything came from or through Jesus. I wonder if we

need to emphasise that a bit more. It's certainly a common theme of the New Testament, as we've seen in our house groups recently.

We mustn't separate Jesus the man from the Word, the eternal Son of God. It's not that God the Father was the busy one back in the Old Testament, then when the time was right for the incarnation, the Son, who up until then wasn't really up to much, suddenly sprang into action.

And as we come up to Christmas, I wonder if perhaps that is something we could meditate on ourselves.

When you receive that Christmas card this year with a nativity scene on the front of it.

That little baby, born in a mucky stable, lying in an animal's feeding trough - he created everything. He created his mother who gave birth to him. He created the cows and pigs that were there to greet him when he arrived. If you believe your Christmas card nativity scenes that is. He created the rich and noble kings who came to visit him a couple of years later.

He created the people who would later nail him to a cross and kill him.

Doesn't that make Christmas all the more incredible?
Isn't Jesus just so much bigger than we usually think?
We mustn't let ourselves domesticate Jesus. We mustn't think that he is somehow a little tool that God used to forgive us, that he whipped out of his toolbox, and then popped back in when the job was done.

John will not let us have that view of Jesus. This wasn't someone who God created to send to earth and save us.
This was God the creator, who himself came to earth and saved us.

So those of you who are alive here this morning - you are alive because of Jesus. He made you.
I wonder if you believe that. You owe your very being, your very existence, to Jesus.
If you are a Christian, you no doubt believe that in your mind. But I wonder if you have ever really thought about it for very long.
It's an amazing thing to think about.

And it's not just you - he created everything and everyone that lives and has ever lived! They are all dependent on Jesus.
It's really mind-expanding stuff, isn't it?

I don't know if you ever watch the TV, and see some scenes from somewhere in another part of the world, scenes of just thousands of people. And you see all those faces, whether they're demonstrating or rioting or mourning or

at a cricket match or something – sometimes I do that and I just get slightly dizzy thinking about it – Jesus made them all too, I wonder if they know it.

A few months ago, I met a patient who was an asylum seeker from North Korea. I'd never met anyone from north Korea, I don't think. It was a bit strange, really, someone completely random, from the other side of the world, a country that I had just never thought of before. And there she was, she'd ended up in Liverpool, sitting a few feet from me. I'd never given her a minutes' thought before then, and I didn't know anything about her – how she had arrived here, what her life had been like, nothing. She didn't speak English, so I had no way of finding out, either!

But Jesus knew her, and everything about her, because he made her, as well. Did she realise it? I don't know.

But John is claiming that here. He is claiming such astoundingly important things here, about life, the universe and everything.

But if you're not a Christian here today, you might not think that Jesus did create you. You might not think that he is really God.

Now I'm not asking you to believe me just because I say it. I'm not even asking you to believe it just because John says it. But what I am doing is to ask you, and urge you, to consider whether it is true or not, by reading the rest of John's gospel. Because John is writing this letter to people just like you.

This is what he says right at the end of his book:

³⁰Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹But these are written that you may ^[a]believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

He is writing for people who don't believe. And he doesn't expect them to have believed just by reading his first paragraph – he's written a whole book, and this is just the start.

So do read the rest of this book, and do come back over the next few weeks as we look at the next few verses, too, because they also have some pretty astounding claims.

But what I hope you realise is that these are claims that cannot be ignored. John is saying things which, if true, should change the way you live, the way you think. And should change the way you think about Jesus. Because if Jesus is your creator and life-giver, then there must be a right way to respond to him.

Surely the right way to respond to the person who is God, the person who made you, is to know him, to love him, to be thankful to him, to be in awe of

him. Yet I suspect that most of us here, Christian or not Christian, live at least part, if not all, of our lives pretty oblivious to Jesus, pretty ungrateful to him, not really giving him much of a thought.

Jesus is eternally God, Jesus created the world, and he also gives life and light to everyone.

And that's our third point, which brings us back to verses 4 and 5.

Jesus is light and life, v4-5.

"In him was life, and the life was the light of men". In him was life, in him was the light of men.

Can you see how verses 1-3 have made verses 4 and 5 possible? If the Word is God, who created the world, then it's no surprise that the word should have life-giving power.

What does it mean, though, for that life to be "the light of men"?

Well, the answer seems to be on 2 levels.

Firstly, I think it's referring to creation again. To the fact that human life comes from God, and also perhaps that humans are made in the image of God - so the light of men is something which sets mankind apart from the rest of creation.

But secondly, in John, light - and darkness - have explicitly moral overtones. Light is God's righteousness and goodness, and especially God's salvation, while darkness is evil.

Turn to John chapter 3, v19:

"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ²¹But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God".

So when John talks about this light of men, he isn't just talking about what happened at creation and the life that we have, or the sun and stars and electric light bulbs.

He's saying that from the Word comes righteousness and salvation.

Look at verse 5 back in Ch1: "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it". (if you have an NIV Bible you'll see in the footnotes that "overcome" can be translated "understood" - and it's overcome that I think is probably more likely to be the kind of thing John is talking about here.)

And then when John says that the darkness has not overcome the light, he's not saying that the sun and stars and electric light bulbs still exist. Although they do.

But he's particularly saying that evil of darkness has not triumphed over God's light, God's salvation plan.

It's worth asking the question: how could darkness overcome light, extinguish it?

Well, I'm no science teacher, but how do you get rid of the light from a candle, or from a light bulb? There isn't some chemical reaction, where you have light and if you add the right chemicals in the right order, hey presto, you get darkness.

You can't turn **on** darkness, press a darkness switch.

The only way you can get rid of light is to get rid of the source of the light. To snuff out the candle, to switch off the light bulb.

So how might the darkness, in this passage, have overcome, or extinguished, the light? The only way to overcome the light is to get rid of the source of the light, the Word, Jesus.

And the reason John can confidently say "the darkness has not overcome it" is because darkness has already tried to get rid of Jesus. Jesus died. Darkness thought it had won when Jesus died.

But the light was not overcome, because death could not hold Jesus. He rose from the dead, he lives now, and continues to give life and light to anyone who will come to him.

That is why George Best's funeral yesterday was so tragic. That's why your funeral will be tragic, if you haven't turned to the light. The hopelessness and desolation that his family felt were so unnecessary. As far as we know, darkness and death have overcome George Best, because he did not know the light, and he ran from it.

It's tragic and wasteful, but it's also what John says happens all the time. Because "the darkness has not overcome it" can also mean "the darkness has not understood it" – I think John has both meanings in mind. People throughout history have not understood the light, and have run from it, preferring the darkness.

But while people in the darkness do not understand the light, are hostile to the light, the light still shines, darkness will never snuff it out.

People that run from it are on the losing side, because their side has already played its last card, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Let's look at a couple of other verses from John's gospel that talk about this as well.

Turn firstly to John 11, v9-10.

"A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light.

¹⁰It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light."

People who do not turn to Jesus are stumbling around in the darkness, blindly groping for things they cannot see.

It's the idea of getting up in the middle of the night and having to get to the toilet or something. You have to pick your way across the room to the light switch, trying to avoid stubbing your toe or slipping or tripping over, and falling flat on your face.

That's what will happen to people who do not turn to Jesus.

Next turn to John 8, verse 12.

"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

So what Jesus is saying is that there is no need for people to be groping and stumbling in the dark – all anyone needs to do is to follow him.

Well, that is sobering stuff, and again, if you are not a Christian I hope you will take that seriously this morning.

Because what these verses offer you is a chance for life. In Jesus is life!

Turn to him, because he is your life, it comes from him. Turn to him, because he made you! Turn to him, because he is God! Turn to him, because his is the side that will never be overcome.

If you are a Christian, I hope that seeing this makes you pray more, makes you more keen to speak about how amazing Jesus is to your friends and family this Christmas.

Because as you see your friends and family this Christmas, many of whom perhaps are not Christians, I hope it makes you see the tragic waste that life without God is – a life that **will** be snuffed out and overcome if they don't turn to Jesus.

But I hope it also makes you rejoice!

Rejoice that the darkness has not overcome the light.

Because it means that we can and should rejoice that Jesus has not left us in the dark, we are not pitiful blind people with no hope, but we have life and light and will not stumble.

It means that when we know of Christians who die, we can be confident for them, and rejoice that their life is not ended.

It means that we can be confident in the face of our own deaths, because we know Jesus, in whom is life.

It means that when the world around us seems to be doing a jolly good job of snuffing out Christianity and stifling it and gagging it, we mustn't get downhearted, but we should rejoice in the knowledge that there is nothing more that the world can do to stop the light that it hasn't already tried – and failed – to do! So it should make us speak confidently about the light this Christmas.

Next week we're going to sing the great carol, Hark the Herald Angels sing. As we finish, let me read to you the last verse of that song:

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Risen with healing in His wings,

Mild, He lays His glory by;
Born that men no more may die;
Born to raise the sons of earth;
Born to give them second birth.

Hark! the herald angels sing:
'Glory to the new-born King.'

Let's pray.