

“In the Beginning was... *Jesus*” // John 1:1–18 // *Jesus, Lord at thy Birth, Christmas 2022 #1*¹

Introduction

Great to see all of you this morning... to those you joining in from [Apex](#), and [Chapel Hill](#), and [Alamance County](#), and [North Durham](#) and [Downtown Durham](#) and [Brier Creek](#), and [Blue Ridge](#) and [Garner](#) and [Fuquay Varina](#), [Summit en Español](#)—our [prison campuses](#) and our friends joining in [Puerto Rico](#), to all you, good morning. We are **one church that gathers in multiple places throughout the Triangle** each weekend.

John 1 if you have your Bibles...

The story is told of a little boy who wanted a bicycle really, really bad but didn't know the best way to pray for one. So, trying to imitate how he heard his parents pray, that night before he went to bed he got down on his knees and said, “Lord, if it be thy will, please grant your humble servant a bike, in Jesus' name.” Two days later though, no bike; and then he overheard a prosperity preacher on TV praying and decided to try his way. So, that night he got down on his knees and said, “Father, in the name of Jesus, I COMMAND you to get me

this bike. I claim a blue one with the studded tires and racing stripes. In JESUS' NAME I name it and claim it.” He felt pretty good about this but, again, two days later, still no bike. And that's when he overheard his dad watching the movie “The Godfather,” so that night before bed he grabbed the lil' statue of Mary from the Nativity set, got down on his knees and said, “*Jesus, if you ever want to see your mother again...*”

Well, needless to say, this boy had **some very misinformed views of Jesus!** But the truth is, it's not just little boys in our society who are confused about who Jesus really is. Some see Jesus as a mythical figure who makes for a great religious fairy tale but was not actually a real person. Then there's Tweetable Jesus who feels exactly like you do on most political and social issues of the day and comes in nicely as a weapon on social media. Others like genie Jesus, who shows up at key moments to grant you wishes in pursuit of your life agenda. Others prefer Precious Moments Jesus who makes a cameo in your life at Christmas, Easter, marriage and funerals. And then there's fire insurance Jesus, with whom you arrange a deal to ensure your entry into Heaven.

The most important question of our lives is “Who really was/IS Jesus?” In the opening to his Gospel, John aims to answer that question. You can almost think of John 1 as Jesus' résumé. Who he really is and why he alone is qualified to be our Savior.

¹ Works Consulted: Joby Martin, “The Gospel According to John - Week 1: The Word Became Flesh,” this sermon was preached at The Church of Eleven22, and posted April 11, 2021; Craig Groeschel, “[God With Us: Week 4 - Always With Us with Craig Groeschel](#),” a sermon published on YouTube

by Life.Church on Dec. 28, 2017; Timothy Keller, “[The Word](#),” a sermon preached at Redeemer Presbyterian Church on November 27, 2016; Timothy Keller, “[The Glory of the Incarnation](#),” a sermon preached at Redeemer Presbyterian Church on December 11, 2016; Tony Evans, “[Session 1](#) (John 1:1–34),” this teaching was published by RightNow Media.

This is one of my favorite passages in the Bible, but **when I was looking back through my files this week, I'm ashamed to admit that in the 20+ years I've served here as Pastor**, I think I've only preached on this passage once, and that was 17 years ago—even though it's one of my favorites. And I think that's because I've always been intimidated by this passage, feeling like whatever I say is going to fall so far short of the majesty it contains—like my words can only take away from it rather than illuminate it. I remember, earlier this summer, **swimming in the Atlantic Ocean** with my 12 year old son, and as we swam out deeper, I was a few yards ahead of him, and I got to a point where I couldn't touch the bottom, so I yelled back, "Hey, don't swim out here, it's SO deep!" realizing instantly, as I said that, how silly that statement would sound to God—because just a few miles out the ocean gets up to 4 miles deep. **Feeling like "oh, it's so deep"** when you're in only 8 feet of water seems like rather *shallow* thinking to God.

In the same way, I feel like my deepest reflections on this passage pale in comparison to whatever is here. **But, the Holy Spirit put it in here for a reason, so let's take a dive.**

(BTW, just so you know what we're doing—for the next few weeks we're going to be going **through the first 2 chapters** of the Gospel of John in a Christmas series called "**Jesus, Lord at thy Birth**"—*You say* (exasperated), "What happened to King David?" Look, it's like a **good Netflix show**. We got to the end of season 1—we finished the book of 1 Samuel—now you have to wait until January for the new season to drop--so, we can focus on Christmas for a few weeks!)

² The word we translate as "Word" is the Greek word "logos," a word heavy with importance in that culture. Greek philosophers used the terms "logos" to refer to "the

John starts off Jesus' résumé this way: In the beginning was the Word...(John 1:1)

Any student of the Bible recognizes that John here, in his opening, echoes the opening sentence of the Bible itself: **Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth..."**

And do you remember, from Genesis 1, what instrument God used to create everything?

- Did he create the world by waving a wand?
- Did he concoct up a magic potion, or shape something out of raw materials?
- No, Genesis 1:2 says that he spoke and the worlds burst into existence.
- The most recurring word in Genesis 1 is the word **"SAID"**: **"And God said... let there be light, and there was light..."** And God said, "Let there be a **sun to rule by day and a moon by night.**" And God said, "Let there be plants and animals."

In Genesis 1, **God created the world through his word**, and now John, in the opening to his Gospel, makes the staggering claim that the Word God used to create the worlds was **actually a person—Jesus.**²

order behind the universe." John takes that concept and said, "It's a person; Jesus. He is the creating force behind the universe; the order, the logic of it all."

Look at vs 2: "...and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."³ That's a confusing statement. **How can something be WITH something AND THAT SAME something at the same time?** Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses both say that you should write that second instance of "God" there in that sentence with a lowercase "g" and put an indefinite article in front of it, so that it reads, "...and the Word was with God and the word was (a) god..." Jesus was special, they say--he was the first thing God created and more important than all the rest, **but not God himself, because God created him.** But the next verse takes that possibility off the table. It says, [3] **All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.** *If it was made, it was made by Jesus*, which takes off the table that Jesus was a made thing, because that would mean that Jesus would have had to make himself, which is impossible. Everything that was made was made by Jesus, and Jesus could not create himself, which makes Jesus an un-made thing, and the only thing that is un-made is God. Make sense? We're only in 8 feet of water, people.

So, this Word was with God and itself God at the same time. You say, *How can that be? How can something be WITH something AND that same something at the same time?*

This is, in part, where Christians get the concept of the Trinity: that God has existed eternally as 1 Being in 3 persons--each Person distinct from the others yet each represented in the others, and all comprising only one singular Being, God.

³ Literally, "and God was the Word." (I realize this is getting into the weeds a little bit, but I just want you to be ready when the guys in ties show up at your door and try to explain to you that you've been reading the Bible all wrong.) A JW will try to make a

You say, "But that doesn't really make a lot of sense: 3 Persons, yet only 1 Being?" Whenever I try to teach these concepts I first remind people that we're talking about the nature of God, and our finite minds, amazing as they are, are just not built to fully comprehend divine realities.

There was a mathematician in the 19th century named **Edwin Abbot who wrote a book called *Flatlands***, in which all of creation existed in only 2 dimensions. We were only dots on the page. Well, the God who created this 2-dimensional world was a 3-dimensional sphere (like a basketball), and he wanted to reveal himself to his 2-dimensional dots. How could he do that? He can't just describe himself, because they have no capacity to understand the 3rd dimension. So, he decides to pass through their plane. What does that look like? **(image)** It looks like a dot that enlarges into a circle, and shrinks back into a dot. Imagine the poor dots trying to explain what just happened. How much more we humans, Professor Abbot said, as finite beings, trying to comprehend the incomprehensible God!

Sometimes the best way for God to communicate these realities to us is through analogies, and that's what he does here: he calls Jesus "the Word." Jesus is to the Father what a "word" is to us. Think about it: in one sense, our words are separate from us, but in another, they are part of us. There's a famous story about a Christian missionary named Timothy 1st who back in the 8th century was invited by one of the first Muslim Caliphs to come to Mecca and defend the Trinity--

big deal out of the fact that in Greek there is no definite article before the word for God, *theos*, making it possible to translate the phrase "the Word was a god." But in Greek, it's common to drop the article when you switch the word order, and the context of these verses clearly indicate that Jesus was the all-creating God.)

because the Caliph said that if Jesus were God that would mean there had to be two Gods and that was blasphemy. Timothy said, “Well, it’s true, there’s only one God--and then he explained the Trinity using John’s example of the Word. **He said, when we communicate with someone, our minds first think a thought, like, “I feel hot.”** We then form that thought into the words of whatever language we are trying to communicate in; and then our vocal cords create vibrations in the air that carry those words to someone else’s ears. Timothy said, “So, in the act of communicating, we have three different things: thoughts; words; and vocal vibrations. All distinct from each other, yet one in the act of communication. You’d never say, ‘I heard J.D.’s words but not J.D.’ No, my thoughts and my words ARE me.”⁴ The Father is like the thought, the Son is the Word, and the Spirit is like the vibration carrying the Word to our ears. **There’s only one God--and the God who sits on Heaven’s throne is the Father;** the God we see with our eyes, hear with our ears and touch with our hands is Jesus; and the God we feel moving in our souls is God the Spirit. The Word was with God and the Word was God.

Jesus is the Word of God--the perfect expression of the Father. Everything that God was, Jesus was.

- **Leviticus** taught us that God is holy--we saw what that looked like in how Jesus lived.
- **Exodus** told us God is a deliverer--we saw what that looked like in how Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons and in how he treated the outcast.

- **Deuteronomy** told us that God was full of love, and gracious--we saw what that looked like in how Jesus treated the woman caught in adultery and how he responded to Zacchaeus.
- **The Psalms** told us that God was tender and long-suffering; we saw what that looked like in how Jesus treated his disciples in failure and in how he received children.
- **Isaiah** told us God was tender--but we understood it when we saw Jesus standing at the tomb of Lazarus weeping

Jesus is the perfect expression of the Father. In his words we hear the Father’s voice; in his smile we sense the Father’s heart; in his touch we feel the Father’s presence.⁵

In Vs. 4, John continues this Genesis 1/ Jesus parallel: **[4] In him was life, and the life was the light of men.** Light is used 7x in these opening verses to describe Jesus. Light was **the first thing God created in Genesis 1;** and it was fundamental to everything else.

- **Light brings life:** Today we call this process photosynthesis--light actually gives life to plants: John wouldn’t have known the word ‘photosynthesis,’ but he saw the effects. When light shines on things they come alive. Jesus is like that, John says.
- **Light dispels darkness.** When the lights are on, you can see things. You can avoid dangers. One of the most annoying things about getting older is the fact I can’t make it through a full night’s sleep w/o having to get up and go to the bathroom. Now, I have walked the little path from my bed to the bathroom many times, and it’s a fairly straight shot, but somehow my left pinky toe still

⁴ My paraphrase, of course

⁵ Muslims also believe that God has an eternal word beside him, but it is a book--the Koran. The Bible teaches that God’s eternal word is a Person.

manages to find the corner of my dresser on the way there--I swear it's like it has a homing beacon, or a magnet, in it or something. Even though I've walked that path many times, without light I still run into things. Jesus is like that, John says. He illuminates our lives. He helps guide us through decisions. He makes sense of our relationships. We understand who we are in him.

- **Light creates color:** Color doesn't reside in the objects themselves, color is in the light that reflects off of them. In the same way, Jesus reveals the beauty and distinctiveness of creation. **There's a movie that came out in the early 2000's called *Pleasantville***--it stars Tobey Macguire--it has one of the worst messages of any movie in the last 2 decades, I think--It's like the opposite of John 1. Tobey Macguire and his sister, Reese Witherspoon, are able to travel back in time to the 1950's where everything is in black and white. As they teach people, in their 2000's enlightened states, to throw off societal chains and embrace sexual freedom, the character begin to take on color. Now, we agree, of course, that there were some non-ideal things about the 1950's that we don't want to go back to and that self-expression is a healthy process--but what brings us color is being near Jesus. His light draws out our beauty and our distinctiveness. C.S. Lewis said in the dark, everything looks the same; it is only in the light that their distinctiveness and uniqueness is revealed. In the same way, we are most ourselves when we are in fellowship with Jesus, the light. Or, to borrow a different analogy from him, a fish is most free when it's in water, not when it frees itself from the water and flops out on shore. If a fish were to say, "You know, I'm sick of this very limiting ocean, I want to be out there, free; I want to be where the people are, part of that world..." and were

to flop up onto the shore, it's not going to go well for that fish--and that's because fish were created for water. In the same way, we were created for Jesus. We are most free in him.

- **There's one more dimension I want to draw out there--and I might be taking this too far: But only now are we learning how fundamental light is to the structure of our universe.** Light was the foundation of Albert Einstein's famous "theory of relativity," a scientific idea so complex that only Einstein, myself, and a handful of other scientists understand it. Basically it works like this--you know the famous formula, **$E=mc^2$** : E=energy measured in *eerds*; m=matter measured by mass; c=the constant, or the speed of light (which travels at 186,282.2 mps). Matter and energy are connected, somehow, along the principle of light. Einstein showed that even time itself is tied to light. The theory of relativity works like this: If I am in a car going **60 mph and you are in one going 40mph** the same direction, and I pass you, my speed relative to you is 20mph. Relative to the ground I'm going 60mph, but relative to you I'm going 20. If you are in a car going 50 mph and I pass you going the opposite direction going 50mph, then my speed relative to yours is not 50mph but 100mph. But, Einstein showed that if you could hijack a sunbeam, and ride along on top of it, traveling at 186k mps--think Rainbow Road on Mario Kart, and you passed me going the opposite direction also at 186k mps, then you'd think your speed relative to mind would be double the speed of light... but not so. Whether I am standing still or moving at the speed of light opposite of you, or anywhere in between, our speeds relative to each other remain at 186,000 mps. Which is just mind-blowing. And that's because light is the constant, the foundation. **What changes as we approach the speed of light is**

not speed, but time. At the speed of light, Einstein said, time stands still.

- **Like I said, it's hard to understand**--and who knows how much we still get wrong--but the point is that light is fundamental to creation. It's the constant. The same thing is true of Jesus. Paul says in Colossians says that Jesus is not only before all things, **in him all things hold together. (Col 1:18)** They still can't figure out how an atom holds together--you have protons in the center with a positive charge and electrons with a negative charge and that should drive them apart but somehow they hold together. I'm not trying to say there's no scientific explanation for that, just that in that there's an analogy for Jesus. He's the light that hold together the first creation and the light of the new creation.

If you're taking notes, here's our first 3 words on Jesus' résumé: **Jesus is...**

- **The Word**
- **The Light**
- **The Life**

The main thing to understand here is that John connects Jesus to the original work of creation.

- In Genesis 1, God spoke, and matter sprang from nothing; order came from chaos; light came from darkness and life sprang from deadness.
- **In the same way, John says,** Jesus' word brings order to chaotic, confused lives. His word will calm storms and bring peace; his touch will heal diseases. He'll speak and blind men will begin to see again, he'll speak and the lame will walk; he'll speak and dead men will be raised to new life; he'll speak and the dead Lazarus will

walk out of the grave. His word will deliver the oppressed from their demons, break their chains of addiction and fill the broken with joy. His word will release the sinner from their sins and turn graves into gardens.

- **Just as Jesus was the power of the first creation,** John says, so he is the power of the new creation.

The Apostle John will carry this idea of Jesus as the new creation all the way through the end of his Gospel--It's one of the things that makes **John's Gospel** my favorite.

- It is John who points out that Christ was crucified on the sixth day, which was the same day of the week in Genesis 1 that man was created. But then, John points out, Jesus was resurrected on a Sunday, the first day of the new week. Do you see what's being taught? Jesus died on the sixth day, absorbing the curse that man had brought to the first creation by sin, and in his resurrection he started a week of new creation.
- Get this: **John points out that the first place humanity encounters the resurrected Jesus was in a garden.** John 20--Mary Magdalene, a former demon-possessed woman, is in the garden, weeping, looking for the body of Jesus, when Jesus suddenly appears behind her and calls her name. You say, "What's significant about that?" Well, **where had been the last place God and humanity had been together?** A Garden, where we had rejected God and hidden from him. Jesus returned to the same place, found us, just outside that tomb of death we had hidden ourselves in, and said, "Here I am. You hid from me and I found you; and with these wounds I have saved you."
- There's more: When Jesus appears to the rest of his disciples later that evening, one of the first things he does is breathe on them

and as he does he says, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). As I’ve pointed out—that wasn’t a common Hebrew greeting in those days. You didn’t go up to your friends and say, “Hey Matthew.... swwwww....” No, it was weird, but do you see what Jesus was doing? He was re-enacting the creative moment of Genesis 1. Just as God breathed into the lump of clay he’d formed into man’s image and “man became a living soul,” now Jesus was breathing the Holy Spirit into his disciples so that spiritually they would come alive.⁶

In the opening verses of his Gospel, John establishes: “Just as Jesus was the power of the old creation,” he says, so he is the power of the new creation.”

So, the first 3 words on Jesus’ resume: The Word; the Light; and the Life. In vs. 14 we find the 4th: **14 And (that word, that light) the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

“Dwelt among us” is literally, **“tabernacled.”** In the Old Testament, the tabernacle was the tent-like structure that housed the Presence and Glory of God on earth. That’s the word John uses here,⁷ because that’s what the body of Jesus was. In Jesus, God took on flesh and dwelt among us. Christians call this the **“incarnation,” which literally means “en-fleshing,”** and that’s your 4th word on your resume sheet: **4. Glory enfleshed.** The glory of God took on flesh and blood so we could see it and touch it and understand it.

⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 175–77.

What were God’s glory’s defining characteristics? Lots of things he could say here, but John boiled it down to 2. **V. 14** *A Person filled with grace and truth.* Grace and truth. **Religion is often characterized by one or the other--some of you grew up around this.** Many religions are truth without grace--they tell you what’s right but in a way that condemns and excludes you.

Or, they are grace without truth--they act all accepting but refuse to be honest about what God’s Word says. Truth without grace is fundamentalism; grace without truth is sentimentality. Both bring death. **Jesus was full of both grace and truth, and only that brings life.** Jesus’ truth didn’t cancel out grace; nor did grace compromise the truth. Jesus told us exactly what God’s righteous standards were but then he died in our place so we wouldn’t perish under them. He didn’t lower God’s standards or grade on a curve. He lived them out fully but then died in our place so that we wouldn’t perish.

In 1964, a woman in Manhattan by the name of **Kitty Genovese** was walking to her apartment when she was assaulted by a man who began to stab her, right there on the street. She desperately yelled for help. Lights in the apartments turned on, and neighbors pulled up their blinds and looked down at this horrifying scene--and yet, not one single person came down to help her. One man, when interviewed later, actually said, “I didn’t want to get involved--not only is it dangerous for me, there’s too much legal paperwork and liability involved.” It became a national scandal--what kind of nation have we become where a woman could be stabbed to death in plain sight with several dozen people looking on simply because nobody wanted to come down and help? Oh friends! We were all Kitty, but thank God, Jesus came down--full of grace and truth. He told us the absolute truth about our darkness, but then died in our place so that we could live.

⁷ The Greek word is “skenoō” [skin-AH-oh], which means “reside” or “dwell.” (Joshua 22:29)

And, if I might add: I find it significant that John puts *grace before truth*. That kind of word order is never accidental in the Bible. Jesus led with grace. The accent of his life was on grace. In him, we see how God really feels about sinners. He doesn't want them to perish, he wants them to live. He takes no pleasure, the Bible says, in the death of the wicked. He takes delight in mercy, in repentance--some of you are here this morning with a lifetime of sin and regret behind you-- Jesus doesn't want you to perish. In Luke 15, Jesus claimed that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents than 99 who are already his (More joy over you being here than 9900 of us who have been serving him for a long time). Sometimes when we do a baptism, Christians will quote this verse and say, "The angels are partying in heaven!" But what Luke 15:10 actually says is that **"...there is joy before the angels of God when one sinner repents."** It's not the angels that are rejoicing; it's God who rejoices in front of the angels. In Jesus, see how God cares about sinners. We see it in how he responded to the woman caught in adultery and the despised Zacchaeus. How he couldn't turn away the lepers or sinners or tax collectors. He was full of grace and truth.

- (K&A)

18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

There were some things about God that **we, sinful flesh and blood, would never be able to understand** so long as they were simply being described to us in words. So he came down; down, so that we could see him, and touch him, and experience him, and understand.

Let me bring it WAY down for us. Y'all remember Joby who was here a few weeks ago? In a message I was listening to by him, he explains that he grew up in South Carolina, and next to his house was an empty, sandy lot, pockmarked with nests full of carpenter ants. He loved to go over there with his Big Wheel. (How many of you

remember Big Wheels?) Think low-slung kids' tricycle with a fat front wheel--the Harley Davidson of tricycles. I'm not sure how it ever got approved to be on the market, because as a kid, you couldn't see over the front wheel--and road blindness is exhilarating, doesn't contribute to safety). Well, the other cool feature was that the pedals attached right to the front wheel, so at high speed you could lock the wheel in a dead stop, and if you turned the wheel real hard you could donut for days. Joby loved to take his Big Wheel over to the sandy lot and skid atop the anthills, leaving in his wake billowing waves of sand and ants.

One day, some grape jelly from his sandwich dripped onto the sand, and, he said, within five minutes hundreds of ants swarmed to the spillage. So the next day, he brought over a full jar of jelly and smeared several streaks across the lot. In 5 minutes, each streak looked like bumper-to-bumper traffic on an ant highway. So, he took his Big Wheel, and, at full speed, he'd hit the ant river, turn his wheel, and skid across the backs of the ants like a car on an oil slick. (Note: I'm just telling the story, not advocating for it.) Every day he laid out a new jelly trap, setting up the ants for his joy-ride of death.

Now, say that you have a soft spot in your heart for these ants, and you are appalled by Joby's ant-ics (see what I did there?). You want to warn the ants not to take the bait of Joby's jelly. You want to tell them, "Hear ye, hear ye, all ye ants! Don't fall for the jelly. The ant who eats of this jelly shall surely die. Ants: I don't think you're ready... *for this jelly.*" So, you want to communicate with them--but how do you do it? Well, if you stood above their anthills and yelled this down at them, the ants would have just looked up and said, "Oh man, look at the size of that guy's boot!" and scuttled away. The only way to really communicate with them, to really save them, would be to get down on their level—to become an ant, but with a human perspective. Only then could you communicate with them in terms they could understand and lead them to safety.

And THIS, my friends, is what Jesus did in the incarnation. (Some of you are like... didn't get the theory of relativity stuff or the Word analogy, but THIS I get.) The Word became flesh and dwelt among us so that he could communicate with us.

In him we saw what lofty things like love and holiness and grace and truth looked like. We beheld them; we felt them. **We saw God's glory en-fleshed and lived out in front of us.**

Some imagine you, are distant and removed

But you chased us down in merciful pursuit, to the sinner, you were grace, and the broken you embraced

And in the end the proof is in your wounds; yes in the end the proof is in your wounds!

Blood and tears, how can it be? There's a God who weeps, there's a God who bleeds; Oh praise the One, who would reach for me, Hallelujah to the Son of suffering!

18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

If you are taking notes, here's the 4 words on Jesus' resume:

1. **Word**
2. **Light**
3. **Life**
4. **Glory Enfleshed** (A glory full of grace and truth!)

And how did we respond?

VAMP

10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

We didn't recognize him. He was like a healthy person coming into a room full of sick people—his health seemed odd to us. And threatening. And humiliating.

We thought him too obsessed with God; his radical God-focus, irrelevant in a world of business and politics and practical needs; his insistence on holiness, prudish; his love for the poor, impractical and wasteful and threatening to our livelihood; his grace, too extreme. His demands, too fanatical.

Many teenagers today think, "I don't want to be a Jesus-fanatic; that's no fun, it's weird." **That's what it means when it says,** 'He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, it did not know him.'" I know a lot of church people who would say, "Being religious is great, but don't get radical ideas in your head like giving your life away for the poor or going overseas to reach the lost. **That's what it means when it says,** 'He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, it did not know him.'"

When true light shines in the darkness, the darkness resents it because the light exposes how dark the darkness is.

I read a book over the break called *Live Not By Lies* by Rod Dreher, and in it he tells the stories of faithful Christians who suffered unspeakable things at the hands of the Communist regime. There was this one prison, *Pitești*,⁸ renown for its cruelty. In a 1966 testimony before the U.S. Senate, one escaped prisoner, Richard Wurmbrand, testified to its horrors.

⁸ pee-TEŠHT-ih

One story was told about a prisoner named *Constantine*—*who was sick from the day he was put into the cell—the Communists had beat him really badly and he was so weak that he could barely talk. But every word he said to his cellmates was about Christ.* One survivor said, “*Just looking at the flood of love in his face and hearing him pray forever changed me.*” *Even though his captors tortured for nearly three years, but he would not curse his torturers, and would only pray for them and bless them in Jesus’ name.*

And how did those Communist guards respond to prisoners like this? Wurmbrand explained that they took one young Christian and tied him to a cross, stood it upright and left it for days; but twice daily, they’d lay the cross bearing the man down flat on the floor, and one hundred other inmates were forced by guards to urinate and defecate on him. Each time, the cross was erected again and the guards would say to the Christian prisoners, “Look at your Christ, how beautiful he is, adore him, kneel before him, how fine he smells, your Christ.”

10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

“His own” first means the Jewish people; Jesus was born to Israel, and they rejected him, but “his own” implies more than that— “his own” implies ownership. All of us were people God had created; and because he had created us he rightfully owned us, but we scorned him. We didn’t want a Lord—we wanted to be Lord. We somehow thought that we could commandeer creation with no thought of the Creator. And, when he insisted that he was Lord, the God of creation, our resistance became so violent that we crucified him.

You say, “I wouldn’t have crucified him...” You only say that because you’ve never been pushed to really consider what it means for him to

be Lord. When your will and his cannot go on together; only one can win out.

But then comes one of the greatest verses in all the Bible: 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

To all who would simply receive him, and just believe in his name--them he gave the right to become the children of God. Imagine you awoken to find yourself on a stretcher in the back of an ambulance.

You’re not quite sure how you got there, but as you feel panic rising in your heart, the EMT puts their hand calmly on your head and says, “You were in a really serious wreck, and you lost a lot of blood. But thankfully, we got to you in time. We’ve stabilized you, and we’re taking you to the hospital where you’ll make a full recovery. You’re going to be ok.” At that point, the EMT is not asking you to do anything. You just need to trust them to keep their promise. This is what John said Jesus did for us. Sin had wrecked our relationship with God and sent us hurtling toward death. Jesus came as the new creation and rescued us. Discovering the gospel is like waking up on a stretcher looking at Jesus, who is saying, “I’ve got this. I’m saving you. **All you have to do—all you can do—is receive me.** Believe that I’m doing what I said I was doing.”

Come every soul, by sin oppressed, there’s mercy with the Lord! And he will surely give you rest, (just!) by trusting in his word. Only trust him, only trust him, only trust him now! And he will save you, he will save you, he will save you now!

One final verse: 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Just like the original creation didn’t have a will when God spoke into it--he spoke into deadness and nothingness and life sprang forth; so we don’t have spiritual life when God speaks to us. It’s his voice that

creates life in our hearts. When you are re-born, it's "not of blood nor the will of the flesh, but of God."

See, if you're sensing a desire to know him, to be reconciled to him, to be saved by him, those desires don't come from you. They come from God. **And all I can tell you is this:** if you are sensing him moving in your soul, don't resist him. Those feelings aren't from you. HE'S inviting you to life. All you have to do is open the door. But whatever you do, don't harden your heart toward him. He may not knock at your heart's door forever.

Come every soul, by sin oppressed, there's mercy with the Lord! And he will surely give you rest, (just!) by trusting in his word. Only trust him, only trust him, only trust him now! And he will save you, he will save you, he will save you now!