

Title: Game Over
Text: John 1.1-14
Theme: The Word is the Light
Series: Advent 2017 #5
Prop Stmtnt: Jesus is the full expression of God, which has eternal implications.

Read Text:

The Academic Integrity Office of the University of Windsor, (just across the river) has published a series of confessions from students who have been caught plagiarizing. In one of them, a 3rd year student majoring (ironically) in criminology said (and I quote) “*I found myself overwhelmed with papers and midterms to write. I needed to finish these assignments promptly. This is when (and I think this next line is hilarious) I found myself with another paper and plagiarizing (sic) seemed to be the only way out.*” “I found myself with another paper.” What? Were you on a date? Did you happen to sit next to each other on a bus? I found myself with another paper. Did you happen to be at a party together and you thought, wow! This is amazing! I happen to need a paper – and bam! Here you are! Such a deal. The whole thing is pathetic. This dude has to write a confession for plagiarizing a paper and he can’t even confess right.

Plagiarism is copying something from someone else and presenting it as if it is your own. Some professors and reporters who write books and articles, some comedians, some musicians and sadly, some pastors have been guilty of plagiarism. Plagiarism is being deceitful. Perhaps it is motivated by laziness, the fear of failure, or wanting to appear smart, but in the end you are claiming credit that belongs to someone else.

At Christmas, it seems as if our entire culture is guilty of plagiarism. Think about it. We hear that this is the season of light, the season of hope, the season of joy, the season of cheer, good will and peace. (did I leave any out?) But in the interest of intellectual honesty I think that we need to ask, where did you get that idea from? Why is this the season of light? Why is this the season of hope, joy, cheer, good will and peace? What makes it a season of light? Why do we need light? Why do we need hope, joy, cheer, good will and peace? Or, to put another way, why aren’t we all just good, for goodness sake? Our culture wants to borrow the benefits of the gospel and borrow the benefits of Jesus, while it dismisses the gospel as ridiculous and the real Jesus as a myth. But, it is more than plagiarism to attempt to steal the fruits of the gospel without the gospel, or to take the benefits of following Jesus without following Jesus; it is impossible.

We need light because we are in darkness. We need hope because left to ourselves we only have despair. We need joy because without God we are miserable. Our idea of cheer is getting hammered. Seriously, how many people do you know who simply cannot conceive of having a good time without slamming down a few brewskis to dullen the pain? Light, peace, joy, hope and cheer are attractive themes. We want them, but they are elusive because most people have not seen how those can only be found in Christ. Christ is the light. If you reject Christ, you reject the light.

In this text, John talks about light. But, this light is not some fuzzy concept of goodness, nor some indistinguishable idea, form or notion of being nice, pleasant and helpful to mankind. The light that John speaks of is in a war with darkness. Look at verse 5.

1. **Darkness is in a war with the Light.** (5)

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

This verse has two nouns and two verbs. Light and darkness are the two nouns. “*Shines*” and “*has not overcome it*” are the two verbs. The verb that is translated “*has not overcome it*” is also translated in some versions as “*has not comprehended it.*” Both of those ideas are in view here. John is telling us that light is in a war with darkness and that the darkness cannot figure out the light and therefore it cannot figure out how to destroy it. Let’s unpack that.

There are two distinct categories in this world. There is Light and there is Darkness. (slide) Everything in this world falls into one or the other. Jesus uses two distinct categories in his teaching and those distinct categories are always expressions of either light or darkness. Jesus is the Light. (slide) Look at John 1.4 and 9 (read). Later in John 8.12 Jesus said, “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*” So, this is very important to understand because this helps you to discern what is going on in your world. Jesus is the source of the category of Light. Everything in this category is rooted in Christ.

In John 8 Christ is being attacked by the religious leaders because he is carefully explaining these two categories and he is saying that the religious leaders are in the category of darkness. In one of the most pointed, controversial and provocative exchanges ever, Jesus comes right out and says to the religious leaders in v.44, “*You are of your father the devil and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*”

You can only imagine what their reaction was. But do you see what Jesus is doing? He is emphasizing the fact that there are two categories. He is the light and Satan is the darkness. (slide) In his gospel John clearly emphasizes this contrast between truth and error. He describes it as “*what is above*” in contrast to “*what is below.*” In John 8.23 Jesus said to the religious leaders “*you are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.*” Light is from Jesus. Light is not from below. Light is truth. Error is darkness. Light is not of this world. Error and darkness are of this world. This means that the advent of Christ is when the Light itself came into this world and all hell broke loose. Therefore, Christmas is cosmic. Christmas is not a safe holiday. Christmas is when God invaded the darkness and planted a flag and said, “*Game on!*” 1 John 3.8 says, *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*

2. **The Darkness is losing.**

the darkness has not overcome it

If you are involved in a war and you cannot overcome your enemy, it means that you are losing. This is what happened when Christ came into the world. He exposed the darkness for what it is.

a. **The darkness is exposed as darkness.**

If everything is dark, you do not see the difference. If you are born blind, you do not know that you are blind. If you are born deaf, you do not know that you cannot hear. If you are in darkness, you do not know it unless the light is turned on. Then you are able to see that there is such a thing as light and darkness. Darkness is a fitting metaphor for evil. Evil cannot stand in the presence of light. The light exposes the evil for what it is.

But what is the darkness? Darkness is any attempt to reject the absolute rule of God over my life and to then rule my own life and/or the lives of others. Darkness is self-will, self-rule, self-promotion, self-worship, even self-righteousness. It is the idea that I can sin. I can deceive others. I can cover up my lies. I can sin in secret. I am not accountable to anyone else. I can be the god of my own life. I can master my own life. I can choose my own fate. I can save myself. But, when that does not work, I get angry. When others do not do what I want them to, I get angry, why? Because they are not submitting to my lordship. They are not playing by my rules. Listen, the reason why the world crucified Christ 2,000 years ago and would do it all over again if it had a chance is because Christ exposes our desire for self-rule and we are threatened by that, unless of course we repent and give him the keys to our life.

So, for example, many of the Scribes and Pharisees were evil. They had the titles of being good. They had the positions of being in charge, being religious, being representatives of God, but in reality, they were evil. They used religion as a cover-up for self-rule, greed, power and self-righteousness. Jesus came along and he exposed them for what they were. And they hated him for it. He was not impressed with their titles. He knew their hearts for what they were and his very presence was terrifying. They pretended to be the good guys, but the presence of Jesus was like turning on the light and it became obvious that they were in darkness, and they were not too happy about that.

Think of when Christ was on trial before Pilate. The trial of Christ was what appeared to be happening. What was really happening was the trial of Pilate. Pilate was being exposed and he had no idea what to do with Jesus. Pilate, who appeared to be in charge, was not really in charge. He had no ultimate authority to declare Christ guilty. If he said that Christ was guilty, he was actually guilty. That is what I am trying to say. The darkness is losing because darkness is darkness and no matter what the darkness does it will always lose because light always banishes darkness. Therefore, if you are involved in a war with an enemy that is defeating you, you will only hate that enemy even more.

Many of you are U of M fans. That means that you hate Ohio State. And you know that the hostility is certainly mutual. For the last 13 out of 14 years, Ohio State has won The

Game. But, as a U of M fan, the fact that you have been beaten again and again and again does not cause you to go, “y’know, I kinda like these Buckeyes. After all, we certainly can’t beat them, might as well join them. You don’t do that! The fact that you keep losing only means that your hatred runs even deeper, right? Well, on a more serious note...

b. The darkness hates the light.

Now, let’s go back to that verb at the end of verse 5. “The darkness has not overcome it” (and/or “the darkness has not understood it or comprehended it). Since the darkness is “of this world” it is fighting against the light with the weapons of this world. But, the light is “not of this world” so the weapons of this world are not effective against the light. The darkness cannot understand the light because it is of this world and it does not have the capacity to understand the light and therefore it cannot overcome it.

Our country dedicates tons of manpower and resources to studying our enemies. If we can understand our enemy, then we can figure out how to anticipate what they are going to do. But, if you cannot understand your enemy, then you are always going to be surprised. The darkness could not understand Christ and therefore it could not anticipate what he was going to do and the darkness ended up cooperating with Christ’s plan to be our Savior and in so doing, darkness basically committed suicide.

Christ, who had real power, laid it aside. He surrendered his position in order to die on a cross and rescue us. The darkness had no category for that. The darkness did not understand that so the darkness, not comprehending what the light was doing, condemned the light, crucified the light, only for the light to cut the jugular of the darkness.

The apostle John discipled a man by the name of Polycarp who became an early leader in the early church. Because Christianity was outlawed by the Roman empire, Polycarp was considered to be an enemy of the state and his arrest was ordered. In spite of his age (86) the officials had a difficult time finding him because so many people were helping to protect him. When the officials were finally able to track him down they came to the house where he was staying anticipating a battle. Instead, he heard them coming so he came downstairs and began to talk with them. They were completely taken back by his age, his calm, his fearlessness and the fact that it was obvious to them anyway, that this old man presented no threat to the Roman Empire. After a bit, Polycarp asked for the table to be set and for lunch to be served to the men who had come to arrest him. After they ate together, he asked if he might have some time to pray before they went. He was granted this request and he prayed...for two hours. By this time, the soldiers were all repenting for arresting this man, but they had their orders. Eventually Polycarp was brought to trial but all along the way, people kept pleading with this venerable and godly man to just say that Caesar is Lord (it’s just words) and burn some incense and they will let you go. But, he refused. Finally the proconsul threatened him with torture if he would not repent, but Polycarp told him that if someone repents they need to repent of something bad in order to embrace something good and that he was being asked to repent of something good in order to embrace something bad, and if he did that, that would really be torture. Then he was threatened with being burned with fire, and once again

Polycarp said that while you threaten me with a fire that only burns for a while, but you are ignorant of the fire of judgment that never stops burning.

Do you see what is going on? The government officials are trying to use the rules of this world with Polycarp. But Polycarp, as a follower of Christ plays by the rules of another world. He is not bound by this world's rules. Power is not position, or money, weapons or force. But, since those who were threatening him did not understand that, they could not figure out why he was not afraid of them. In the end they ended up executing Polycarp, but in so doing, the gospel that Polycarp believed in, was only spread abroad more and more. By killing him, the Roman officials helped spread the news about Christ. The darkness could not comprehend the light and therefore it could not overcome it.

Do you see my argument for why our culture is so guilty of plagiarism? You may be attracted to light. You may like the notion of light and see the benefits of light, but you cannot legitimately talk about light, hope, peace etc., without Christ. You cannot borrow light from the category of Jesus because Jesus is the light. In order to be in the light, in order to be truly associated with the light, you therefore have to be in Christ. But that means that you have to accept Christ for who he claims to be. He defines things as they are because he made them. We do not define Christ; Christ defines us. Again chapter 8 is very telling on this point. Jesus told the religious leaders that the reason why they were from below is because of their sins and unless they believed that Jesus is God (v.24) they would die in their sins. People want light, hope and peace, but they don't want to submit to Christ. They want the benefits of Christ without the person of Christ. The light threatens the darkness. The light makes the darkness angry because the darkness cannot stand in the presence of the light.

I believe that this explains why after years of being somewhat dormant, that all of sudden it seems, the Islam religion now has become in many areas so radicalized. I also believe that is why here in the west, Christianity is now so hated and vilified. The darkness is losing and it is having a panic attack. My own personal belief is that there will be a season of time on this earth that is known as the Tribulation. I believe that the world will attempt to forge an alliance, an economic, military, and religious alliance and will attempt to unify itself in an effort to rage against God. But,

3. **The Darkness will lose.**

For example, you may hate the law of gravity. You may start a movement that attempts to ban the law of gravity. You may get 500,000 people to sign a petition that puts an initiative on the ballot to ban the law of gravity. You may even get a law passed that outlaws the law of gravity. But just because you outlaw the law of gravity doesn't outlaw the law of gravity. Gravity is. Truth is. The darkness can rant against it, it can threaten it. It can even try to kill it, but the darkness will lose, because...

a. **It has been decisively defeated.**

When Christ came into the world at his advent, it was game on. When Christ died on the cross and then rose again from the dead, it was game over. It was game over because Christ took upon himself the ultimate weapon of darkness – which is death and he defeated it. He defeated death because he crushed the power of sin. The power of sin is the law. The law reveals our sin and therefore the law condemns us by exposing our sin. But Christ took that sin upon himself when he died on the cross and in his death he paid in full for the sins of every single person who would ever believe on him. By dying in our place, his death was the death of death for us. Death has died, life has won. The darkness that threatens us makes threats it cannot make good on. Like the proconsul who threatened Polycarp, darkness can only shoot blanks because death has no hold on us.

b. It will be once and for all banished.

For now, darkness is still our enemy and it still, even as a defeated, angry, defiant foe holds sway in lives, it will one day be banished forever and ever. And on that day, when the reign of Christ is once and for all recognized by all, when every knee bows and every tongues confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord, then darkness everything that does with it will become a distant, fading and likely a forgotten memory.

Choir/orchestra assemble

Can you imagine living without darkness?

Therefore,

Whose side are you on?

When you are exposed to light and darkness, what side do you come down on?

Psalm 2 – Hallelujah Chorus