

The Tale of the Word

Hespeler, January 4, 2026 © Scott McAndless – Second Sunday after Christmas Day

Jeremiah 31:7-14, Psalm 147:12-20, Ephesians 1:3-14, [John 1:1-18](#)

In the beginning, when God began to create the heavens and the earth, the heavens may have been in order, but the earth was in complete chaos, as seen in the tumultuous waters of the deep. But worst of all, worse even than the chaos, was the darkness.

Darkness covered the face of the whole earth. It penetrated every corner. It filled the living soul of the earth. And as God considered the task of creating, a wind from God, which is the Spirit that proceeds from God, was brooding over the face of the waters like a mother bird broods over an egg before life springs forth from it.



The First Word

But before life was possible, before the work of creation could truly begin, God knew one thing was necessary. And so, God spoke just one Word. The Word that God said was “Light.” God spoke the Word as a command, calling it into being. And so light became.

Now, I know that people have long puzzled over that Word *light* as the first act of the creator. They have noticed, and rightly so, that God doesn’t get around to creating the sun, the moon and the stars until the fourth day of creation.

We know that all of the light that we experience, even the light that humans generate, has its ultimate source in those heavenly bodies. And so, we sensibly ask, where was the light coming from for those first three days?

Limiting the Darkness

The truth is that the light that God spoke into being on the first day was more essential than what comes from those created things. The light that God spoke was spoken into being to counter the darkness that would overwhelm the earth.

The purpose of this first Word was therefore to restrain the darkness. God used it to set the boundaries of the darkness. It was limited to the night, while the light was given free rein over the day. For if the darkness were not confined to its appropriate place, it would constantly drag the earth back down into the chaos which slowly destroys all life and hope.

Necessary to Creation

That is why “*light*” had to be the first Word. It was the Word that made the whole creation possible. And the light that came from it was God’s constant companion in that work. And, as God spoke humanity into being, that first Word was there and ready to fill them with life, which was the light of all humankind.

But when God finished all of that great work of creation and declared that it was good and instituted rest for God and all God’s people, the darkness was still there, abiding within its limits, at least for the moment.

The Darkness of Empire

The people that God had created developed and grew. They invented agriculture and cities. And in an

attempt to flourish, they gave power to certain people so that they could impose order and keep the primeval chaos and darkness at bay.

And the darkness that had waited saw its moment. It entered into the hearts of a few who found power and wealth in these new systems. They became kings and emperors who used the surplus that the labour of others created to amass ever more to themselves.

In the valley of the Nile River, one powerful ruler, a Pharaoh, used his power to turn whole peoples into slaves to serve his whims. And the slaves suffered in the darkness of their bonds.

A Word of Defiance

But God saw this growing darkness and once again spoke to set a limit on it. He spoke a Word of defiance into the heart of a man named Moses, who demanded liberty for his people and would not back down until they were free. And God became the God of those former slaves.

But God knew that those slaves had internalized the darkness during their long years of oppression. God knew that they could easily fall back into the ways of darkness. They would seek to exploit their neighbours and steal the fruit of their labours as Pharaoh had done unto them.

And so, God gathered this new people at a place called Sinai and spoke to them the Word of light. God taught them to live in harmony and share the resources of their land in ways that would benefit everyone.

Darkness in the Promised Land

The people of God entered into a land of their own, and there they sought to live out the Word of light that they had been given. But it was a constant struggle. The darkness had not given up its fight, and it kept creeping back into the hearts of the people.

The darkness took the Word of life that had been given on Sinai and twisted it so that, instead of giving life and spreading light, it became a list of rules for people to follow. And it also became a weapon that you could employ to condemn those who didn't follow those rules in the way that you thought they should.

And so, community and neighbourliness began to break down in the land. They turned to the dark ways of greed. They made slaves of their fellow humans, just as they had once been enslaved. And they told themselves that it was okay, that God wouldn't mind if they just burned a few sacrifices to keep God contented.

Prophets

But God did not desire their sacrifices; God wanted the people to live in the light and do deeds of light. So, God called prophets one by one and spoke the Word of light into their souls and sent them out to speak the Word to the people. They challenged the people and called them back into the light.

But still, the people drifted so easily into the ways of darkness. They resisted the message of the prophets. Some of them they even expelled and killed. For others, they twisted their messages and used them separate and divide the people. Still, the darkness found its way.

A Written Word

New and better ways of speaking the Word into the world were needed. One solution that God considered was to commission (or shall we say inspire) a written text. After all, modern people think of a book as the perfect way to proclaim a Word so that it cannot be corrupted or misused.

We think this way because, ever since the invention of the printing press, it has been possible to make texts in nearly limitless quantities that are virtually identical to each other. Such perfect copies suggest to us that the message in them is incorruptible and will always remain the same.

Limitations of a Written Word

But God knows the limitations of the printed Word. God understands how the meaning of words changes over time and how something written in one historical context can take on a radically different meaning in another.

So, while God knew that the written Word would play an important role in speaking the Word to the whole world, it could not serve as the ultimate speaking of the Word.

God knew with perfect foresight that the darkness would find ways to take even the precious Word of Scripture and twist it so that people would use it to justify such terrible things as slavery, oppression and the neglect of the poor and the strangers.

God Confers with Godself

And so, God began to think to Godself. “We continue to speak the Word into this world that we have made,” God said. (And please don’t ask me to explain why God’s pronouns are we/us in the Bible. At this point, thousands of books have been written on that question, and we don’t have the time to explore the answer here.)

“We continue to speak the Word into the darkness of this world,” God said. “And for moments, there are flashes of brilliance, and it seems as if the darkness has been defeated.

“But then it keeps happening. The darkness manages to grasp the Word that we have spoken and finds ways to lead people to doubt its meaning or twist the Word that has been given to serve its own dark purposes.

A Living Word

“We need to find a way to speak the Word so that the darkness cannot corrupt it. We need a Word that can speak to changing circumstances and can respond to new attacks as they arise. We need a Word that understands the challenges of living in the real world and yet can still persevere in the face of the darkness.

“What we need, therefore, is a living Word. It would not be a Word of sterile and unchangeable rules, but a Word that could encourage the practice of love in all situations.

“Even more important, it would have to be a Word made flesh – a Word that could speak into the messiness of human flesh. It would be able to understand the weakness, the needs and the limits of human flesh and how it can be tempted towards the darkness.

“And yet, how could that be? How could the Word be alive and entirely human while still retaining that constant connection with us? And that was when the divine Creator knew what had to happen – what had always had to happen.

The Word Made Flesh

And so, the Word that had been there from the beginning, that Word that had not only been a partner with God in all creation but that had made creation possible, the Word that had been woven into all of the commandments and that had spoken through the Prophets, became flesh.

This Word had not only always been with God and God’s companion in all works. The Word had

always been the expression of God. God's speech had always been the effective expression of the whole being of God, so the Word was God.

Light and Life Come into Being

And so the Word came into being in a man. And this man was life. And he brought light to all people. For the Word had always been **“let there be light.”**

And so, the terms the original battle – the battle before all battles – were changed. For the Word that had become flesh did not just set limits on the darkness and restrict it to the night. What came into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overtake it. The darkness could never overtake it.

A Treatise on Genesis

The Gospel of John does something truly extraordinary in its prologue. There is nothing quite like it in all ancient literature. John, as he writes it, is pulling together elements from everywhere. He is intentionally pulling in elements from the creation story in the Book of Genesis, where God calls all things into being by merely speaking a Word.

But he is not writing a treatise on the Genesis creation story.

A Philosophical Word

He is also drawing from Greek Philosophy. We see it in the word that he repeats over and over again – the word *Word*. He is writing in Greek, so he uses the Greek word *logos* (λόγος).

And that word that he uses is not just the common Greek word for a word. It is the name of a concept that was central to all Greek philosophy and knowledge. The *logos* was behind all logic and reason. In fact, all knowledge was considered to be a kind of *logos*. Biology was the *logos* of life. Theology was the *logos* of the gods, and so on.

So, all throughout this passage, John is commenting on a key concept of Greek philosophy, but he is not writing a philosophical treatise on the *logos*.

A Story

No, John is writing a story. And it is the story of the meaning of all history. It is the story of light and darkness, and a Word that ensures the victory of the light and the defeat of the darkness.

Human beings understand the world by telling stories. It is what we have always done. We gather together the various things we have experienced of the world, and we make it all make sense by tying it together into a narrative.

The point of such stories is not that they are historically accurate or factual. A good story is simply one that makes all of those truths about the world make sense together. And that is the kind of story that John is telling in this passage. He masterfully makes sense of the whole sweep of human history by narratively relating it to this idea of the Word.

So, remember the story of the Word. Carry it with you. And when the darkness threatens to overwhelm you, remember this story. For the Word that was there at the beginning of all things is the Word that became human for you. It is still the Word that God wants to speak into your heart.