

# In Him Was Life

by John Piper

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*The sermon explores the concept of life and its relationship to God, Jesus Christ, and humanity, emphasizing that life is the source of all things and that it gives us the ability to see and understand God.*

**Duration:** 46:26

**Scripture:** John 1:1-8, John 8:12

**Topics:** "Divine Nature", "Christian Faith"

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## Description

In this sermon, the pastor discusses the importance of recognizing the living nature of ultimate reality, which is found in Jesus Christ. He emphasizes that all human beings, despite their degeneracy, are created in the image of God and possess a reflection of infinite reality. The pastor encourages the audience to reflect on the significance of verses 6 through 8 in relation to the flow of the sermon. He concludes by urging listeners to have faith in Jesus, receive His life, and seek to be faithful to Him in order to be strengthened, humbled, saved, and sent.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org) The passage for tonight's sermon comes from the book of John, chapter 1, verses 1 through 13. Again, the passage is the Gospel of John, chapter 1, verses 1 to 13.

John, chapter 1, starting in verse 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light that all might believe through Him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him. Yet, the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.

But, to all who did receive Him, who believe in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will, nor of the flesh, excuse me, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Let's pray. Father in Heaven, we love Your Word.

It makes us tremble, because it hurts us often. But, oh, how it heals. Oh, how it moves, it stirs, it strengthens, it solidifies.

Oh, what would we do without this rock under our feet? The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making us wise. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. What would we do without this honey, without this gold, without this rock, without this hammer, without this balm? And so come and make me faithful to it. So that those who hear would be strengthened and humbled and saved and sent.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. John chapter 1, verse 4. In Him, that is in Christ, the Word, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him. Without Him was not anything made that was made.

Verse 4. In Him, this Word, this Jesus Christ, this God was life. In Him was life. Therefore, in the beginning, before there was anything else but God, there was life.

This has two huge implications. Number one, ultimate reality is living. Ultimate reality is alive.

Original reality, ultimate reality, absolute reality is a living person. How can I help you begin to feel the wonder that you should, I should feel at that raw fact? That ultimate, original, absolute, from which everything else comes reality is a living person. If your child, which he or she will do eventually if you have children, says to you at about age four or five, where did God come from? You will answer, perhaps, God didn't come from anywhere.

He always was there. He never had a beginning. He was there before anything else was.

He made everything else. There wasn't anything before God to bring Him about. Got that, little four-year-old? And then the four-year-old will say, but how did He get to be the way He was? And you will say, He just is the way He was.

He didn't get to be that way. He always has been what He is. Nobody made Him the way He is.

No force, no power made Him what He is. He just been there as He is forever and ever and ever and ever as far back forever. That's what it means to be God.

And one of the things that He has been forever and ever and ever is life. He's alive. He's a living person.

There has always been a living person without beginning. Takes your breath away. As far back as you can go in eternity, forever and ever and ever, there's one changeless reality.

Life. Divine, personal life. Ultimate reality, absolute reality, original reality is alive.

In Him was life. Here's the second implication. Physical matter did not give rise to life.

It's the other way around. Life gave rise to physical matter. Once there was only life and no matter.

That's all there was, was life. And no physical matter whatsoever existed. And then personal life created matter and there was both life and matter.

Now here's a great division between atheists and Christians. The atheistic worldview and the Christian worldview. For atheists, everything begins with inanimate matter and energy.

That's where it begins. It's just there. Like God, it's just there.

And since there was nothing there before to make it what it was, it could have been anything. Not sure they think about that very much. It could have been anything.

There's no statistical probability one way or the other because there was nothing there to create a statistical probability. It just could have been anything. And they choose to believe stuff and energy.

That's just an act of faith. There's zero, zero proof for that. They just have faith.

They believe that matter was the first thing that was there. They don't know this. They guess.

They guess. They say impersonal matter, impersonal energy are original. They're absolute.

They're ultimate. And then, for billions of years with no creator, no intelligence, no design, no purpose, no plan, there emerges from this mindless, lifeless, random matter and energy not only irreducible complexities of independent, interdependent biological structures, but also this glorious thing called living personhood. You.

And me. That's their account. For Christians, it's the other way around.

First, there was life. And then, there was matter and energy. First, there was living personhood.

And then, there was matter and energy. In the beginning was the Word. And in Him was life.

Before there was anything else, there was life. Wherever you turn on this planet and see a living person, you see an image of absolute reality. Absolute, eternal, ultimate, original reality.

The Word. God. You've never met an ordinary human being.

There aren't any. They're all extraordinary. I don't care how degenerate they have become.

When you look upon a human being, you're seeing something staggeringly extraordinary in the image of life. An echo. A reflection of infinite, ultimate reality.

How would that I could walk through Philip's neighborhood conscious always, deeply conscious of this. They're all amazing. And they're all dead.

Dead. All of them. All of us.

Which is why everything that I have said up till this point in the sermon is not the main point of these verses. I've been spinning out implications that I think are really there which are not the main thing in John's mind at all. Just because I find them fantastically interesting and wonderfully important.

But it's not what John's after. That little talk about the last ten minutes or so, that's not John's point. John's got something else going on here in him was life.

The life that John has in mind as he writes verse 4 is new life. Spiritual life. Saving life.

The gift of eternal life. The opposite of being dead even though you're walking around. It's the opposite of condemnation and judgment.

That's mainly what he means here. Not that the other is wrong. In fact I could take you to other verses in John to show why the last ten minutes are warranted by this text but not the main point.

Listen to this. This is John chapter 5 verse 24. Truly, truly I say to you whoever hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life.

He doesn't come into judgment but has passed from death to life. Do you hear what that is saying? If you believe in Jesus you from the entire mass of human death have passed out of it into life. Everybody's dead.

That's the meaning of sin and the fall. The entire human race is spiritually dead to Jesus Christ. Apart from him we're all dead.

And with him we will live forever and not come into judgment with the gift of life. That's the main thing. Here's some other confirmations of that.

First John 5 verse 11. This is one of the most important. God gave us eternal life and this life is in his son.

Do you get that? In him was life. John 1 verse 4. First John 5 verse 11. The life, eternal life was in his son.

Whoever has the son has life. Whoever does not have the son does not have life. He's dead.

So everybody's dead until they have Jesus. You don't need to work to make Christianity controversial. Say sentences from the Bible.

Here's another one. John 5 verse 40. You refuse to come to me that you may have life.

John 10 verse 10. I came that they might have life and have it abundantly. John 10 verse 28.

I give them eternal life and they will never perish. I think it's very clear that what is meant in John 1 verse 4 in him was life is in him was saving life. In him was eternal life.

In him was the life which if you have it you're no longer spiritually dead. You're no longer going into judgment. You're going into heaven.

That's the kind of life he means in John 1 verse 4. And if you have the son you have that life because that life is in the son. Vital union with Jesus is everything. If you're united to Jesus you have what he has.

Life. And if you're not, you don't. You're dead.

Second half of verse 4. The life was the light of men. Why does he say that? The life that is in the son, in the word, in God, in Jesus. The life was the light.

Life is light. Life was the light of men. What does he mean by that? Why does he say that? I think he says that because we don't really understand what our deadness is until he starts putting it in terms that we can kind of connect with.

You walk up to your average person at the mall or at your office and say you know what the pastor said about you on the weekend? He said you're dead. They'll think you've lost your mind. It doesn't communicate anything that would be helpful probably.

Well what other terms then might you use to get at what does that mean? They're walking around. They're smiling. They're drinking, eating.

They do stuff. What do you mean they're dead? They don't look dead. This life is the light of men.

People aren't dead because they can't walk. They're dead because they can't see. That's why light is so crucial here.

You can't see him for who he is. Without Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit a fallen, sinful, unregenerate person will look at Jesus Christ. He'll either be boring or he'll be a great teacher and they'll be working hard to try to be like him a little bit or he'll be God.

Satan knows he's God but you want to get away from him because you don't like the way he runs the world but you can't see him as infinitely precious. You can't see him as the most beautiful person there ever was. You can't see him as the highest treasure of your life.

You are blind until something happens. That's what he means by dead. It has to do with what you see, what you perceive Jesus to be.

So he says in verse 4, in him was life and that life was the light of men. In other words, when that life comes into you, moves on you, you're awakened to see what really is. Light goes on for you.

Life enables light. That's what he's saying. Chapter 8, verse 12, I am the light of the world, Jesus says, I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. Light of life. Lay that on top of verse 4. In him was life and that life became light.

Therefore that light is the light of life. It's the light that was produced by life. I've got to have life.

I'm dead and if I'm dead I can't see. I've got to live so that I can see. Something's got to happen to me.

A miracle has to happen to me. You can see why last year we spent 13 weeks on the doctrine of the new birth, which is exactly where we're going in this sermon because that's where the text goes. Verse 5, Now, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Christ is shining in the darkness. So he's come into the world as the light and the life. He's shining.

And the darkness, that's the collective six billion darkened souls. And then how should this be translated? ESV says, has not overcome it. NIV, NASB, King James Version, all translate it differently than that.

They all translate it. The darkness has not understood it. The darkness has not comprehended it.

Now, you're stuck there, but you're not any more stuck than the Greek scholars are because you got Greek scholars translating all these versions and they're disagreeing with each other about whether it should be translated overcome or understand. And there's a very simple reason. This word, katalambano, is like, here's the closest analogy I can think of, it's like our word grasp.

Very close to our word grasp. You know the word grasp has two meanings, don't you? You can either grasp something and do something bad with it or you can grasp an idea and understand it. This is not hard.

We do this in English and they do it in Greek and so the ambiguity is there. I'm inclined to think since John is not stupid, he knew exactly that that ambiguity existed and meant to leave it that way. So that we would say, I wonder if he means the darkness hasn't grasped it and squashed it or the darkness just can't even get what it is.

It's just dumb, it's just dead. Because both are absolutely true. However, I'm opting for understand as his main meaning and here's the reason.

You can see it, don't need Greek to see it. Verses 10 and 11 are going to talk that way about the coming of the light into the darkness. He came to his own and they didn't know him.

Not they didn't kill him, they didn't know him. Let me read verse 10. He was in the world and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him, didn't grasp him, didn't understand him, didn't comprehend him.

They're dead. They're blind. I think that corresponds to verse 5. The darkness has not understood it.

Verse 11. He came to his own and his own people did not receive him. So the true light is coming into the world.

The world was made through him. People were chosen by him, Israel. I suspect both of those are meant here in verse 10 and 11.

He came to his own. He was in the world and the world was made through him. He came to his own.

That is everybody is his own because he made them. The world is Jesus. It belongs to him but he also in the Old Testament chose Israel and so coming to your own at a narrower level would be he came to his own and they didn't receive him.

The people of Israel that he was offering himself to for their Messiah didn't receive him. It says in verse 9 this light was coming into the world enlightening everyone. What does that mean? It enlightens everyone.

I'll give you my take and you test it. And so many of these choices that you make and how you understand a text are confirmed or not by the rest of what you read in the gospel. It's kind of hard to make a big case for everything right here when page after page is going to either confirm one way of understanding or another so I'm just giving it out there.

You keep it in your mind and weigh it as we go through. I'm going to take enlightens everyone not to mean some kind of he's the ultimate Logos that is in every human brain. I don't think that's in John's mind at all frankly.

I think enlightens everyone means that Christ gives life to everyone who receives it. Here's the analogy for understanding it that way a doctor says this flu vaccine works for everyone. Come fall.

That's what you're going to hear on the radio. Got plenty of flu vaccine. Come on all you stupid Minnesotans.

Get your shots. It works for everybody. But what they mean is those who get the shots.

So when he says he enlightens everyone he means if you receive him light will happen. If you receive his life you'll see so that's the way I understand verse nine. Now last question.

What does God do to keep the darkness from overcoming the light? Return to that implication. If they're not knowing him if they're not receiving him what are they doing? Can they kill him? In killing him are they overcoming the light? And as he meets resistance everywhere he goes from so many even disciples are going to leave him in chapter six because he says hard things and little teeny band of people. He got about a hundred and twenty after three years of ministry and he's the son of God.

That's not a very effective church plant. Well it was incredibly effective. Just wasn't impressive.

So he's getting this resistance all over the place. What does God do so that this resistance can be overcome rather than it overcoming the light? And you know where I'm going. I'm going to verses twelve and thirteen because that's the answer.

I think I'm being guided by the flow here of what he's doing. He's answering my question. He gave me my question by answering it.

What do you do if you're dead? And if your friends are dead and your family's dead and you don't want to be dead and you can't see and you'd want to see what has to happen. All right now let's read the answer to that question. Verse twelve.

But to all who did receive him he came to his own they didn't receive him but to all who did receive him that is another word for receive who believed in his name he gave the right to become the children of God. How did that happen? Verse thirteen is going to tell you how that happened. They were born who were born this is where new birth comes from they were born not of blood so it wasn't two bloodlines coming together a man and a woman to produce another one nor of the will of the flesh it wasn't just some physical activity by which you came into being nor was it the will of a husband or a man but you were born of God.

So he came into the world he came to his own his own didn't receive him they were dead they were blind but some did receive him some did who were they? Why did they? They were dead they were dead some dead people didn't receive him not a surprise some dead people did very surprising dead people don't receive Jesus they laugh at him they scorn him they watch television and skip that channel well it says they were born of God that's what happened in verse thirteen they were born of God not of blood not of the will of flesh nor the will of man but they were born of God and because they're born of God they're what? alive life go back to verse four verse thirteen is describing how verse four in practical experience becomes real for you in him was life but you're dead and deadness means you don't want him so what hope is there for anybody to get saved? well none in us not like you and your Christian family had a real strong spiritual proclivity to believe well that's bad theology I mean bad is an understatement I should use bad words to describe how bad that theology is a little reminder John chapter three wish we could do it all

at once but we have to take it as it comes this is Nicodemus you remember what Jesus said truly truly I say to you unless one is born again he cannot what? anybody remember? he cannot see the kingdom of God you can't see it you can't receive it you can't live in it because you're dead and unless you're born again you won't even see it well you'll see a what is that?

I don't like that I just want to go golf so you can't enter in and you can't be born again you can't be saved so what's God's remedy for that deadness? send Jesus into the world as the light of the world and the life to lay down his life for us John 10-15 and then to causing people to be born again so they can see and have life and be a recipient of all that Jesus is for them now I'm going to close with this question what about sequence here? and you'll see in a minute this may sound pointless to you at first it isn't and I think you'll see why what about sequence here in what happens? you got new birth and life that's one thing that happens you got new sight that's another thing that happens and you've got new faith or receiving Jesus to as many as received him gave the power to become to as many as believed on his name you got seeing, believing, being born again and I'm asking the questions of sequence here should we even think in terms of a temporal sequence? which comes first? faith, receiving and then life and then sight or sight and then receiving and then life or is there a sequence? so that here's the practical part so I know what to do what do I do next? so if you came into this room and you were not a Christian you've heard me use all kinds of descriptions dead, blind bored by Jesus and perhaps God's been at work in these services and you're wondering whoa, what do I do?

I don't want to be blind I don't want to be lifeless that's why this issue of sequence is important so let me give you my answer to this I think that all of the things I just mentioned happen simultaneously that's hard to grasp you may remember we used the analogy of fire and light last year when we were doing this series on the new birth here I'm going to use another one if your eyes are closed my eyes are closed and all is darkness which happens first? open the eyes or seeing light I cannot think that they're different the meaning of open is that light is coming in that's the meaning of open which is why when I think of God intervening to open to give life that opens that's not a temporarily different moment than Jesus' glory and light streaming into my heart and my eyes I can't

separate them in any way temporarily it solves a lot of problems if you believe that it really does now here's the catch from God causes life life quickens eyes eyes see light Jesus comes in the problem is in verse 4 of chapter 1 life is in the sun life is in the sun there is no saving life apart from Jesus none therefore when we think about this what comes first and how does it work Jesus can't be left off to the side while major mega dynamics are going on in my soul spiritually Jesus is over there and he'll show up once the work is done uh-uh it doesn't work that way he shows up in the gospel immediately and that event of his showing up in the gospel and being preached to me or shared with me on the sidewalk is the means by which God will work light in me because that life and that

light is coming at me and God the Spirit is coming in here and in one moment these things are happening together God opening eyes Jesus' light flowing in not some other light that makes me ready to receive Jesus later Jesus himself with the light, with the life is coming at the same moment that the new birth is happening here's the way I try to say it it seems to me that we're talking about the same thing from different sides there are at least four of them we're talking about faith and that is a conscious act of your mind and heart I believe, I receive, I welcome, I rest in him second, we're talking about new birth that is unconscious you don't make that happen nobody ever causes himself to be born again God causes people to be born again it's an unconscious thing that enables you to see

third, there's a seeing with new eyes and fourth, there's union with Christ where life and those four things faith, new birth, seeing with new eyes, union with Christ are temporally indistinguishable here's the implication of that for your life tonight and those you care about leading to Christ and salvation when Jesus commands you tonight which he does right now we're almost done, another couple of minutes when Jesus commands you to believe there at the North Campus or downtown on Sunday morning when Jesus commands you to believe this means that you don't wait for a separate experience called the new birth before you believe because that would imply you'll know when it happens different from faith like now I know I'm born again and I've got the ability to believe so I'm going to consider

believing now you're not born again if you're considering believing when you're born again your eyes are open to the glory of Jesus he's streaming in, you're receiving, you're saved nobody's born again and unsaved nobody's born again apart from seeing, receiving Jesus in the gospel therefore the first implication is let's get out of our head that when the command comes in this room believe you say but you're implying I really can't without the work of the Holy Spirit yes, so what? the experience of the new birth and the experience of believing are one if you find your heart being drawn out to the Savior to embrace and receive him do it! don't wait around for this other thing that you're going to call new birth that will be as you look back I was born again!

I was drawn to the Savior, my heart was open to his glory I believed, why else would I have believed had he not awakened me and made me new and given me life in Christ that's the first implication here's another one don't rush ahead and believe as though you could do it without the new birth that's almost the opposite of what I just said that is not contradictory don't have in your mind I've got this thing under control here so I can do it when I'm 78 just before I breathe my last you don't you don't it's not in your control which is why you better not put it off if God is drawing you now he may not draw you again this is one of the great pernicious things about viewing conversion as a decision over which you have final, ultimate authority you don't you better tremble with a sense of

utter reliance upon God so what I'm warning against here is the opposite error I warned against a minute ago the other error is I've got to wait until this supernatural thing happens to me called the new birth and then I'll consider Jesus because then I'll have the ability to that's ridiculous that's not biblical that's the opposite of what I'm saying here I think it's the opposite of what's implied in verses 12 and 13 the other mistake is to say I've got this thing under control I can do this and I'll do it when I please I'm not going to do it tonight but maybe, you know when I'm done with my world trip or whatever you don't have it under your control if God is pulling on you now yield and you will find in your faith that you have been born of God you may wonder as we close why I skipped

verses 6 through 8 and the reason is that I didn't have time to do verses 6 through 8 and I have very great eagerness to do verses 6 through 8 and they work nicely with what comes in 15, 14, 15 following so we're going to pick it up there next time and they relate very closely so here's a little homework read verses 6 through 8 and then a few verses farther than 13 and ask why did he stick those in there? that just seems to interrupt the flow that little John the Baptist piece it just goes so nicely from 5 to 10 that's the way the pastor preached it why did he write it like that? and I'll try to answer that it's very significant let's pray Father in heaven in these services this weekend those listening to me at the North Campus in downtown on Lord's Day morning and those here in this room

now are not here by accident there are no accidents and so I pray that a great saving moving of the Holy Spirit who causes us to be born again surprises us sneaks up on us opens our eyes gives us life in the

Son when he's preached I pray that you would be moving and saving and strengthening your people and enlarging your flock on this earth I thank you Lord Jesus very personally that you laid down your life for me and that you took it again and that I and we have union with you now by faith and that your life is our life and your death became our death and we will be with you forever grant that more and more people will see this and believe it I pray in Jesus name, Amen Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper Pastor for Preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis,

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