

Empire Church of the Brethren

## Sunday Service Sermons

**03 December 2023**

God's Affirmative Action Program: The Reason

Text: "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." *John 1:4-5*

In 1965 the federal government of the United States initiated affirmative action programs to see that businesses right some wrongs, balance some imbalances, correct some faults, ultimately, to bring reconciliation.

God also has an affirmative action program designed to bring reconciliation, that is reconciliation between God and mankind.

As we approach Christmas we will examine God's affirmative action program as expressed in the prologue to John's gospel, *John 1:1-8*.

The first matter to consider is the reason for God's affirmative action program.

Why did God need one?

Because humans had sinned against their Creator and broken fellowship with him, God had to make a way for them to come back into a right relationship with him.

He showed his love for humankind by initiating a plan to restore them to a position of right standing.

Just as we say, "I love you," with words and actions, that is how God communicated his love to us. He sent his Son, the living Word, to earth.

*John 1:1* with words reminiscent of *Genesis 1:1* says, "In the beginning was the Word," God had a word for us.

The Word of God is communicative.

When the writer of the fourth gospel wanted to tell us of God's Word to us, he chose a concept that would communicate to all people who would receive this gospel.

The concept was "Word."

To Jews, Greeks, Christians, and the world at large, this was a concept that would communicate what God had done in Christ Jesus.

It contained power.

To the Jews the Word of God meant power.

God spoke a word and the world came into being.

The Word of God could burn like fire or shatter like a hammer.

The Word of God could accomplish the divine purpose.

The Hebrews who would read this gospel would immediately understand the power of God when they understood that the Word was in the beginning with God and was God.

It contained principle.

But to the Greek reader "the Word" would mean a rational principle.

It had to do more with philosophical thought than personal power.

The Jewish apologist Philo had adopted this Greek philosophical concept to refer to the projected thought of the transcendent God, the clue to the meaning and purpose of life.

It contained a proclamation.

The early Christian church viewed the preaching of the gospel as a "ministry of the Word".

The entire event of Christ's life was a divine declaration, a redemptive proclamation.

We are told in Revelation, "His name is the Word of God".

In preaching the Word, the early Christians were proclaiming the redemptive message of Jesus Christ.

It also contained a person.

The unique conviction of the prologue to John's gospel is that the Word of God is a person.

The Word is not Jesus' power or principle or proclamation but his person.

When truth becomes personal, it becomes meaningful to us.

God had a word for us, a word that communicates to us, in a personal way, that we can be made right with God.

The Word is comprehensive.

The Word relates to God.

The Word is not just identified with God; he is identical with God.

When you want to see God, and know what God is like, you look to Jesus Christ.

He is related to God in being.

He gives us an accurate communication of God.

The Word relates to the world.

The Word of God relates to the world in that God was the agent of creation.

He is revealed and known by his creative activity.

John and Paul both wanted to make sure that we understood that creation was as much the work of Christ as was redemption.

God relates to the world in creativity.

The Word relates to humankind.

But the comprehensive Word that God spoke also relates to all of humankind.

It is expressed in two terms: Life and light.

These translate to redemption.

Jesus Christ is related to humankind redemptively.

So the reason for God's affirmative action program is that God had a Word for us, a Word that was both communicative and comprehensive.

By this Word, God spoke the last Word to us.

Listen to the opening words of the book of Hebrews: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."

God has a witness to us.

If the Word God has spoken to us shows us that Christ, the Word, is, it also shows us what Christ does.

Through this Word that had become flesh, God gave a witness to himself in this world.

Christ came into the world to reveal God and to redeem people.

That witness is expressed in two keywords in John's gospel: life and light.

In Christ there is life.

One thing Jesus did was to impart life to persons who lived with no hope of eternal life.

For all the hopeless, helpless, wondering, wandering people in the world, Jesus gives the promise that there is life, life with worth and meaning.

Jacobo Timerman was a Jewish newspaper publisher in Argentina.

In 1977 he was taken prisoner by the revolutionary government because of his writing and was placed in a prison and subjected to torture.

He told his story in a book titled "Prisoner without a name, Cell without a Number".

One night the guard failed to close the peephole in his door.

When he looked out the peephole, he saw that the peephole in the door facing his was open.

Then he saw an eye behind it.

Looking through the peephole was forbidden.

Thinking it was a trap, he stepped back, waited, then returned to the peephole.

The eye on the other side of the hall did the same.

Through that night they looked through the peephole at one another.

They never knew who the other was.

But that blinking, that flutter of a movement proved to Timmerman that he was not the last human survivor amid the universe of torturing custodians.

They invented games that night, moving away, then returning, creating movement in their confined world.

And there was the blink, the acknowledgment that there was life.

That night in the solitude he knew that there was life.

This life is also described as light.

Christ brings light into the world, light about our darkened ideas about sin, self, and salvation.

The light of God's love shines about us in Jesus Christ.

Twice in John's gospel, Jesus made the claim for himself, "I am the light of the world".

Notice something about this light: the darkness cannot put it out.

The light of God's grace shines with such power that the depths of darkness cannot put it out.

In fact, darkness cannot even dim it.

God's light in Jesus Christ is brighter than all the accumulated darkness of the world's sin.

God's witness to us is that the Word has become flesh and lived among us.

This gives witness to both what we can know about God and what we can experience with God, life and light.

When you have something to say, you use a word to express it.

God expressed his love for us, his life in us, and his light to us in a Word, Jesus The Christ.

That Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Through it we see God and respond to his love for us in faith and action.

And we discover why we are here and what we are here to accomplish.