

## **Genesis 1:1-2:2**

The very first act of creation was to create light:

“And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.

God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.”

God created a perfect universe and saw that it was very good. It was governed by the light of His glory and all things were in their proper place. In addition to separating light from darkness, God separated the waters below from the waters above; He separated the land from the sea and He created life in its various separate kinds. We see a creation of peace and order where both day and night had their light – the sun for day and moon for night.

But as Genesis goes on to relate, sin entered the world through Satan’s temptation of Adam and Eve. From this point on, the night takes on a different connotation. Night is no longer associated with rest and the benign rule of the moon, but with the evil forces of Satan.

Job 10:21-22 “I go to the land of darkness and the shadow of death; a land as dark as darkness itself, as dark as the shadow of death, without any order, where even the light is like darkness.”

Isa 5:20 “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.”

Darkness has come to represent evil and despair. Satan has brought darkness into people’s souls. They are separated from God’s love and lost without His guidance. Where Satan has his way there is confusion between good and evil and even

the light is like darkness. This darkness and confusion is evident in every society, but in our affluent and civilised society we try hard to keep it hidden away from view.

However, having just come back from a month in Liberia the reality of this darkness in people's lives is fresh in my mind. I have been taking small teams to minister in Liberia for four years. During this time God has been stirring us up to simply believe the Gospel, and we in turn have been stirring up the churches in Liberia. We are now working with four churches and in twelve communities.

In each community we saw demonic oppression enslaving poor souls to varying degrees of hopelessness. It seemed that each community suffered from a different type of oppression. Amongst the squalor and filth of the swamp community, alcohol and drug addiction have taken a grip, enslaving people in a spiral of hopelessness. In a rural community we met people terrorised by nightly demonic visitations bringing all kinds of sickness. In one village blindness seemed to have a grip – with an unusual number of people suffered from cataracts, eye injuries and other eye-sight problems. Another village had an unusual number of dumb people. Wherever we went we encountered sickness, witchcraft, curses and superstition. It certainly fits Isaiah's description of "gross darkness covering the earth."

But we were not helpless. God has not left this world in the hands of Satan. He has not left it without hope and remedy. The God of Light who created light, has sent Jesus His Son to be the light of the world.

Jn 1:4 "In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it."

1Jn 3:8 The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

Jesus came to expose and overcome the works of darkness. He did this with both teaching and practical healing:

Acts 10:38 God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

The Gospel was good news because wherever Jesus went He brought transformation; healing the sick and setting people free from the devil's oppression. The Gospel is still good news because Jesus gave us His authority and commission to do the same. The challenge we faced was to truly believe the promises Jesus gave us in the Gospels that those who believe in Him will also do the works that He did.

It was often daunting, even overwhelming, when we saw so much sickness and oppression in a community. But the theme of our trip this year was the Great Commission:

Matthew 28 "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Mk 16: In my name they will drive out demons; ... they will place their hands on the sick, and they will get well."

Each day we stirred one another to truly believe we had both the authority of Jesus and His commission to bring the light

of the gospel into people's lives and communities and also to bring healing.

The welcome we received wherever we went was truly amazing. We visited six villages in Lofa, the last unreached district of Liberia, near the Guinea border. In the past, visiting missionaries have been thrown out or killed by the village chiefs who have been fierce in protecting the traditional witchcraft. But in each village we received a wholehearted welcome and the invitation to share the gospel and plant churches. Wherever we went we found that people were tired of the oppression of demonic forces and welcomed the good news we had to bring. It was just as Paul wrote:

Ro 13:12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.

After official introductions the chief would show us around his village and then we prayed for the sick and shared the good news of Jesus. During the month countless people were healed – more than 40 in just one village. Many were healed instantly, including a man with a cataract, a dumb man and a seriously sick man with malaria, whose yellow jaundiced eyes were clear as crystal after we prayed.

Many others were healed in the hours or days following prayer including a woman Gordon prayed for who for 20 years had been crouching on the floor, living almost like an animal without talking to anyone. The next day she was beautifully dressed, singing and dancing and praising God.

It was such a joy and privilege to see the gospel being lived out so literally and immediately. We are so used in our self-sufficient western culture to a faith that consists more of

words and ideas than the transforming power of God. But we must keep stirring ourselves to truly believe the scriptures and not to shoe-horn them into our own experience. If we had not had the courage to simply believe the gospels, we would have seen nothing except despair. But praise God, our Father has rescued us and sends us to rescue others from darkness:

“We give thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,” (Col 1:12-13)

Fire and his wife Korbeh were rescued. Fire was a hopeless alcoholic and his wife sold drugs. Gordon led them to Christ and they were baptised in the swamp a few days later. Their lives have been transformed by Jesus. The same is true of each of the 11 who were baptised during our trip.

Before going to Liberia I had a dream about the Imam in a particular Muslim village turning to Christ. We visited this village several times during the month and each time more of my dream unfolded before our eyes. It culminated during our last visit in the Imam praying with me, asking again and again for Jesus to come and take control of his village, driving out evil and helping him to lead the people to Jesus.

It was wonderful and amazing to see God working in that dear man’s heart. Whenever we visited his eyes lit up with joy. Paul’s words were fulfilled before us:

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” (2Co 4:4-6)

The light of the Gospel has shone in many communities and countless lives through our trip. We expect a bible study group to start within a few days, either in the Imam's house or in the Mosque and in other villages at least four church plants have been initiated with requests for several more.

If you would like to hear more and see slides and videos of our trip, you are welcome to come to a Liberia Evening either at St Mary's Chinley on 22<sup>nd</sup> March or St Matthews on 29<sup>th</sup> March (both 7.30 pm).

In conclusion, what does the Gospel mean to you? Are you truly expecting God to answer you when, in the Lord's prayer you pray, "May Your Kingdom come and Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." What does it mean in your life for God's Kingdom to come and His will to be done?

Are you facing oppression or sickness? What dark corners need the Light of God's love to shine on them?

We face a stubborn enemy but we have a victorious King. We can take what comes and wait for Heaven or we can fight the fight of faith and stand our ground against the enemy.

People often ask me how I deal with unanswered prayer. How can I be sure that God always wants to answer my prayers? My answer is simple. I would much rather have God say to me "You believed too much" rather than "You believed too little."

It is not easy. It is a constant discipline and fight of faith. But God has been stirring our faith to believe for more; to see transformed lives and for all kinds of sickness to be healed as His Kingdom of Light shines out in the darkness.

We have begun to see our prayers answered both in Liberia and here at home ... and we are hungry for more.

I hope that you too will be stirred in your faith to see light shine out of darkness.

Stephen Dolley. 23 Feb 2014