

A Frightening and Freeing Light

JAY Y. KIM

Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

JOHN 3:21

For God so loved the world that he . . .”

Chances are, you can finish the line without a second thought. John 3:16 is arguably the most famous verse in the Bible—but it doesn’t stand alone. Though the rest of the passage in this third chapter of John’s gospel receives far less fanfare, it offers us a sobering and hopeful truth:

Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light. . . . But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. (vv. 19, 21)

Human experience is the paradoxical commingling of the love of darkness and the need for light. And this reality isn’t just true *out there*, among



the sinful masses. This is true *right here*—in my heart, mind, and soul, and in yours. The apostle Paul aptly describes this pervasive and universal tension: “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do” (Rom. 7:15). We’ve all been there. We still are.

Light can both expose and illuminate, making it simultaneously frightening and freeing. American physicist Richard Feynman said, “The first principle is that you must not fool yourself—and you are the easiest person to fool.” If he was right—and I believe he was—then this frightening and freeing light is *exactly* what we need. This light exposes our pride and illuminates our shame, which have both stricken us since the very beginning of the human story.

In the Genesis creation narrative, God created a good world and

placed Adam and Eve at its center, as his image-bearers, called to bring the earth’s good potential to bear. But when the first humans sinned against God, it was because they came to believe the lie that they could be “like God” (Gen. 3:5). This is pride. And where does pride inevitably lead? Straight toward shame. “I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid,” the man said (3:10).

Jesus, the Light, has come to free us from the darkness of pride and shame. The light has come to tell us the truth—that we are forgiven, accepted, loved. The light has come to undo the catastrophe of the Fall and to enact God’s good new world, where we can all belong.

Meditate on John 3:16–21.

How is God’s light frightening? How is it freeing? In what ways does the broader context of verse 16 deepen your understanding of Jesus’ identity and purpose?