

“Linchpin” series / 19: “Live Lightly” / May 18, 2022

So, we’ve spent the last 5 months laying out the powerful evidence for God, and for Jesus as the Son of God. I can’t prove either one, but there is way more evidence for than against! And ... what if we’re right? What if there really is a God, and Jesus really is God ... in a bod? Well, if that is so ... then a story has been unfolding since before time ... as story you’re part of. Here it is ...

The book of Genesis opens with these words ... Genesis 1.1: “In the beginning.” “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” It’s kind of like a “Once upon a time ...” But it’s not a fairy tale, this time, but rather a grand story, an epic. But the words of Genesis do not contain the story of God’s beginning, it’s the story of ours. It’s about where we fit into this big, fat story of God.

Now the Gospel of John takes us back even further, to the time before time. It says, “In the beginning (in our beginning) the Word already existed. (Jesus was already there.) The Word (that’s what John is calling Jesus ; Jesus) was with God, and the Word (Jesus) was God. He (already) existed (before our) in the beginning with God. (In fact,) God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.” (John 1.1-3). So, there was a time when there was God, and nothing else. Now, that only makes sense, doesn’t it? This universe is not eternal, and there had to be someone who is eternal to get it all started.

So, once upon a time there was God, and only God. But, weirdly enough, he wasn’t alone. Because there is something about God that is both one and ... three. We speak of him as God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. One, and yet anything but alone, or lonely. You see, God didn’t create “stuff” because he was lonely, or needy ... but rather out of a superfluity of creativity ... and love ... it seems.

So, once upon a time, in the time before our time, God created these magnificent ... what we would call “supernatural” creatures. Creatures so grand, so powerful, so glorious that others, later, would treat them like gods ... these angels, and archangels, and cherubim, and seraphim. Now, God created them to be good, it seems. But, like us, he also created them to be free, it seems. Free to choose for God, or against him ... like us. And, like us, some of these angels and archangels chose badly. Dissatisfied with their role in this big, fat story of God, they reached for more ... far more ... and they fell. And instead of becoming more, they became less than they were created to be. You see, the greater the power for good, the

greater the potential for evil. The greater the hero, the greater the villain. What we do in micro, it seems that Satan and his minions did to an exponentially greater degree. We throw God off, and it seems he did too. In our evil, we humans incite others to disrespect our God. So, why is it so hard for us to believe that an even greater villain would do the same?

And so, God cast those that rebelled from his presence. Because, every creature that can freely choose either tells God, "Thy will be done," or God tells them, "Okay, then thy will be done," it seems. Because a God of love won't force himself on us.

But God wasn't done, yet. Out of that superfluity of creativity, and love, our eternal, transcendent, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly holy, yet perfectly loving God turned the page and invited us into his story ... this big, fat story of God. (not as an afterthought, a replacement; we were in his plan from the beginning)

So, "In the beginning" (in our beginning, this time) God created (our) heavens and (our) earth." (Genesis 1.1). Now, how God's creative work began is so telling. It says, "The earth was formless and empty, (and) darkness (darkness) was over the surface of the deep." (Genesis 1.2) There was this "darkness," it says, until God says ... "Let there be light." And there was light, it says. (Genesis 1.3). And I wonder ... I wonder if it means just "physical" light. ... "Let there be ... light."

Anyway, it says, God keeps creating our universe over these 6 "days," until, on day 6, he creates a creature that is special ... he creates us. In his image, to be loved and to love him back, to do life with God. And to make that possible he gave us humans this ability, this freedom ... to choose. Now, God knew the risks! He had seen creatures misuse that gift before. But without freedom, there can be no genuine love. And apparently our Creator God sees love as ... he sees you as ... worth the risk. "So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created (us) them; male and female he created (us) them." (Genesis 1.27) How cool is that!

And he placed us in this paradisaical "garden" ... but. There was another creature in that garden ... one who hated God, and thus, who hated whatever God loves. And that "fallen angel" took advantage of that piece of us that is most god-like ... our freedom to choose. And he whispered to us, "God is holding you back! You can't trust God! He's holding out on you! He doesn't have your best interests at heart ... only his own! You need to rewrite the story, and give yourself a better part! You

need to pursue your own happiness ... not his! He can't tell you what to do! He can't tell you what's right for you!" And he wraps it all in a lie ... "You won't die," he says. Have you ever heard words like those? Have you ever been tempted by words like those? Well, we reached for more ... and we fell. Instead of becoming more, we became less than we were created to be. Because no creature can ever out-think or out-good our eternal, transcendent, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly holy, yet perfectly loving God ... can we?

And so, a darkness – a darkness -- fell back over the earth. Not physical ... this time, but real nonetheless. A spiritual darkness we were incapable of dispelling. And we fell under the power of that ... enemy of God ... In fact, the apostle Paul tells us that "We are not (really) fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark (dark) world." (Ephesians 6.12)

But, love doesn't give up easily ... and even though God won't force himself on us, the lengths to which he would go to win us back! And so begins the story of the rescue. In the days before Jesus, God began dropping these clues, these hints: he was not done with us, yet. In fact, something was coming ... some "one" was coming ... a Messiah ... a Savior. But no one expected that rescuer to be God himself! And no one could have predicted the lengths to which God would go to effect our rescue! "When the right time came (it says), God sent his ... own Son ... born of a woman" ... go figure?! (Galatians 4.4) No one ... no one could have predicted this! That God would become one of us ... kind of?! That he would live among us ... for a time?! To show us the heart of God. And then to ... die?! ... for us, in our place?! Gods can't die, can they?! And then ... because he really is God ... to walk out of his tomb!

Jesus said, "I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark." (John 12.46) To a world shrouded in darkness, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." (John 8.12) You see, the one who had said, in the beginning, "Let there be light," he actually stepped into our world to be our light. How cool is that! In other words, without Jesus you are stumbling around in darkness. With Jesus, you can be who you really are, and you can live life the way you were meant to live life ... with God, for God, God's way ... for now, and for forever.

And then ... and then ... Jesus left. But before he left, he gave us Jesus followers a mission, an assignment, a job to do. My job, your job ... no exceptions, guys, if you are a Jesus follower. He says, "You are the light of the world" now. You see, this world that is still shrouded in darkness ... for a time. So, Jesus says, "It's your job to point these creatures I love towards me!" He says, "You are to be "like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden." Have you ever been in a plane at night, and looked down at the lights of a city below? Those points of light, that's us! Have you ever stood on one hill on a dark night and seen the lights of a town on a nearby hill? Those lights are supposed to be us! We're not supposed to hide! He says, "No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket." That would be stupid! He says, "Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house." That's supposed to be us, guys! That's our role in this big, fat story of God. He says, "In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, (Why? So you can look good? No!) so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father." (Matthew 5.14-16) "Your mission, your assignment, your job ... is to point them towards me," Jesus says. Now, have you any idea how big that is, how important that is? And, do you have any idea how honored we are to have been given that mission by our Creator God?!

And so ... like one candle lighting the wicks of others, the light from that light of the world spread to a dozen, and then to a few hundred, and then to thousands, and then to millions. And it kept spreading till there are billions of points of light in this world that is still shrouded in darkness ... for just a short time more. And our enemy keeps trying to extinguish that light, but darkness can't overcome light, can it?

So ... here it is, here it is: "Live lightly." That's who we are, that's what we do: "Live lightly." There is a God, guys! I can't prove it, but the evidence is overwhelming. And Jesus is the Son of God, who stepped into our world, died for us, and then defeated the death we are so afraid of. I can't prove that either, but the evidence is overwhelming. Which means, we can be "the light of the world" now, we can ... "live lightly." Do you know what that means? It means two things.

- (Live Lightly) It means, fear can't own us! Sin can't own us, disease can't own us, shame can't own us, brokenness can't own us, even death can't own us! Because there is a God, and we're God's kids, and we know what he has planned for us! It means, no matter what happens around us, and no matter what happens to us, we can actually experience the inklings of joy! There is meaning to life for us now, and beauty all around us ... even in the darkest places. And goodness, and grace. So, someone says, "How are you doing

today?” And you answer, “Better than I deserve!” ... with a sparkle in your eyes. No fear, instead, inklings of joy as we do life with God, for God, God’s way ... the way life was meant to be lived ... because we know there’s a God, and we know what he thinks of us, and we know he’s there for us, and we know what’s coming! So we can live lightly.

- (Live Lightly) And ... it means, you really are the light of the world, now. If you have kids who are not Jesus followers yet ... you are the light of the world ... for them. If you have neighbors or colleagues who are not Jesus followers yet ... you are the light of the world ... for them. If you have friends ... if you have enemies who are not Jesus followers yet ... you are the light of the world ... for them. You have been granted the honor and privilege ... and the responsibility of pointing them to a better way. So ... how’s that going for you?

Overall, we’ve done okay, I think. We Jesus followers have been the light of the world for millennia ... in so many ways. Now, that’s not what you’re going to hear. You’re going to hear that we Jesus followers are the ones holding people back, holding people down. You are going to hear that we are the regressives, the repressors, the narrowminded bigots. “We are not the light bearers,” you will hear, “we are the ones shrouding this world in darkness,” they will say ... cluelessly.

Did you know ... Did you know that ever since Jesus, we Jesus followers have been the light of the world in so many ways? I am not talking about just evangelistically, I am talking about elevating creatures made in the image of God in so many ways. Most of our history books will mute this part of our story, but it’s there, guys! I have two books on my shelves that will blow your minds. One of them is called, “What Has Christianity Ever Done for Us? ... How it shaped the modern world.” By Jonathan Hill. And it has! The other is called, “How Christianity Changed the World,” by Alvin Schmidt. They just lay it out. We have been the light of the world for two millennia, guys!

Think about it: In the world into which the church was born, life was cheap. Babies didn’t matter, children mattered little more (especially girls), woman were often little more than property, slavery was normal (and acceptable), and compassion ... as we know it ... was not even valued ... by most. And, because we Jesus followers began to understand the heart of our God, and the value he placed on these creatures he crafted in his own image, we pointed them towards, and we became ... the light of the world.

You see, in the world of the New Testament, they not only practiced abortion, they practiced infanticide. They might kill unwanted babies; or they might just throw them out and abandon them. Especially girls, or any who might be frail, or deformed. Except Jesus followers. Those babies others treated as defective or valueless, we treated as God's kids. Where they would throw away their babies, especially girls, we would take those kids in, and raise them as our own. We were the warriors in the war against abortion, we've still got those warriors in this church. We were the warriors in the battle against infanticide, and we still have warriors like them in this church.

In the world of the New Testament, most women were degraded ... but not by Jesus. And gradually we began to get it ... Like us guys, women bear the image of God, and they are precious to our God. So, in cultures where women have been degraded, Christians have been the ones to lift them up. We have fought against burning widows alive. We have fought against binding their feet to deform them so they will walk daintily. We have been the ones to fight against the cutting of the clitoris of young girls. Where women are treated as property, we are the ones who have given them dignity, and worth, and purpose; we are the ones who have fought to remove their veils. That is our heritage, guys!

And slavery ... That took us a while, because sometimes we Jesus followers listen more to our culture than we do to our God. But, to God, "There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3.28) So we were the ones who finally got it, and who fought for the abolition of slavery. That's our legacy, guys!

In fact, we Jesus followers have been at the root of most of the movements for social justice. We are the ones who started taking care of orphans; we are the ones who started taking care of seniors who were thrown away. We were the ones to fight for child labor laws. We were the ones who worked for freedom, for personal rights, for fundamental equality. Those passions, those fundamental rights assumed by so many justice warriors today ... they are standing on our shoulders, guys!

It's a long list.

- Charity ... compassion ... Jesus said, "I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I

needed clothes, and you clothed me. I was in prison, and you came to visit me.” In that world, those who were not Jesus followers would give, if they thought they’d get something back. But we gave selflessly, just because we know people matter ... to God ... and to us.

- “I was sick, and you looked after me,” Jesus said. Because, he said, “When you do it for one of these precious children of mine, you are doing it for me!” So, when there was a pandemic and everyone else ran, we stayed, and tended the sick. We are the ones who built the first hospitals, and kept on building them. Why do you think they’re still called Central Baptist, and St. Joseph, and Good Samaritan, and King’s Daughters, and St. Jude? In fact, we are the ones who invented nursing!
- You can talk about education. We are the light of the world, guys! We are the ones who pioneered education for both sexes. We are the ones who pushed public education for the poor as well as the rich. We are the ones who started the first and the greatest universities. We have lived ... lightly!
- Jesus is the one who said, “The laborer deserves his wages.” So we are the ones who have elevated the dignity of God-honoring work, and the responsibility we all have to respect and value those who work. That’s our legacy!
- And did you know ... did you know ... that the greatest scientists through history have been Jesus followers, men and women studying the handiwork of our God? Did you know that most of the greatest artists, most of the greatest writers, most of the greatest musicians in history dedicated their God-given gifts to honoring our God?

Read the books! Track the history! We have been the light of the world, guys. And we still are! One guy, (Henry Bosch, cited in Simmons) put it like this. He says, “Socrates taught for 40 years, Plato for 50, Aristotle for 40, and Jesus for only 3. Yet the influence of Christ's 3 year ministry infinitely transcends the impact left by the combined 130 years of teaching of these men who are among the greatest philosophers of all antiquity. Jesus painted no pictures, yet some of the finest paintings of Raphael, Michelangelo, and Leonardo Davinci received their inspiration from him. Jesus wrote no poetry, but Dante, Milton, and scores of the world's greatest poets were inspired by him. Jesus composed no music. Still, Hayden, Handel, Beethoven, Bach, and Mendelssohn reached their highest perfection of melody in the hymns, symphonies, and oratorios they composed in his praise. Every sphere of human greatness has been enriched by this humble Carpenter of Nazareth.” No kidding! We can be proud of the influence Jesus has had!

You see, Jesus was the turning point, guys. He became the turning point when, as our Creator God, he stepped into a world shrouded in darkness again, to win us back. And Jesus followers have made a profound difference. ... But ... But there is still so much darkness, because this world is still under the thumb of the Prince of Darkness, and his lies are so seductive. We all have these God-given longings, which we try to satiate in such God-dishonoring ways. Because whenever we try to out-think or out-good our God we make messes we can't fix. So we still live in a world shrouded in darkness, in such desperate need of God's light.

- We still fight over racism. Prejudice and bigotry are still there, guys. But instead of God's solutions, we concoct our own! And it's such a mess, so much darkness!
- We still fight over sex, and sexism. But instead of accepting God's design, and God's boundaries, we concoct our own ... and make such a mess ... so much darkness!
- We still struggle to affirm the value of every man, every woman ... no matter how young or how old, no matter how rich or how poor, no matter how gifted or how ordinary, no matter how liberal or now conservative, no matter how courageous or how timid.

It's our job to show them a better way! Guys, Jesus came to be the light of the world ... pointing us back towards God. And that's our job now. They are going to push back on us. That's okay! There is a God, and Jesus is the Son of God, and we trust him. So we can live lightly! And we can still make a difference.

Sometimes it only takes something little. Sean Larkin is one of our elders, and he's been doing something that seems kind of little, maybe, but has such power. Come on up here, Sean ... Sean has been creating and sending these cards of encouragement for ... how long? ...

- How do you do it? _____
- How do you choose to whom to send one? _____
- Why do you do it? _____

Guys, that's just one little, but powerful way to live lightly. How are you doing it?

- Guys like Sean ... they are the light of the world ... not the social justice warriors.
- You guys are the light of the world ... not the scientists.

- Jesus followers ... we are the light of the world ... not the “educators.”
- You guys are the light of the world ... not the talking heads, or the politicians.
- As we point people towards Jesus, we are the light of the world ... not those who might be so passionate for whatever lesser cause.

Now we’ve been trying to coach you on some little ways ... such little ways ... to live lightly.

- In January it was the “Yes it’s free” cards.
- In February, we gave out roses ... You guys gave out a thousand roses to remind people that God loves them.
- In March it was these little March Madness basketballs. They have 2 Corinthians 5.13 printed on them. “If it seems we are crazy, it is to bring glory to God. And if we are in our right minds, it is for your benefit.” (2 Corinthians 5.13) Because we really are the light of the world.
- In April was our invites to our Good Friday Service, and our Easter Extravaganza, and our Easter service.
- This month it is these cards. We’re asking you to take one or two of these cards, and ... be like Sean. Send it to someone who needs some encouragement ... from God, and from us.

Over the course of this year, we are committed to giving our community 12,000 nudges towards Jesus, a thousand a month, in whole bunch of little ways. Because ... we are on a mission from God. ... and every single person who turns towards Jesus ... God dances!

- Have you ever heard of a guy named Edward Kimball? I hadn’t either. But he led Dwight L. Moody to Christ, who led maybe a million people to Christ.
- Have you ever heard of a guy named Mordecai Hamm? I hadn’t either. But he led Billy Graham to Christ, who led over 3 million people to Christ.

But it doesn’t have to be a Dwight L. Moody, or a Billy Graham. The Jews had it right. “He who saves a single soul, saves the world entire.”

- Moms, Dads: there is nothing more important you can accomplish in this world, there is nothing that will give you more joy in this world and the next, than to nudge a kid towards Jesus. Do you buy that? If you don’t, you’re messed up!

- Do you have an friends? Do you have any colleagues, or coworkers? Did you know that there is nothing better that you can give a friend or a colleague than a nudge towards Jesus? Nothing!
- A neighbor? A cousin? A Christian brother or sister who is slipping, maybe? An enemy, even? You are the light of the world, guys. So, live lightly! Show them there's a better way! Show them what doing life with God, for God, God's way looks like! Show them what courage and hope and genuine joy look like!

Because there really is a God. And Jesus really is the Son of God, our Savior, and our Lord.