Spring Retreat UBF 2016

**The Word is the Light of mankind**

John 1:1-5

Key verse 1:4

In him was life; and that life was the light of all mankind

In this spring retreat we will meditate on Jesus, the Light of the world. For this opening message, we will ponder John 1. In this gospel, the author John introduces Jesus as “the Word.” To the Greeks, the Word is the rational principle of the universe. John, however, introduces a radical idea about the Word; John personified the Word into a Person and the Word is the light of all mankind. Today we will ponder these two points.

**First, the Word is Personified.**

John begins in verse 1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In this verse John tells us about the Word’s origin, relationship and His identity. “In the beginning.” A long, long time ago, even before time began, the Word existed. The Word, in fact, does not have an origin. The Word exists in eternity. The Word was with God. The word “with” indicates a personal and equal relationship. The Word had a face-to-face relationship with God with equal status. The Word, in fact, is God. The Word is what God is and the Word does what God does. The Word thus represents the self-expression of God.

The Greek word for the Word is *Logos*, which is the rational principle of the universe. The term Logos was first introduced by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus in 500 BC. He was interested in finding the rational principle that governs the universe. He called this principle “Logos.” *Logos* was the unifying principle, the Law or Reason which accounted for the stable pattern in an ever changing world. *Logos* was, in fact, his philosophical explanation of God. Later, the Stoic philosophers, the successors of Heraclitus, expounded the idea of *Logos*. By the time John lived, the word *Logos* was understood by most Greek people as the rational principle that governs the universe. That is why John gives no explanation of the *Logos*. He assumes that the readers will be familiar with the word, *Logos*. To the Greeks, the *Logos* is the impersonal logic, energy or rational principle. It is a philosophical term to describe what God is. John, however, introduced this revolutionary idea about the *Logos* in his Gospel. John *personified the Logos* into a person by capitalizing “Word” in order to introduce Jesus as the Living Logos, the living Logic and Principle who rules the universe. By stating it this way, John claims that Jesus is the True and eternal Logos, or Principle that rules the universe.

In fact, John redefines the meaning of Logos. The Greek philosophers were not able to understand the whole idea of the *Logos*, because of their limited knowledge of the *Logos*. They were able to understand only a little fraction of the *Logos*. They were like the blind men who try to figure out what the elephant looks like by touching it and end up naming it “leather” instead of the elephant. Similarly, the Greek philosophers tried to figure out with their limited knowledge the whole Person of the Logos and ended up naming it “principle.” They had never imagined that the *Logos* was a person. Greek philosophy proves that philosophy is incapable of guiding us to the Person of Christ, the True Logos. It can guide us to the principle and that’s it. Philosophy cannot guide us to the Person of Christ, because knowing the Person of Christ is not a matter of studying but a matter of experiencing. So John said in 1Jn 1:1, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.” John experienced the Logos, Person of Christ while the Greek philosophers only reasoned about it. John saw him, touched him, kissed him, ate with him and slept with him. That is why John redefined the meaning of Logos by personifying the Logos into the Person the Word.

**Second, the Word is the light of all mankind**

In verse 2 John reemphasizes the Deity of the Logos. In verse 3 John tells us that the Logos is the Creator who made all things in the universe.In verse 4 John state that in the Word was life and that life was the light of all mankind. In Greek philosophy, the Word Logos has no life, because it is nothing but a concept or idea. However, in the True Logos was life. John did not say “In him was created life,” but “was life.” The Greek word for life here is *zoe* from which the word zoo comes. *Zoe* life is eternal or spiritual life that is not tainted with death. The life we have is *bio*, not *zoe*. *Bio* life is a life that is tainted with death. It can be compared to a life battery. As time goes by, our life battery in us runs out and dies down. However, the life the Word has is compared to a life-generator. *Zoe* life generates life. The life never runs out or dies down, because it is not tainted with death.

John, then, said that the Word is the light of all mankind. How does the Word become the light of all mankind? It is when the Word generates light, emitting it to all mankind. How does the Word generate the light? The Word generates the light when the Word speaks. We can see this in Genesis 1. In the beginning the Spirit of God was hovering over the water around earth. And God spoke, “Let there be light.” Then there was light. When the Word speaks, the light comes out of Him.

Light is a natural energy agent that stimulates the eyes in our brain and enables our eyes to see things in the physical reality. Without light we are not able to see things. If we do not see things, we do not understand things, because the ability to understand ties to the ability to see. In other words, without light we live both in darkness and in ignorance and error. Similarly, spiritual light is a spiritual energy agent that stimulates the eyes in our heart and enables the eyes in our heart to see things in the spiritual reality, rather than the physical reality. So the spiritual light enables us to understand the spiritual reality. Natural light comes from the sun. However, the spiritual light comes from the Son the Logos. When the spiritual light comes out of the Logos and stimulates the eyes of our heart, we will be literally enlightened, understanding the spiritual things. However, without the spiritual light we live both in spiritual darkness and in spiritual ignorance. So Paul said in Eph 1:18, “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.” The spiritual light enlightens our heart, enabling us to know spiritual things.

When the Word speaks, it is called *rhema* in Greek, which means “Spoken word.” When the Word does not speak, it is called *logos* in Greek which means “written word.” The entire Scripture is the “written Word” *Logos*. However, when a certain word from the Scripture personally speaks to you in a certain situation, the word becomes a *rhema* to you. When we study the Scriptures, most of the time we gain knowledge of the Word. So we get *logos*, not *rhema*. However, sometimes, the word comes alive and personally speaks to us. Then we receive the *rhema*, spoken word.

There are many differences between *logos* and *rhema*. First of all, *logos* has to do with life while *rhema* has to do with light. John said, “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.” When the word is inside the Word, the word is *logos*, having life. However, when the word comes out of the Word and comes to us as light, the word becomes *rhema*. So *rhema* is the word we receive from God while *logos* is the word we learn from our own study. In other words, *rhema* is like revelation that we receive while *logos* is like information that we study. *Rhema* enlightens our heart while *logos* educates our mind. So *rhema* is heart knowledge while *logos* is head knowledge. *Rhema* is dynamic while *logos* is static. Finally, we never forget a *rhema* we received and we tend to forget the *logos* we learned. We can compare it to a bullet. When the bullet is in a gun, the bullet is like *logos*. However, when the bullet comes out of the gun by pressing the trigger, the bullet becomes *rhema*. Which one is more powerful do you think? *Rhema*! We need both *logos* and *rhema*; yet we need more *rhema* than *logos*. In fact, if a person has no *rhema* but all logos, the person is not a real Christian. He or she may be an excellent bible student or theologian, but not a child of God.

There are 70 uses of rhema in the New Testament. Giving few, one is Rom 10:17, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the **word** of Christ.” Here the word is written in Greek *rhema*, not *logos*. In other words, faith comes only by receiving the *rhema*, not *logos*. We become children of God by faith alone. Without having *rhema* we are not really saved nor become children of God. Even though we study the Bible a lot and know the whole story of the Scripture yet have no *rhema*, we are not really saved. It is all about head knowledge, not heart knowledge. Another is Mat 4:4, “Jesus answered, ‘it is written: man does not live on bread alone, but on every **word** that comes from the mouth of God.” Here the word is also *rhema*. Only *rhema* sustains and revives our life. If we have a lot of the *logos*, head knowledge about the Bible, we cannot maintain our spiritual life. We need to receive a fresh word, or *rhema* from the Word. Another is Heb 11:3, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s **command**, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” Here the command is actually *rhema*. The universe was formed at God’s word *rhema*. When God spoke, the universe was created. Another is John 15:7, “If you remain in me and my **words** remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” My words are *rhema*, not *logos*.

The Word was personified as a Person. Similarly, the Word should be personalized to us as rhema. When the Word speaks to us, the word comes into our heart as *rhema*. The word enlightens our heart. The word reveals our heart, illuminating the structure, color, and condition of our heart. As a result, the word illuminates us to see the messy room of our heart, dark color of our heart, hidden sin in our heart and helps us to come to God in repentance. That is why Hebrews 4:12 states, “The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

How can we receive *rhema* rather than *logos*? All I can say is three words: relationship, obedience and desperation. First, relationship. The Word is a Person, not a book. The Word is the Person Jesus, not just a collection of spiritual knowledge. The Word is an object or person for relationship, not an object of study, although elements of study may be involved. If we do not speak to Him, He will not speak to us. If the Word does not speak to us, we will never receive the *rhema*. We need to have a personal relationship with the Word, the Person Jesus. We need to maintain that personal relationship with Jesus through daily prayer; say ‘Hi,” in the morning, asking Him for help so that your day may be filled with His love and blessings: before going to bed, tell Him about how your day went. When we talk to Him, He will talk to us. Second, obedience. Jesus said in Jn 14:23-24, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.” We cannot have a personal relationship with Him if we do not love Him. We can maintain our personal relationship with Him only on the condition of love. And love requires obedience. “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.” Third, desperation. Desperation comes from the awareness that we lack something. Desperation produces earnestness. God loves earnest seekers. Heb 11:6 says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” When we seek Him, He will speak to us.

Personally I have received many words of *rhema* over the last 30 years of life of faith. Almost of all came from my desperation. Almost all are unforgettable. One example has to do with my jobless situation. In 1996, I was in desperation, because I had no job. I came to America in 1993. I passed the TOEFL English exam and medical license exam step 1 and step 2 by 2014 August. I applied to hospitals for residency programs in 1995. However, I failed many interviews and was not able to get a job. Because I had no job, I had to live in my in-law’s house, eating free meals and having free lodging. My wife had to work hard. I thought that I would get a job in 1996. However, I failed again after 11 interviews. So I was in desperation. I remembered one night. It was Monday night at 10pm after a church meeting in Oct 1996. I went up to the balcony in the Chicago UBF church to pray for my job. While praying for my job, I was tired of praying for the same thing over and over. So I began to read the Scripture, beginning with Matthew’s Gospel. When I read chapter 6:31-32, the word came into my heart as rhema, although I read, studied and memorized the words as logos for a long time. It says, “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.” When I read this word, this word penetrated my soul and electrified my spirit so much that the word moved inside of me; especially the word, “your heavenly Father knows that you need them.” I remembered that after coming out of the building I shouted in the parking lot, “I got a job! I got a job!” Although I did not get a job at the moment, I knew that I got a job. Mark 11:24 echoed in my ear, “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” It was miracle that my worry literally disappeared from my heart without any trace even without any shadow. The Word became the light for my dark soul. The Word enlightened me that God’s promise is always true. The Word reminded me that God is always good. Four months after I received the *rhema*, I got a job. On one Tuesday evening when I came home in the evening, I discovered the voice mail in my house phone. The program director named Dr. Howare Weiss in Columbus Hospital in Chicago left a voice mail for the interview. I did not know who he was. I had never heard of his name. I had the interview on the next day, Wednesday morning and I got a job on the next day Thursday morning. I never forget how God kept His promise. I never forget how good God is. I praise God for His faithfulness to His Word. I praise God for His goodness. He always keeps His promise. He rewards those who earnestly seek him.

*Rhema* enlightens you and electrifies your spirit. We need the written word of God through faithful bible study. However, we need *rhema* through having a personal conversation with the Word in loving obedience. We need to earnestly seek the Word. I pray that in this spring reteat you and I may receive the *rhema* through personal conversation with the Word as well as *logos* through the Bible study.