

“Light of the World”

Living as Light in a Dark World – part 1

John 8:12-30

[TITLE SLIDE] Welcome, friends. I am glad that you have come today to worship and hear God’s voice. Turn to your neighbor and remind them, “We are in this together.” We are. We cannot be God’s church alone. We need each other. We need Jesus. My deepest hope is that today, through our time together, you will find him. Would you please pray with me?

O God, my Rock and my Redeemer, speak the words today that your Spirit wants us to hear. Let me step aside so that you can shine. Let your church tremble with excitement and anticipation over the work you are about to do in each one of us. We are your people, and this is your house. Shine your light into our lives, so that we can glorify you. Through the power of Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

This Sunday I am beginning a new series called “Living as Light in a Dark World.” For the next six weeks, I want us to examine some of Jesus’s famous “I am” statements in an attempt to shine light into our world. I thought I’d start today on a lighter note – pun intended – a share a few lightbulb jokes...

Where was Mickey Mouse when the lights went out? In the dark.

How many psychologists does it take to change a lightbulb? Only one, but the lightbulb has to want to change.

How many Methodists does it take to change a light bulb? We’ll let you know after the board meets next month. (It never hurts to poke fun at ourselves.)

This one is for the engineers in the room. How many programmers does it take to change a lightbulb? None. That’s a hardware problem.

Laughter is healing, and goodness knows, we had enough problems in the world in 2020. It seemed like a year of great darkness. Faced with a pandemic and civil unrest, we were looking to 2021 for a reset. However, just because we bought a new calendar does not mean our problems have disappeared.

[SLIDE 33] There always seems to be a battle between the forces of light and darkness, good and evil. Darkness always seems to come when we are the most vulnerable. For example...

...when we lose a loved one.

...when anxiety from work, politics, and family overwhelms us.

...when we battle with addiction and anger and can't seem to find victory.

Did you ever notice that in books, movies, and even the Bible, darkness a prevalent theme? As children, many of us naturally feared the dark. Darkness represents the unknown, full of things that could harm us. Darkness represents the loss of control – if we can't see it, we can't deal with it. No wonder that darkness generally represents evil. Darkness can be overwhelming.

[SLIDE 34] When I use the bathroom in the middle of the night, I stumble around the bedroom in the dark trying not to stub my toe. I even have four nightlights in various outlets to guide me in the right direction. Darkness doesn't seem to bother my wife, though. Without her glasses, she amazingly negotiates this perilous path to the bathroom in the dark. She also sleeps on the side of the bed closest to the door, so that helps.

We used to play a game in youth group, where one person would wear a blindfold, and the other would lead them through an obstacle course, sometimes only by voice commands. It was unnerving to walk through the course, not knowing if you were going to crash.

[SLIDE 35] Spiritually seeking, there are a lot of us who stumble in the dark. Wouldn't it be great if we found a light that would bring us clarity? If we found that light, wouldn't we be desperate to share it with the rest of the world? Wouldn't it be great if racism, greed, addiction, anxiety, hatred and fifty other problems in our world could be illuminated?

In the same way that we can flip a switch to bring us the light we need to see in a dark room, the Bible says, there is a light we can access to help us with our deeper, spiritual problems.

[SLIDE 36] Within each of us is the capacity to spread either light or darkness. For example, Jesus says in Matthew 6:22-23 (NIV). “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”

Having light or darkness is a choice, but we cannot produce light on our own. We need to find the source of the light.

[SLIDE 37] Jesus says it plainly in John 8:12: “I am the light of the world.” Context is important here. This statement was uttered in the midst of an ongoing argument between Jesus and the Jewish rulers of his day. We only heard a portion of the argument in the scripture we read. [SLIDE 38] In fact, Jesus uttered these words after a particularly dark episode – they brought to him a woman caught having an affair and wanted to stone her to death. Jesus showed compassion and mercy in an incredible display of light, simultaneously shaming her accusers and freeing her from her own plight. His final words to her were, “Then neither do I condemn you....Go now and leave your life of sin.” (John 8:11)

This woman found the light in Jesus. That is the light we are seeking. Jesus proclaimed that he was the light of the world. Here are some other things he said about his light. [SLIDE 39]

John 12:35 - "For a little while longer, the Light will be among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going."

John 12:36 – "While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become [children] of light."

John 12:46 – "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in Me should remain in darkness."

Jesus wants to give his light to all people. In the Bible, darkness is equated with sin. You can't see it – it's hidden, uncontrollable, secret. Crimes are often committed in the darkness so there won't be any witnesses.

[SLIDE 40] Light, however, has the opposite effect. Light helps us see, correct our course, and find what we're looking for. Surgeons, dentists, optometrists – they all use powerful lights to examine us and find the problems. Did you know, there are two headlights on your car for a reason – to see the road! Maybe we should make it our mission to find all those drivers with one headlight and preach the truth to them!

[SLIDE 41] The Bible says it plainly: Jesus came into the world to be the light so that we would no longer be stuck in the darkness of our sin. The trouble is, like

the Pharisees, many people just don't want to believe that Jesus is who he says he is. They are resistant to letting Jesus shine his light into their lives.

The Pharisees wouldn't trust Jesus. They pointed out that Jesus's testimony was not valid, because he didn't have any witnesses to back him up. They were quoting from Deuteronomy 19:15 (NIV), which says, “A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”

[SLIDE 42] I happen to know the power of three witnesses in my family. When my wife asks a question, usually, “Who left the dirty dishes out?” we quickly receive three testimonies from fair, unbiased witnesses, namely my children. “Not me!” “Not me!” “Not me!” I wisely refrain from incriminating myself and plead the 5th amendment, but usually I'm found guilty, anyway. Fortunately, the punishment is usually light.

Jesus says his Father testifies on his behalf. Literally, Jesus speaks the words that God gave him. Still, none of the Pharisees believe Jesus, because they don't know what father Jesus is talking about. They think it's Joseph. Jesus obviously means his heavenly Father, God.

[SLIDE 43] The argument that plays out here is sadly one that has been repeated throughout history. Jesus clearly explains who he is. Some believe, and some do not. It seems that those who risk losing power and influence if they truly follow Jesus are the ones who live in the greatest darkness. The gospel of John predicts this blindness. (John 3:19) “The Light has come into the world, but people loved the darkness rather than the Light because their deeds were evil.”

Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus comes to us straight from God. If ever anyone knew how we are supposed to live and love, it is Jesus. Jesus is the light, the answer, the one who teaches us the way to honor God and to live in peace with one another. The question is, do we run to the light or away from it?

I have one more joke for you: How many cockroaches does it take to change a lightbulb? No one knows, because they all scatter when it comes on.

[SLIDE 44] Each of us can respond to God. We don't have to scatter. In fact, this is what Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:14: “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.”

Matthew 5:14 is the corollary of John 8:12. He is the light, and we are the light. As followers of Christ, we can be the light to the world, if we each respond to the offer God is making us. The gospel is the good news: instead of choosing sin, we can choose forgiveness and light. [SLIDE 45] Romans 5:8 – “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Or Timothy 1:15 – “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.”

[SLIDE 46] Each of us has the option to admit our darkness, repent and follow the light instead. We can all live for Christ, by serving others out of love and gratitude for how God has saved us....or, we can choose to continue in darkness. It seems like it would be an easy decision to make – who wants to stumble around in the dark and stub our toes anymore? Yet, not all the world has chosen the light. That means we still have work left to do.

All of us together can combine our light and shine the way to Jesus. How much more powerful is it for cars to have two headlights and taillights and blinkers? I love skiing on the Tech trails at night – they have lights, and those lights are attractive and practical! In the same way, we can shine God’s light. [SLIDE 47] Philippians 2:14-16 says, “Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life...”

[SLIDE 48] Stars are amazing to look at. So are the moon, sunrises, sunsets, and even the twinkling of city lights. That’s how we can appear to other people – bright, shining, hopeful. We don’t produce the light – we can only reflect the light. Letting Jesus control us from the inside out causes us to live in a way that produces illuminates the path for others.

[SLIDE 49] If someone is making a bad decision for their job, their marriage, or their health, we can help them correct their course and follow the light.

When someone gossips, we can shine the light on the truth.

When someone hurts us, we can use the light of God’s love to forgive them.

When we are tempted to succumb to anxiety, to give in to temptation, to overreact to things we cannot control, we can use the light of God's word to stay strong.

[SLIDE 50] Philippians 4:6-7 tells us, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

[SLIDE 51] You will find it difficult or impossible to live this way if you don't submit your life to Jesus's light. So let him come in and chase away your darkness. Shine his light into the dark corners that are getting moldy and rotten. Shine his light into a situation to give you new wisdom, understanding, empathy and compassion for others. Truly, no one wants to live in the darkness. But they cannot escape unless someone brings the light to them. Will you be that light bearer?

Let us pray.

Memory Verse: John 8:12 (NIV) "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Reflection Questions:

1. Where the darkest place you have ever visited? What did it feel like to experience that darkness?
2. What events have been the darkest moments of your life? Who or what shined light into them?
3. How does Jesus shed his light into your life? What light sources does he use?
4. How does confession illuminate the areas of our life God wants to remake?
5. Pray for someone who walks in the darkness without Christ. Pray for an opportunity to share the gospel with them.