

# A Light to the Gentiles

## The Glory of Christ part 2

Luke 2:32 12-24-10

Summary: Darkness is nothingness – the lack of knowledge, hope, and blessing; and we are so needy that nothingness is all it takes to crush us. Christ is the light that opens the door to reality for us. He is a self-revealing God whose presence drives away all darkness. Experience His light by opening your eyes and by appreciating His light for what it is whenever you experience it.

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## The meaning of darkness

When Simeon met up with Joseph and Mary he took little Jesus from their arms and held Him and then he said this:

**Luke 2:30 my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.**

On Sunday we are going to see that all of Simeon's words have their background in Isaiah. Isaiah spoke often about the Messiah coming as a light to dispel the darkness of God's judgment and punishment.

**Isaiah 5:25 the Lord's anger burns against his people; his hand is raised and he strikes them down. ... 30 And if one looks at the land, he will see darkness and distress; even the light will be darkened by the clouds.**

What does that mean? Is that talking about physical darkness? Did Nebuchadnezzar pass a law requiring those worthless compact florescent bulbs instead of incandescent bulbs so that the whole land was poorly lit? No, darkness is a metaphor to describe all the various aspects of judgment – including ignorance, hopelessness, and suffering. And the reason darkness is such a good metaphor to describe those things is because of what darkness is – which is nothing. Darkness is nothingness. Darkness does not actually exist. It is not a substance that is there – it is just a word we use to describe a situation when light is not there. Darkness is not something; it is just a word we use to describe the absence of something (light). So it is the perfect metaphor to describe things like ignorance or hopelessness or any other lack of blessing from God. When you are confused and do not know what you should do, or you misunderstand or misinterpret important things – that is the darkness of ignorance. Knowledge and insight are like light, and when they are missing your life goes dark. Hope and joy are also like light, so when you have nothing to look forward to, nothing on the horizon to give you joy – that is the darkness of hopelessness. And blessing from God in general is like light, so when

that light is missing, and hard, painful things just keep on happening to you without a break – that is the darkness of suffering. So darkness becomes a kind of a catch-all metaphor to refer to all that is miserable in life.

### **Darkness crushes**

Isn't it amazing that all it takes to destroy us is nothingness?

### **Psalm 139:11 ...Surely the darkness will crush me ...**

The psalmist is afraid of darkness – which is nothing. And he was right to be afraid of nothingness, because we are so needy that for us nothingness is lethal. We need knowledge and insight to live, so the darkness of ignorance is lethal. You have to have some ability to perceive reality in order to navigate through life. Inability to perceive reality is the definition of insanity.

That is why we are afraid of the dark. When it is dark you cannot see potential hazards and threats, so you are afraid just because they might be there – even if they aren't. For a little child to feel threatened there does not have to be a monster coming after him. All that is needed for him to be afraid is darkness, because if he cannot see then for all he knows there might be a monster. And it is the same for us. If you do not know what to do in a certain situation – your eyes are blind to wisdom so you cannot see which way is the right way and which way is the wrong way – that is terrifying because there might be something bad right around the corner. The darkness of ignorance is terrifying.

And so is the darkness of hopelessness. Even if we are surrounded with wonderful blessings, if we cannot see them we are still gripped with terror. The presence, abundance, sufficiency, and availability of the things we need for life are not enough. It is not enough for them to just be available - we have to be able to see them. Without the hope that comes from perceiving the good things that we need we are crushed by hopelessness. You can handle a little darkness in your life if you know it is temporary and the dawn is coming soon. But when it starts to feel like the night is permanent, and there is no morning coming – that is when it is unbearable.

**Isaiah 8:20 If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. 21 Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. 22 Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.**

That is the punishment for Israel's sin – darkness. But that darkness is not forever.

## **The Promise of Light**

**Isaiah 9:1 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles**

The territory of Zebulun and Naphtali was the northernmost portion of Israel, and he calls it Galilee of the Gentiles – probably because it was the gateway between Israel and the rest of the world. Whenever someone (besides Egypt) attacked Israel they came in through the north, so Galilee was always the first to get hit. And in verse 2 Isaiah jumps ahead into the future and starts speaking about this deliverance in the past tense from the prophetic perspective.

**2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.**

The day will come in Israel when right up there on the north end, at the gateway to the rest of the world, the sun will finally rise and dispel the darkness. In the past God had been a light to the faithful among His people in Israel, but the rays of light from the dawning of this new day would shoot across the entire world.

**Isaiah 49:6 It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.**

Israel will still be the center from which the light emanates, but it will be a light for the whole world. Ignorance will give way to knowledge of and love for the truth, the gloom of suffering will give way to restoration and joy, and the blackness of despair and hopelessness will give way to the dawn of hope. And the significance of all that happening at the gateway to the rest of the world is the fact that it will be the Servant of the Lord, who represents Israel that will be the light for the rest of the world. The light will be a person. In Isaiah 42:6, God the Father speaks to that Servant (the Messiah):

**Isaiah 42:6 I will make you to be ... a light for the Gentiles 16 I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them**

All of that is what is behind Simeon's reaction when he sees the baby Jesus:

**30 my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.**

That little child that Simeon held in his arms came from heaven to enable us to see His marvelous, bountiful provision. He is our light of hope and our light of knowledge. He is light to our path and He shows us the next place to step as we walk through life so we do not have to be afraid of falling into a pit.

### **Light opens the door to reality**

Blindness cuts you off from reality. When you are in the dark there might be wonderful things all around you- spectacular clouds, gorgeous flowers, fascinating information in a book; but without light you are not only unable to experience them, but you remain unaware that they are even there. But when the lights come on, nothingness is instantly transformed into manifold fullness. The door to reality swings wide open, and, by means of the marvelous gift of perception, you can have interaction with reality. And it works the same way in the spiritual realm. We read in Scripture about invisible realities that do not seem real at all. We have heard that Satan is like a vicious, deadly, roaring lion, but to us he seems more like nothingness. We have heard that God's attributes are so delightful that they cause singing and dancing and shouts of joy, but so often they seem more like a mere list of dry, theological facts. God's chastisement is said to be excruciating, but to us it seems worth risking it in order to have a few seconds of shallow pleasure. So many of the things Scripture points to as the most important realities there seem to us like nothing but an ethereal, substanceless collection of thoughts and ideas and words.

They are real, and to navigate successfully through life we must live as though they are real- which is easy when the light are on, but impossible in the dark. When the Lord Jesus Christ turns on the lights and opens your eyes to truth, navigating life is as easy as walking through a well-lit room. That is not to say we can see perfectly. In this life we see "but a poor reflection in the mirror" (1

Cor.13:12). But oh, how much better even a reflected glimpse of His glory is than darkness! One of the reasons Christ is so precious to us, and so much more delightful and satisfying to us than anything this world has to offer, is because He is light, and light opens the door to reality

### **Clothed in Light (Splendorous and Self-Revealing)**

And this little child that Simeon held in his arms is light. That is His nature. God is by nature a self-revealing God – so much so that Scripture says He is *clothed* with light.

### **Psalm 104:1 O LORD my God ... you are clothed with splendor and majesty. 2 He wraps himself in light as with a garment**

Light is the medium of perception – it is the medium that carries information about the world around you into your eyes. So the meaning of that verse is that God clothes Himself with the means of spiritual perception. That which makes something knowable – that is what God wears as clothes. It means He is by nature a self-revealing God. Some philosophers have reasoned that God is so great that He must be unknowable. That is what the agnostics say – God is so great and immense and transcendent that He is unknowable. That makes a lot of sense. God is so great that He is incapable of revealing Himself? No - God is even greater than they think. He is so great that He is capable of revealing His greatness – even to beings like us.

If He wrapped Himself in darkness then we might have an excuse for not perceiving Him. But if His very clothing is light, there is no excuse for our dullness other than closed eyes. Before we were saved we were all blind. We had some understanding of God, but the dim shadow of natural man's concept of God is not powerful enough to draw out true worship from the heart or become the soul's prime object of affection. Before we were born again, when we thought about God we were like little flies buzzing around a Rembrandt. A fly appreciates a Rembrandt in the same way it appreciates a pile of manure – it is a nice place to land. Before we were saved we buzzed around the brilliant brushstrokes of God's compassion and grace and patience and love and power and holiness with only the tiniest appreciation for how glorious those things really are. We buzzed around the shading and perspective and color and mood of His genius oblivious to 99.999% of the beauty. Only the work of the Lord Jesus Christ can enliven our dead hearts to love for Him. Only His Word about Himself applied to the heart by His Holy Spirit can do the miracle of giving a fly some appreciation of a Rembrandt.

### **The God whose presence drives away the darkness**

Think for a moment of what an awesome being the Lord Jesus Christ is. He is so good, so glorious, so powerful, so righteous, so pure, so absolutely perfect in every way that His mere arrival transforms a world of deep darkness into a kingdom of glorious light. All the darkness of this world will be dispelled when Jesus returns. Just as the sun effortlessly transforms the night into day just by being the sun, so the Son of God, just by His Coming, will transform this world of darkness, evil, and sin into a glorious kingdom of universal righteousness, peace, joy, and goodness. Thorns will all become extinct, trouble will be gone, tears wiped away, and we will know nothing but everlasting, ever-increasing joy in Him. And ever since Jesus' first coming in the manger two thousand years ago that glorious age to come has been breaking in upon this present age, so that there are portions of that glorious age of light that we can enjoy even now!

## **How to enjoy Him as your light**

### **My light (experiencing it)**

So let's talk for a minute about how to do that. How do you enjoy the light of the glorious age to come right here and now? Jesus is the light of the world, but most of the world has their eyes squeezed shut. A person who has his eyes closed, or who is blind does not experience the light. He may know a lot of information about the sun, and he may understand that the sun is a big light, but it is not a light *to him*.

### **Psalm 27:1 The LORD is my light**

Experiencing the Lord not just as the light but as your light happens when the things Jesus taught, and the work of His Spirit open your eyes to shine on your path so you can see things as they really are. The right way looks like the right way, and the things the Bible says are most delightful seem most delightful, and sin looks ugly and righteousness looks attractive and this life seems like a breath and eternity seems most important. Trials seem purposeful and the joys of life seem like gestures of God's love.

It lights up your mind, so you can understand truth about Him. It lights up your heart, so you can accept and believe and embrace as wonderful the truth about Him. It lights up your heart and conscience, exposing your sin so you can see that you need to repent, and it warms and softens your heart so that you are willing to repent. It turns your night to day so that what was a mere list of facts becomes a world of reality, and what you once merely acknowledged as true now actually seems true and real. No wonder the psalmist thought of light as being a synonym for joy.

### **Psalm 97:11 Light is shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart.**

#### **Appreciate the light you have for what it is**

Think for a minute about the spiritual realities that your soul does not seem to be fully convinced of (for example, the certainty of God's provision, or the fact that fellowship with Him would be better than the pleasure of some sin). Cry out to the Lord Jesus Christ to be your light in those areas so you can see those realities instead of the distortions you see now. The closer you are to God and the more you experience fellowship with Him the more the eyes of your heart will see. Draw near to Him and darkness will give way to light.

And when you have done that, think about this – think of some spiritual truths that your soul is fully convinced of – things that really do seem true to you – things God's Word says that some folks cannot accept but that are easy for you to accept and delight in. Those things seem to you to be true are not because of the force of the evidence alone, but because you have experienced this attribute of Christ. The Light has shined in your eyes! Praise Him for being *your* light. Each time you understand something in Scripture or gain insight about Scripture from a sermon or book, remind yourself that you are, at that moment, experiencing the light-likeness of God!

It is very possible that you are experiencing it right now, at this very moment. If you have understood anything from Scripture as I have been talking, and if your heart was able to believe it and accept it and embrace it as wonderful, or if you were able to see sin in your heart and have a desire and willingness to turn from that sin; if you have been able, during this message, to see anything good in God's Word and desire that good thing, that means you experienced the presence of God, and it had an effect on your mind, heart, soul, affections, desires, and will. It means your whole being has been sunbathing in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ. It means He is here in this room and you experienced His presence.

### **Psalm 97:11 Light is shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart.**

#### **Prayer**

Before I close in prayer I want to give you a couple moments to spend in silent prayer before God and ask Him to show you which part of your life has the least light right now.

Is it your mind? You don't understand the truth about Him very well – you are confused.

Is it your soul? Your appetites and desires are twisted and distorted.

Is it your conscience? Guilt does not sting you as it should.

Is it your will? You just cannot get over the hump of willingness to do what you know you ought to do?

Is it your affections? You just love the wrong things. Your love for the things in this world is strong and your love for the things of God is weak.

## **Prayer**

Pry our eyes open, Lord. Make our hearts interested enough to see Your glory. Let us so revel in the possibility of seeing Your glory that we will recoil from sin or anything else that will cloud our vision of You. It is an amazing thing, dear Father, that You have revealed Yourself to us! Create in us the drive and eagerness to see Your glory. Make us at least as eager to see Your glory as we are to catch a glimpse of the impure things in this world that entice us. Let the intensity of our desire to behold Your power and glory at least match the intensity of desire we have for the sins our flesh so craves. Dear Lord God, please, open our eyes wider. By Your grace they are open, but still so dim. Most days we drift back into dullness and spiritual sleep countless times during the day and become oblivious to the blazing sun right in front of our face. Oh, for the day when this flesh is redeemed and we will be eternally awake and alert to You! Lord, hasten that day. Let it begin today in some measure. Let us see and be warmed and brightened with joy today by Your light.