

Light that Leads to Life (Easter Sunday)

John 1:1-9 & 3:16-21 on April 4, 2021

Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

Please read John 1:1-9 before going further in this transcript.

That last verse that Gerri just read for us says, “The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.” (John 1:9) This is a reference to Jesus; Jesus is the true light.

Jesus is the “Light that Leads to Life.” The concept of “light” can mean various things to us¹: Light can mean mechanical physical light that helps us see in the darkness, like a light bulb or a flashlight. Light can also mean natural physical light, like light from the sun, moon, and stars. Light can also be personified, as in “he or she is the light of my life.” Perhaps most importantly though, light can mean something spiritual; it’s a way of communicating spiritual truth that overcomes spiritual darkness. This is what John 1:4-5 is driving at, “In him [Jesus] was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Jesus is the spiritual light that overcomes spiritual darkness; Jesus is the “Light that Leads to Life.”

All throughout the Bible, “Light is closely linked with God.”² Psalm 104:2 says, “The LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment...” 1 John 1:5 says, “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”³ You see, “Darkness is no problem [at all for] God...”⁴ Anyone who’s ever been through a power outage would agree that light is good. Having a flashlight ready is a game changer. Anyone who’s ever been out tent camping WITHOUT electricity or a generator, truly understands the value of having a light source. A flashlight or maybe a kerosene lantern, or the light of the campfire make all the difference.

But there are also times when light ISN’T that great, when it actually irritates us, when we actually PREFER darkness. Like when someone shines the light in your eyes when you’re trying to sleep. Or, when you just woke up in the morning. Or like when we stuff all our junk in a closet and close the door because we don’t want to think about it. We don’t want to see all that stuff! In fact, we appreciate how HELPFUL the darkness is, in helping us to hide our mess. We might even be thanking God for those unlight, dark corners in the house, where no one ever goes, and no one ever sees. The fact is, sometimes, we LOVE, the darkness. We not only love the PHYSICAL darkness, but also the SPIRITUAL darkness. We read about this in John 3:19-20, “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world [referring to Jesus], but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.”

¹ See Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). Light. *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 1342). Grand Rapids, MI.

² Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). Light. *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 1342). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

³ Daniel 2:22 says that, “...light dwells with Him.”

⁴ “...darkness and light are alike to him (Ps 139:12).” Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). Light. In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 1342). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

1. Jesus' light exposes our darkness. Let's look at John 1:9 again, "The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world."⁵ You see, God loves us SO much, that He sent Jesus to shine His light on all of the darkness in this world, on everyone's darkness, including that of each and every person. The light of Jesus exposes the dark corners where evil tries to hide. That's why we sometimes run AWAY from Jesus rather than running TOWARD Him. Today, let's all humbly consider the dark corners of our own hearts. Those hidden places that we don't want exposed to the light of Jesus.

In the Bible God has tried to teach us about our own sinfulness. God has warned us about how our own sinful depravity, has the power to destroy our own individual lives, as well as the lives of those around us, And even our society as a whole. We need to pay attention to God's warnings and turn our lives over to Him. Our tendency is to shrink back from His light, especially when it's shining directly in our eyes, directly on our own hidden sins. It's uncomfortable and it hurts! Our response to God is often: "Point that light in someone else's direction!"

If each one of us were to be brutally honest, then we'd have to admit that there are areas in our lives where our thoughts, words, and actions are not all that they should be. Each one of us has stumbled in our own private thought life. This may center on greed or lust or some other temptation. And from time to time, those evil thoughts come out of our mouths as we speak in destructive and hurtful ways to the people around us. Some of those people may be complete strangers, but others are our closest friends and family. Before we even know it, we've said something we never would have imagined ourselves saying, but it just slips out. And w/o the option of an "undo button," like we have on our computers, we can't take those words back. Sometimes, we don't even WANT to take those words back. We're GLAD that we said it, because we've decided in our own hearts, that another person deserved to be talked down to that way. (Sin, gets the best of us.) At times, the dark corners of our human hearts go far beyond just thoughts and words. At times, those dark corners find their outlet in evil behaviors. We end up doing things that we know are dark and evil; what the Bible calls sinful.

⁵ "gives light to everyone." "The verb phōtizei [φωτίζω] may have its primary lexical meaning 'to shed light upon', i.e. 'to make visible', 'to bring to light'. Inner illumination is then not in view...What is at stake, rather, is the objective revelation, the 'light', that comes into the world with the incarnation of the Word, the invasion of the 'true light'. It shines on [everyone], and divides the race: those who hate the light respond as the world does (1:10): they flee lest their deeds should be exposed by this light (3:19–21). But some receive this revelation (1:12–13), and thereby testify that their deeds have been done through God (3:21). In John's Gospel it is repeatedly the case that the light shines on all, and forces a distinction (e.g. 3:19–21; 8:12; 9:39–41)." (Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 124). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.)

Jesus' light not only exposes our darkness, but it reminds us that we are in danger of perishing. Jesus came into our world to shed light on all of us. He came to make visible, what we NEEDED to see; not just what we WANTED to see. And even though these things are difficult to see, even though they make us feel uncomfortable, we NEED to see them, because these things are killing us. God loves us too much, to leave death in our blind spot.

2. Jesus' light reminds us to believe lest we perish. Ironically, we hear about this danger of perishing, every time we hear the good news of John 3:16. John 3:16 says "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." This is wonderful news! God loved us SO much that He sent the best; He sent His very own, "one and only Son," to die for our sin! Why did He do this? Because He loves us! But... why did He NEED to do this? Because otherwise, EVERYONE would have perished! ALL of us would die not only a PHYSICAL death, but also a SPIRITUAL death. You see, the light that Jesus shines is a matter of our own spiritual life and death. That's why it's important to really think about everything that John 3:16 is saying.

The verses that follow John 3:16, make it even more clear, that our spiritual life/death hangs in the balance. John 3:17-18, clarify, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." This phrase in John 3:18, "stands condemned already" means that we're already behind the 8-ball. We've inherited our sin condition from Adam and Eve's sin, way back in the Garden of Eden. Our sin condition already has us on the ropes. This condemnation means that our current condition leaves us on the brink of perishing in hell.⁶ This condition of "standing condemned already" is the default setting for every human being. Jesus came to shed light on this very condition, in order to help us see our need for rescue from condemnation.

We are born into our sinful condition before we even do anything right or wrong. But it doesn't take very long for us, as human beings, to begin living out the proof of our sinful condition; the evidence is readily available. Evil attitudes and actions come naturally to us. When we live our own way, instead of God's way, not only do we do evil things, but we also leave good things undone. For any person willing to be honest and transparent about their own life, it's easy to paint a remarkably clear picture, of just how badly we need to be saved from our sin.

⁶ See Romans 11:32.

Early on in Jesus' ministry, we read this in Matthew 4:16-17, "The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.' From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'" You see, "sometimes light is used to express the illumination that happens, when people come to the knowledge of God and his salvation."⁷ In other words, Jesus came into the world as a light because WE were living in darkness. And His light still shines as a message, "Repent." To repent means "to turn." Turn FROM the darkness, TOWARD His light.

A man named, Paul David Tripp, says it this way: "You can't repent of what you haven't confessed, you can't confess what you haven't grieved, and you can't grieve what you haven't seen."⁸ Jesus came to help us SEE our mess, so that we could repent of that mess. So that we can grieve over our sin. If we don't yet see our need for Jesus, then we still have a spiritual blind spot. There's an alternative to hiding from the light; there's another option. When the light shines on our darkness, we don't HAVE TO run away from it. We can choose to do something that doesn't come naturally to us. Rather than instinctively RECOILING from the light, and hiding in darkness, we can WELCOME the light of Jesus. We can ask him to rescue us from the darkness. To save us from being condemned for our sin.⁹ If it weren't for God's incredible love and His amazing grace, NONE of us would EVER be able to be saved, and become His follower.^{10 11} So, even as God clarifies our dreadful situation of being in danger of perishing¹², He does it with a strategy ready at hand: God's gift to this world, is the gift of his Son, and Jesus is the ONLY reason there is ANY hope for this world.¹³ Jesus' light not only exposes our darkness, Jesus' light not only reminds us to believe lest we perish, but Jesus' light also leads us to life!

3. Jesus' light leads to life! This is where we begin to truly recognize why Easter morning is SUCH a big deal! This is where the gospel steps in! The gospel is the Good News about Jesus. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, and His light shines forth to lead us to life! Jesus' resurrection from the dead, not only proves that God accepted His payment for sin, but it also proves that His light does indeed lead to life. John 1:5

⁷ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). Light. In Baker encyclopedia of the Bible (Vol. 2, p. 1343). Grand Rapids, MI.

⁸ Journey to the Cross: A 40-day Lenten Devotional, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2021 p. 171.

⁹ John 3:21 literally says "does the truth" in contrast to 3:20 "does evil." "This strange expression makes it clear that the lover of light is not some intrinsically superior person." Carson, D. A. (1991). The Gospel according to John (p. 208). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: IVP; W.B. Eerdmans.

¹⁰ I like how D.A. Carson puts it: "Christians were not born Christians...they 'were by nature objects of wrath' (Eph. 2:3). Despite this desperate status, they were made alive with Christ because of God's great love for them, this God 'who is rich in mercy' (Eph. 2:4-5)." Carson, D. A. (1991). The Gospel according to John (p. 206). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: IVP; W.B. Eerdmans.

¹¹ In other words, all of us start out "already standing condemned." All of us who've been rescued from sin, were ourselves in this very same situation, lost in spiritual darkness just like everyone else.

¹² Consider Ezekiel 18:23.

¹³ See Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 205). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: IVP; W.B. Eerdmans.

says, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”¹⁴ ¹⁵ ¹⁶ Jesus was NOT overcome by the darkness of this world. INSTEAD, He overcame it! His light shines and overcomes ALL darkness, ALL evil, and ALL sin. 2 Timothy 1:10 tells us that “...Our Savior, Christ Jesus...has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” When Jesus rose from the dead on Easter morning, He most certainly conquered death, but He most certainly also conquered darkness! In John 12:46 Jesus said, “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”¹⁷ God sent Jesus to be the light that leads to eternal life.¹⁸

Eternal life is offered to each one of us through the gospel. There is a great summary of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:2-4, “By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”

That’s the gospel in a nutshell:

Christ died for our sins; He was buried; He was raised to life.

Indeed, Jesus’ light leads to life; His own resurrection on Easter Sunday is all the evidence that we need. However, there’s actually even more evidence available to us. “The proof is in the pudding.” One of the key pieces of evidence that proves that Jesus’ light leads to life is found in the testimonies of His followers. Today, we are privileged to hear 2 of these testimonies. John Lofgren and his sister, Ruth Lofgren, have asked to be baptized this morning. The light of Jesus has led each of them to new life in Christ. If you’d like to hear their testimonies and see their baptisms, please visit our April 4, 2021 Worship Service Archive for the 10:45 a.m. service at <https://efcbemidji.org/archive/>.

Baptism isn’t what saves us from our sin, but it does represent what saves us. 1 Peter 3:21 says, “and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Baptism is our way of identifying with Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. Baptism is an outward symbol of an inward commitment to Christ. 1 Peter 1:3 says, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

Brother or Sister in Christ: Christ is risen! (*Christ is risen indeed!*)

¹⁴ “darkness” doesn’t mean the absence of physical light, but rather the absence of spiritual light; what we call evil. *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2146 footnote on John 1:5.

¹⁵ The *NKJV* translates it, “comprehend.” “Overcome” can also be translated “understood.” The original Greek can be translated either way and likely means BOTH here. *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2146 footnote on John 1:5.

¹⁶ “the light prevailed; the darkness has not ‘understood’ the light (verse 10).” *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2146 footnote on John 1:5.

¹⁷ See John 8:12.

¹⁸ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1782 footnote on John 8:12.