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John 12:46 “Jesus, the Light of the World”

Intro. Last night was the longest night of the year. Today the daylight hours will begin to lengthen once again. For thousands of years people have celebrated the winter solstice and the return of the sun to greater prominence. I do not like long, dark nights with only 10 hours of daylight. How would you like to live in Anchorage Alaska, where they only had 5 ½ hours of daylight yesterday? I am getting to the age where I don't like to drive at night, especially when it is raining. Several times I have gotten up in the darkness of night and have stubbed my toe! Occasionally I have stumbled and even fallen in the darkness.

When Andrew was a baby, he started crying in the night and I told Cheryl I would take a turn tending to him. So I found my way to his crib in the darkness, picked him up, and proceeded to the rocking chair to try to rock him back to sleep. When I sat down, I totally missed the chair and I fell into the floor with him in my arms! I do not like darkness! It is good for sleeping but that's about it.

The Bible speaks of spiritual darkness. John 3:19 says that “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” Paul said in Eph. 5:11, “...have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness....” Satan rules over a kingdom of darkness (Luke 22:53; Acts 26:18; Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:13). The world lives in darkness.

Ah, but I have good news. Jesus says in our text today, “I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.” Christmas is a time of lights shining in the darkness. When the angels announced to the shepherds that the Messiah had been born, the light of their glory shone round about (Luke 2:9). A bright star shined in the darkness over Bethlehem where Jesus was born, guiding the wise men to the place where He was. So Cheryl and I have a star and lights on our Christmas tree. As you drive about at night you can see many other Christmas lights. This nativity is on display at our home.

So this morning, after the darkest night of the year, I want to share what it means that Jesus has come as a light to the world.

I. CHRIST EXISTED BEFORE HIS INCARNATION

Again, Jesus said, “I have come as a light into the world....” Here Jesus probably compares Himself to the sun which illuminates the earth. The sun is already in existence prior to the time it shines through the early morning darkness. Even so, Jesus was already in existence prior to the time His light began to shine into this world.

If He came into the world, where did He come from? We know from the first verse of John's Gospel He was with God “in the beginning.” Jesus said in John 8:58, “...before Abraham was, I AM.” He is the eternal Son of God, the great I AM.

So Jesus did not come into being when He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. He did not come into being when He was born in Bethlehem. He has always been with the Heavenly Father in eternity past. He came into this world on a mission, and He departed this world when He ascended to the right hand of God. Someday He is coming again to save His people, to save the world from the curse of sin, and to establish His kingdom.

If Jesus lived in eternity past, you can be sure that the Risen Christ lives today and forever. Jesus is the source of eternal life. You can count on that.

II. CHRIST FUNCTIONS AS LIGHT

Notice, Jesus doesn't say, "I have the light." Rather, He says, "I have come as a light." The word translated "have come" is in the perfect tense, which refers to an action that has abiding results. Yes, the impact of the coming of Jesus Christ continues to this very day. Light is powerful. It is impactful. Light dispels darkness. It must flee from the light.

So in what ways does Jesus function as light to the world?

A. He Reveals Truth about God – Light is a common symbol for knowledge. We see this truth that He reveals God to us right here in the context. Jesus says in v.45, "And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me." Likewise, Jesus said in John 14:9, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father..." John 1:18 says, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him," or explained Him to us.¹ The apostle Paul said in 2 Cor. 4:6, "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Yes we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

One way He reveals truth about God is not only from His own example, but also by His Word. He says in v.47, "if anyone hears My words..." Then He says in the last of v.48 that if you do not believe His Word, that "the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day." Then in v.49 He affirms that what He speaks is the very Word of God, the Word of the Father. There He says, "For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak."²

So if you want to know the truth about God, look to Jesus. Read about Him. Hear His word.

B. He Exposes Our Sin – John 3:20 says, "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed." Light is that which makes manifest. It reveals the dirt or stains on a garment. Compared to the holy life of Jesus your own sin is more clearly evident. Also, Jesus did not just expose and rebuke outward sin, but sins of the heart. He said in Mt. 15:19, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."

The first step in the salvation of the soul is an awareness of personal sin and the need of a Savior. The life of Jesus in the words of Jesus will expose your sins before a holy God. That is painfully necessary for everyone.

C. He Delivers Us from Darkness - In our text today Jesus said, "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness." Shortly before the birth of Jesus, Zacharias said in Luke 1:79 that the promised Messiah would "give light to those

¹ The Greek word *exegeomai* used in Greek writing of the interpretation of things sacred and divine (OLB).

² John Calvin said, "Now, if the whole wisdom of the world were collected into one mass, not a single ray of the true light would be found in that vast heap; but, contrary, it will be a confused chaos; for it belongs to Christ alone to deliver us from darkness." [Calvin's Commentaries].

who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.” Jesus said in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

There are several kinds of darkness that He saves us from:

1. He Saves Us from Spiritual Blindness - In Acts 26:18 Jesus Himself said that He was sending the apostle Paul to the nations “to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light...” Here we see that one aspect of the darkness that Jesus came to save us from is spiritual blindness. Paul speaks of this problem in Eph. 4:18, “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” God lamented this spiritual blindness in Isa. 1:3, “The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; But Israel does not know, My people do not consider.” Because of such spiritual blindness people fall into the darkness of sin, error, and falsehood.

In his opening prologue John gives an interesting statement as to how Christ delivers us from spiritual blindness and gives us true understanding of God and the things of God. He says in 1:4, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” It is the life of Christ in the soul that is the light of men. Until you have the life of Christ within you, you cannot understand spiritual truth.³ In fact, he says in the next verse, “And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” When you accept Jesus as your divine teacher, He opens up all the mysteries that perplex you. Daniel 2:22 says of God, “He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him.”

Oh friend, receive the life of Jesus into your soul and then God will enlighten your understanding and the things of God will begin to make sense.

There is another kind of darkness that Jesus saves us from:

2. He Saves Us from Sin – Again, Jesus said in Acts 26:18 that he would “turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins...” Not only does Jesus save us from the penalty of sin but also from the power of sin. Jesus said in John 11:9-10, “If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” To live in darkness also means to do the shameful deeds of darkness: sexual immorality, impurity, greed, theft, obscenity, foolish talk, coarse joking, falsehood, slander, bitterness, rage, brawling, and malice (cf. Eph 4:25-5:12). Take a look at the daily news in our newspapers or on our TVs and even social media and we see darkness everywhere.

3. He Saves Us from Satan - Again, Jesus said in Acts 26:18 that he would turn people “from the power of Satan to God...” Yes, Satan is the ruler of this dark world. Until you come to Christ you are under his control either directly or indirectly. The Christ rescues us from the kingdom of darkness (Col. 1:13).

So if you want to be saved from the darkness of ignorance, sin, and Satan you must come to Christ, the light of the world.

D. Light Gives Life – Again, Jesus said in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." Light means life. Light signifies life-giving power. Think of the miracle we know as photosynthesis. In photosynthesis light means life. In the presence of light, green plants convert water, carbon dioxide, and minerals into carbohydrates and oxygen. If there would be no light, there would be no photosynthesis. If there would be no photosynthesis, there would be no more life. Without the light of the sun the earth would just be a cold, dark, barren wasteland. So light means life. Just as

³ Eph. 2:1 says that the Lord has made us alive who “were dead in trespasses and sins.”

the sun is the source of life even so Jesus is the source of life and the well-spring of being. All life comes from Jesus and stems from Jesus. If you want to live, to really live, you must turn to Christ.

Notice another primary truth that is implied in our text:

III. CHRIST IS THE ONLY SAVIOR

Three times He said He was the light of the world. He said it in v.46 of our text. He made a similar statement in John 8:12 and John 9:5. It must be a very important truth.

What other analogy can we draw from his statement? We have only one sun. The moon is merely a reflector of the light of the sun. It has no light of its own. The stars are too far away to give light to the world. Even so Jesus is the only one who can say, "I have come as the light of the world." Is the only source of life. He is the only Savior.

Jesus Christ is not the only Savior for the Jews, but for the whole world. Again, he said, "I am the light of the world." Just as the light of the sun reaches all nations, even so the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to reach all nations. This truth is also indicated by what Jesus said in the last of v.46, "that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness." That can be more literally translated, "that everyone⁴ who believes...." Jesus loves the whole world. Just as the sun shines for the good of all, Jesus came into the world to give his life a ransom for all. Romans 10:13 says, "For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." Simeon said of the Christ child in Lk. 2:32, that he would be "A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles...."

This is why we are to send missionaries to the nations. This is why we are to give to our Lottie Moon Christmas offering to support them in their mission. We must tell the nations that the only Savior is Jesus. Do you believe that today?

Finally, since the darkness of ignorance, sin, and Satan alienates us from the life of God, and since Jesus has come to carry out the function of the light of the world, I call upon each one to:

IV. BELIEVE IN CHRIST!

How it is possible for anyone to go from darkness into light? Jesus says in the last of v.46, "that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness." To go from darkness to light we must believe in Jesus. To believe in Jesus is to believe He is the light. It is to believe He is the source of life and the well-spring of being. To believe in Jesus is to believe that all life comes from Him and stems from Him. All who exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ become children of light; they no longer walk in darkness.

Yet all who reject Jesus abide in darkness, and at the end of their earthly life they will plunge into the blackness of darkness forever. In fact, hell is a place of outer darkness (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).⁵

On the other hand, if you believe and trust in Christ as your Savior, you will have eternal life in the light of heaven. He says in v.50, "And I know that His command is everlasting life." God wants people to have eternal life.

⁴ It is *pas* (all) without the definite article.

⁵ Apparently, only Matthew's gospel records Jesus referring to hell as a place of darkness.

I believe that saving faith also requires repentance. We have to cut ties with all the works of darkness. The Apostle Paul says in Eph 5:11, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”

Conclusion: I wonder who needs to be saved from the spiritual ignorance and sin of this dark world? Christ alone is the light of the world. He can enlighten you to the truth of God. He can deliver you from the darkness of sin and the bondage of Satan. Repent of your sins and believe in him today!

As for those of us who are already believers, remember the exhortation of the apostle Paul to walk as children of light (Eph. 5:8b). We are to shine the light of the gospel in this dark world. What better time to do so than this Christmas season?

Sources: Gerald L. Borchert, *The New American Commentary: John 12-21* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002); notes from sermon on John 12:46 by Rev. Adrian Dieleman, Pastor, Trinity United Reformed Church, dated December 21, 2003; Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hgts, VA: Published by Author), 2019; Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to John, Vol. 2* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1966); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955); H.A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of John* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1942); Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); H.D.M. Spence & Joseph S. Exell, Ed., *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol.17 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950); Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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