

## **Living in the Light** **John 3:19-21**

In chapter 3 of John, we'll read from verses 16 to 21, and tonight we're looking at verses 19 to 21. Before the reading, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do ask now that you would indeed bless your word to us. We seek not a word from man, but a word from God, for we acknowledge that the wisdom of man is but foolishness in your sight. Father, please speak to us by your Spirit from your word, and help us all that we may hear and obey. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

John chapter 3, starting at verse 16: “<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” Amen.

Well as we've worked our way through John chapter 3, we've seen that Jesus has been teaching Nicodemus, and it's worthwhile noticing something about Nicodemus—John chapter 3, verse 2: “This man came to Jesus by night.” He came to Jesus under the cover of darkness. It doesn't say exactly for what reason, but when you're reading the Apostle John, you must remember that he always sees something particular, or special about the concepts of light and darkness. And so it is with our passage tonight, or our portion tonight, verses 19 to 21.

Having taught Nicodemus that you cannot see the kingdom of God unless you be born again, or born from above, that you cannot enter the kingdom of God lest you be born of water and the Spirit—that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit—having taught Nicodemus that the wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sound, but do not know where it comes from or where it goes, Nicodemus was somewhat flummoxed. He was somewhat brought to a pause. “How can these things be?” he asked. And Jesus went on to tell him that if Nicodemus can't believe the earthly things, the things that have already been revealed to him in Scripture, how is he going to believe the words of Jesus Himself?

We then moved on and we came to verse 16, the Apostle John's commentary I think on the words of Jesus: “<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

What do we take from talking about the fact that God so loved the world? Well, you'll notice in verse 16 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. The world was in a state of perishing. The reason salvation was needed was that people were in a state of perishing. No one was on neutral ground. No one was just walking in no-man's land.

In John's gospel, nobody is just taking their choices as they go. In John's gospel, people are in darkness until God lifts them and brings them into the light. In verse 17, we're told that "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.<sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already."

The condemnation is already standing. To be converted is not to be taken from a state of neutrality and put into, let's say, a positive state. To be converted is to be rescued from condemnation, or death, or the picture that the Apostle John uses here in our passage tonight, it's to be rescued from darkness, to be brought into the light.

There's this myth of human neutrality. You've heard me speak of it many times, and I continue to speak of it. There's just this imagination, it's so pervasive in our society, that everybody is just born in this state of goodness, and they do nothing wrong until they learn to do something wrong. And there's this myth, or this idea, that in this supposed state of being born in human goodness, that somehow or other all a person need do is take the right choices. And when people do things wrong, Aw, they just took some bad choices. They made some mistakes. You know, "I'm sorry if I offended anyone," or you know, "if I set anyone off." They say things like that.

No one in the world today is willing, it seems to me, to simply confess to the truth. We're born sinners. We're not sinners because we sin, we sin because we're sinners. We're born in a particular condition. We're born in the condition of fallen humanity. Always remember the first three words of Ephesians chapter 2: "You were dead." Not, "You were alive." Not, "You were presented with options." You were dead.

We come to our passage tonight: "And this is the judgment"; or, "In this way does the judgment fall"; or, "The judgment is like this: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."

Who and what, then, was the Apostle John referring to when he says, "The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil"? Well, it's not too hard to work out. Turn back to John chapter 1. In the prologue, speaking of the Word: the Word who was with God, the Word who was God, who was in the beginning with God and all things were made through him.

Picking it up now at verse 4 of chapter 1: "In him was life, and the life was the light of men.<sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.<sup>7</sup> He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.<sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.<sup>9</sup> The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.<sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.<sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him."

The light which comes into the world is none other than the Son of God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. And John tells us, He comes into the world. He came, not just to the world in general, but He came to His own people. He came to the Jews. He came to the people who had the Old Testament Scriptures, the people who would claim to be the very people of God. Yet it says,

they did not know Him. They would not receive Him. They would not become children of God. And so John is obviously referring to the light that the Lord Jesus Christ brings into the world.

But there's more to it than just that. If you move down to verse 18 of John chapter 1: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." All the light that God has ever sent to humanity, from the beginning of creation, has come to us through the eternally begotten Son of God. Jesus didn't come into existence when He was born. Jesus didn't come into being when He was conceived. Jesus is the eternally begotten Son of God. God is and always has been, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When Jesus took upon Himself flesh, His divine nature did not change, for God does not change. He added humanity to divinity. He didn't make humanity divine; he added humanity to divinity. For God is unchanging, and nothing changes God. You don't want a God who changes, my friend. You can't trust a God who changes. You want a God who's true to His word, a God who keeps His promises, a God on whom you can rely. "Our rock, our fortress, our God, in Him will I trust," it says in Psalm 91. That's the God whom you need to know. All the light that humanity has ever received, all the divine light that humanity has ever known, has come to us through His Son, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

"No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." So let's sort of decipher that statement. Who is the only God who is at the Father's side? Well, that's John pointing us back to verse 1. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." That "with" God is the with of being side-by-side and drawing closer together. The Word—the Word is the God who is at the Father's side, and He has made Him, God the Father, known. Behind the "making Him known" is the Greek word for exegesis. He's exegeted Him, He's drawn things about the Father into the light for all of us.

So when John says in chapter 3, "<sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil," he is saying that that's what happened when Jesus took upon Himself flesh and came to Jerusalem. He is saying that that is what happened when Jesus became incarnate. But he's also saying that nothing has ever changed, that people have always refused to come into the light. People have always loved darkness rather than the light. Why? Because their works were evil.

You see, there's a problem with someone who's confirmed and hardened in their sin. There's a problem with someone who is a sinner and enjoys their sin. They don't want to come into the light. They don't want to be drawn into fellowship with God. They don't want to own, or confess, their sinfulness. They don't want it to be known that they are what they actually are, and that is, workers of evil.

Turn to First John, the Epistle of First John, near the end of the Bible. Now it's the same author, the Apostle John. And I want us to hear how he describes the light, and coming into the light, here. First John chapter 1, we'll start at verse 5: "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Now we can just stop immediately and think about that. What have we already seen in John chapter 1, verse 1, and then as John speaks about life and light? God is light. And the Word is God. And the Word was the life that is the light of men. You see the way John wants us to think.

“<sup>5</sup>...God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. <sup>7</sup>But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup>If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup>If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

So what’s “walking in the light”? It’s not actually walking sinlessly. That’s comforting, because we can’t. Walking in the light is not walking sinlessly. What is walking in the light? Confessing our sins. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We have fellowship with one another, looking back at verse 7, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Walking in the light is not, my friends, being perfect. There’s no sinless perfection in this life. There’s no sinless perfection on this earth. Walking in the light is walking in the humility of acknowledging our sinfulness and our desperate need for help and power from God. Walking in the light is being humble, being a humble person, being humble people who are prepared to be convicted of our sins.

“But the people,” it says in John chapter 3, “loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.” The people weren’t neutral. The people weren’t just a little bit misguided. It says they loved something. They loved darkness. They loved wickedness. They loved evil. That’s the state of humanity. That’s why mankind seems to get nowhere. It’s two steps forward, three steps back. Every time something good seems to happen, it seems to, you know, fall over, it blows away in the next change of the wind.

Is there this evolutionary process of mankind, growing into some kind of angelic super-being with total control of all his faculties, doing what’s right all the time? Do you see that in the world? Or what do you see? I see war and madness. I see nations destroying themselves through sheer unrighteousness.

You look in the world today, you see nations literally dying. Why? Because they’re having no children. Now that’s crazy. It’s really crazy. What are they doing rather than having children? Well, they’re having anything rather than children. They’d rather have an abortion than have children. They’d rather have erotic entertainment than have children. They’d rather have homosexual marriage, or lesbian marriage, they’d rather do all those things than have children.

People love the darkness. People just want what they want. “I just want what I want so that I can be myself. I just want to be myself. I want to be who I really am.” And yet when you step back and you look at this person who’s supposedly being who they really are, you’re just seeing this nasty, selfish little person, destroying themselves through stupidity, a person who will not exercise any kind of self-control. They love the darkness rather than the light, because their works were evil.

And in Scripture, the thing about being in the darkness, as we took our reading from Acts chapter 26—just turn there quickly for a moment—now this is the Lord speaking to the Apostle Paul, Acts chapter 26, reading from verse 17: “delivering you from your people and from the

Gentiles—to whom I am sending you <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

Those who are in darkness are under a power. They have a king, they have a prince. In the book of Ephesians, he’s called the “prince of the power of the air.” It’s as though he’s got this pervasive influence upon the people of the world. They have a king, they have a prince, and they are under his power.

Now I don’t think that anybody is necessarily under the power of the Devil himself, but Scripture tells us he has a kingdom. He has a dominion of fallen angels, and people who walk in darkness are under the power of Satan. They’re under the power of the Devil. We don’t like to talk about that. We don’t like to think about it that way. We don’t like the idea that there are spiritual forces and powers, unseen and unknown, working in the background, or even sometimes they’re working in the foreground, I think. And we don’t like that idea, and it’s very unsettling and very uncomfortable. We like to imagine that humanity, as I have said, gets to take its own choices, gets to choose its own path, and we as individuals get to do this.

But you’ve got to remember, from the time of the Fall, Adam and Eve allowed the serpent to usurp the order of creation. They allowed the serpent to become something that he should never have been. They allowed him to become the prince of this world. Adam was set up as king. He was given dominion and authority and power. If he had used it, if he had exercised it correctly, that serpent would never have come to the powerful position that he is in today. We don’t like to think about it. It’s uncomfortable. It’s discomfoting.

“Are you saying everyone’s under the power of the Devil in one way or another?” Yes, unless they’re under the power of the Holy Spirit, unless they are born again in Christ. Yes. “Are you saying that everything that the church is doing is in some way a spiritual battle, it’s some kind of warfare?” Answer: Yes. Read your Bible, my friends. Read Ephesians chapter 6; read about your need for the full armour of God. Or read Second Corinthians, where Paul talks about the fact that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. You can’t win this battle with human strength. You can only win this battle in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. We can only make a difference in and through the power of God, as it’s exercised in our obedience, our faithful obedience.

I think that we get so desperately uncomfortable with this that we would choose to close our eyes to it and not to know about it. You know, C.S. Lewis, at the start of “The Screwtape Letters,” said that there’s two problems when it comes to humanity and the devils—that was his word for the fallen spirits—Either they’re too interested, or they’re not interested at all. Either they’re too interested in a deliberately evil way, a pernicious way; or, those who should know better, would rather be ignorant, and rather not know the truth.

There’s no value in not knowing the truth, my friends. You can’t live in faithful obedience, and at the same time, live in complete and utter ignorance. We see people under some kind of strange compulsion. They can’t break the sinful patterns in their lives. I can look at people in my own family, and I ask the question to myself all the time, and I want to shake them and say to them, “How bad does it have to get before you’ll give up? How bad does this have to get before you’ll change your ways? How lonely do you want to be? How miserable to you want to be?”

How foolish do you want to make yourself look? Can't you understand, you're destroying yourself?" If taking them by the throat and shaking them would do any good, I'd try it, but that's carnal. That's fleshly. It can't do any good. It won't make a speck of difference. They'll just think I'm a madman. They'll just think I'm a fool.

You can't break that grip in somebody's life by any human means. You can't even break it with good reason and logic and clear common sense. You want to know something? You can't even break it by simply just reading Scripture. That grip is broken by God Himself. It's broken by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are God's servants. He is the sovereign Lord. He has put us in this world as His servants to pray, to preach, to love in the power of Christ. You can't break that grip through any other means than the means which God has appointed, and that means, my friends—prayer. Prayer.

You want to see real church growth? I'm not talking necessarily about numbers, and I'm not talking necessarily about public profile. I'm not talking about any of those things. You want to see real church growth, where the saints are growing in Christ-likeness and faith and grace, and the fruit of that growth is that they become an attraction to the people who are being called into the kingdom? You want to see real church growth, where people are drawn into the kingdom and are truly repenting? Well, my friends, that comes in answer to prayer. Not because we have the power, not because our prayer makes us special. It comes in answer to prayer because God has ordained that the means by which He does this is in answer to the prayers of His saints.

Turn to Ephesians chapter 6 for a moment. We'll start at verse 10. Now this is that description of the whole armour of God. <sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup> and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; <sup>17</sup> and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, <sup>18</sup> praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, <sup>19</sup> and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak." Verse 18: "Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication."

We kind of get romantic ideas. We fool ourselves. We get a little bit excited when we read about the whole armour of God. We imagine great warriors going out to fight the battle. You know, you get sort of Pilgrim's-Progress type pictures in your mind: The Christian off on his pilgrimage, fighting the enemies that come before him. But here's the funny thing. What does Paul tell us is the fruit of a Christian who is clothed in the armour of God? What does Paul tell us about a Christian who is clothed in the armour of God, and wrestling and fighting with these heavenly spiritual forces of evil? What's the fruit of it? What's the evidence of it? Verse 18: "Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication."

A Christian wearing their armour is a Christian who is involved in prayer, a Christian who has a prayer life, a Christian who is communing with God, praying for God to extend His kingdom through His people, praying for God's church, making supplication for all the saints.

My friends, we ought be praying one for another. We ought be praying for every Christian in this town. We ought be praying for every Christian in this nation. We ought be praying that every Christian be growing in faith and grace and Christ-likeness. That's actually more important than praying for souls to be saved, though I pray for souls to be saved, as you all know. Why? Because a strong, living church, filled with the Spirit of God, a church filled with saints who are obedient, who are walking in the light, who have shunned the works of darkness, who are growing in Christ-likeness, that kind of church bears the fruit for which it was planted.

The things that we want to see have to be the fruit, the harvest, of the things that God has planted. You don't just say, you know, "Haven't seen any converts for a while. Let's have an evangelism rally." You don't just choose to do something because you feel that there's a lack. You know, you don't get fruit from a tree by telling the tree to grow fruit.

Have you ever noticed something? Farmers—they don't actually grow the crops they harvest. A wheat farmer, he doesn't actually grow wheat. He grows the cereal crop which produces the wheat. He tends to the plant which bears the fruit that he desires. Apple farmers don't grow apples, they grow apple trees. You get the fruit from caring for the plant that produces the fruit. You don't get the fruit by saying you want the fruit, you've actually got to have the tree, or the plant. You've got to have the means to produce the fruit. Winemakers don't grow grapes, they tend their vines. The vines grow the grapes.

We as Christians ought to be tending to God's vineyard. That's a picture from the book of Isaiah. And the church is indeed His vineyard, from which He hopes to draw a harvest. We as Christians ought to be praying for Christians, for ourselves, and for all the people with whom we are in fellowship. You want to see a powerful ministry that changes the world around it? Become a people of prayer. That's going to start, isn't it, by coming into the light, as John was saying. We're going to have to come into the light and actually confess our failings: "Father in heaven, I am not what I ought to be. My prayer life is not what it ought to be. I am not faithful enough, I am not diligent enough. I take this too lightly. I'm not serious about Christianity. My approach to the things of God is lightweight, and I understand that it should be serious."

In other words, the church must be repentant. You want to be a person of prayer? Well then you must be a person who is ever repentant and humble in the sight of God, ever being willing to confess your sins, ever being convicted of your wickedness. You will become a person who prays, you will become a warrior of light. But that will be incidental.

As I said, the fruit comes from tending the vine, and God has ordained that the church runs on prayer. It runs on the prayers of the saints. Everything we try, apart from prayer, we're just like a fish out of water, flopping itself to death on the beach. All energy, no profit. All movement, no life. Prayer is the water that the church should swim in. By prayer, constant prayer, we are a people who walk in the light, and we become a people who have the power to share the gospel in a way that draws other people from the darkness into the light.

It's a spiritual battle, my friends. You've got to be one of God's warriors. Therefore, that means that you've got to be a broken-down person, one of the meek, one of those who hunger and thirsts for righteousness. Our ministry, or our attempt at ministry, is a waste of time apart from prayer, because we're struggling and battling with forces of darkness, and we're trying to draw people who love darkness rather than light into the light.

Let's keep reading in John chapter 3, verse 20: "For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed."<sup>21</sup> But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

People don't want the world to know what they're really like. Who here, Christians, all of us, who here would like their mind to be played out as a video on that screen at the back of the room? Who would like those thoughts to be there for all the world to see? Not one of us. And we're Christians. We're the people of God, and we don't want our thoughts to come into the light. We don't want it to be known what *we* are truly like. How much more, people in darkness. How much more, people in sin. How much more, people who are chasing after the things of the world, loving the things of the world and loving their sins. They don't want their deeds exposed. They don't want the world to know what they're like.

Those who do wicked things hate the light. People are haters of God; haters of God, haters of Christ, haters of His salvation. The message that the world does not want to hear is that you are a sinner, and you cannot work your way into God's good books. You are a sinner, and you cannot redeem yourself. You are a sinner, and there's nothing you can do for yourself. It's the message the world does not want to hear.

Why is it that there are certain places that call themselves churches that can draw in thousands of people? Well I'll tell you, they're not preaching the message that people don't want to hear. They're preaching the message that people do want to hear. They're not worried about whether or not they're drawing people from darkness to light. Their mission, as far as they're concerned, is simply to draw people from the carpark through the door. As far as they're concerned, that's the mission of the church—Get people to turn up on Sunday morning, and some of them Sunday evening as well. They don't ask the question, "Are these people converted? Are these people born again? Are these people repentant?"

There are churches in which thousands of people are in attendance right now, and there's no more Christians in the room than we've got here tonight, though there are thousands of people in those buildings. They're not drawing people from darkness to light. As I said, they're drawing people from the carpark into the auditorium. As far as they're concerned, that's the Christian mission.

People love their sins. People enjoy their sins. What's wrong with the world? Why? Well, the sin numbs the mind. Have you noticed something about Australians today? They really don't like the big questions. They really don't like being made to think. They really don't like being asked to actually put this thing here in your skull that God has given you, to work. They'd rather be numb, they'd rather be dumb. The alcohol, the drugs, you name it, whatever else it is—the porn, the computer games, you name it.



What's the plan? Numb the mind. Turn the brain off. "I don't want to think. I want to do the bare minimum I have to do to get from one week to the next, and I want to be able to use the income that I make from that bare minimum to dull my senses. Don't ask me big questions, don't make me think. Whatever you do, don't make me think."

We've become an incredibly thoughtless people who will believe just about whatever drivel is put in front of them through the news media, through TV, whatever. They'll believe just about any nonsense that gets put in front of them rather than hear the truth, rather than be awakened, rather than use their mind.

If we are such fools as Christians—and that's the way the world looks at us—if we are such fools, how is it that we are the ones who can look at the world and cope with it? We can see the evil that's in the world, we can see the madness that's in the world, just the same as anyone else—the crime, the troubles, the sin. We can see all of those things, and we can cope with it. And we're the fools?

They see all the same things and knock it down with a dozen cans, or knock it down with some marijuana, or knock it down with a night of porn; anything rather than put their minds on the reality. They'll chase after any idol that they can, whether it's the idol of ongoing relationships, or whether it's the idol of fitness, whatever idol—the idol of money, the idol of some kind of self-protection, some kind of imagined security, the whole lot.

What do they want to do? Dull the mind. "Don't ask me the big questions. Don't make me think. Whatever you do, don't challenge me, because I've got this little bubble of a worldview that I'm happy with, thank you very much. I would rather think that I'm okay, and I would rather think that the guy next door is okay, than actually ask the question, 'Am I really okay?' And I would rather take any substitute than the real reason for which I was created—the worship of the living God. I'd rather take any substitute, other than bend the knee to God, because I just want to stay in this fuzzy state that's called survival." And they're hardening their hearts, day by day by day. And they know that they're in the wrong. All of humanity hears God's testimony.

Turn to Psalm 19. <sup>1</sup>The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. <sup>2</sup>Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. <sup>3</sup>There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. <sup>4</sup>Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. <sup>6</sup>Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat."

"The heavens declare the glory of God." All of creation—it's a masterpiece, and the artist has signed it. "God, the living God, I made this." The signature's there for anyone who cares to look. It's clear. It's legible. It's not in any way hidden. The heavens are constantly declaring the glory of God. The sky is constantly proclaiming His handiwork, and all of humanity is like a little kid, who's imaging that if he can't be seen, he won't get into trouble, so he steps around the corner, puts his fingers in his ears, shuts his eyes, and goes, "It's not happening. It's not happening. It's not happening." Trying to run away from God, trying to hide from the truth, trying to hide from the testimony of creation itself.

But that's not enough, is it? God sent His Son. God sent His Son into the world. God sent light. God sent His prophets. God sent His word. God sent His law. God's sending, sending, sending, sending. If the world was a letterbox, it would be stuffed, filled with letters from God to humanity. "Hey, I made you. I'm God. Worship me. From God, to humanity."

He keeps sending, sending, sending, sending. Finally He sent forth His Son, but that wasn't final, because the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son, died, and then He was resurrected, and then He ascended to heaven, and then He sent His Holy Spirit into the church. But that wasn't final. Then He sent His church into the world. Sending, sending, sending. Sending out the call, sending out the testimony, sending out the word, God constantly seeking to call humanity back to repentance.

Now, you know, I'm Reformed. I don't imagine God's up there breaking His heart at His failure to reach humanity. He knows what's going on. He's reaching those whom He intended to reach. But the point is that God's constant sending to all of humanity puts all of humanity under His judgment and condemnation. His constant sending to all of humanity is enough that God can rightly judge and condemn everyone. The knowledge of God that you get through creation is not enough to save a person, but it's enough to damn a person.

And here's the thing, looking at Psalm 19, "The heavens declare the glory of God." Is there anyone who's not under the heavens? No. "The sky proclaims his handiwork." Is there anyone who's not under the sky? "Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."

And so all the world is receiving this sending from God via creation, this testimony of the sun, the moon, the stars, the heavens, and all of creation all around us—this testimony saying, "Made by God! Made by God!" And all the world chooses darkness rather than light. They have the knowledge. They actually know. There's no such thing as an atheist. There's just someone who refuses to acknowledge the truth that they know. They simply will not acknowledge that they know. They all know, everybody knows. If they don't, God's a liar. We know God's no liar. Therefore, all of humanity knows and is responsible to God, and all of humanity is choosing evil.

Everybody has free will. Everybody's free to take any choice they desire, according to their nature. The problem is, human nature. We all know what human nature is, don't we? Human nature, being what it is, things are as good as they can be, human nature being considered. What are we saying when we say things like that? Human nature, sin, the sinful nature, the flesh, the inherited corruption, the darkness that's in the hearts of all humanity, and has been there from the Fall of our first father, Adam. People live in darkness and will not come to the light. What can change that? Well, we know, don't we? We've been looking at this portion of Scripture now for weeks. What can change that? The power of the Holy Spirit, life from above. What can change that? The work of God.

How can we be involved? We've already spoken of it tonight. We're to be a people of prayer. God has ordained a means. God could convert the world without the work of a single Christian, without the obedience of a single Christian. God could reach every single person in the world if that was His will. He *is* the sovereign God, but He has ordained that we, His people, are the means by which He will accomplish His purposes. He has given us the gift of prayer. He has given us the gift of His word. He's given us the purpose of proclamation.

I come back to this. If we want to see the church victorious and truly growing—I mean truly growing—it starts with us. Why? Because we are the church. It starts with all the Christians in the world. You want to see a crop? Tend to the vine. We must be a spiritual people of prayer. And that doesn't mean you have to be particularly eloquent. It doesn't mean you have to have some special gift with words. My friends, you've got the Scripture. Scripture tells you all you need to know about prayer. Read it. Read the Psalms. Read the epistles. Read the words of the Lord Jesus Himself. You've got all you need to know to be a person of prayer.

We, as God's people, must be God's people. We must be godly. We must be Christ-like. Think of the life of Jesus. Now this is the most amazing thing to me, when I think about it. He's God the Son of God. According to the sovereign will of God, He's sent into the world to do the work of salvation. Read the prophecies in the Old Testament. Has there ever been a life that was more predicted, or a life that was more under the sovereign control of God? And Jesus was a man of prayer. Everything about His life was bathed in prayer. Jesus would retire to the mountaintop to pray. Jesus would retire into the garden to pray. Jesus would teach His disciples to pray. The sovereignty of God included the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ. The sovereignty of God was that our Saviour would be a praying Saviour.

Well, the sovereignty of God is that His church be a praying church, that His church be a people of true spiritual life, a people who live in the light, a people constantly coming back into the light, being broken-hearted, being remade again, praying, praying, praying. And I'm telling you Christians, each and every one of us, we can by the power of God live this life. We can do these things. Why? Because God wants these things to be done, and He's given the power of His Holy Spirit to His people that they will be done. We can't do them in our power, we can't do them by our own wisdom, but it's God who works in us to will and to work for His good pleasure. It's God who works in us.

We as Christians must be an obedient people to our God. We must be obedient to our God, to His revealed will in Scripture and then we'll see it. We'll see it. We'll see true, genuine church growth. We'll see true, genuine, gospel harvests. You don't need gimmicks. You don't need shows and song and dance. You just need obedient Christians, living the life that God has ordained that we live. Let's close in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, I do pray that you would make us obedient, faithful people. I pray that you would give us the gift of prayer and that we would exercise that gift with diligence, with love in our hearts, that we would pray according to your will, as revealed in Scripture. Lord, I pray that we indeed would become and be made more Christ-like in all that we do. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.