

The light . . .

by

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“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Isa. 9:2)

A generation of darkness! This is the way prophets and apostles described the world into which Christ came. They would have received some argument, of course. The Scribes and Pharisees were certain that they had the last word of truth from Heaven. The Sadducees were ready to enlighten all of them with their own counsel which was bright in their own eyes. Saul, later to become the apostle Paul, was trained at the feet of the famous Gamaliel, and considered himself to be living at the apex of wisdom and knowledge. The rulers of the Roman world could not imagine a more brilliant civilization. The successful citizen of the 1st Century was not about to admit that he was walking in darkness.

Jus the same, right when Jesus was saying, “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believes on me may not abide in darkness,” the Pharisees were taking counsel to kill him. Wherever He preached, Christ had to cut through their matted layers of lies before His truth could shine through. As the prophet had said, Christ appeared in the world in the midst of gross darkness.

Even so, coming as “the light of the world,” Jesus made no move which might be accepted by the world as of particular significance in relieving its burdens.

Christ led no movement to gain freedom from Rome.

He said nothing about freeing the slaves.

He offered no sweeping legislation.

He established no schools or colleges.

He offered no program on behalf of the poor.

He made no medical break-through to eradicate disease.

So far as the world could observe Jesus left it much as he found it: He entered it through a lowly stable and left it on a shameful cross.

Where then was the light? The light Christ shed is in regard to the darkened condition of man’s understanding, in regard to sin and man’s destiny. John puts it this way:

“And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men lived the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. For every one that does evil hates the light, and comes not to the light, lest his works should be reproved. But he that does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God” (John 3:19–21).

When Jesus began preaching, His message was aimed at sin: “**Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**” The darkness of the world is the power of sin; the light of Christ reveals that sin must be cleansed in order for man to live eternally in God’s

image. The heart of the problem is that sin so darkens the mind that man is unmindful of his awful condition.

The apostle Paul in his systematic theology agrees: **“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened...”** (Rom. 1:21).

Such expression sound like a commentary on man today. The depth of darkness is emphasized by the modern plea that times have changed, and that Christian faith must change in order to be relevant to the space age. A Roman Catholic professor of Union Theological Seminary, winner of the Spellman award, had announced that due to man’s greater enlightenment we no longer need to believe in the virgin birth of Christ. Christ is the light—deny Him and be enlightened! Such were the vain imaginings of the 20th Century, and today.

The fact is that the darkness doesn’t change. It may use new devices—the pill, new abortion techniques; new names may be given, call it sickness instead of sin—but man is still committing the sin of Adam, rejecting the law of the Creator and deciding for himself what he will call right and wrong.

Also, the wages are the same: “You shall surely die.” Prophets said, “The soul that sins, it shall die” and the Apostles said, “The wages of sin is death.” I fail to see nay difference in the consequences of sin in Adams time and now.

Cain hated his brother Abel, because Abele walked in the light, and for this reason Cain slew him (I John 3:12, 19–21). The whole earth soon filled with violence until God destroyed it, except for eight faithful souls. Jesus said it will be the same kind of world when He returns. Sodom and Gomorrah demonstrate the final judgment when man will be totaled out because of sin (Jude 7). The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah are the same sins being committed in Berkely and San Francisco, in Dallas and Lubbock.

Christ is the One who reveals such truth, and for this reason men hated him. “For every one the does evil hates the light.” The Jews “took counsel that they might put him to death” (John 11:53), and finally succeeded in doing so (only by His voluntary consent, as He has all power), for the inexorable and holy light could not be allowed to expose their darkness. This is the judgment upon man, that in his wickedness he cannot endure purity. This is the darkness, that man loves sin rather than holiness, and is thus excluded from life with God. Whether he realizes it or not, such is man’s condition. **“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”** (Rom. 3:23).

But, praise the name of Jesus, He gives the remedy, being not only the diagnostician, but the surgeon as well. Having taught us and demonstrated by the contrast of His life with ours that we are sinners, worthy of death, Jesus then proclaims the fact that He came to give His life a ransom, and to bear the penalty of death in our place.

Even in His death He was a light revealing the penalty for sin. Being “made sin on our behalf” He sustained the punishment for sin: death itself. **“He poured out his live unto death.” “But he was wounded for our transgression, he was bruised for our iniquities...and with his stripes we are healed”** (Isa. 53:12, 5).

Christ, the sinless Once, came from Heaven in human form, humbled Himself to suffer the punishment due to sinners, and thus released us from sin and ultimate destruction.

This is light! Sin is shown to be real, “exceedingly sinful,” as the Scripture says. Man is without excuse. He cannot say that he knew not what he was doing; Christ made it

very clear. Neither can he plead ignorance of the penalty; the death of Jesus was very real. Finally, he cannot resort to the common cry that he can't help it, for Christ has brought a cure: "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believes on me may not abide in darkness" (John 12:46).

Without Christ men cannot know the meaning of life. In vain they seek to answer: "Where did I come from?" "What is my purpose in being?" "What is my final destiny?"

But in Christ these mysteries fade away like the darkness before the morning sun. Man was created by God. He is here to do the Father's will and to be conformed to His image and glorify Him. He is finally destined to be made gloriously immortal to dwell in a new creation with God, Who has already "delivered us out of the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col. 1:13).

The Wise Men followed a mysterious star and the shepherds beheld a great light at the announcement of Christ's birth. But Christ did not come with visible light. His glory was veiled by His humanity. Yet when men heard Him and recognized the truth, their darkness vanished, and they saw themselves as they really were. Peter: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." Paul: "I am chief of sinners." Still this horrible guilt did not produce despair, as the Freudian concept suggests. By turning fully to the light they saw also the way out of sin and their great potential for immortality.

When the light shines into our hearts there is first a horrible feeling of self-loathing. Like Isaiah, one feels, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King..." (Isa. 6:5). The natural reaction is to recoil from the light, to flee back into the darkness where sin will be unnoticed. In the world sin is a normal way of life, but if there is a desire to LIVE and fulfill God's eternal purpose, the action is a deliberate repentance, a rejection of sin, and faith in the Christ who died for our sins. One is then marvelously free from the darkness, there is direction and purpose, and Divine help in living.

Then a strange thing happens. The light draws him closer and closer. He comes to the light to have his works manifest, to see if he is pleasing to God. The closer to the light he gets, the more of his own sin he sees: thoughts and feelings he never saw before, deeds that he had excused, now are recognized as wicked. At first, he thought himself to be a common sinner, but now, in the Light, he wonders that he could have ever been so evil. Then this same light bathes his mind in the truth that all such sin was laid upon Christ, "who bore our sins upon the tree." He basks in this light, for "if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleans us from all sin" (I John 1:7).

Whatever happens economically, scientifically, socially, politically, the chief problem of each person is sin, and the basic question is that of life and death. Christ came into the world to save man from sin and give him eternal life. "The world knew Him not." But to all who do receive Him, there is light, and these are seen "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation...as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15).

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