

Shining with the Light of Christ

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[0 : 0 0] When I was a kid, I was really scared of the dark. I mean, I couldn't go to sleep at night unless there was a light on in my bedroom. I can't remember exactly how old I was before I overcame that fear, but I guess however old or young we are, there are several things about darkness that none of us like. When there's no light, we can't see what's going on around us. We can't see where we're going or what lies ahead. Darkness masks the truth and it distorts reality. The only time when that appeals is if you're trying to cover up and hide something that you don't want to be found out for, but which you know deep down inside is plainly wrong. And so it is that we find the contrast between darkness and light as one of the central images that recurs throughout the Bible. For Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, he would of course have been writing out of his own experience. His own life had been turned around from systematically persecuting Christians and approving of their executions to being overcome by light in a vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus. The very encounter that pulled him out of darkness into a totally transformed life. Anyway, I guess you know all that.

So looking at today's passage from 2 Corinthians, there's just one thing I want us to focus on, and it's this. We need to pay very close attention to the way our eyes can become accustomed to the light, or lack of light. Firstly, there's the danger that our eyes become accustomed to the light.

What I mean by that is that when you become a Christian, you see things differently. When you know the reality of God in your life, it's like having the light suddenly come on.

Now, as long as you are aware of that reality, it has this amazing way of holding things like worry or fear or despair at bay. Why? Not because you can necessarily see the future all of a sudden, but when you sense the light of God's presence in your life, you just get this reassurance that there's enough light around for you to see where to put your foot as you try to move forwards.

You can keep walking and take each day as it comes, as you know God is with you. Now, notice I'm choosing my words very carefully here. I'm saying that it's when you know the reality of God's presence that you are aware of his light. Things get more tricky when we forget about that presence. And what I mean there is that God is present throughout our lives, but we forget that he is.

[2 : 5 7] That is to say, our eyes become accustomed to the light. We get used to the truths of the gospel, and so we get caught up and distracted by whatever problems our circumstances throw at us.

And that's when we need to remind ourselves that we're not actually in the dark. That's when we need to reclaim those simple gospel truths that ignited us when we first heard them, but which we've allowed to take a bit of a back seat in our thinking.

The writer Garrison Kyler recalled his childhood Thanksgiving dinners as the family gathered around the table and remembered the blessings of the past year. He described an uncle, he was called Uncle John, who would usually say a very, very long and drawn out prayer, which caused everyone to squirm.

And Kyler said this, everybody in the family knew that Uncle John couldn't pray without talking about the cross and crying.

And sure enough, Uncle John prayed, talked about the cross and cried. Meanwhile, the rest of us shifted nervously from one foot to the other and longed for the prayer to end. And Kyler adds this very powerful observation. All of us knew that Jesus died on the cross for us.

[4 : 17] It's just that Uncle John had never gotten over it. Let's never get over it. Let's not let our eyes become so accustomed to the light of God's presence that we fail to see and appreciate the difference it can make when we face the challenges and uncertainties of everyday life.

But you know, there's a second danger that's worth mentioning too. And that's the danger of becoming all too familiar with a lack of light. Darkness, that is. Some time ago, I remember going to the cinema on what turned out to be a really lovely, sunny summer's evening.

It was one of those evenings that was so nice and sunny that, had we known, we probably wouldn't have chosen to spend it in the cinema. But arrangements had already been made. And that was where we were.

I don't recall what the film was, but I do remember leaving the cinema, which of course had been darkened for the film, and then stepping outside into the glorious sunshine.

It jarred my senses, because having spent a couple of hours in the dark, it felt like it was night time. Well, it was evening, but it wasn't dark. It was still very, very bright outside.

[5 : 31] And it took me some time, not only for my eyes to adjust, but also to mentally adjust to the fact that it was actually very light. You know, it's possible for us to be so immersed in darkness that we just absorb it, or rather, it absorbs us.

We forget about the light. We become so drawn into something that's really not good for us, or indeed good for anyone. We can get into patterns of destructive thinking and negative thoughts.

We can get pulled into really unhelpful cycles of behaviour and activity, doing stuff and thinking stuff that deep down we know is not good.

Yet the more we're exposed to it, we become desensitised, kidding ourselves that, well, maybe there's no real problem. Paul's answer to that is not easy, but it is quite simple.

In Ephesians 5, he writes, Wake up, sleeper. I love the way it's paraphrased in Eugene Peterson's The Message.

[6 : 37] He writes this, Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busy work, the barren pursuits of darkness. Expose these things for the sham that they are.

It's a scandal when people waste their lives on things they must do in the darkness where no one will see. Rip the cover off those frauds and see how attractive they look in the light of Christ.

Wake up from your sleep. Climb out of your coffins. Christ will show you the light. So watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get.

These are desperate times. Today, today is Mothering Sunday. We give thanks for mothers and we pray for mothers. And as we do so, we're reminded of our own birth and the gift of life itself.

So as we celebrate mothers and as we celebrate the gift of life, let's wake up again to the new birth and the new life in Christ that is ours.

[7 : 40] Let's pray. Lord Jesus, thank you that your desire is to shine your light into our darkness, giving us hope, peace and a sense of direction.

Shine in and through us whatever age or stage we're at. And on this day, we give thanks for mothers everywhere and we pray for them and for all who are involved in the daily challenges of caring for and raising children.

Encourage them and sustain them in the power of your love. Amen. Amen.