

No Need for Light Globes

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[0 : 00] Lord Jesus, you are the light. You are the light of the world. Your word is light. Pray that this night by your spirit that you would shine your light into each heart, each life that's gathered here.

And we ask this for Christ's sake. Amen. An elderly woman stood on a busy street corner. She was hesitant to cross because there were no traffic signals. And as she waited, a gentleman came up beside her and said, can I cross over with you?

Relieved, she thanked him and she took his arm. But the path that they took was anything but safe. The man seemed to be confused as they dodged traffic and they walked in this zigzag pattern across the road.

You almost got us killed, the woman exclaimed in anger. You walk like you're blind. Well, I am, he replied.

That's why I asked if I could cross with you. When you came in tonight, you were given a piece of paper. I'd like you to take that now. And if you haven't, I'm not sure if we've got any spare ones.

[1 : 09] If you haven't got one there with you, maybe you could do it on the back of the sheet that you've got. You'll see there's two lines on it. What I'd like you to do with your eyes very tightly shut, so no peeking, Lisa.

Eyes very tightly shut. With your pen or pencil, could you just write the word darkness? But I want you to write the word darkness with your eyes shut so that the letters exactly touch, the top and bottom of the letters touch the two lines.

Let's just do that for a moment. Okay. Anyone want to enter into a writing competition? It's a very simple exercise, isn't it, to show us that we just absolutely need to be able to see what we're doing. Our son Brendan, known to many of you in the room, has multiple disabilities. But in the spectrum of Brendan's disabilities, the one that I think stands out perhaps the most is his cortical blindness. It massively impacts Brendan's daily life. It massively impacts his development in life. Of course, fortunately for most of us with normal sight, living in a modern, urban, western world, it's actually not easy to comprehend real darkness, is it?

[2 : 36] I mean, even at three o'clock in the morning, light still blaze all around us. But that's not the case in some developing countries. One of our missionary families, the Youngs living in Nigeria, often in their town, well before midnight, all of the power goes off.

And there's just complete darkness. I don't know whether you've had the experience of going caving, I remember as a young teenager doing that, and the guide was sort of one of those masochistic types.

When we were well below the earth's surface, he switched the lights off. It was some experience, groping, stumbling around, wondering where you're going to put your foot next.

Your heart rate starting to race, your palms starting to sweat. Well, the Bible has a lot to say about spiritual blindness and spiritual sight.

In fact, all the way through scriptures, you'll find that blindness is a spiritual metaphor. It's a metaphor of being spiritually in the dark, unable to discern God, unable to discern God's truth.

[3 : 48] And the reality is that outside of a relationship with Jesus Christ, the Bible describes every person as living in darkness.

But it's not just a question of living in darkness. The Bible actually says that people outside of Christ love darkness. You see, that's what the Apostle John says in Chapter 3.

He writes, people love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. And we just simply see lots of evidence of that, don't we, every day.

Not exclusively, but most major crimes are committed under the cover of darkness. It's interesting to me also that the world uses darkness, the word darkness, as a metaphor to describe actions which are less than transparent.

Let me give you an example of that just in the last week. You probably will have read about the growing outrage in Europe over the CIA practice which has been dubbed rendition.

[4 : 48] And this practice, this controversial CIA practice, is one of abducting terrorist suspects, flying them across the globe, and then some suggest subjecting them to torture.

Well, after September 11, the head of the CIA anti-terrorism, counter-terrorism department, a guy by the name of Kofa Black, was appearing before a US Senate committee.

And he said, listen, I'm not going to tell you all this much about what we do, what we do with terrorists as a very classified area. All you need to know is that there was a before 9-11, and there's now an after 9-11, and after 9-11, the gloves have come off.

And the US Vice President Dick Cheney, in fact, spoke of the need to work through sort of the dark side. See, this concept actually pervades all of our society.

Darkness, physical darkness, dark acts, spiritual darkness. And that's the reality of the world in which we live.

[6 : 02] And it's into this reality that the Apostle John writes. And if you could turn to those Bibles, hopefully still left open, on page 862, it'll be helpful as we look at some of the verses in this great opening chapter.

It's into this dark reality that the Apostle John writes in verse 5, Verse 5, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

So immediately we're confronted with the question, who is the light? And as that passage was so wonderfully, dramatically presented to us, you would have no doubt noticed that the one described as the Word is in fact the light.

Verse 14, we read that the Word became flesh and lived among us. This Word who took on flesh is none other than Jesus Christ. You see that mentioned in verse 17.

And then in verse 18, he's described as God the Father's only Son, the one who's made the Father known. So the picture is Jesus has come into our world, into our dark world, and he's the light of the world.

[7 : 14] He's the one who knows God the Father and the one who makes God the Father known. That's why, of course, in chapter 8, Jesus simply declares, I am the light of the world.

A little boy heard his Sunday school teacher say that Jesus was the light of the world, and he took the remark quite literally. And after the class, the boy ran up to the teacher and said, listen, if Jesus really is the light of the world, then I sure wish he'd come and hang out in my alley because it's awfully dark where I live.

Have a look at verse 9. John writes, the true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him.

He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. See, it's plain, just as we look at those verses, that the light is Jesus, and this light invades the darkness.

It shines on every person, and it exposes each one of us for who we are. And there's not one of us that are exempt from that shining light.

[8 : 25] It's Jesus Christ who shines in the darkness. This divine light has penetrated. It's unveiled the darkness for what it actually is.

Well, but what's the darkness? Perhaps you're still wondering. I want to say that it's simply the world outside of relationship with God.

Spiritually blind. It's the world of unbelief. It's the world of evil. And the darkness of the world is hostile to the word. Darkness stands for the Christ-less life.

Darkness is hostile to the light. Darkness stands for the ignorance of life apart from Christ.

Darkness stands for the chaos of life without Christ.

Darkness stands for the immorality of the Christ-less life. Darkness is characteristically unfruitful.

Darkness is connected with hate and lovelessness.

[9 : 30] And darkness is the final place for those who will not accept the light, the Lord Jesus Christ. So it's into our world, our world of unbelief, into our world of darkness that God enters.

Look again at verse 5. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. Look carefully at the verse. Jesus Christ, the light of the world, has entered into the darkness of evil, of unbelief and lostness, but the darkness does not overcome Jesus.

I mean, grasp the significance of that. Jesus is the victor. The light will triumph. And all of those who believe in him, the children of light, in fact, will likewise triumph.

This opposition to Jesus, this darkness, this opposition to the true light, was in fact so extreme that Jesus was crucified.

But it wasn't any victory for the powers of darkness. Not at all. I mean, it was the Lamb of God giving himself as a perfect sacrifice for sin, for sinners like you and me living in this world of darkness.

[10:59] Each evening, of course, the physical darkness, it's a little early for this illustration, but each evening the physical darkness, if you like, puts out the light of the day.

And that's what the spiritual darkness tried to do without any success to the Lord Jesus. He simply overcame it. He rose from the dead.

The light shines in the darkness. Jesus shines. The gospel shines. The church shines. And I want you to look at verses 1 to 4 because we see three reasons why the darkness will not overcome it. Look, firstly, we'll work backwards at verse 4. In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. You see, the existence of light simply makes it possible for life to exist.

And here we read that the life was in the word, that is, the life was in Jesus. He's the source of physical life. He's the source of spiritual life. And the light is the offerer of life.

[12:04] The darkness can't overcome the light. But maybe you're still not convinced. How can you be sure of that? Then look at the second reason, the second reason in verse 3, for the triumph of the light.

All things came into being through him. And without him, not one thing, not one thing came into being. So the one who's the source of life is none other than the one through whom everything was made.

The life that shines is the light, is the life of the creator. Everything owes its existence to the word. And so thirdly, we see the reason in verses 1 and 2 for the triumph of the light.

In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

As Ellie said at the beginning, it's quite a verse, isn't it? Quite two verses. The word was with God, and the word was God, because the word never had a beginning.

[13:11] There was never a time when the word was not. When you think about that, the word is co-eternal with the father.

He's not the father because it says that he was with God, the father. But he's equally God with God, the father, because the word was God. Now, if your mind is sort of racing on that, let me simply put it this way.

Everything that we can say about God, we can say, and we must say, about the word. The picture is just wonderfully clear, isn't it, at the beginning of John chapter 1.

The light will not be overcome by the darkness. Now, not only is the light a living light, not only is the life of this light the life of God's word, through whom everything was created, but this word, this life, this light is God.

You see, that's what John declares at the beginning of his gospel. This word, this light, God himself, didn't just sort of arrive and make a fleeting visit to the world.

[14:27] God, verse 14 tells us that he actually lived among us, full of grace and truth. He lived among us.

But what a tragedy. Fallen humanity, even God's chosen people. They didn't know the Lord Jesus. They didn't accept the Lord Jesus. And the sense of the words there is one of willful rejection. But that's the case, isn't it, today?

Our school friends, our college friends, our work colleagues, perhaps our neighbours, perhaps some relatives in our family. Darkness, overwhelming darkness, and spiritual blindness.

The devil is the master deceiver. Paul writes to the Corinthians in his second letter and he says this, the God of this world, and he's referring to Satan, has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

[15:47] I remember clearly in my late teenage years going along with this deception. this deception where the devil puts such enormous creativity into making darkness appear like light.

I got sucked right into that. It was interesting, in my head, I knew that Jesus is the light of the world. But I actually found the false lights of the world more attractive.

I was wrong. They are attractive for a passing moment. But the false lights of the world are in fact destructive.

So perhaps tonight I'm speaking to one, maybe more than one, who also finds the false lights of the world attractive. What do I mean by these false lights of the world?

I mean if you like a system of belief that ignores and rejects Jesus Christ. And out of that system of belief flow all of our actions.

[17:03] You see, the Bible is so clear on this. There's only darkness and light. There's not this sort of middle ground. There's darkness and there's light. And darkness is empty, it's life-sapping, and ultimately darkness is life-destroying.

Darkness, overwhelming darkness, spiritual blindness. They're not really the sort of opening lines that you'd use if you were the keynote speaker at a positive thinking conference, are they?

So look with me at verse 12. But, what a magnificent little word. In the midst of darkness, in the midst of spiritual blindness, the gospel penetrates the darkness.

And the darkness doesn't overcome the light. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God. That is, those who entrust themselves to Jesus Christ will share in divine birth.

That's the message of Christmas. But it's also the message of Boxing Day. It's actually the message for every day and it's the message for every person.

[18:27] God has come in human flesh, he's dwelt among us, he's died for us, and he's risen from the grave in total triumph.

Friends, if I'm speaking to someone tonight who doesn't know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, then the truth is simply that there is no hope in that situation.

Our greatest need is spiritual rebirth. And it's only available through the preexistent word, the word that has always existed, the word that actually became flesh.

The Christmas message is a message of hope. Sinful men and women, sinful men and women outside of a relationship with God can be recreated. You see, the light does shine in the darkness. And that light brings life. It brings life to a world in which there is no hope. And for those who entrust themselves to Jesus, John says in verse 16, from his fullness we've all received grace, grace upon grace.

[19:47] John Newton, the captain of a slave ship in the early 1700s, he actually knew a thing or two about spiritual blindness, certainly as he looked back over his life. And after John Newton was saved, he penned these words and they are words that you can just feel them flowing out of his heart.

Words that are often used at a soccer match for a reason I've never quite understood. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found.

I was blind, but now I see. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved. How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.

From spiritual darkness and blindness to spiritual light. Well, the Christmas season certainly represents great business for the light globe business.

The press reported just in the last week about the rivalry, the increasing rivalry between house owners, each seeking to outdo the other with their Christmas lights. And I have to tell you, that is great for business if you are a light globe retailer.

[21:03] In fact, there's a retailer in the southeastern suburbs titled the business Santa's Place, and that business has doubled in size each year in recent years.

But the world actually doesn't need any more light globes. light globes fade out. They burn out. What this dark, dark, dark world needs is the true light.

And it's in this dark, dark world that unfortunately we actually come across many false lights. False lights that fade out. False lights that don't provide any new life.

And certainly as I reflect on my life and as I think of many who I know well, we often try to light up our lives in all of the wrong places.

There's a German comedian by the name of Carl Vanentin, and he walked onto a stage where everything was dark except for a small area under a street lamp. And he began to look for something on the ground and he told the policeman who also came onto that scene onto the stage that he was trying to find a key.

[22 : 18] And whereupon both of them started to, or continued to search for the key. This went on for ages. And finally the officer said to comedian Carl, are you sure that you lost the key here?

Oh, no, no, no, said Valentin. And he points over to the corner. He said, it's actually over there, but this is where the light is. You see, there are many false lights in the world, false lights that fade out, false lights that do provide no hope.

So I guess I want to make an appeal to my brothers and sisters in Christ tonight. We are called to be Jesus' light bearers.

Jesus' light bearers in a dark, spiritually blind world. But this spiritually dark, blind world is actually the world in which we live, we play, we work, we study, like it's just the world that we hang out in. And when it comes to shining a light for Jesus, some people are perhaps like a match. They ignite, they burn for 15 seconds, and then it's all over. Others are like a disposable light.

[23 : 38] light up for a year or two, but the battery of faithfulness finally runs out. Some people are even like an electric light globe. They turn it on when they want to, and they turn it off when they don't want to.

What we need to be as God's people is like the sun, and shine 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

at this Advent season, we remember the birth of Jesus. God become flesh, the light that shines in the darkness.

And at the Advent season, we also remember the return of the Lord Jesus. He's coming again in blazing glory. That will be some light show.

And when the Lord returns, and that's a literal fact, it will be a visible fact, it will be blazing glory, the Lord is going to usher in the new heaven and the new earth.

[24 : 49] And in the last book of the New Testament, John writes this about the new Jerusalem and the new heaven and the new earth. He says, nothing accursed will be found in there anymore.

But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it and his servants will worship him. They'll see his face and his name will be on their foreheads.

There'll be no more night. They need no light of lamp or sun. them. Why?

For the Lord God will be their light and they will reign forever and ever. That is a fantastic prospect. Christmas is a great time for celebration. For followers of Jesus Christ, for God's people, each day should be a celebration, a celebration of God's mercy, shown to us in sending his son, his son, the word, his son, the light of the world, his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who came to save us, to redeem us, to rescue us from darkness, to renew us.

[26 : 16] so may our hearts and lives overflow in praise to the one who is indeed the light of the world.

Father, we thank you that in your extraordinary love, you sent the Lord Jesus into this world. The word became flesh.

Into the world that the Lord Jesus created, there was nothing that was made, that was not made through him, but with the fall, a world of spiritual blindness, spiritual blank darkness.

Lord, I pray for anyone who is here tonight, who under the conviction of the Holy Spirit recognises that they are living in darkness, that they would turn from their sin, turn from their rebellion, repent of their sins and put their trust in the light of the world and be reborn.

Lord, for the many here who are your children, who are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, may we each, as we continue to reflect on this passage, have renewed passion, have renewed vigour, have renewed commitment to indeed be Jesus' lightbearers, lightbearers in a dark, dark world.

[27 : 43] And we ask this for the sake and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.