

Why Darkness Doesn't Win

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[0 : 00] First, let me ask that you turn in your Bible to John chapter 1, and then I want you to join me in prayer.

! There is not a habit, a ritual, something that is scribed out as a preface, but it is the glad confession of your supremacy and your sufficiency, and our absolute dependence upon you to work in making the word that you have given to us that is settled in the heavens clear and understandable and appreciated in the lives of your children.

So the declaration of the word is of the Lord, and the application and appreciation of the word is of the Lord, and we are dependent upon you today.

And we ask that you would be pleased to bless us with the work of the Holy Spirit, both in the preaching and the application of the word to our lives.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you, Aaron.

[2 : 29] Now. I called on Aaron earlier in the week.

I said, Aaron, would you mind doing a favor for me? I think it has a place. And he said, well, I've never played that before. I said, you can handle it. And I do appreciate Aaron doing that.

And there's a reason for it. You know, when we hear those notes, what do we think? We think that they are an introduction to the President of the United States coming out because that is pretty much the fanfare that is played at any time when he is making a public appearance.

And it's kind of a signal that he is going to be out immediately. We use similar signals that I don't know that they're always accepted, but we do things like blinking the lights in the lobby.

You know why we do that? Come on down. You know, come in. Okay. Another thing we do, and I have been tempted to pipe music out into the lobby before we get started because you're kind of cued that you're not going in until some music is happening and then kind of drift in as you feel inclined.

[3 : 55] And I thought, we'll play the music early and surprise you one time. But here's what I know. I'd only get away with it once. And then what you would do is just kind of wait it out.

And so those kind of preparatory signals would not make much sense. But the reason I had Aaron play this little line is I want you to understand clearly that Jesus did not come into his public ministry unannounced and missed.

Now it's true, and we make much of it, and I think rightfully so, that his birth was with relative anonymity. He arrived in a little old town, and he ended up actually in a manger.

But I want you to understand that while his birth was that way, his public ministry was not something that was characterized by stealth or secret. And as we look at John 1, verse 6, and carry down to verse 13, what I want you to understand.

Aaron, you can go sit with your honey. She thinks you should be up there. Hi, Megan. I mean, you know, you're married, right?

[5 : 17] Is he turning color just a little bit? Okay. Okay. As we look at John 1, we look at verse 6 through 13.

I want you to understand that the God of this universe is not into secrets and surprises and catching us unaware. Everything he does, his justice, is something that is communicated clearly so that men are without excuse.

When ultimately they reject the sweetness of the gospel, they will never be able to say, I didn't know. I didn't hear. And so this morning, as we look at this passage, we want to understand that Christ's coming was prophesied in the Old Testament.

It was announced by John the Baptist. And yet, as we will see, John's ministry and the coming of the light, the Lord Jesus Christ, was largely rejected.

Does that mean that the darkness wins? No. Because as we are going to see later on towards the end of our lesson this morning, what it says there in verse 12 and 13 is, But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God.

[6 : 48] I'm excited to be able to tell you that the darkness doesn't win, and that is a reminder of that reality. Well, let's dive into the text and mark, first of all, John's great work.

We find it there in verses 6 through 8, and it says, There was a man sent from God whose name was John. Now, the Bible makes it rather clear, if you read through any of the synoptic gospels, that John was a rather unusual man.

For one, his dress and his diet was something that set him apart from the crowd. But we find the thing that was most significant about him was not his dress and his diet, but it really was the ministry that he had.

The scripture makes it very clear that he was Christ's forerunner, or he was Christ's introducer or front man, the one who came in front to make it very clear that someone important was coming. I want you to understand that John's ministry was not something that he took upon himself simply as a career choice, because it tells us there in verse 6, there was a man sent.

[7 : 54] The office and role that John engaged in was something that he received by divine appointment. And I want you to understand that John was called by God to go before the Messiah and to announce Christ's coming.

Just like if we heard that hail to the chief, and we were in Washington, D.C., kind of sitting in a press club there, waiting for the president to come out, we would know that says, all right, all right, here he is.

John served in that capacity. I want you to understand that in doing what John did, he was fulfilling Old Testament prophecy.

And I want you to look at a couple different passages to fix that in your mind. Go back, if you would, to Matthew chapter 3, and then also in Luke chapter 3, and basically both of the passages are fairly similar.

But I draw attention to them so that you can see that this issue of John's ministry was something that the Spirit of God considered to be very important and wants us not to miss it.

[8 : 57] John chapter 3, verse 1 through 3. In those days, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, when he said, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord.

Make his path straight. And then over in Luke, we find a very similar statement made by Luke. Luke chapter 3, verse 2 through 5.

During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.

And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord.

Make his path straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

[10 : 08] I want you to understand, if you were to read through the Gospels and get an idea of John's ministry, what you would recognize is this, is that John came and made it undeniably clear that he was not the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, but he was the forerunner.

He was coming in advance and making the ministry of Jesus that was coming to be clear. He called people to repentance, and in calling people to repentance, he made it quite clear that what they had been involved in, in their behavior and practice, and the religious culture that they were living, it was not adequate.

The superficiality of their performance in their religious Jewish issues was not sufficient, and it was a call, it's time to repent and make things right in your heart.

I want you to thank me just for a moment about the message that John preached. We find that John made it very, very clear that the Messiah's coming was one that required things to be changed in the environment in which he was speaking.

Now, I want you to understand that when he makes this statement, and look in your mind, just go back to the passage in Luke, I'm going to reference it. It says, Make his path straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked become straight. [11:28] It is talking about an ancient practice that characterized when a king would come to visit some little berg. What would happen is that the king, anticipating showing up at Columbus, so to speak, would send out his advance man, and his advance man would come into the community and say, By the way, King so-and-so is going to arrive on August the 29th, and he is going to come from Port Columbus, and he's going to come down such and such a path, and we want you to be ready when he comes.

I think about, over the years, the number of times that, while I've been here, we've had a president or one of the presidential hopefuls show up here in Columbus, and guess what happens when a president or someone who is campaigning to become president shows up in Columbus? Guess what happens? How many of you have been caught in the traffic before? You know, you decide you're going from point A to point B, and you find out that there are all these police officers that are being paid double time or whatever else it is, and they are blocking off the traffic, and you want to go this way, and guess what? No, you're going this way. Well, in the old days, in order to have things ready for the king, what they had to do was take care of potholes. They had to kind of straighten out the road, you know, get everything right.

The king was going to go from point A to point B, and it was going to be a smooth path. It was going to have no bumps in it. Everything was going to be just zip, and so the village would all kind of come out and fill in the potholes and make everything just perfect.

[13:08] By the way, if they didn't, guess what happened? The king would be bumping along, you see. And pretty soon, heads would roll.

That was the ancient world. And so Isaiah says, I want you to know that there will be a messenger that is going to come in front of the Messiah, and the Messiah is going to expect that things be in order.

I want you to understand that John 1.8 makes it very clear that John's coming and John's life was all wrapped up in his ministry.

It says there in verse 7, He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him. John's focus was in no way upon himself. Every time John had an opportunity, he made it clear that the hero of the story was the Lord Jesus Christ who was coming.

He was the one who would be the Savior of the world, and John's ministry was always pointing attention to the coming Messiah. In verse 8, it says, He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

[14:24] One of the undeniable truths about a faithful witness is that the witness is not the hero of the story, and John never allowed anybody to attach any of the significance or glory to what he was doing to himself.

Now, it's interesting to stop and think about this, that John's ministry was atypical from many of the prophets that were used in a very dramatic and significant way.

I think about two in particular. One would be Elijah, and the other would be Moses. In both cases, along with their public ministry, there were also some pretty dramatic what?

Miracles. John was significant only in his messianic preaching and his call for repentance, and it was so powerful through the power of the Spirit of God that he brought profound conviction.

Remember? People coming out to be baptized, people one after, just droves of them coming out, and so some of the religious leaders in Jerusalem sent people down to say, All right, John, are you that prophet?

[15:33] Are you the one who is the forerunner? Are you coming to... He says, Hey, listen, no, I'm not that prophet. Talking about what Moses had predicted about the coming of the Messiah.

He says, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord. All of John's life, all that he was engaged in, was wrapped up in pointing to Christ.

And I just wonder, stop just for a minute and think about your own life. So how significant is the issue of you making clear the ministry and significance of Christ for your heart and life?

How central is it? I want you to stop and think for a moment. Go, if you would, to 2 Corinthians. Let's cut over there for a second and just mark what Paul has to say about the ministry of believers.

He says that we are ambassadors for Christ. There in verse 20, 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 20, it says, Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ.

[16:36] God making his appeal through us, we implore you. Now listen to me. What does it mean to implore? What does it mean to implore? It means to beg with an earnestness because in practical terms, we implore when we know what the outcome is going to be if individuals refuse the gospel.

someone shared with me earlier today the blessing that an individual who has been prayed for for many, many, many years came to know Christ this Thursday.

Came to know the Lord Jesus Christ against the backdrop of cancer and an understanding of their life being very frail and very tentative. And in that space, God's spirit brought conviction.

And I guarantee you, over the years, those who have loved this individual have pled and pled and pled and God graciously saved him. So here it says that we implore you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God.

So as you think about the ministry that John the Baptist had and go back there, if you will, to John chapter 1, you mark that John came. What did he do? He says, hey, listen, I am here to let you know that the Messiah is coming and when he comes, he is to be listened to and attended to.

[17:56] Well, you would think that when you had hail to the chief being played, that people would at least act like they expect the president to come in and show due deference and respect.

When you look there in verse 9, it says the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own and his own people did not receive him.

And so the second thing we see is first of all, John's ministry of making Jesus clear and his coming evident. But secondly, we want to understand that the light of Christ was rejected.

You can't say that John didn't make the coming of Christ clear. His ministry, public, every aspect of what he was engaged in was driving towards the point.

The Lord Jesus, the Messiah is coming. And when Jesus showed up on the scene, remember what John the Baptist said? We're going to look at it later. It says, Behold the Lamb of God that comes to what?

[18:58] Take away the sins of the world. That's the one. And I want you to understand that John the Baptist did his job faithfully. And in the face of doing his job faithfully, we can be certain that no one in that day would ever have been able to say, I didn't know that that was the Messiah and that his coming was of any significance to me.

You can imagine, given the unbearable burden of sin and the darkness of the world that was in that day and we see it in our day as well, you would just stop to think that just the streaming indication of light would draw people to it.

It says there, He was not the light but came to bear witness about the light. There is a light and the light is valuable and you are to be drawn to it and yet, when the light came into the world, the light was not received by the world.

The light showed up and yet it was intentionally rejected by all. So I want you to stop and recognize that what the Bible is telling us to this point is that some 2,000 years ago, the Lord Jesus Christ burst into the blackness of a sin-torn world and He brought hope and salvation for all.

That's what He did. And when John wrote, He gives light to everyone, what He was making clear is that the Lord Jesus came to allow the gospel ministry and the impact of salvation through Him to be available to all people.

[20:33] Now I want you to recognize that the hope of salvation in the thinking of Jews was limited to guess who? Jews. And their idea was that, well, okay, if you want salvation, guess what you have to do?

You have to become a Jew. The hope of salvation through the finished work of Christ was not something that was limited to the circumcised Jew that wore robes and bells on their robe or whatever.

The promise of salvation was to all who came by faith, convicted of their sin and believing that the Lord Jesus Christ died in their place to pay the penalty for sin and to satisfy the judgment of God.

The amazing thing that we find in this passage is this. The world that desperately needed and still needs salvation and the Jews as well who had received incredible blessings through being Abraham's children both equally rejected the light.

Look at what it says there. He came into the world and the world was made through him and yet the world did not know him. It's not, I don't know him. It's just saying I don't want him. And verse 11, he came to his own.

[21 : 42] He came to the Jews. And what was the response of the Jews when they recognized this is the one that has come according to promise, according to prophecy, they said I don't want him. I don't want to have anything to do with him.

And as we saw last week in John and also in Romans, fallen mankind does not simply reject the light out of ignorance but rejects the light out of an intentional hardening of the heart that says I do not want what Christ has to offer.

Sinful men willingly choose to reject the light because of the blackness and darkness of their heart. I remind you of what it says in John chapter 3.

It says that they refuse the light. Why? Because their deeds are evil. They don't want to come to grips with the reality of the condition of their soul and when the light turns on instead of saying I need that light I desperately recognize the condition of my heart.

They say hey I don't want that. I refuse it. So let's take up the final piece of our study this morning and understand what we find there in verse 12 and 13.

[22 : 52] Here's the reality. God sent John the Baptist as the forerunner, as an announcer to make it clear to the unbelieving world I am sending my Messiah, the Savior of the world and he is available to all.

He's the light. He's the life. He's the one in whom alone you have opportunity of complete deliverance for all of your sin and the hope of eternity.

And in the face of that beautiful, wonderful message the unbelieving world and unbelieving Jews said hey I don't want anything to do with that. No thank you. Well, does darkness win?

Does darkness win? You look there in verse 12 it says, But to all who did receive him who believed in his name he gave the right to become the children of God who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God.

And so as we look at verse 12 and 13 what we are seeing here is the absolute undeniable miracle that salvation is. I want you to listen to the sweet truth that follows because some have received him that's what it says and some will receive him still in this day.

[24 : 10] Some have believed in him and those who have believed in him have become the children of God. So let me put together verse 12 and 13 11 and 12 this way say that verse 11 announces what faith does and verse 12 tells us how faith comes.

Verse 11 says what faith does verse 12 says how faith comes. It would be easy to look around in the world today and all you got to do is listen to the news and everywhere you turn you are just almost overwhelmed by the unbelievable darkness and cruelty of the world we see.

Isn't that right? It's not just in Syria and Iraq where people are suffering for their faith. It's not just in the Sudan and places where where women are being grossly abused because they're believers.

These are not just the only places where the darkness of sin exists and the brutality of the heart of unregenerate men and women comes to the fore. Everywhere you look you see the ugliness of the darkness of men's souls.

And as you look at that you understand man it is a horrible world that we live in and yet we understand as it says there in verse 12 it says verse 11 and 12 it says but to all who did receive him who believed in his name he gave the right he gave the right to become the children of God.

[25 : 37] It's amazing at all that any any at all get the message and receive the truth and come to the light. and because of this response to the truth they become the children of God.

To receive and believe is to respond to the truth of our sin. To receive the truth means to accept it and say I believe that that is right about me and I am in a desperate condition and I can't do anything about it.

Not too long ago talking with an individual about the issue of their salvation and the reality of the condition of their soul and as we really got down to the nitty gritty it came out that well this person's idea was that hey listen I'm doing the best I can and the best that I can is good enough.

Well I want to tell you this if mankind could get to heaven on the basis of their own good efforts then Jesus would never have had to come and his dying on the cross was an absolute waste and exercise in futility.

Jesus came because we cannot save ourselves. And I want you to understand the blessing that comes with being God's child turn over if you will you're in John chapter 1 but turn if you will to 1 John chapter 3 1 John chapter 3 towards the very end of the Bible but listen to what it says in 1 John chapter 3 verse 1 and 2 it says see what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called the children of God.

[27 : 08] and so we are and I want you to recognize this morning when that passage penned by John says see what manner he was kind of saying wow look at that that we should be called the children of God.

Does it get any better than that? And the answer is no. No. there was a day when each of you here that at one point did not know the Lord Jesus Christ were a child of Satan were doomed to eternal destruction were under the slave grip of Satan and were doing pretty much everything he wanted you to do and God in his kindness and his mercy came to help you see the darkness of your condition and he opened your eyes and he gave life to a dead heart and he brought salvation to you and he made you his child he blessed you and John says hey let me tell you something those who did receive him who believed in his name he gave the right to become the children of God well we understand what faith does it receives but let's also think about how this comes about how does faith come so as you look at verse 13 you find three very interesting statements that the apostle makes that we need to mark he says there he says who were born not of blood not of blood there are some different opinions of what blood has to do with this issue and some would say that it has to do with physical birth

I would take it to mean that this statement is talking about the fact that salvation was not something that came about because of a certain ethnicity why do you think what do you think the Jews thought about salvation they thought that because they were Jews they had what salvation one of the rabbis taught that Abraham camped towards the very end of the slide down towards hell and when he saw someone skittering down towards eternal hell and he noticed that the person was circumcised he'd snatched that guy because Jews didn't go to hell and here is John saying hey listen let me tell you something salvation is not something that comes because of your ethnicity now we're sitting here and we're thinking well I'm not a Jew but you know it's pretty easy to get caught up in the idea well why am I saved oh I tell you what I love those testimonies I grew up in a Christian home so that's a good thing but do people get to heaven because they grew up in a Christian home and the answer is not on your life not of blood secondly we find there it says nor of the will of the flesh that word flesh is talking about the emotions and so salvation is not a birthright it's not a matter of emotional stirring and I want to make it clear for a person who is passionate about preaching the gospel and has no hesitation of being moved emotionally when I appeal to people to come to Christ

I want you to understand nevertheless that salvation is not an emotional decision I've been moved to all kinds of things and we need to be very careful that we understand that ultimately the issue of salvation is not just a matter of having had an emotional experience now some of us grew up in an environment where if they didn't have an adequate number at the altar guess what they would do well let me give you a little rendition of it now as we are singing verse 19 of just as I am okay and if nobody comes for I want the organist this morning I want to get on those keys I want you to play it quietly and there's some of you out here that if you don't come I'm coming down you know listen can you be moved emotionally to make decisions and the answer is you bet you but in the unbelieving world we have three days in which to reverse our decision how many of you understand that

I can sell you a vacuum sweeper that you think is going to take you to heaven but three days later you may decide you don't want it and you can say no emotion doesn't save us furthermore it says there in verse 13 nor of the will of man that's talking about the intellect so why did you come to Christ well I was figuring it out I read the Bible it just made sense to me bada bada bing I decided I'd be a Christian you follow that I'm all for apologetics but nobody has ever come to Christ simply on the basis of an apologetic argument do you follow that dead men do not come to life just because the intellectual argument for the reality of God is so persuasive that they are absolutely crushed by the weight of intellect no so how are men saved let me read it to you who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of will of man but of

[33 : 09] God let me have you look at a companion passage I'm fired up about this so just bear with me turn in your Bible can we ever get away from the book of Ephesians I don't think so Ephesians chapter 2 the idea that salvation is something that we can be manipulated emotionally

into deciding about or we can be persuaded intellectually into deciding about has no basis in the scriptures because in the Bible it makes it clear that salvation is of the Lord Ephesians chapter 2 we start out with some pretty ugly news it says but you were dead in the trespasses and sins by the way verse number 9 of just as I am does it do anything for a dead carcass lying in a funeral home and the answer is no no no putting

Josh McDowell's evidence that demands a verdict on top of the casket does that cause the person to rise up no no no but the God who saves was the one who spoke and brought life from death and here's what it says you were dead in trespasses and sin kind of skipping ahead it says there in verse 5 by grace you were saved and then in verse 7 and verse 8 it says for by grace you have been saved through faith and so that we don't get confused with the natural tendency of kind of taking a little bit of credit to ourself here's what it says in verse 8 the latter part and this is not of your own doing it is the what the gift of God not the result of works so that no may boast god god god god and if we who are sitting here this morning stop to consider the reality of our salvation and the fact that we who once were the children of slavery once the children of Satan to recognize that we enjoy personal relationship with the Lord and creator of this universe it is because salvation is of the Lord and he in his grace saved us so what obligation does that bring to us do you know what it does first of all to be individuals who with gladness proclaim the wonder and majesty of our Savior we ought to spend the rest of our life in a spirit of thanksgiving say wow

I can't believe he loves me and he's given me salvation and I want the rest of you to find out about the one I love secondly because we have been saved by his grace we also have a burden and an obligation to live lives that do not complicate the gospel do you follow what I'm saying hey listen if you live like a skunk Monday through Saturday you don't have much power to do anything other than drive people away from the sweetness of the gospel if your vocabulary is a shame to the Lord Jesus Christ where you work don't expect to have much of an impact on people who desperately need Christ and we who have been saved by the Lord Jesus have a longing to see the one who has loved us and the one who has saved us high and exalted and lifted up and we want to be able to say that's the one I love that's the one who can save and so let me close with this question first of all do you know him are you sitting here today as one who by the grace of God has come to know the Lord Jesus Christ then here's the truth you have been saved for a purpose like John the Baptist of saying come to the Lord Jesus that you might have forgiveness for all of your sins and if you're here today and you do not know Christ you may have grown up in a Christian home you may have been baptized you may know all the Bible verses but here's the truth of the matter you have never had the transforming power of the gospel change your life bring conviction and then deliverance and salvation and you've never been able to in reality say

Jesus is my savior and I know him I would plead with you this morning where you sit you humble yourself and say I need Jesus desperately I'm fooling myself and I'm not going to do it anymore and you plead with him to save you where you sit let's bow our heads our father God this morning we are very thankful for the blessing of your word that makes it clear that the Lord Jesus is the light of the world we're thankful that salvation is something that you do first of all by convicting us of our sin and bringing us to the point of seeing the absolute darkness and bankruptcy of our soul and in the misery of that conviction you graciously lift up the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners and he paid the penalty for my sin and for all of our sins and he offers salvation to whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord and I would plead with you father this morning that you would honor your son by drawing to the cross those that are here that are broken in their sin and desperately need the Lord Jesus we ask this in Jesus name

Amen I'm going to ask that you stand together as we sing in closing let's stand and if you're here this morning and the spirit of God is addressing an issue you need to care for publicly it might be that you're here and you need Christ as your personal savior I don't know the condition of your heart but the spirit of God does and if you're here and you need Christ to save you then you humble yourself and cry out for him to do that and if you want to share that with us you come forward and have somebody pray with you and encourage you from the scriptures it might be that you're here and you are a child of God but you've not connected to a body of believers and let me tell you something being part of the local church is important and you're willing to humble yourself and say I'm willing to take that step you come forward it might be that you need to be baptized in obedience you've come to faith but you've never publicly made that an issue that you have acted upon with baptism and I encourage you to take care of that as we sing this song in closing what can take a

dying man and raise him up to life again what can heal a wounded soul what can make us white a stone what can fill the emptiness what can mend our brokenness brokenness mighty awesome wonderful is the holy cross mighty is the power of the cross mighty is the power of the cross mighty is the power of the cross what can lead the cross what restores our faith in God what reveals the Father's love what can lead the wayward home what can melt a heart of stone what can free the guilty ones what can save and own