

Now You Are Light

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Preacher: Dave Nannery

[0 : 0 0] All right, well, I'll start out with a little bit of a game, sort of a question and answer session. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to say a phrase, and I need all of you together, and with our collective brains, I think we can pull this off.

I need you to shout out the name, first of all, the name of the movie series that this phrase comes from. So the name of the movie series this phrase comes from? The Dark Side of the Force.

Star Wars. Star Wars. Okay, everybody gets that. Okay, great. Let's try it with a book. I'm going to say the phrase, you shout out the book series that it comes from. Let's see who gets this one.

The Dark Riders. The Dark Riders. Anyone get that one? Lord of the Rings. There we go. Very good. All right. So last one. We're going to now move into the area of music.

I'm going to say a phrase. You say the album it comes from. The Dark Side of the Moon. Pink Floyd's the artist. Wait, Pink Floyd's the artist.

[0 : 5 8] What's the name of the album? The album. The album's also The Dark Side of the Moon. Okay. So. Come on, you guys. All right. There's a theme.

Okay. Have you. Anyone figured out what the theme is? Darkness. Darkness. Right. In these three examples, or at least the ones that you're familiar with, does darkness represent what is good or what is evil?

It represents what's evil. Have you ever wondered why that is? Why in our culture, and in fact, not just in our culture, but in many other cultures around the world, is darkness associated with evil and light associated with good?

Because after all, there is, I mean, let's just face it, physical light and darkness, that's not like a good and evil thing. There's nothing evil about a room with the lights turned off.

Right? In fact, darkness saves electricity. All light does is jack up your hydro bill. Right? Haven't you ever, you know, didn't your mom ever tell you turn off the lights when you leave the room? Is it because she loves the darkness?

[2 : 0 4] No, it just saves money. But in our culture, somehow, we have come to think of darkness as evil and light as good. And at first, it might seem like an arbitrary thing that we settled on.

You know, north is at the top of the map, or, okay, I won't say anything else because I might say something that isn't arbitrary after all. But is there a reason for that?

Well, the contrast between light and darkness, as I mentioned, isn't just present in our own culture, is present in other cultures as well. In our own case, it's made its way into our culture from a number of different sources.

One of those sources is God's Word. One of those sources is the Bible. And we're about to read a passage of Scripture from the Bible that gives us this contrast, this contrast between light on the one hand, darkness on the other hand.

And this passage of Scripture comes from the pen of the Apostle Paul. He's writing to the Christian church in the first century city of Ephesus. And Paul's letter to the Ephesians, first of all, it is 100% his own writing.

[3 : 0 9] It's all his own words. At the same time, it is also 100% the writing of the Holy Spirit of God. It is the Holy Spirit's message to his church in the city of Ephesus.

And it's the Holy Spirit's message to us today. It has continuing significance to us today. So we'll be thinking over Ephesians chapter 5, verses 8 through 14 today.

Ephesians chapter 5, verses 8 through 14. So if you were, we read from Ephesians chapter 2 at the beginning of the service. And Ephesians chapter 5 is just three chapters later in the book of Ephesians.

Now, to understand these verses, we do have to go back a little bit. Quite frankly, to fully understand them, we have to go back to chapter 1, verse 1. But we only have so much time. So we'll just go back to chapter 5, verse 1. And I'll be drawing from, as we continue through this sermon, I'll also be drawing from some material that's in Ephesians chapter 4 as well.

[4 : 10] But we'll start a reading in Ephesians chapter 5, verse 1. So if you have a copy of the scripture with you, just follow along with me. Now, as I'm reading this, here's a question to be thinking through. So here's what we want in our minds as we're reading this.

What does God say it looks like? What does God say it looks like for you and me to live in darkness? What does God say it looks like for you and me to live in darkness? And what does God say it looks like for you and me to live in the light? So these are the words of God the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking which are out of place.

[5 : 22] But instead, let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure or who is covetous, that is, an idolater, has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Let no one deceive you with empty words because of these things. For because of these things, the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore, do not become partners with them. For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.

And try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.

But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible. For anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says, awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

[6 : 32] This is the word of the Lord. Now, we've been talking about darkness and light. We've been talking about what it means to live in the darkness, what it means to live in the light.

So, there are answers to these questions. What's the darkness? What's the light? But they are going to come at the end of a journey. And so, we're going to take a journey here. And the path to get the answers to these questions.

It makes its way first through verses 1 through 7. And in these verses, the Apostle Paul is reminding us first of all. The very first thing he reminds us of is that we who are Christians, we who believe in Jesus Christ, we have entrusted ourselves to Jesus Christ.

We're God's beloved children, his dearly loved children. And we belong to him. And he loves us as our father. We obey because we are loved.

We don't obey in order to win his love, to win his affection. We obey because we have it already. And so, we are to imitate him. Just like children imitate their father.

[7 : 45] We walk in love just as his son, Jesus Christ, did. But then, Paul explains that this love he's talking about, it's very different from the way that their culture understood love, and it's very different from the way that our culture understands love.

Don't let the use of the word love that gets thrown around as a buzzword in our culture fool you. The love that Jesus Christ and God the Father have called us to have is very different from the kind of love that our culture values and praises.

Here's what love looks like according to verse 2. Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. It's a love that comes at a great cost.

A former pastor of mine once said, walking in love equals giving and dying. Walking in love equals giving and dying. And so, it's no surprise that then Paul warns you and me not to fall for counterfeit love.

And he talks next about sexual activity outside of marriage because that might look like love. It might feel like love, but it is not love. It isn't about giving and dying.

[9 : 00] It's about taking and indulging. And that's why Paul associates it with coveting. With having this excessive desire and craving. It's when a good desire, when sexual desire, a good desire becomes a demand.

That I have to have this. It's when you become greedy for another person's body. Whether that person is your boyfriend or girlfriend or just an image on a computer screen. That's not love. It's the opposite of love. And Paul warns us, even joking about this sort of thing is a problem. That pastor of mine described it. He said, tolerance to sin leads to greater sin. Tolerance to sin leads to greater sin.

And so, Paul tells us that the best weapon in fighting sexual immorality in verse 4 is, in fact, thanksgiving. Thanksgiving, of all things, is a weapon in the fight.

Why? Because now, instead of demanding sexual satisfaction, instead of focusing on the relationships and pleasure that God hasn't given you, you're thanking him for the relationships and the pleasures in your life that he has given you.

[10:04] That's the spirit of gratitude. We're called to a life of thanksgiving. The alternative is a life that will lead to destruction. Since God is not going to let anyone off the hook for perverting the love that we are called to show to one another.

Brothers and sisters, we're called to something that is so much better than our old way of living.

That old way of living, that includes attitudes and actions that were mentioned back in chapter 4.

So, you know, if you were to look through chapter 4, just above this, you'd see lying and falsehood, stealing, corrupting talk, bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice. All of that was the old way of living.

All of that belongs to the culture of a world that is passing away. A world that doesn't have a future. But there's a new and better way of living.

A way of living in God's kingdom that does have an eternal future. And that new way of living begins in verse 7. Paul here, he's warning us against going back to that old way of living because he says it's not appropriate for us anymore.

[11:11] Because we belong to that new kingdom. We belong to that new nation. The kingdom of Christ and God. We're his people now. We have a new culture. We have a new way of life.

We have a new identity. And so it makes no sense to partner up with people who live like we used to live. To tie ourselves to them and go wherever they go.

And do whatever they do. To join our lives with theirs in disobedience to God. Paul writes in verses 7 and 8. Do not become partners with them.

For at one time you were darkness. But now you are light in the Lord. So let's pause for a moment. Let's take in as much of the meaning of verse 8 as we can take in.

So it says, At one time you were darkness. But now you are light in the Lord. Now notice, Our first temptation sometimes is to think that he's saying a command.

[12:10] You know, he's saying, Stop being darkness. Start being light. And that's not actually what he's saying. If you look at it carefully, This isn't a command. This is a statement of fact. He's saying, This is the way things already are.

You were darkness. You are light. You were darkness. Past tense.

You are light. Present tense. So whatever this darkness was outside of God's kingdom, That's that darkness.

That is what we who are Christians used to be. Whatever this light is inside of God's kingdom, This light is what we are now. We were in the darkness.

So we were darkness. We are now in the light. So we are light. It really shouldn't surprise us that we draw our identity from the darkness or the light that surround us.

[13:10] That's a theme that's woven throughout the Bible. It's this true statement that all human beings are created in the image of God. We see that right from the beginning in Genesis chapter 1.

That all human beings are created in the image of God. We can't look inside of ourselves for our own identity. We can't look inside of ourselves and find within ourselves our own meaning, our own purpose.

There's nothing there to find. We always derive our identity from something or from someone else. Always derive our identity from something or someone else. We're like the moon.

It has no light of its own. It always reflects the light of another object. The author Hannah Anderson puts it this way. Human beings could never be the center of our own existence.

We are, by nature, image bearers. So when we turn from God, when we refuse to base our identity in Him, we are compelled to find it somewhere else because we must reflect something.

[14:18] And when we do, we sin. So in other words, your identity has to come from somewhere and from something outside of you, wherever you turn to, that's going to be your identity.

You're going to reflect something. If you turn to God as we were meant to do, we bear His image. If we turn to something else, we end up producing sin. And we can see that illustrated in the previous verses.

Whatever the darkness is, it leads to sexual immorality, to coveting, to idolatry. Whatever the darkness is, in chapter 4, it led to dishonesty, to unrighteous anger, to theft, gossip, bitter conflict. And God hates all of these behaviors. He hates all of these sins. They can't be allowed into His kingdom. That's why Paul wrote in verse 6, just before this, that because of these things, the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

So that's who you and I were once you were darkness. But then comes the good news about who we are. Now you are light in the Lord.

[15:26] Now you are light in the Lord. Those last three words, in the Lord, those are key. You are light in the Lord.

You and I who believe in Jesus Christ, we are now in the Lord. We are now in Christ. That's what makes us light.

And so this theme of being in Christ, that is actually one of the hallmarks. If you read through Paul's letters, that comes up over and over again in so many of his letters, and especially in the letter to the Ephesians.

To be in Christ, that means that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ, everyone who entrusts themselves to Jesus Christ, everyone who accepts that He died, He lived for us, He died for our sins, He rose again to give us new life, and we believe it, and we believe Him.

We are united to Him. We're united to Him. In Christ, we belong to God's kingdom, not because we just naturally fit in on our own.

[16:36] We belong to God's kingdom because Jesus Christ belongs to our kingdom, and we're partnered up with Him. We're united with Him, brought into the same family, made one with Him. We come into God's kingdom because Jesus Christ comes into God's kingdom.

In Christ, God looks at us, and He sees us as righteous. He sees us as fulfilling all the right and good expectations that He has of us.

He sees us as righteous and as without sin because Jesus Christ took all of our sin on Himself because He suffered that wrath of God against our sin.

He paid the full penalty that we should have paid. Because He's united with us, He could pay it. He could take all of that on Himself. And because we're united to Him, in Christ, we are raised to life because Jesus Christ was raised to life again.

And so in Christ, now we can finally live that new way of life that God calls us to live.

[17:46] And Hannah Anderson writes again, This is what Christ offers us. He offers us His identity. He offers us Himself. When we are joined to Him, when our lives are hidden with Christ in God, we can finally die to our old selves because as His image bearers, we become whatever He is.

We become whatever He is. Now there are attributes of God that we can never take on. We're never going to be all-knowing and all-powerful and so forth. But just as God is loving and God is patient and God is kind, we take on these attributes.

We start to look like Him. What that means is that the holy life that Christ lived is a life that you and I can live too. We can live it too.

That's what leads Paul to continue at the end of verse 8. Walk as children of light. For the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.

And try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. So because we are in Christ, because we are in the Lord, now we're part of His family.

[19:04] Just as Jesus Christ is the Son of God, so we also are brought in and called children of God. Brought into that family of God. So we are children of light. As the Apostle John writes in 1 John 1, God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

So God is light. And Jesus Christ, because He is fully God as well as fully man. Because Jesus Christ is light. So you and I who are Christians, we are children of light.

We belong to that family where our Father is light. And Jesus Christ is light. And so as children of God, we naturally, we look to our Father. We say, wow, our Father loves us.

And He's brought us into this family. He's freed us and purified us from our sins and welcomed us into His kingdom. And look at how good He is. And I want to be like Him. We would naturally just want to imitate Him.

We just pick up His mannerisms and His character. We want to learn what pleases Him. We take an interest in what interests Him. We get excited about what He gets excited about.

[20 : 11] And so as we read in Ephesians 5, verse 10, we try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Well, what is it? What's pleasing to the Lord? Well, verse 9.

It's what Paul calls all that is good and right and true. That's what's pleasing to the Lord. All that's good and right and true. And he calls this the fruit of light.

The fruit of light. And that's a bit of an odd figure of speech, isn't it? Sort of a mixed metaphor. What do fruit and light have to do with each other, it seems? Well, lest we think that, you know, maybe, okay, that's just something that he says in passing and then he just moves on from that.

Paul actually keeps talking about fruit in the next verse, in verse 11. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

So he keeps connecting fruit with light, unfruitfulness with darkness. Whatever light is, it produces fruit. Whatever darkness is, it produces no fruit. And it helps me to think of it this way.

[21 : 16] So I think back to when I was in school. Just a little boy. And, of course, you know, one of the projects I was told to do was an experiment with bean plants. And so I would take two styrofoam cups and one of them I would fill with, sorry, both of them I would fill with soil.

Each of them I would take a single bean, I'd plant it in the soil, water them both every day. Both of them would grow. But there was a difference. There was one single difference between the two bean plants. One of them was placed on the windowsill.

Sunlight came in through the window and shone on the plant. That plant sprouted from the bean.

That plant grew up quickly. It grew up green. It grew up healthy. It was able to produce beans of its own.

That plant bore fruit. Can you guess what I did with the other plant? Anyone done this experiment before? What do you do with the other plant? You put it in the dark.

I put it in a cupboard. You're just supposed to put it in a kitchen cupboard in the darkness where it's going to get no light. You know what? That plant sprouted too, actually. The plant does sprout.

[22 : 23] In fact, it grows up quite quickly. But it also grows up white. It grows up sickly. It grows up with yellowed leaves or leaves that are falling off.

And its stalk is desperately growing out, hoping to find that light. Searching and searching and aching for the light. Without the light, though, this plant bore no fruit.

Zero fruit. Nothing. And so it is with us. Now you are light in the Lord, so walk as children of light.

Now you are light in the Lord, so walk as children of light.

If we are children of light, if we are living in the light, we bear fruit. We think and say and we do what is good and right and true.

So many of the things that are described in chapters 4 and 5. Telling the truth. Reconciling. Doing honest work. Speaking words of grace to people.

[23 : 29] Kind to one another. Tenderhearted. Forgiving one another. Imitating God. Walking in love. Making the best use of the time. If we are children of light, living in the light, we bear fruit.

We think, we say, we do what is good and right and true. Here's what it looks like. That's what it looks like to walk as children of light.

But we've already learned about what verse 11 calls the unfruitful works of darkness. All those lies, that anger, the theft, the gossip, the slander, the sexual immorality. These are evil things. And you and I, we can't afford to become callous to them.

We can't afford to think it's just okay to grow up as sickly white stocks. We must expose these things as evil. We must expose them as so disgraceful that we consider it shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.

That's what Paul writes in verse 12. So brothers and sisters, you and I, we can't afford to allow sin to fester in our hearts. What that means is that for me, sin has to be killed off in my heart.

[24 : 37] It's got to die. And that means for you, sin has to be killed off in your heart. It's got to die. This is where we finally learn the difference between the darkness and the light.

What it means to be in the darkness, what it means to be in the light. Paul writes that we must expose the works of darkness in verse 11. That those things, these are things that are done in

secret.

Now think about that. Isn't that exactly what light does? Light exposes what was once in darkness. In short, light reveals us, darkness conceals us.

Light reveals us, darkness conceals us. Evil things are done in the darkness because, precisely because the darkness will conceal them. Evil things are not often done in broad daylight.

In fact, isn't that sort of an expression we use? It was done in broad daylight. We're so flabbergasted when something evil is done in broad daylight. Why? Because it's almost always done in the darkness.

[25 : 50] That's the usual way you do evil things. Why? Because the darkness will hide it. The darkness will conceal it. The light will reveal the evil for what it is, so you don't do it there.

Light will always be a threat to what is wrong, to what is evil, to sin. Because light reveals evil for what it really is. Light will always reveal evil for what it really is.

That's why the apostle John wrote in John chapter 3. The light has come into the world. And he's writing about Jesus Christ, the true light. He says, the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light.

Because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his work should be exposed. 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.

So darkness conceals us, but light reveals us. And Jesus Christ explains what it means for our works to be exposed by the light in Luke chapter 12.

[27 : 05] And here's what Jesus said. Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore, whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light.

And what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops. How does that make you feel? You excited to hear that whatever you said in the dark shall be heard in the light?

Are you, I mean, how are you like, yes, oh man, what I've whispered in private rooms. That's going to be shouted from the housetops. Awesome. That's not how we feel. If anything, it fills us with dread. Because if you're like me, that's not exactly an encouraging thought.

But the reality is there are dark corners in my life that I don't want other people to know about.

There are concealed corners in my life in which I've allowed sin to grow.

I've allowed it to multiply, festering like a dead rat in a dark room. And I think everyone in this room knows what I mean by that. Have you got a dark corner of your life?

[28 : 16] The light isn't shining on it right now. Are there areas of your life that you keep in secret because you're ashamed? You don't want others to know about it.

Maybe you're okay if others know, but, you know, you're just not going to make the effort to do it. You just don't see why it should be such a priority.

You haven't found a few trustworthy friends, a few trustworthy family members here at SBC. But it's that very secrecy, that very hiddenness that is causing the sin to grow.

It's that very darkness which is keeping you white and sickly, unable to bear fruit for God. Now, the German pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he put it this way.

Sin demands to have a man by himself. By himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him.

[29 : 24] And the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light.

In the darkness of the unexpressed, it poisons the whole being of a person. Sin is a lot like yeast. It just sort of makes its way through the entire lump of bread dough. You can't isolate it and confine it. You can't partition it off. You can't hide it in a dark corner and hope it stays there and never grows.

It grows. And from time to time, I've had to confess to my brothers in Christ that I need that white hot spotlight of God's truth to be directed at those dark corners of my life.

Offentimes, what I find helpful is to do this, to have them, you know, on a weekly basis, ask me a series of exposing questions every time we meet.

[30 : 21] Questions that are challenging me on whether I have been doing what is good and right and true in secret as well as out in the open. Whether I've been doing what's pleasing to the Lord.

The reason I need that is because I'm a son of God. I'm a son of light. And so I need the light to live. I need the light to live and to thrive and bear fruit.

And you can't live and thrive and bear fruit unless you have light shining on you. That might sound intimidating.

That might sound scary to you. And frankly, it is. I'm scared of it. And we're terrified of that light of judgment. The light shining on us.

I mean, isn't public speaking one of the biggest fear that so many of us have? Just the thought of, like, there being a dark room filled with people and you get on the stage and a giant spotlight flares down on you.

[31 : 18] And everybody sees every last feature and every pore in your body. Terrifying, right? The light of judgment.

It's the greatest fear that we know. In fact, that fear of death that we have, we're afraid of dying because death calls us to account. Because death means judgment.

The musician and poet Ryan O'Neill, he writes this. Death puts an unwanted emphasis on how we should have lived. Death brings to light whether or not our lives have been lived well or not.

And we don't often want this light. But we need it. We need the light to shine on us because the light transforms us. Darkness deforms us, but light transforms us.

Darkness deforms us, but light transforms us. Light transforms us because light does not only reveal the truth about who we are.

[32 : 28] It doesn't just expose and reveal the truth about who we are. Light reveals the truth about who God is. And light reveals the truth about what he has done for us in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Light reveals the truth that God is the father of everyone who believes in his son, Jesus Christ. Light reveals that his Holy Spirit can save us from our old way of life.

Darkness deforms us, but light transforms us. And Paul writes this in Ephesians 5, verse 13. When anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible.

For anything that becomes visible is light. So something that's exposed by the light becomes visible and then produce. And then that thing that's exposed by the light also becomes light.

And that reminds me of how the prophet Moses met God on Mount Sinai, as we learned last year. And he's meeting and encountering the Lord God on this mountain.

[33 : 32] He receives his commandments on behalf of the people of Israel. And in Exodus chapter 34, we read this. So Moses had stood before the Lord God.

That he had stood in the presence of a God of light and glory. And remembered what we learned before. Remember, we are all image bearers. We are all image bearers by nature.

So what that means is that we reflect whatever we're looking at. Whatever you behold, that is what you become. So when Moses came down from the mountain, after beholding the glory of God, his face was shining like the sun, blazing with glory.

And so will you be. When you behold the glory of the Lord, you will become what you behold. When his light illuminates every corner of your life, you too will become light.

You will bear his image just as you were meant to do. And your light will shine on others like the sun breaking through the clouds.

[35 : 15] And they will see in your words, they will see in your actions, that good and holy character of God that we read about. Not everyone is going to like it.

Remember, it hurts when a bright light is shone in a dark room. It hurts when light comes because the light brings judgment. But that light will shine brightly.

And though many may feel judged, others will see that light and long for that light. You will become what you were made to be because now you are light.

So do you long to be, do you long to become what you were created to be? If so, open up your heart to other believers.

Let them shine God's light into your life. Let them reveal to you who you are. Seek them out. Find people who are mature in the faith. Ask them the hard questions.

[36 : 23] Tell them the truth about who you are. Get them to challenge you. And ask them not only to reveal who you are. Ask them to reveal to you and remind you again and again who God is.

And what God has done for you. And as his light breaks radiant into your soul, it will transform you. It will. That's not just a suggestion.

This isn't just, you know, your pastor's, you know, good advice. This is a call to action. This is a summons from the Lord your God. In Ephesians chapter 5 verse 14, Paul delivers a message from the Holy Spirit of God.

A message for you and me. Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

There are people in this room. Some of you are believers. Some of you who don't yet believe in Christ. You've lived your life in darkness.

[37 : 31] And maybe that's all you know. Maybe you don't know how to live any other way. Maybe you don't even know that there is another way. So listen to this.

Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. He will shine on you.

That is a promise. That is a promise from the Lord Jesus Christ. He will shine his light on you. You will be revealed for who you are, but you will also be transformed into who he is.

Christ will shine on you, and you will belong to him, a child of God in Christ. Now you are light in the Lord, so walk as children of light. Awake, O sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

God, our Father.