

“A Prayer of Light for a People who Walk in Darkness” | Luke 6:17-23 (Scripture Set to Worship)

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Introduction

Today we continue our series, *Scripture Set to Worship*. The message from the prophet Isaiah reminds us that the world can be very, very dark, but our inheritance as God’s people is everlasting light in Christ.

We’ll look at today’s passage in three parts.

- First, we’ll ask what it means for the world to be in darkness?
- Second, we’ll ask what it means for a Christian to be light to this dark world?
- Third, we’ll look at two potential points of failure that we face in this task:
 - the tendency to “love to hate” the world and,
 - the temptation to “fall in love” with the world.

I. What does it mean for the world be in darkness?

Some of us tend to focus on the glimmers of hope in our shared human experience. There is light all around if you only are attuned to see it. Others see the world as mostly clouds. **If there is any light, it is rare and at best overcast.**

The passage from Isaiah, and many other biblical texts seem to suggest the cloudier view. And a lot of Christians follow suit.

- “Darkness covers the land, deep gloom enshrouds the peoples,” it says here in Isaiah
- “Do not love the world or the things in the world”, it says in 1 John 2.

And yet, if we read Scripture more carefully and more comprehensively, we start to recognize that

- when God created the world, he called it **very good** (Genesis 1:31).
- God created human beings **in his image** (Gen. 1:27)

A snapshot reading of Isaiah can make it seem like Christians are meant to be the quintessential card-carrying gloom and doomers, it’s actually **the world in its rejection of God** that is dark and cloudy; *not the world as such*.

Jesus himself

- specifically **prays to the Father that we would *not* be taken out of the world** (John 17:15).
- and **actively sends us *into* the world** (John 17:18) so that the world might believe through us and be saved through him (John 17:21).

Beyond all of this, we see the reality that **God's common grace enables goodness to exist** even in the midst of the sin and darkness of this present evil age.

- God causes rain to fall on the just and unjust (Mt. 5:45)
- Christians and non-Christians alike can follow their conscience and live moral lives "by nature," as the apostle Paul says in Romans (2:14).

But, all this being true let us not be mistaken, the world can be really, really spiritually dark, And, if we're not careful we'll easily become like it. We'll leave the light behind. Or worse, we'll start to view the darkness *as if it were* light.

Take for example what it says earlier in Isaiah 5:20

Woe to those who call evil good
and good evil,
**who put darkness for light
and light for darkness**

Often times when we are immersed in the darkness, even with the glimmers of God's common grace, we start to take on the character of the darkness because the darkness is so dominant in the world. It easily overshadows the glimmer.

I think of a recent example. Every so often, we'll find ourselves playing laser tag over there at the place in Bailey's Crossroads. Now, in laser tag you are literally 'in the dark' but you also quite literally see glimmers all around, glimmers of the grace of play, fun, family, and community. It's a game of tag. But with lasers! In a huge dark warehouse with all sorts of forts and paths. If you've ever played, you'll know they mix the groups. When my family played a few months ago, the blue team was a bunch of ten-year-old boys from a birthday party, the green team was a Girl Scout troop, the purple and red teams were a mix of families and a bunch of other random kids and adults. I've even played against corporate offices who were there for a function.

It's almost always fun, but before you know it, once the darkness sets in everyone yields to the tone of the game.

- The first one to go feral were the **birthday blue team ten-year old boys**. Their recent time well spent practicing in Fortnite was evident. It gave them an instant advantage. Well played, sirs.
- Then, of all people, the **Girl Scouts**! They started out so sweet, but two minutes in, the lure of the laser turned them into fierce competitors, and I was bombarded by the glimmer of their group's lasers.

At first, I laughed; but then I got even.

'Secure the perimeter! Secure the perimeter! Here comes the birthday boy.'

'Girl Scouts coming up the ramp! [Tag! Tag! Tag! Tag!] You hear them all surprised, "hey!"

"Yes, that's right Girl Scouts, the darkness has turned me too." I'm shouting out stuff like, "And, next time bring some Thin Mints!"

It's a silly way of recognizing what we all really know can be a much more serious matter, right?

We tend to become like the people we hang out with.

As we start the new school year, and especially our kids, teens, and college students, but all of us really—let us be aware that the world can be an adventure, but it can also be dark.

So, let us be careful to keep the light of the gospel on as we walk through a world that can get really dark and really sinful . . . That and, you've been forewarned, **do not** underestimate the Girl Scouts in laser tag.

[Transition and Summary]

To sum up this first point: darkness does not mean that the entirety of God's creation is rubbish. Darkness is the spiritual state of a world that is largely separated from God, but that God loves and came to save. But it begs the question: what does it mean for Christians to be light?

II. What does it mean for a Christian to be light?

Ila. We cannot make ourselves light.

Through the Spirit working through the words of the prophet Isaiah, God speaks spiritual life into existence where there was only spiritual death and darkness. **The command to "arise" and "shine light" is something the people of God are incapable of doing on their own.**

- The Creation of the World – "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:3)
- The Raising of Lazarus – "Lazarus, come out!" (John 11:43)
- The Healing of the Leper "Be clean!" (Mark 4:41)

You can't arise, unless you know you've been made low. You can't be light, unless you know it's dark.

IIb. The light we shine is God's light

We quickly learn, however that the light we shine is not our own light, generated by ourselves, but God's light generated by his glory.

"Arise," Isaiah says, "shine" (lit. "be light!")

for **your light** has come
and **the glory of the Lord** has risen upon you.

Verse 2, for although darkness covers the land and deep gloom enshrouds the peoples

- over you **the Lord will arise**
- upon you **his glory will appear**

The light that we shine is nothing less than the spiritual presence of Almighty God into a dark world that Jesus died to save.

- **As 1 John says, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."** (1 John 1:5)
- **In the Gospel of John, Jesus says**
 - "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:1; cf. 12:46)

When the Bible exhorts Christians to "walk in light" (1 John 1:7) as "children of the light" (1 Thess. 5:5; cf. Eph. 5:8) it is calling us **to be bearers of the God's saving presence** who dwells within us by His Holy Spirit. God causes us to arise and to "see the light" so that we might be the light to people who are spiritually "in the dark."

IIc. Two ways (of many) that we can position ourselves to be light to the world

1. Living in The Light of God's Word

Earlier in chapter 2 of Isaiah the prophet says this,

[O]ut of Zion shall go forth **the law**,
and **the word of the LORD** from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:3)

"Come, let us walk **in the light of the LORD** (Isa. 2:6)

In the same way, the Psalmist says,

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105)

One way to live in the Word is to learn and pray these Canticles, daily. I do this in really intentional ways. Ways that disrupt the 'normal' flow of things. I have an **old chamberstick**

candle holder. The kind that holds a single candle, and has a little handle on it. These were used in the 17th-19th century as a way of providing light in people's rooms, which were called "chambers" back then.

Recently, after dinner, I have been walking down to my completely dark basement, with only **the light of a single candle in the chamberstick holder.** I feel like an old character in a Charles Dickens novel.

I do a brief, Evening Prayer, with only the light from the chamberstick candle. When prayer is over, I usually feel a strong sense of spiritual clarity.

[Transition]: Lately, the chamberstick candle has not only helped me to have a unique experience of prayer, it has helped me to think about how to go from **living by the Word** to our second way of being light in the world, **living out the Word.**

2. Living *out* the Light of God's Word

Is. 58:10 if you pour yourself out for the hungry
and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,
then shall your light rise in the darkness
and your gloom be as the noonday.

This is incredibly significant. It shows that not only does the light of Christ go forth in Word, *but also in deed.* How does your light rise in the darkness? One way, Isaiah says, is to "pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted."

Even though I don't physically carry around the chamberstick candle with me, I do carry it *spiritually* with me, everywhere I go. It's such a small light. But that's what is so helpful.

It reminds me that being light to the world is

- not meant to be a **flood light** (blinding the people with its obnoxious brightness and big plans to single handily save the world).
- nor is it like a **spot light** (attracting attention to ourselves).
- + No, the light of a **chamberstick charity** is more like **the soft, unassuming flicker of a singular candle** a warm spiritual glow that it lights our path so that in its peaceful, gentle flicker, we can "be light" to whoever God sovereignly brings into our midst.

[Transition and Summary]

God calls us into a world that is dark, but not discarded; depraved but never devoid of the image of God. A world that God views not as rubbish but as the object of redemption.

We're called to be light. Something we could never accomplish on our own, and something that is achieved through living in and living out the Word of God.

But what are some points of potential failure? We'll explore two: the tendency to fall in love with the world, and the temptation to "love to hate" the world.

III. What are some points of potential failure in trying to be light in a dark world?

IIIa. *Loving to Hate the World*

The phrase "love to hate" refers to a person "finding pleasure or satisfaction in disliking or criticizing something or someone."

- Not God so *hated* the world; but "God so loved the world" (John 3:16)
- "For God did not send his Son into the world *to condemn* the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:17)

We are not meant to adopt the strategies of darkness to bring people light

- Our passage says that violence, ruin, and destruction will be no more in our borders and yet we often adopt an aggressive persona as a successful strategies for promoting the light.
- We close ourselves off from the world and 'close the gates,' but the passage says that the nations will stream into the fullness of light **through open gates**.
- We build walls that exclude, but the walls of the city of the Lord are called Salvation. This word is *Yeshua*, which means 'the Lord saves.' It is also the word from which we get the name Jesus.
- We become known for what we're against rather than what we're for.
- When we do this, **we deliver the good news in bad news packaging**. People do not see Christianity in a new light but they receive a Jesus clothed in the same clouds of the world's gloom and darkness

If we hate the world, **we demonize the world that God loves** rather than the darkness that God has come to set alight.

IIIB. *Falling "in love" with the World*

Demas

- In **Col. 4:14** and **Philem. 24** a man named **Demas** is listed as ministry co-worker of Paul.
- **But in 2 Tim. 4:10** we read that **Demas** has "fallen in love with this present world" and abandoned his Christian faith, ministry, and friends

What happened to Demas? Demas saw the glimmers of grace in this dark world, and decided to settle for the flicker. And we can do this too, we can spend our lives “falling in love with the world”, accumulating the good, but momentary glimmers forgetting about the fulness of the flame.

The perspective of a contemporary British Comic

We see this in the words of a contemporary comedian who was a Christian as a child, but lost his faith early on, and is now an atheist. He says,

- “I no longer needed a reason for my existence, just a reason to live. And imagination, free will, love, humor, fun, music, sports, beer, and pizza are all good enough reasons for living.”

In other words, the glimmers are enough. The experiences. Enjoy those moments, he feels, there is nothing else

Keanu Reeves

- Explaining the Matrix to young high school kids who never saw it.

“Well there’s this guy who’s in a kind of virtual world. And he finds out that there’s a real world and he’s really questioning what’s real and what’s not real. And he really wants to know what’s real,” explained Reeves. “Why?” asked one his friend’s kids. “Who cares if it’s real?”

Conclusion

The truth is, we all rejoice in the beauty that emanates from every culture, all around us. They give us such delight in a sometimes dark and gloomy world. They are glimmers of the original goodness of creation.

Common grace is a glimmer; Gospel grace is the glimmer brought to the fullness of its glory. Gospel grace **meets the fallen world at the flicker and points them to the fulness**. Eternal light, everlasting life, and the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Let us walk in that light and lead others to that light.

Discussion Questions

- (1) What are some ways that you drawn to “love to hate” the world around you, viewing it solely in a negative light, and as the object of disdain rather than redemption?
- (2) What are the common grace glimmers of the world that you are most prone to try to collect, in ways that might make you forget both the fullness of the light of God’s glory, and to stop short of the fulness and to settle for the flicker?
- (3) How is the life of personal devotion in God’s Word connected to the living out of Gospel grace, charity and good works in your own life? How can developing the disciplines of daily devotion in the Word ‘light the flame’ for intentional, missional Christian living, in the seemingly small, but sovereignly providential areas of everyday life?
- (4) The New Testament calls us to live go into the world but to walk as children of the light, in holiness and without moral compromise. How can we love the world like God (John 3:16) while not falling in love with the world? How can we acknowledge common grace, without becoming naïve about how morally dark the world really is?
- (5) How can we ourselves, and our children (i.e. next gen) avoid being seduced by the backlight of our devices, so that we can focus on the eternal light of the Gospel?