

THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

THE POINT:
JESUS SHINES HIS LIGHT INTO A DARK WORLD.

Leader pages on pp. 106-109

ISAIAH 9:1-3; JOHN 1:1-9

Isa. ^{9:1} Nevertheless, the gloom of the distressed land will not be like that of the former times when he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali. But in the future he will bring honor to the way of the sea, to the land east of the Jordan, and to Galilee of the nations.

² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness.

³ You have enlarged the nation and increased its joy. The people have rejoiced before you as they rejoice at harvest time and as they rejoice when dividing spoils.

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MEMORY VERSE

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John ^{1:1} In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

² He was with God in the beginning.

³ All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.

⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

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⁵ That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

⁷ He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him.

⁸ He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.

⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

KEYWORDS

Have seen (Isa. 9:2)—Though the literal translation is “have seen,” Isaiah was prophesying a future time after God had punished and purified His people.

The Word (John 1:1)—The Greek word *logos* conveys the notion of divine self-expression or speech (Ps. 19:1-4). God’s word

is effective. He speaks and things come to being (Gen. 1:3,9).

Overcome (v. 5)—Throughout John’s Gospel darkness represents the power of evil. Though the word translated overcome can have other meanings, this word best reflects the hostility between “light” and “darkness.”

HOW DOES JESUS SHINE HIS LIGHT INTO THE WORLD?

Have you ever tried to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night with no light on? A couple of mornings each week, I have to get up earlier than usual for a meeting. In the winter, that means getting up before the sun does. My spouse, on the other hand, does not need to get up as early as I do. Being the good person that I am, I don't turn on a light, and I try to be quiet and careful not to wake anyone.

One morning as I tried to leave the dark bedroom for my early morning meeting, my big toe collided with the edge of our big dresser—hard. Has this ever happened to you? By some miracle, I was able to cry quietly with tears in my eyes and successfully limp out of the room without waking my loved ones. I sure could have used a light in that dark room.

Even more importantly, we need a light in the dark culture in which we live. Thankfully, we have that in Jesus. We should be encouraged. The light of Christ will always break through our sin-filled world. Jesus is the light that Isaiah promised us centuries before His birth.

He Dawns in Our Darkness

// Isaiah 9:1-3

Physical darkness can be a dangerous thing but not as dangerous as spiritual darkness. The nation of Judah was living in spiritual darkness because of their rebellion against God. Isaiah had described how the people would “see only distress, darkness, and the gloom of affliction” (Isa. 8:22). They would face defeat, but though the destruction and darkness would be great for the people of Judah, they still had hope. Isaiah contrasted the coming “gloom of the distressed

land” of Judah with what God did to the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Israel split into two kingdoms after Solomon's death. The tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, along with eight other tribes, became the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Because the kingdom of Israel had rebelled against God, He allowed the Assyrians to take over the nation around 732 BC. The Assyrians exiled the people, and people from other nations settled the land.



THE POINT: JESUS SHINES HIS LIGHT INTO A DARK WORLD.

This area included Nazareth, where Jesus was raised. The prophet's statement that "in the future" God would "bring honor" to this area points to the fact that this was Jesus' hometown. Even though the people had been rebellious and had been "walking in darkness," that darkness would be swept away by "a great light." This prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew describes how Jesus fulfilled this prophecy: "He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah" (Matt. 4:13-14).

People would no longer walk in darkness when the Messiah—the light of the world (John 8:12), was born. Satan wants us in darkness. When we're stuck in darkness, we can become callous to our sin and pain. We can become blind to the dangers of this world. Worst of all, we can lose sight of God's direction and purpose for our lives.

The light of Jesus exposes our sin and points to a life that is greater than a life lived in darkness. Too many people have allowed the darkness of this world to limit their perspectives in life. They have either given up all hope of freedom from their sin, or they simply have chosen to settle for life in the darkness.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS OUR WORLD WALKS IN DARKNESS?

Isaiah's prophecy promised a great light that would shine on the land of darkness and in our individual lives. We see this truth in Jesus; His ways are far greater and more joyful than the ways of darkness. God's ways aren't to kill the joy in our lives! His ways are the key to joy.

WHAT WORDS WOULD YOU USE TO DESCRIBE THE HOPE THAT GOD'S LIGHT BRINGS?

Light Shines Through His Life // John 1:1-4

The opening verses of the Gospel of John declare that the bright glory of Jesus has overcome the darkness in this world. John announced who Jesus is! Jesus is God; "He was with God in the beginning" (v. 2) and all creation came through Him. Although Jesus came into the world through the virgin birth; God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always



DIGGING DEEPER JOHN THE BAPTIST

An angel told Zacharias, John the Baptist's father, that John would be great, wouldn't drink wine, and would be filled with the Holy Spirit. He would be devoted to the powerful ministry of the Lord. His ministry would turn many back to the Lord, leading them to repentance. He would be the forerunner before Christ (Luke 1:17a). His ministry would be preparation for the Messiah. He would serve in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17b). His ministry would be powerful and prophetic. John would "turn the hearts of the fathers ... and the disobedient" (Luke 1:17, Mal. 4:6). John would make ready the people, preparing them for the Lord (Luke 1:17). John's ministry would be God empowered, focused on Christ, and for the benefit of others—exactly the way our service for God should look like.

What part of this description of John the Baptist motivates you to seek and fulfill your calling?

existed, and have always been in relationship with each other.

John described Jesus as “the Word” (v. 1). We often refer to the Bible as “God’s Word”—God’s revelation of Himself to us—but Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God. He is the Word who most fully reveals God because He is God! Because Jesus is “the Word,” Gentile believers would see that Jesus is the One who came to enable them to see what is real and true. Elsewhere in John’s Gospel, Jesus is referred to as “the true light” (1:9), “the true bread” (6:32), and “the true vine” (15:1).



WHAT ARE THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF JESUS BEING THE LIGHT OF MEN?

In the Book of Genesis, Adam and Eve enjoyed the light and privilege of walking with God. Unfortunately, they sinned against God, and that sin brought separation—a separation that was passed down to all humanity. With that separation comes ignorance, darkness, and even death. Isaiah had prophesied that light was coming into this world, and John now proclaimed that the Word—Jesus—is that light. The life of Christ is the light of men. Without Christ there is no life or light. In Christ, we have

the privilege and joy of being “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14-16)—reflecting the light of Christ to those around us.

Only the gospel of Jesus can truly shine light in this dark world. Even as we feed and clothe the poor, we talk about Jesus. He is the light of the world, and He alone offers true life change. When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive His light and join with His Church in being the light of the world. Let’s shine the light of Christ by sharing the light of Christ.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST ENCOUNTER THE LIGHT OF JESUS?

He Lights Every Life // John 1:5-9

It is impossible to know what we’re looking at without light! Remember when as kids we played blind man’s bluff? The person who was “it” wore a blindfold and stumbled around trying to find us, even though we were in plain sight. With the blindfold that person was in the dark.

Taking off the blindfold would have turned on the light for that player. We all need light and truth to live. Thankfully, Jesus is that light shining in darkness. His light exposes how things really are: the sin in our lives, the evil in the world, and the way out of that darkness. Once things become visible, the ways of God are easier to understand. It’s impossible for us to truly understand the ways of God and the abundant life He has for us without the light of Christ in our lives. We can’t understand or live for Jesus without being able to see the light of Jesus.

WHICH DESCRIPTION OF JESUS IN VERSES 1-9 ENCOURAGES YOU TODAY?

God raised up John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus and to point people to the light of Christ. John’s message was about the light of the Messiah. After John’s birth, his father Zechariah prophesied that his son

THE POINT: JESUS SHINES HIS LIGHT INTO A DARK WORLD.

would “go before the Lord to prepare his ways,” proclaiming the light and salvation of Christ (Luke 1:76-77).

When God sent Jesus into this world, He was showing us that He heard our cries in the darkness and loved us enough to save us from that darkness. In Jesus, we can live in the light. Those who believe in Jesus are commanded to walk in His light. As we walk in the light, we declare Christ to the world. John the Baptist had a mission to shine the light of Christ, and so do we. God loves the world and desires for everyone to enjoy His salvation and light; He works through us to reflect that salvation and light to others. May we commit our lives to proclaim the light of Christ to all who are still in darkness. The Lord has saved us to shine!

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

IN WHAT WAYS CAN YOU SHINE THE LIGHT OF JESUS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

DID YOU KNOW?

The electric grid in America is made up of 450,000 miles of high voltage transmission wire. This source of light and energy makes our lifestyles comfortable. Our food is preserved, our houses are heated and cooled, and our lights allow us to enjoy sights and scenes around us. But we often take lights for granted, thinking they will always work and be there. This attitude changes during blackouts. Many people in various parts of the country have experienced a lack of lights due to this interruption. One significant blackout occurred on a cold Tuesday, November 9, 1965, in the Northeastern U.S. When people were cooking their food and heating their homes, the lights went out. Families were without the convenience of light and electricity for more than 13 hours.¹ The cause was human error.

How is a blackout a metaphor for what our lives would be like without Christ who is our light?

LIVE IT

How can the light of Jesus shine through you?

There's a lot wrong in our world, because the world is evil. Humankind left to its own is full of darkness and sin (Jer. 17:9). Thankfully God does not leave us in darkness; He sent Jesus into the world to dispel the darkness of sin. And because His light shines through His followers, we too can be the light that someone else needs. Let your light shine this week by doing the following:

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- **Repent of sin.** Pray that God will reveal any sin you are holding on to. Then ask the Holy Spirit to destroy that part of your sin nature so you can represent Him well.
- **Share hope.** Reflect on the hope that you have in Jesus. Then share the hope of Jesus with people you may encounter who have lost their hope.
- **Obey the Spirit.** Pray for God's guidance in all areas of your life so you can be ready to meet a need, pray for someone, share the gospel, or other spiritual work when the Spirit prompts you.

DAILY READINGS

1. LET THERE BE LIGHT // MATTHEW 4:13-16

Isaiah prophesied about the region of Capernaum. Capernaum included Naphtali and Zebulun (two of the original tribes of Israel). John the Baptist was the messenger God sent to prepare the way for the Lord. After John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus relocated His ministry to the region of Galilee where Capernaum was located, which fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah. "But in the future he will bring honor to the way of the sea, to the land east of the Jordan, and to Galilee of the nations" (Isa. 9:1-2). The prophecy foretold that all who live in darkness and who are experiencing the darkness of death can receive the light of Jesus.

Whether in darkness or the shadow of death, look to the light of Jesus for hope.

2. JESUS THE LIGHT // JOHN 8:12

Have you noticed that people who are visually impaired typically have a stronger sense of hearing and touch? When the sense of sight is lost, the brain compensates by making the other senses stronger. The loss of sight causes dramatic functional changes in the brain's visual cortex. These adaptive functions are sustained, reinforced, and eventually lead to permanent structural changes. We were spiritually blind and in need of functional changes so that we could see. Jesus came to bring us His Light so that we can experience sustained, reinforced, and permanent spiritual changes. Jesus brings life and light to humankind.

Let Jesus be your light, and you will no longer be spiritually blind.

3. SAFE LIGHT // JOHN 1:4-5

Growing up we had to be in the house when the street lights came on. Street lights came on when it turned dark. If you weren't in the house there were consequences. My mother knew it was dangerous for us to be outside and not in the safety of our home when it was dark. Our heavenly Father knows

the world is filled with darkness, and He devised a plan for the light of Christ to overcome the darkness. He desires that we live in the safety of His light. John tells us, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it" (vv. 4-5).

Find safety and life in the light of Jesus.

4. GUARANTEED RESCUE // MICAH 5:2

Hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, Micah prophesied that Jesus' birth would take place in the small town of Bethlehem. Micah said, "His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times" (v 2). Indicating that the promised eternal King would be a descendant of David. Moreover, the coming Messiah would live as a man but be fully God. He would rule eternally, and He would be endowed with the power and majesty of God. Micah continued, "They will live securely, for then his greatness will extend to the ends of the earth" (v 4). God's love for us was declared hundreds of years before Jesus was born. He was and is the promised Savior.

Jesus came to save us from our sins. Let us respond with awe and worship.

5. SOVEREIGN DECREE // LUKE 2:1-5

Caesar called for a census: "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered" (v 1). He likely wanted an accurate count of the region's population for taxation purposes. Joseph was from the house and family of David, so he and Mary were required to travel to the city of his heritage. "Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem" (v. 4). God is sovereign. And in His sovereignty He presides over events great and small. He used a pagan emperor's decree to fulfill biblical prophecy and accomplish His perfect plan. What power; what love that our God would go to that length to save us.

His perfect plan for our salvation should be celebrated with joy.