

Jesus, the Light of God

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[0 : 00] The living room windows of my house and the balcony face west. So occasionally, well, we're treated to a sunset every evening, but occasionally we are treated to a spectacular sunset, a vibrant colors, beautiful, passionate sunset.

And usually it's one of the kids that notice it first and they'll hear an exclamation and say, oh, wow, that's so beautiful. And then we'll hear the invitation, dad, mom, come on over here, take a look, come and look at the sunset.

And we'll pause to marvel for a short while on the exquisite display of light. And light brings color to our world. Light dispels the darkness, enables us to see.

Light also dispels the cold, brings warmth. Light, it makes the plants grow, providing food for the animals and for us. Life is not possible without light in this physical world.

In a similar way, in the spiritual life, life is not possible without the light. And John tells us in this passage that Jesus is the light that gives us spiritual life.

[1 : 17] And he invites us then to behold Jesus, to believe in Jesus, the light of the world. He says, Jesus says in verse 23, the hour has come for the son of man to be glorified.

Jesus speaks of the hour when he will be glorified throughout the gospel of John. But up to this point in the gospel, in this book, it has always been in the future.

The hour is not yet. But now Jesus says the hour has come. And that's because the Greeks have arrived to see Jesus.

This is hinting at the salvation that Jesus will bring, which will be not only for the Jews, but also for the Greeks, the Gentiles. So the hour has come. And then in verse 24, Jesus tells us what will happen at this hour.

He says, truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.

[2 : 17] It's curious that Jesus speaks of a grain of wheat falling to the earth and dying when he is describing and explaining the hour of his glorification. Glory means being exalted above others.

It means being lifted up. Falling and dying are the exact opposite of that. It means being brought down below others. Jesus continues his mysterious teaching in verse 27.

He says, now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say, Father, save me from this hour? Why is the hour of his glorification something that Jesus might want to be saved from?

We find out why in verses 32 to 33. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

Again, the theme of death resurfaces. It's not merely that Jesus is going to be glorified after his death. Jesus is literally going to be lifted up from the earth when he is crucified.

[3 : 27] Jesus' exaltation, his glorification, it starts with his death on the cross. His death is part of his glorification.

This paradox between dying and being lifted up is an allusion to Isaiah 52, 53, which prophesied of the Messiah that would come. The servant of the Lord.

And he said this, that the servant of the Lord shall be high and lifted up. And shall be exalted. And yet in the same breath, that same passage says that he will be despised and rejected by men.

A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And that he would bear our griefs and carry our sorrows. Be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. That's the glory.

But isn't death a humiliating defeat? In what sense is that a form of exaltation? As Jesus said earlier in verse 24. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone.

[4 : 31] But if it dies, it bears much fruit. It is only in its death that a grain of wheat functions as a seed. So in a sense, its burial is its birth.

Similarly, it is by his death that Jesus achieves his victory. He says in verses 31 to 32. Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out.

And I, when I'm lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. In Jesus' death, the world that passed judgment on Jesus and sentenced him to death, stands judged in turn.

Because in rejecting Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah that the Father sent, they have shown themselves to be condemned already. Those who turn toward Jesus in faith, the light of the world, are illuminated by the light.

But those who turn away from Jesus only see the shadow cast by their own rejection of the light of the world. That's what this judgment refers to. And Jesus also, he says, Now is the time when the ruler of the world will be cast out.

[5 : 44] The ruler of the world, the Bible often refers to Satan, to the evil spiritual ruler that holds sway over the sinful world. And because the true king has come, and as Jesus is glorified, as he is crucified, and as he is resurrected, and as he is ascended to the heavens, as he ascends his throne first on the cross, and then eventually at the right hand of the Father in heaven, the ruler of this world is cast out.

He's cast down. This was also prophesied of in Psalm 82, that God himself would come, that he would remove these spiritual rulers, so that he can bring all people, all nations to himself, under his gracious reign.

And that's what Jesus is referring to here, that he would draw all people to himself. That doesn't mean all individuals, without exception, will come, because then that would make the statement about the judgment of the world nonsensical.

But it does mean that all people without distinction, all kinds of people, Jews, Gentiles, men, women, black, white, all kinds of people will be invited to the kingdom of God because of what Jesus has accomplished on the cross.

Because Jesus paid off our debt of sin on the cross. Because he paid the penalty for our sins, the spiritual rulers, the authorities that held sway over us with our debt of sin no longer holds sway.

[7 : 12] Christ reigns and he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of God's beloved Son. That's what God has done in Jesus. And Jesus is the light that delivers us from this domain of darkness.

It says in verses 35 to 36, In speaking of having the light only for a little while longer, Jesus is speaking of his impending departure through his death and resurrection and ascension.

And Jesus said very explicitly earlier in this same gospel, in John 8, 12, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Jesus is the only religious leader in history who spoke in this way that's gained any kind of following. All the other religious leaders said, There is a light. Look at that light. Follow that teaching.

Jesus said, I am the light. And follow me. You know what it's like to get up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom to get a drink of water.

[8 : 28] You grow up around in the dark. You probably, you know, hit some things and drop them. And eventually you make your way to the bathroom. And that's easy enough to do if you know your way around the house.

But imagine going somewhere far away in complete darkness. stumbling, not being able to find the way. That's what a spiritual life apart from Jesus is like.

There is no way we can find our way apart from the light of the world. And in contrast, imagine the joy and the wonder of a colorblind man who, with the help of color correcting glasses, is for the first time able to look into the color of his daughter's eyes or his wife's hair.

The joy and the wonder of that. Or think about how a cataract surgery or lens replacement surgery transforms a blind woman's life. She can walk around without feeling around with a cane anymore.

She can go somewhere without the help of a guide dog for the blind. She can actually see where she is going for the first time. Such was our spiritual condition prior to the dawning of the light of the world.

[9 : 48] We were groping about in darkness, in blindness, not knowing where we were going. It was a hopeless endeavor. On our own, in our blindness, we would have never found a way of salvation.

We would have never found our way to God. But thanks be to God for God who said, let light shine out of darkness has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

That's what it says in 2 Corinthians 4, 6. In the radiance of Jesus' face, we see the light of the glory of God. Jesus reveals the will of God. Jesus shows us the face of God.

Jesus restores us into the arms of God. I don't know if all of you have seen the recent Google ad entitled The Year in Search 2022.

It claims that more than ever before, people searched for the answer to these questions on Google. Can I change? Can I change my life?

[10 : 54] Can I change myself? Can I change my outlook? How to start again? Can I create change? Can I level up? Can I evolve?

I'm not sure if that's an actual existential question or Pokemon question, but it seems like there's definitely a trend of people wanting to grow, wanting to change.

And it's meant to be an uplifting ad, inviting people to seek change, to hope for change. But actually left me feeling really sad because it was a reminder to me of how hopeless our world is apart from Christ.

people search for those questions because they don't know the answer. Because they know something is wrong with the world, because they know that something is wrong even with themselves, but they don't know how to change.

They don't know the way out. They are groping about in the darkness. We cannot become a new person apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ. C.S. Lewis, the famous Oxford professor, was once a staunch atheist.

[12 : 08] But after becoming a Christian at the age of 32, he wrote in one of his essays this, I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.

Jesus is the light of the world. And he enables us to see God and the world that he has created rightly. When you believe and behold the light of the world, the sin and the darkness of this world are exposed for what they really are.

When you believe and behold the light of the world, you can make sense of human history, how it began and where it is headed, why it has the cycles and the ups and downs that it has. When you believe and behold the light of the world, you can see God as he really is and not as men make him out to be with their fallible imagination.

God in his steadfast love and faithfulness. God in his mercy and justice. God in his grace and truth. If you are not yet a follower of Jesus Christ, I urge you to believe in the light that you may become sons of light, as it says in verse 36.

No matter how confidently a blind man denies the existence of light, I don't know what you're talking about. I don't see anything. There's no such thing as a light. You're making all this up. The light is there.

[13 : 35] In the same way, I can say, and every Christian in the history of the world can say, I once thought I saw, but now I see that I once was blind, but now I see.

When we believe and behold the light of the world, we become sons of light. One of our pastor interns who preached for our church a couple weeks ago mentioned that the Hebrew expression son of something can literally refer to being a son of someone, but it can also be used idiomatically to characterize something.

So, for example, in Hebrews 89, 22, or Psalm 89, 22, it refers to the wicked literally as sons of wickedness. Obviously, wickedness did not have a son, but it's describing that this person is so wicked that he can be characterized as a son of wickedness.

Similarly, it speaks of sons of affliction to refer to people who are afflicted. And then, and so when it says here that once you believe in Jesus, you become sons of light, it means that you will be characterized by the same light, by the light of the world, that you'll become more like Jesus, that you will have the relationship with God the Father the same way Jesus did.

And so what does believing and beholding the light entail? What does that mean? Jesus explains in verses 25 to 26, whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

[15 : 08] If anyone serves me, he must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. Believing and beholding the light of the world entails following in the footsteps of Jesus who, like a grain of wheat that falls into the earth and dies, laid down his life on the cross for us to give us eternal life.

That's what it means to follow Jesus. That's what it means to become sons of light. Whoever loves his own life, and here's another Hebrew idiom when he says, whoever loves his life loses it, whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

He's not telling us to emotionally hate your own life or to hate yourself. That's not what he's referring to. It's an idiom that refers to a preferential choice of something. When you, when you choose to love Jesus, when you choose to love serving him and following him even more than your own life, your own preferences, your own priorities, your own desires, when you submit those things to Jesus and say, I will follow you, that's what it means to lose your life for Jesus' sake.

So in order to behold the light, that means we must leave behind the darkness. We must forfeit, forsake our past life, our sins, the things we sought other than Jesus.

is there something that you are clinging to in your life that you are not willing to give up for Jesus' sake? Even a good thing can be a damning thing if it prevents you from turning to Jesus.

[16 : 52] Do you love the praise of the world? Are you hesitant to follow Jesus because you fear the ridicule of this world? Do you love the pleasures of the world?

Are you unwilling to let go of these pleasures for the sake of obedience to Jesus? Repent. Turn away from your sins so you can turn and face the light of the world.

Those who entrust their lives to Jesus in this way become once and for all sons of the light. And if you have already done that, if you are already a Christian, follower of Christ, then keep beholding Jesus.

2 Corinthians 3.18 says, We all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. Some of us are already sons of the light.

But our entire lives we grow more and more into the likeness of the light of the world. We become more and more like Jesus Christ. And the way we do that is the same way we were saved by believing and beholding Jesus by dying to ourselves our selfish and sinful desires and living to Christ for His purposes and priorities.

[18 : 07] Emptying ourselves of our pride, humbling ourselves and following the path of suffering, even death, death to self for the sake of being alive to Christ, living for His glory.

And that's my prayer for us this evening that this Christmas we would believe and behold the light of the world again.