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The Light Of The World

The Lord's Character As Light

John 8:12

Years ago, I read a story about how the Lord used Genesis 1:1-3 to convince a high-ranking army officer of his need to turn from darkness to light. The missionary who visited him read to him Genesis 1:1-2 and then left him alone, very abruptly. This caused the officer to reflect on what he just had heard, especially after the same thing happened again the next day.

On the third day, the missionary returned and looking at his contact, saw a change in him. He then read to him the same passage, once more, but included verse 3, "Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light" (Gen. 1:3 NKJV). Through a work of God's Spirit, this man had begun to see his lost condition of darkness and turned to God's light, our Lord Jesus Christ. What about you, dear reader, did you already turn to Him with confession of your sins, from darkness to light?.

The account of this real event illustrates God's wisdom and power in using the biblical account of the creation of physical light, to bring spiritual light into a realm of darkness, producing life and a new birth. This is what happened to Saul of Tarsus (read Acts 9:3-18), as he wrote later himself, "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

How about us? When we were drawn to this marvelous light by Him who called us (1 Pet. 2:9), we learned how it is needed also for our daily walk, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105). "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart" (Ps. 97:11). Furthermore, walking

in the light implies having fellowship with each other as believers (1 Jn. 1:7) and with God, even though we are surrounded by the darkness of this world. David prayed therefore, "That I may walk before God in the light of the living" (Ps. 56:13).

The Arrival Of The True Light

When the Lord Jesus came to His people Israel, about five hundred years after their return from the Babylonian captivity, He found them living in darkness. "The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned" (Mt. 4:16 ESV).

After three and a half years of His public ministry, the Lord Jesus said, "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light...These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them" (Jn. 12:36 NKJV). Why? Here is the answer: the true Light gave light to every man when the Messiah came into the world, but His people did not see or recognize this light (Jn. 1:9-11), except for some who believed (v. 12). The Lord, who knows the hearts (Acts 1:24), was not able to have true fellowship with the rest of the people, even though they believed in the miracles He performed (Jn. 2:24-25).

Believers today also belong to a remnant of believers, just as a few believed in those days. Do you truly believe? Most professing Christians are attracted to all kinds of outward things, but are not really born again, for they do not believe with the heart. However, those who truly believe also have become lights themselves, as the Lord Jesus told His disciples, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden (...). In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 5:14,16 ESV). "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men (...) the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it (...). That was the true Light when coming into the world gives light to every man" (Jn. 1:4-5, 9).

Matthew summarizes this as follows, "the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned" (Mt. 4:16 ESV). However, they rejected it, as they rejected the Messiah despite the irrefutable signs He gave showing that He was their Messiah. Many years later, John wrote, "(...) this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil" (Jn. 3:19 ESV; also read vs. 20-21). Later we read that John the Baptist

had functioned as a light, of whom the Lord said, “He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light (Jn. 5:35 ESV), but the Lord continued, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (Jn. 9:5 NKJV). This refers to His earthly ministry, whereas now He shines from Heaven.

Shining Lights To Represent The Lord Jesus Christ

When Jesus sent His disciples on a mission, He said, “You are the light of the world” and He compared them to a city on a hill that is not hidden. In the same way, disciples today are to shine for Him to the glory of God the Father (Mt. 5:14-16). Is this not a great privilege? For sure, but it comes with great responsibilities for which He provides the resources. “I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in Me may not remain in darkness” (Jn. 12:46 ESV). Nevertheless, He was rejected while on earth, but now He is shining from Heaven, as Saul of Tarsus experienced (see above).

Furthermore, the Lord in glory uses the believers on earth to shine as lights for Him. Of the many Scriptures about this topic, let’s look at a few. “(...) You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8 NKJV). The Apostle described the tremendous blessings that the believers have received (see Eph. 1-3), and through these Scriptures exhorts us all to walk in a manner worthy of the heavenly calling with which we have been called (4:1-6).

To put his teachings into practice, we need the right attitude and spiritual maturity, as well as willingness to hold the truth in love (4:15). God’s plan is that Christ may shine in, and be reflected through all the believers who together form “the new man” (4:24) to display Christ. Each believer has one or more gifts, but all need to grow to reflect the beauties of Christ who is now in Heaven (4:7-32). If we don’t grow, we will remain vulnerable just as babes, tossed to and fro, carried away, and deceived (4:14).

Furthermore, Paul explains that all believers individually are children of God, and should walk together in love to represent God who is love (5:1-7). And so, being light in the Lord, we must function as lights and walk as children of light (5:8) honoring the rights of Christ and of God in this world that rejects Both, while doing the will of the Lord (5:17). Light is separated from darkness, and so the believers are to shine as lights in this dark world to reflect Him. This goes together with

walking in wisdom (5:15), doing His will (5:17). The aspects just mentioned of *love, light and wisdom* are inseparable and God wants us to represent Him as His children: what a privilege and what a challenge at the same time!

Help From John's Gospel

We may study this Gospel in several ways. For now, we just want to see some links between what we had before and John's Gospel as it describes the Lord's excellence in various ways, especially in the seven great "I am" statements. His preeminence also comes out in His seven discourses, as well as in the seven miracles He performed during His earthly ministry, apart from the great miracle of His death and resurrection, and in His post-resurrection ministry.

Showing that these elements are inseparable, John links *life* (chs. 3-7) with *light* (chs. 8-12), and with *love* (chs. 13-17). What we saw earlier about love, light, and wisdom in Ephesians 5 cannot be realized without life (cf. Jn. 1:4), which is essential, as the Lord explained to Nicodemus (Jn. 3:3-5). We became followers of the Lord Jesus when we came to Him to be saved, and received *life*. Taking His yoke on us (Mt. 11:29) we became His disciples and servants, walking in His *light* to represent Him in the darkness of this world. We cannot do this without true *love* to Him and to His own, but also towards the lost; as an example, see Paul (Rom. 9:1-5).

Seven Signs And Other Sevens

Various words in John's Gospel highlight the Lord's public ministry. The signs He worked demonstrated Who He was – the promised Messiah – and they clearly signified this. Jesus worked remarkable acts of power, often called miracles, and operated with special energy, while drawing people's attention through these exploits, also called wonders. Of these, John selected seven (see Jn. 21:25) that occurred during Christ's ministry before His sufferings. His light shone, His love worked and true life was manifested.

These signs are listed in John's Gospel as follows:

1. Changing water into wine in Cana, Galilee (2:1-11);
2. Healing an official's son in Capernaum, Galilee (4:46-54);
3. Healing a paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda, Jerusalem (5:1-18);
4. Feeding the five thousand near the Sea of Galilee (6:5-14);
5. Walking on the water of the Sea of Galilee (6:16-21);
6. Healing a blind man in Jerusalem (9:1-7);
7. Raising dead Lazarus in Bethany (Jerusalem, 11:1-45).

The seven "I am" statements show that the Lord Jesus Himself is Yahweh, the LORD.ⁱ They are:

1. "I am the Bread of life" (6:35);
2. "I am the Light of the world" (8:12);
3. "I am the Door for the sheep" (10:7,9,11);
4. "I am the good Shepherd" (10:11,14);
5. "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (11:25);
6. "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life" (14:6);
7. "I am the true Vine" (15:1,5).

Besides the seven signs and the seven "I am" statements, John recorded the discussions the Lord had and the discourses He gave. The other Gospels have more emphasis on what He *did* than on what He said, whereas John's special focus is on what the Lord Jesus spoke, because He is the Word (Jn. 1:1-5, 14).

1. Discourse on the Father and the Son (5:19-47);
2. Discourse on the Bread of God (6:22-40);
3. Discourse during the Feast of Booths (ch. 7);
4. Discourse on the Light of the world (ch. 8);
5. Discourse on the Good Shepherd (10:1-18);
6. Discourse on the Grain of Wheat (ch. 12);
7. The Upper-room Discourse (chs. 14-17).

Evidently, much more could be said about the Light of the world. John's Gospel often mentions great contrasts, for we learn much through such comparisons, as in Hebrews and other Scriptures. Old over against new; light over against darkness;

love over against hatred; life over against death, etc. All of this in relation to our Beloved, the Son of God who has loved us and gave Himself for us!

While this article is mainly about the Lord Jesus as *light*, we have seen that this point cannot be separated from Who He is in His *love*, or as the Giver and Sustainer of *life*. The topic of light is also important in the book of Revelation, especially in relation to the new creation, where the adjective “new”ⁱⁱ is another keyword besides “light.” How wonderful this light is and always will be!

ⁱ When Judas was going to betray the Lord, Jesus identified Himself before the band of officers and soldiers who had come to arrest Him, by saying “I am.” The power of God’s presence – for Jesus is God – caused all to go backwards and fall down before Him. Soon, every knee will bow (Phil. 2:10).

ⁱⁱ This word (Greek *kainos*) occurs 14 (2x7) times in John’s writings (Gospel, Epistles, Revelation) and in total 42 (6x7) times in the New Testament.

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