

A Chronicle of Redemption

Chapter 41: The Light of the World

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CHAPTER 41: THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

John 8

Have you ever been in darkness? I mean absolute absence of light. Have you ever been where there's not even a glimmer of light? Remember what that feels like. The absence of light, an utter and complete darkness.

I was backpacking through Northern Guatemala trying to get to an ancient Mayan site where archaeologists were working. As we made it into the camp late in the afternoon, it was like a scene out of *Jurassic Park*: These big, huge tents and scientists running around dusting things off and looking at shards of bone and pieces of pottery. We began to look at all of these different things as they were laid out. We got excited to learn and see more, and so, we wanted to go into the jungle and see the actual dig sites. One of the archaeologists kind of said, "Okay. You take that path, and you head that way."

So, we blazed off into the jungle, my best friend and I. We began to run through the jungle and found this huge stone, carved with Mayan inscriptions. We went further into the jungle, and we saw this archaeological site opened up to where they were actually working and pulling things out of the ground to study it. Over yonder, we saw a hill, a mound that was once a pyramid that had been taken over by the jungle. So, we rushed on into the jungle to climb up and take a look from up there. We climbed to the top and then went down to another dig site and kept going, getting deeper and deeper in the jungle.

Then, we realized that it gets dark really fast in the jungle, and we realized we didn't bring any light. We were now a good ways away from the camp, and so we turned around and began to rush back to camp, hoping to get back while there was still a glimmer of light to be able to see our way. Within a few minutes, though, not even the light of the moon or the stars could be seen through the canopy of the jungle that was above us. It was pitch black. I couldn't even see my hand in front of my face. We were lost in the jungle and in darkness.

So, we began to work together. My friend would go up in one direction, and he would look to try to see if he could see the light of the camp. All the time I would call back to him, so that if he didn't see anything, he could make his way back to where we were. We kept doing this for what seemed like an eternity, with no results, nothing. All we saw was darkness.

Finally, I hear as he's out, "I see a light! I see a light!" My eyes got huge, and I began to rush to where he was yelling, "I see a light! I see a light!" Then, the two of us together, began to rush towards a glimmer of light that we saw off in the distance; and as we got closer that light got larger and brighter, and larger and brighter. We almost fell into the camp as we came bustling back into this camp, out of the dark and into the light of the camp. It was then that we realized no one even knew we were gone. They had been sitting around enjoying the light around the camp, and had not come to bring the light to us and rescue us out of darkness and bring us to the light.

The Coming Light

We are part of a cosmic conflict between light and darkness.

Now each of us, you and I, whether we realize it or not, we are participants in a great struggle, a cosmic struggle between light and darkness. Billions of people are left out in the jungle in darkness with no light. You see, we are a part of a cosmic conflict, you and I, a conflict between light and darkness. This is the ultimate conflict, and it has been going on since the beginning of all time. It is a clash between light and darkness, a clash between the one true God and the prince of this world.

I don't know if we realize this. I don't know if we realize the magnitude of this. We dabble with darkness and play around with sin. We're content to sit around the camp in the church while others could die and go to hell out in the darkness. Do we realize that we, you and I, are a part of a cosmic struggle between light and darkness? This is what the Gospel of John tells us all about: This cosmic conflict between light and darkness. The Gospel of Matthew opens up with the genealogy of Jesus. The Gospel of Mark and Luke begin with John the Baptist. John backs it up even further. John begins in the beginning: Before time was, God was.

Let's look at the opening verses of John together: John 1:1-5. Please turn with me in your Bibles. John 1:1-5: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*

Since the beginning of all time, there has been a conflict between light and darkness. In Genesis 1, we see that God's first act of creation was to create the light. The Word spoke and there was light. However, right after that, we see the conflict, darkness seeking to overcome the light. In Genesis 3, we see Adam choosing to turn away from the light and turn towards his own way, his own plan, his own journey in darkness.

Our world...our world is in darkness and under the judgment of God. As a result of sin entering the world, God had to separate Himself from man and place judgment on all of creation. Our world is in darkness and under the judgment of God. We may think our world is inherently good. We may think that, maybe, our world is inherently neutral. However, the Bible teaches, from the beginning to the end, that the world was created good, but since the Fall, our world is in darkness, inherently evil.

The world is bent towards its own destruction, seeking to overcome the light. This has been true since the beginning of mankind. This is evident throughout the story of Scripture that we have been studying through as a faith family this year in 2010. We've seen this again and again throughout the pages of Scripture as we have walked through redemption story. This is the way it was in the days of Noah. This is the way it was in the days of the Tower of Babel and the days of Abraham, Moses, and David. This is the way it was in the time of the judges, the kings, and the prophets.

You see, throughout human history, mankind has sought to create systems and structures, and its whole society based on a false center, based on man as the center of the universe instead of God as the center. The darkness seeks to twist our understanding and place ourselves in the center, as if we are in control of our own destinies. Religion is man's highest attempt to understand and control his own world.

John 3:19-20 says, "And 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. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed." Not only is our world in darkness and under the judgment of God, but each one of us, you and I, have done evil and have chosen darkness over light. We are condemned for our rebellious love affair with darkness...condemned for our love affair with the darkness. Unbelief is a love affair with darkness.

We are not innocent people living in this dark world. We are guilty people rightly condemned to death for our rebellion and our hate of the light. You see, in the darkness, you and I think that we can be king; we can set the world up around us. However, if we are to come towards the light, we have to recognize that there is only one true rightful king of the universe and ruler over all things, and that is God. We cannot overcome our love of the darkness on our own, but, thankfully, the story does not just end there.

But God chose to reveal the Light that was to come through the people of Israel.

Two of my favorite words in all of Scripture: "But God", "But God." You see, but God chose...God chose to reveal the Light that was to come through the people of Israel...the Light that was coming through the people of Israel. This is what we have been studying throughout the Old Testament, the story of how God chose to reveal Himself to mankind. Beginning with Abraham, He chose one man and called one man to create one people, so that through that people, all the peoples of the earth might be blessed and might recognize Him for what He is: the true Light of all nations.

This is what we see clearly in Genesis 12:1-3. This is what we see throughout the Old Testament. God's people experienced glimpses of the Light that was to come. God continued to reveal Himself, after Abraham, to His people. God revealed His name to Moses out in the desert after he had fled out of Egypt. In Exodus 3:14, God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said, "Say to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God demonstrated His power over the small 'g' gods of Pharaoh, and He liberated His people out of Egypt. As Moses led them out into the desert, out from Egypt, God led them by a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night, representing God's presence with His people.

The presence of God, represented throughout Scripture by light, came to dwell among His people in the tabernacle and then in the temple. We see that salvation for God's people has always been wrapped up in this imagery of light. Psalm 27:1 says, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" So, we see glimpses of the light that was to come throughout the Old Testament, and we see God's people anticipating the day when that light would be present among them, when that light would come.

Each year, the people of Israel celebrated the Festival of Tabernacles. This festival was full of expectation and vivid symbolism about the day when the Messiah would come and be with His people. Jewish rabbis tell us that at night during this festival, in the Court of Women, they had these huge cauldrons filled with oil that they would light, and it would light up of the whole Temple Mount and all of the surrounding houses during this festival, brilliantly depicting the promise in Zechariah 14:7 that one day there would be unending daylight.

Isaiah 9 speaks about the day when the Messiah would come, when he says, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on them has light shined." You see, the people of Israel lived in expectation of the

promised Messiah, the one who was to come to save His people and bring them out of darkness into the light. There is a cosmic battle waging all around us between light and death, between God and the prince of this world. This world is in darkness and under judgment. You and I are condemned for our own sinfulness, but God chose to reveal Himself to the people of Israel to foretell of the day when the light would come into the world.

The Light Has Come

John 1:6-14: Look with me there.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

God sent the Light to a world in darkness.

God sent the light to the world, to our world in darkness. The writer of the Gospel of John is a witness to the true light, the presence of God in human history. John tells the story of man who occupies time and space, but the subject of the story is one who stands beyond all time and space, the Author of creation itself, which now He has become a part of.

The letter to the Colossians says, "*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*" Since the Fall, the world has been under judgment, but the coming of the light brings salvation for all nations, brings salvation for you and for me. The one light shows all things and exposes all things for what they truly are. Because all things were made through the Word, when His light falls on all things, we see them as they truly are.

John continues to tell us that Jesus Himself said,

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 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. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

God sent the Light to the world to dwell among us. The Light Himself has come into the darkness to save the world...to save the world.

Just a few chapters later, as we get into John 8...and even beginning in John 6 is what David preached on last week...what we find is Jesus going up to Jerusalem during the very Festival of Tabernacles. We just spoke about this festival of great expectation and the imagery of light. We spoke about the expectation of God's presence that they had anticipated and Him coming in light. During this festival, it was in the Court of Women that these huge lamps were lit and illuminated the festival each night. During this period of expectation in the Court of Women, with these huge lamps as a backdrop, it is here in the temple where God's presence dwelled with His people.

It is in this place and in this context that we come to the verse and the passage that we are dealing with today: John 8:12-59. In verse 12, John tells us, "*Again Jesus spoke to them saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'*" The Light has come. The long-expected and long-awaited one is present among His people. In the midst of all of this pageantry and imagery of expectation, He stands before the people and says, "I am the light." The illuminator Himself speaking to the people and even using the name found throughout the Old Testament for God: "I am." "I am." "I am the light of the world." Jesus is the fulfillment of all that was spoken of by the prophets and all that was foreshadowed in the temple and the tabernacle throughout the Old Testament.

Charles Spurgeon said,

The tabernacle of old was not full of truth, but full of image, and shadow, and symbol, and picture; but Christ is full of substance; He is not the picture, but the reality; He is not the shadow, but the substance. Herein, O believer, do thou rejoice with joy unspeakable for thou comest unto Christ, the real tabernacle of God. Thou comest unto Him who is full of glory of the Father; and thou comest unto the one in whom thou hast not the representation of grace which thou needest, but grace itself – not the shadow of truth ultimately to be revealed, but the very truth by which the soul is accepted in the sight of God.

This is our Savior, present among the people declaring that He is the light of the world. God is no longer found only in the temple or the tabernacle, but takes up residence among His people. The Old Testament imagery is completed in the person of Jesus Christ.

I don't know about you, but when I read verse 12, I'm expecting the people to jump up in praise. I'm expecting the people in jubilation to say, "He is here! He is here! The promised Messiah is here!" That's what they were singing about and expecting and waiting in this festival, but instead, we find the darkness seeking to overcome the light, seeking to silence the witness, and what we find is a dialogue with the religious leaders about Jesus' authority, about His testimony, and about Him speaking these things. Instead of jubilation, we see the crisis created by the presence of light in the midst of darkness. This is a crisis. The light is shining in the darkness and the darkness seeks to destroy it.

In the following verses, from verse 13 all the way through 59, what we see is an account of this conflict, this interaction between the light and the darkness of the world. This conflict goes right through these verses, all the way through John 8:13-59. Let's look carefully at what's going on in these verses. Let's take, first of all, 13 through 20. Take a look there with me, because what we see is the darkness rejects the Light of Life. The darkness rejects the very Light of Life.

In these first verses, we see that the world's judgment leaves us in darkness. The world and all human experience, even religious experience, is a world of darkness; and, therefore, the light cannot be validated based on the world and the darkness' rules. Jesus is the truth, the one sent by the Father, in whom is light and life. The world cannot apply its tests and proofs to His testimony. We must come to the light and turn away from darkness. Augustine said, "We were born blind from Adam, and we have need of Him who enlightens."

Moving on and looking carefully at 21 through 30, we see another aspect of the world. The world's wisdom leads us to our death. The world's judgments leave us in darkness. The world's wisdom leads us to our death. The world and all human wisdom is organized around a false center. It is organized around man. It is a man-centered worldview. We see everything from our own perspective and, therefore, are incapable of comprehending that which is not of this world. The one and only way to pass out of the realm of darkness into the realm of light is to believe in Jesus, the "I am."

In verses 31 through 47, we see that the world's freedom ensures our bondage. The world's freedom ensures our bondage. The world and all human religion is in bondage to our own sinful nature. We seek to release ourselves from bondage, through religion and many different means, by working our way out of this bondage, but that only further confirms our slavery to sin. Who is able to live according to the law? Not you or I. It just confirms our sinfulness and our need for the light.

Then, in verses 48 through 59, we see that the world's glory ends in our dishonor. In a world that is structured to seek self-glory, we struggle to comprehend a Savior that seeks to glorify the Father. The climax of this encounter between light and darkness comes with the final "I am" statement. The response of the religious leaders, when they realize that He is saying that "I am God," is to pick up stones and try to automatically inflict the punishment from their law for blasphemy: Death by stoning. You see, even religion in its purest form, under the light of Christ, exposed by Christ, is shown to belong, not to the light but to the darkness, because it is our attempt to work ourselves to God.

Throughout these verses in John 8, we see the rejection of the light by those who claimed to be in the light. Those that claimed to be able to see were actually blind and in darkness. How does Jesus respond to this rejection? How does He respond to this? The Light's only response to the darkness is to shine. The Light's only response to the darkness is to shine. We see this patterned in the way Jesus responds. Jesus persistently continues to shine the truth that He is the light of the world.

Look at the "I am" statements that He declares repeatedly, again and again, to these Pharisees, teachers of the law, that know these passages. "*I am the light of the world...Unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins...When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he...Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.*" You see, light is self-evident: it attests to its own presence. It doesn't need to be validated by another source; it is the source. Jesus is the source of all life. He is the illuminator Himself. He is the power and the light in His being. All He must do is shine, and in so doing, He dispels the darkness.

John's purpose for writing the whole Gospel of John is to shine the light of Christ to all people. In John 20:31, he says, "*But these...*" talking about the whole book, "*...are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*"

The Light Shines

We can follow the Light of Christ and become Sons of Light.

Again, in John 12:35-36, we find John calling people to the light. *"So Jesus said to them, 'The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.'"* The good news is that we do not have to remain in darkness. We can follow the light of Christ and become sons of Light. You and I do not have to remain in darkness, but we can become sons of Light.

Paul says it this way in 2 Corinthians 4:6, *"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* This is the good news. The light has come into the world. We no longer have to live in the darkness. We can turn from the darkness of our sins and trust in the one who spoke all creation into being. God can turn the darkness of our lives into the light of day. Coming to faith in Jesus is not a blind leap into the darkness; it is a joyous leap into the light of Christ Himself.

If you are not a Christ-follower, if you have never turned from your sins and trusted in Christ, I call you today to turn from your darkness and your sins. Trust in the light. This same Jesus that said, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* He is the same one that gave His life on the cross as payment for your sins and my sins. We are under judgment and condemnation, but God has made a way for you to be restored to the Father. Turn from darkness and trust in Christ. Believe in the Light and become a son of light today.

Just as my friend, when we were out in the jungle without light in darkness, called out to me and said, "I see the light! I see the light!" you are surrounded by people here in this room who have seen the light. I have seen the light. Others have seen the light. Friend, we have seen the light. Come with us to Jesus. He, Jesus, is the one who is God's Word, who is God, and who was with God before all time began.

Christ-follower, this Jesus is the one whom we are to declare to others. The purpose of our salvation is to bear light to Christ. Sons of Light dispel the darkness. Sons of Light dispel darkness. You and I dispel darkness. The business of light is to banish darkness; that is what light does. We too, who carry the light of Christ, bear witness to the light; and in that way we too become the light of the world. Proclaim the light. Shine the light of Christ to all nations.

1 Peter 2:9 says, *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into marvelous light."* Christ-follower, tell others about this marvelous light. You don't need a Ph.D. in evangelism. All you need to do, believer, is to tell God's story and tell the story about how God has taken you out of darkness into light. He has shown in your life the light of the world; shine that to those around you.

Even out in Central Asia, where we worked for several years among radical Muslims who would face jihad for the sake of killing believers, even among them, I have found that we can speak powerfully about how God has brought us out of darkness into light. No one can tell you that what God has done in your life is not true. The story of God's grace at work in

your life can be a powerful glimpse for others to the light of Christ. Tell your story. Tell the story of God. Tell what He has done.

When Jesus lives in us, we have light, and we become light to the world. Jesus continues to be the source of all light. We simply reflect His light. This is the Father's plan for our lives. This is the purpose and the reason for our salvation. In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus says, "*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 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.*"

The people in darkness, people who have not seen the light, are not just imaginary masses of nameless, faceless people off somewhere thousands of miles away, but they are the people among whom you live and work and play every single day. We all know people living in spiritual darkness. They need the light of Jesus. Do not hide your light, Christ-follower. Weave elements of the gospel into your everyday conversation. Redeem every moment of life for the sake of the gospel. Speak of what God has done in your life.

Don't just invite people to church; introduce people to Jesus. Introduce people to what He has done in your life, the light that Christ has shone into your own life, and how He can do that in their life as well. Call out to people, telling them that you see the light. Say, "I see the light." Don't just stay in the camp, enjoying the light. Take your light and go out in the night of the jungle, out to the world in darkness, and lead them back to the light. This is the purpose for which you have been saved. Shine your light in the darkness.

Sons of Light dispel darkness, but sons of Light also shine His light to all nations. This has been God's plan from the very beginning. Right beginning with Abraham, the plan was that his people would be a blessing to all peoples. This is reinforced in Isaiah 49:6, where it says, "*It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.*" We are to be a light to all nations; bear witness to God's light to all nations. This is the purpose and plan of God for your salvation. We are to lead to all nations, all peoples, so that they may see the light of Christ.

Jesus told Paul, as recorded in Acts 26:18, that He was sending him out to the nations. He said, "*to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.*" Each of us must order our lives by praying and giving and going, to shine His light to all nations. Even in the world today, there are still over 6,000 unreached people groups living in darkness, with little to no access to the light of Christ.

Make your life count according to God's plan; and God's plan is that we would glorify Him by making disciples of all nations, all peoples. Bear the light. Bear the light. Now, bearing the light is not an action by which we put forth our power or our wisdom to conquer the darkness. Instead, it is an action of shining the light of His power, by His Spirit, to all nations, all peoples. It is what He is doing. It is His mission. It is not our work; it is God's work. All we have to do is simply allow Him to shine His light through us, and this is a mission that is worth our lives; it is worth all of our lives.

The light of the Lamb will illuminate His people in His presence for all eternity.

Now, it's worth our lives to go out into the darkness of this world for one reason, and that reason is that one day...one day the light of the Lamb will illuminate His people in His presence for all of eternity. You see, all of eternity we will bask in the light in the glory of

the Father. Now, for a little while, you and I are surrounded by darkness, but one day not so. One day we will bask in the light in the glory of Christ.

Revelation 21:22-26 tell us about this. It says,

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need for sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day – and there will be no night there. They bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

So go out into the world. Go out into the darkness and shine your light, for one day we will gather around the one true Light for all eternity, and we will praise Him for all eternity in the light of His glory, in His honor, in His presence. That is what we will do throughout all of eternity. Jesus is the light of the world, and He shines His light in our lives; and we are to shine that light in the midst of the darkness. He is the light of life. He has come into the world, and darkness has not overcome it.

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