

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD **John 1:1-5, 9-12; John 8:12**

(MEV) **John 1:1-5, 9-12:** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were created through Him, and without Him nothing was created that was created. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. ⁵ The light shines in darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it. ⁹ The true Light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was created through Him, yet the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. ¹² Yet to all who received Him, He gave the power to become sons of God, to those who believed in His name. **John 8:12:** Again, Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life."

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Al Fasol was one of my professors at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He tells the true story of a man who generally went to sleep in church. One Sunday, he experienced a rude awakening. He dropped off like usual, only this time a power outage left the auditorium in total darkness. His pastor did not use notes to preach and kept right on preaching. Somewhere toward the sermon's end, this drowsing man awoke. He rubbed his eyes but couldn't see a thing. He heard the preacher and could feel his wife and daughter on both sides of him, but everything was pitch-black. In a state of panic he stood up and declared, "Help me, I'm blind!" Laughter quickly filled the darkened church of this much embarrassed snoozer.

Physical darkness is not always a bad thing. It helps us to sleep better. If you've ever had a job on the so called "graveyard shift" requiring you to be up all night and sleep days, you know what this can do to sleep disruption. A few minutes of darkness can also be soothing in the midst of a headache or after being outside for hours on an especially bright day. Without nighttime darkness, we couldn't see with our own eyes the mystic beauty of the stars, the silvery moonlight, or behold the vastness of our universe testifying to our Creator's majestic power! But too much darkness can be a bad thing. Winter is a drag to some extent to one in five Americans, when nighttime darkness far exceeds daylight. Some even suffer what's known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a type of depression stemming from decreased daylight. SAD afflicts nearly 10% of Alaskans, where the sun doesn't shine for months on end. Symptoms include lethargy, a heightened desire for sleep, cravings for carbohydrates, feelings of melancholy, fuzzy thinking, and loss of libido or sociability. We are also more prone to Vitamin D deficiency in the darkest months. Direct sunlight converts a chemical in our skin into an active form of Vitamin D. Vitamin D is necessary for our bodies to absorb calcium, one of the main building blocks of our bones. Vitamin D also has a role in our nervous, muscular, and immune systems. Prominent symptoms of Vitamin D deficiency include fatigue, weight gain, poor concentration, and headaches, in addition to more serious health risks.

God designed our bodies to thrive on physical light. He also He created us "in His own image," in His moral "likeness" (**Genesis 1:26-27**), to thrive on the "light" of His moral guidance. The moral aspect of darkness is always bad. Certain crimes flourish in the dark—vandalism, tagging, theft, and assault—when there's less chance of perpetrators being seen in the act or witnesses recognizing them. **Jesus** declared in **John 3:20** (NIV): "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed." People of **Jesus'** day dreaded the darkness much more than we do today. They had no electric lamps, street lights, spotlights, or flashlights. They used oil lamps in their homes and businesses, which gave off meager light at best. Wild animals, wicked people, or evil spirits lurked in the darkness or in their imaginations, ready to attack them without warning. Prior to the improved lighting provided by natural gas and electricity, which did not become common until the last 150 years, people's schedules revolved much more around the rising and setting of the sun. They were often up with the morning sun and retired to the safety of their homes or the comfort of their beds soon after nightfall.

People in **Jesus'** day so valued light that they held special light celebrations. As part of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jews celebrated "The Illumination of the Temple." It took place in the Court of Women, near the center of Herod's Temple complex, atop the Temple Mount overlooking Jerusalem. Four menorahs (candelabras of seven branches) towering 75' high stood in this Court. When darkness descended, these candelabras were lit, illuminating the Temple courtyard and much of Jerusalem all the night long. God commanded observance of the Feast of Tabernacles. Faithful Jews were to construct temporary shelters of tree and palm branches, to remind them of His faithful care over them in their years of wilderness wanderings prior to entering the Promised Land that is now Israel (**Leviticus 23:33-43**). The flaming brilliance of these menorahs recalled the "pillar of fire" by which God unfailingly guided Israel through the wilderness (**Exodus 13:21-22**). This dramatic "Illumination of the Temple" reminded Israel God had promised to send His Light, the Messiah (Christ) to a sin-darkened world; to release them from personal and spiritual bondage and restore their joy. The Feast of Tabernacles was either in progress or had just ended when **Jesus** uttered His memorable words recorded in **John 8:12**: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life." The Greek text of the New Testament uses a double negative to express **Jesus'** emphatic promise, "Whoever follows Me shall *not* walk in the darkness." This does not mean we'll never experience dark times of stress, confusion, or trial. **Jesus'** promise to us is that He will "never" (NIV) or, "by no means" abandon us or fail to guide us faithfully by the light of His Presence through all difficult times; the darkness of sin or Satan will never fully defeat or reclaim us.

A little boy forgot his lines in a Sunday School presentation. His mother, sitting in the front row to prompt him, gestured and formed the words silently with her lips, but it didn't help. Her son's memory was blank. Finally, she leaned forward and whispered the cue, "I am the light of the world." The child beamed proudly and with great feeling and a loud, clear voice said, "My mom is the light of the world." At that moment, his mom truly was the light of *his* world. But **Jesus** made an even more assuring and enduring promise to us when He declared, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life." Can He back up His promise? Yes, for, "He was in the beginning with God.³ All things were created through Him, and without Him nothing was created that was created.⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the light of mankind."

On this Easter sunrise morning, we celebrate "the Light of the world" dawning in our lives with the promise to dispel all moral darkness and evil that threatens to overshadow us. We've all experienced such darkness and shadows; the darkness of fear, depression, or addiction; the darkness of unemployment or financial difficulty; the darkness of broken relationships or death. And yet with the hope of the risen Christ dawning in our hearts, whose "life [is] the light of mankind," all issues that threaten us with darkness somehow look different. When we view them in the light Christ provides us, we gain a new perspective and the eternal hope that all shall be well for us in the end, and that nothing is too great for God in Christ **Jesus** to overcome in our behalf! His "light shines in darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it."

There's an excerpt from John Bunyan's novel, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which illustrates this quite well. It goes something like this (adapted): "Then I saw in my dream that the Interpreter took Christian by the hand, and led him into a place where there was a fire burning against a wall, and a person standing by it, always casting water on it, to quench it; yet the fire was always burning higher and hotter. Then Christian asked, 'What does this mean?' The Interpreter answered, 'This fire is the work of grace that is formed in the heart. The one that casts water upon it, to extinguish it and put it out, is the Devil; but as you see, the fire still burns higher and hotter, and you shall also see the reason for that.' The Interpreter took Christian to the backside of the wall, where he saw a man with a bowl of oil in his hand, which he also threw continuously, but secretly, into the fire. Then Christian asked, 'What does this mean?' The Interpreter answered him, 'This is Christ, who continually, with the oil of His grace, maintains the work already begun in the heart, against which the Devil's work can do nothing, and the souls of Christ's people prove gracious still.'"

The joy of Easter morning is that if we give Christ His rightful place as our Creator and Savior in our hearts, His light will shine in us and upon us, even amidst trials of greatest darkness; even in the most difficult times. When we truly believe this, Christ's light will not only begin to dispel the darkness, but His life will transform our lives as well! "He was in the world, and the world was created through Him, yet the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. ¹² Yet to all who received Him, He gave the power to become sons of God, to those who believed in His name."

A Hindu trader in India once asked a missionary, "What do you put on your face to make it shine?" With surprise this follower of **Jesus Christ** answered, "I don't put anything on it!" His questioner began to lose patience and said insistently, "Yes, you do! All of you who believe in Jesus seem to have it. I've seen it in the towns of Agra and Surat, and even in the city of Bombay." Suddenly this believer understood, and his face glowed more brightly as he said, "Now I know what you mean, and I will tell you the secret. It's not something we put on from the outside but something that comes from within. It's the reflection of the light of Christ in our hearts."

My prayer as we celebrate Christ's resurrection this morning is that we are not just commemorating something **Jesus Christ** did a long time ago. Let us pray that on this Easter Sunday, we will celebrate what Christ is doing in our lives today, and each and every day; shining His light of life to dispel the darkness of our troubled world, and transforming us into beacons whose faces glow radiantly as we share the message of Christ's "light" and "life" with all people! "Again, Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.'"