

SERMON FOR FEBRUARY 19, 2012

- Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 3:18-4:6
- Theme:** The Christian life is one of growth and transformation into the image of the glory of God in the presence of Jesus Christ.
- Subject:** Manifesting the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ to the world that they might see and know God.
- Desired Objective:** To be God's light shining out of darkness.
- Title:** And God said, "Let there be light."

Can you imagine a place of total darkness—a place where there is no light at all? I have been to such a place. When we lived in West Texas, Linda and I went to Carlsbad, New Mexico to the Carlsbad Caverns. We had a special interest in those caverns because two very dear people in the small church where we ministered once served as guides in the caverns. They worked there in the early days when the Carlsbad Caverns were being developed into a tourist attraction. They told us about the beauty and the vastness of these underground caves. It was something we wanted to see for ourselves.

So when we had an opportunity to visit with a minister friend who pastored a church in Carlsbad we went to see the caverns. True to their description they were very large and they were beautiful. At one point when we had descended deep within the caverns our guide told us that we were in a place no light could penetrate at all. That if you were somehow lost in this dark place and did not have some sort of light to show you the way out, you would be lost forever. To let us know just how dark it would be without any light, he switched off the lights that illuminated the area where we were. The darkness was overwhelming and even fearful. You could see absolutely nothing. Even when your eyes had time to adjust to the darkness you could not see your hand before your face.

There is another place I have been where the darkness metaphorically speaking is just as dark. Only the darkness in this case is spiritual blindness—the inability to see the light of the gospel of the glory of God in Jesus Christ. This place of darkness is all around us and it is a place where many of the inhabitants of this world live continually. In the words of Paul, *“the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from*

seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." When I hear almost daily of the ways that people live without regard for God and God's purpose for their lives I know that darkness abounds. Every day in the world around us the consequences of not knowing the God who created us to be in his image are played out by people who engage in shameful and destructive deeds. Sometimes the evening news is simply overwhelming. We daily hear reports of child abductions and sexual molestations; of murder and suicide; of drug addictions and death; of plots to kill and maim; stories of greed and lust; of dishonesty and theft; of hatred and violence. This is not even to mention those ways that systemic evil is shamefully found in governments, systems and institutions. Darkness abounds in the world around us.

We have all seen that darkness and at times we have dwelt in that darkness. Sometimes even now we live on the edge of darkness with its shadow cast over us. And were it not for the revelation of God in Jesus Christ we would be lost in the darkness forever. But God has spoken as He did in the beginning of creation and has said, *"Let light shine out of darkness."* Beloved, in the beginning God created a great light to shine in the heavens by day and a lesser light to shine by night. In other words God created the sun to rule over the day and the moon and stars to rule over the night in order to give light to the world. But now in the time of the church God has created another source of light to shine out of the spiritual darkness that exists in our world. It is the light of his glory shining forth through his people. This light is not our light but rather reflects the glory of God's light in Christ, who reveals to us the will of God. It is this light God commands now to shine out of darkness.

This, of course, lays a special burden upon those who are the people of God, the church. It is to us the glory of God has been revealed through the gospel. We have heard the good news of God's love in Christ and like Peter, James and John on the mount of Transfiguration, we have turned our faces toward him in order that we might behold his glory. And God has now made possible what was not possible before. We can with unveiled faces see the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror. Paul has used the idea of a veil in chapter 3 to speak of the difference between the old covenant given under Moses and the new covenant given by the Spirit of God to the church. The covenant under Moses came with glory. When Moses descended from the mountain where he

had received the law, his countenance reflected the glory of the God in whose presence he had been. His face so much reflected that glory that he had to wear a veil in order not to frighten the people. But it was according to Paul a veil to hide a fading glory, a glory destined to be set aside for a much more permanent glory revealed in Christ. So Paul can now say of the church, *“And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.”*

It would be difficult to place too much emphasis on the phrase, *“are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another”*. This is Paul’s way of describing that work of God that makes it possible for light to shine through us on a world of darkness. I am afraid that many of us in the church today are like flashlights whose batteries are almost dead. We are still able to give some light but it is barely enough to show the way. This is not what God commanded when He said, “Let light shine out of darkness.” Like the brilliant rays of the rising sun, God wants his glory to be seen in all of its power and magnificence.

Beloved, for that to happen you and I have to be willing subjects of God’s constant transformation. The truth is that our reflective powers can become dull and diminished through time. We don’t mean for that to happen but it does when we do not pay attention to our calling and purpose. The Christian life is always one of growing and conforming more to the image of Jesus. None of us has arrived yet at where God wants us to be. So God works to transform us from one degree of glory to another. The purpose of this work is not simply to make of us better people, though that will surely happen. The purpose is that we might shine more brilliantly and give to a world that lives in darkness *“the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”*.

Light if it is light always provides a contrast to the darkness. It reveals what otherwise cannot be seen, in other words what the darkness hides. When I worked at the Charter School one of my jobs was to oversee the Child Nutrition program. Because of that I was required to attend yearly workshops offered by the Federal Government and the State. At one of those workshops our hands were sprayed with some sort of spray and then we were told without any explanation to go and wash them. When we came

back the director of the workshop had a special light to shine upon our hands. The light revealed what we could not otherwise see. It showed how much of the spray still remained on our hands. Of course, it was an object lesson about the importance of thoroughly washing your hands in the preparation of meals. But it was something we could not see without the light.

What Paul proclaims in our text is good news for us and for the world. Every now and then we hear of survival stories—of people lost at sea in the night or trapped beneath the rubble of an earthquake collapsed building or of someone entombed miles below ground after a coal mine explosion. In those dark places they have said what you long for is the glimmer of light, for the dawn to come, for the sun to shine again. And when it does there is a feeling of indescribable joy.

There are similar dark places of despair and hopelessness in this world where people long to see the light. Many as Jesus said are like sheep gone astray. They have lost their way. They are caught in addictions and in ways of living that not only harm themselves but also others. Greed, anger, lust and violence are the daily diet of their lives. They are lost in a dark place. But God has said, “Let light shine out of darkness” and because of Jesus it does. Jesus makes known to us the better way of God’s truth and life. For all who wait for the long night of darkness to end and a new day to come, this is very good news!

Beloved, when God commands light to shine out of darkness we who are the church have to understand that God is commanding the light of Christ to shine through us. This does not mean that in God’s estimation we now live perfect, sinless lives or that we are now perfect examples of what God wants in human behavior. It means rather that by the mercy of God we have light to share with the world because of Jesus. Once we also were in darkness, but God has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in Jesus Christ. It is this light we give by God’s command to the world.