

Be Light to a Dark World

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As you approach this new year, what are you focusing on for your personal life changes? Have you made any resolutions? Are you seeking to make any changes? Do you have any goals or targets you would like to accomplish?

As your pastor, I have the task of directing us to a purpose. I have two purposes I would like to propose.

2019

1. Reduce our debt.

We are carrying a large debt from the renovation. Debt limits our ability to apply money to ministries. So, I would like to encourage us to work at reducing our debt by giving to the renovation fund.

2. Reveal Christ to our world.

If there is any real reason for being a church it is to make Christ known to our world. In the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20) we are told to go make disciples. In Acts 1:8, we are told to be witnesses from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. What are we to witness? We are to witness that Jesus is the Christ and he has eternal life for those who believe in him.

Here is part of the Apostle John's witness:

John 1:1 NIVO

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

² **He was with God in the beginning.**

³ **Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.**

Here, John connects Jesus with God as creator. He existed in the beginning and was part of the creation. John purposely begins with the same phrase as Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning" so we will see the connection.

John 1:4-5 NIVO

⁴ **In him was life, and that life was the light of men.**

⁵ **The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.**

In Him was life, and that life was the light of all men.

The Theme I would have us adopt for this new year is Be Light to a dark world. Specifically, reveal the light of Jesus to the lost world around you.

I have in mind here, that we purposely find ways to make Jesus known to our world which lives in darkness.

How can we purposely make the life of Jesus known to those around us?

1. We can be light making Jesus known to those around us.

If we want to know what it means to be disciples we should begin by looking at the activities of the first disciples of Jesus. What did they do? What were they committed to?

Have you ever considered that world was in total darkness in terms of knowing God when Jesus sent the disciples into the world? They did not live in a Christian nation. Over the centuries, Christianity shaped the morals and ethics of nations. Yet, when it began, that was not in place. The first disciples shared Christ with a pagan world.

We are concerned because our nation, which was once characterized as a Christian nation, has become more like a pagan nation. *Imprimus*, and online journal, says our nation is in a civil war of values. Unless a spiritual awakening breaks out, we might not see a change.

The darkness of paganism oppresses us. Yet, we must decide what we will do about it. Will we withdraw into a holy huddle while the world drives by? Will we seclude ourselves so we don't have to deal with the lifestyles we don't like?

Let's go back and ask how the first disciples sought to share the news of Jesus with their dark world. How can we be light in a place of darkness?

I am preparing to teach New Testament Survey this semester. So, I have been going over much of the New Testament material. We have four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Most people want to know who wrote first and when. I think a better question is to ask, why? Why did they write Gospels? What is in a Gospel? What makes it a Gospel?

Consider John's Gospel. Why did he write it? John tells us why he wrote his Gospel.

John 20:30-31 NIVO

³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

³¹ But these are written 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 Apostle John tells us his purpose in writing the Gospel. He wrote so people could believe in Jesus Christ and have life in his name. John purposed to make the light of salvation in Jesus be known to the dark world he lived in. He did not tell everything Jesus did. He wrote what was necessary so people could come to saving faith.

What purposes do you live for?

If you are a believer, what purpose orients your activities? Do you live for success? Health and wealth? Do you live to be happy?

Living for internal instead of eternal purposes is always short sighted. Living for God's kingdom and seeking to lead people into that kingdom is the only lasting fulfilment to life.

Be light to the dark world about you.

2. We can be light by being full of the life of Jesus and refusing the darkness of the world.

If you are saved, you have the life and the light of Jesus in you. His life gives light to your soul. His life removes the darkness of sin.

This life is more than religious fervor. It is more than a life of religious rules. This life is Christ *alive* in us. When you come to faith, you are born from above, by the power of God into a new life. It is a new birth. As Jesus says, "You must be born again." (John 3:3) It is both a new birth and a birth that comes by the power of God above.

When you are born again, you are a living, spiritual being. The Holy Spirit has come into your soul and has made you a new creation. The Holy Spirit makes Jesus known to you. He also sanctifies you by leading you to put away the darkness of sin. This is the light John is speaking of. Whereas sin is darkness, light is the removal of the old sin patterns. If you want to be characterized by having more light, then you must allow the Holy Spirit to lead you into transformation of what is in you.

I believe this light in us is real.

From a flesh view, we are skin and bones. When we look at one another, we see skin and clothes. We do not see the light. At night, we do not glow in the dark. So, from a flesh perspective, we cannot see the light. However, I believe the light is real that is in us.

It is light that lives in the spiritual realm. When you are saved, you receive the life of Jesus, and his life is light.

Consider, for example, the transfiguration of Jesus. When he was on the mountain with Peter, James and John, he was transfigured. That is, his body began to glow in a bright light. He appeared with other glowing persons, Moses and Elijah. I think God opened the eyes of the disciples to see Jesus and the others as they appear in the spiritual realm.

I believe we are beings of light that radiate the life of God in us. Other people are affected by the life of Jesus radiating out of us. The quality of the light that comes out of us is determined by the amount we are characterized by the life of Jesus. Even though people don't see the light with their eyes, they are still affected by our light.

During the Ph.D. program, I worked for a security company as a security guard. I often had to work at hotels. One of the hotels had a bar which had happy hour. It was not the typical place you would find a minister. I was not dressed as a minister. I had a uniform. One night, I was standing outside the door to the hotel and I was asked by one of the workers, "You are a minister, aren't you?" Yes, I said, how did you know? "I just sensed it," he said. I was dressed in a uniform. Yet, the worker saw something different in me.

If we are going to share the light of Jesus it will help if we are living as light in Jesus. It is as important to be full of Jesus' life as it is to seek to persuade people of the gospel.

Let us be light to a dark world, by living in Jesus' life.

I must make clear, that sharing the light of Jesus is more than knocking people over with the Bible, being obnoxiously religious, or adhering to a religious code of things what we don't do. Jesus was none of these things. The first disciples were none of these things.

At the same time, we must not become afraid of telling people what we believe about Jesus. We must not let the oppression of darkness make us afraid to speak out about Jesus. Yet, we must speak and we must speak in love.

Nor is sharing about Jesus something we do in a fleshly sort of way. By fleshly I mean we run out with our mouths flapping, doing our work in our strength, rather than depending on the Holy Spirit to lead us.

This year I have two goals for us.

1. Work to reduce the debt.

2. Work to share Jesus with our world.

What will you do to join in the effort of making Jesus' eternal life known to people?

It is a new year. Let us do new things.