

“Is the Light Too Bright?”—John 3:19-21

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Is the Light Too Bright?”, is John 3:19-21. These are the words of Jesus: *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. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

What causes people to run and hide? When encountering impending danger a person may run and hide in order to protect himself. One may hide from others to avoid the consequences of getting caught because of disobeying the law. Avoidance behavior is a form of running and hiding to ensure you do not have to interact with another person or situation. It is common for people to run and hide even from themselves by various coping mechanisms, sometimes very destructive and damaging to themselves and those around them.

So, what does cause a person to run and hide? Maybe a fair

psychological answer might be: Feelings of guilt and insecurity in the midst of fear which is fueled by judgment and criticism. However, if we turn to the One Who knows psychology more than we could even imagine, the answer is rather clear. Whatever causes a person to run and hide, and the ways in which he does so, is ultimately an expression of his sinful heart. Following their disobedience to Yahweh's command, the sinful heart of Adam and Eve revealed itself by running to hide from the LORD, even if they couldn't analyze why they did so (cf. Genesis 3:8-13). Even though it was clear to Yahweh why they ran and hid, it was probably baffling to Adam and Eve why their behavior had taken such a turn for the worse. The "light" was just too bright to endure the presence of the LORD **and** sin at the same time.

Jesus' words in our text were spoken during a conversation with a man named Nicodemus about the presence of God in the midst of a sinful world. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a member of the group who was trying to kill Jesus. We're told that Nicodemus spoke up on His behalf, though, in the midst of the Jewish ruling council (cf. John 7:50-52) and helped give Jesus an honorable burial after His death (cf. John 19:39-42). According to John 3:2, Nicodemus started this discussion with this statement: *Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.* Whatever Nicodemus' perspective of Jesus may have been,

the miraculous signs which Jesus had been performing were, for him, legitimate indications of God's presence among them. Jesus was the intersection of the presence of God and a world living in the darkness of sin.

Using the imagery of light and darkness, Jesus revealed God's Will for all people as being embodied in a relationship with His Son, Who was standing in the flesh before Nicodemus, and not bound up in a religious system. While *God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him* (cf. John 3:17), this saving work would involve judgment upon the sin in sinful people. Jesus was sent into this rebellious world in order to deal with God's eternal condemnation on us because of our sin. In verse 19 of our text Jesus says: *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.* At the appearance of the light judgment is inevitable and condemnation is felt.

Just as a group of people bent on rebellious living cannot and will not tolerate one who objects to their behavior, so a world in the clutches of darkness cannot and will not tolerate the One Who reveals it's sinful heart. And that's exactly what the presence of God in the Person of Jesus does! Jesus said in John 9:5 → *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.* Contrary to public opinion

Jesus' presence is not that which condemns a person. Rather, as *the Light of the world* (cf. John 8:12) He acts in judgment to reveal the true nature of our human sinful hearts. It's your own sin which condemns you in the presence of the light of God's holiness. Is the light too bright? Or is the issue that your sin is exposed?

In our text Jesus says that the light which shines on us with His presence will elicit particular actions in people. He says in verse 20 that *everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed*. It is your sins which make you run and hide from the light of the presence of Jesus. Even if you feel that you've been mistreated by sinful victimization, the light of the presence of Jesus will reveal the sin which that sin may be breeding in your own heart and life, keeping you imprisoned in the darkness. Such exposure of sin is what you experience every time you encounter an attack upon or rejection of the Person & Work of Jesus in your life.

You can experience something different in the light of the presence of Jesus! He says in verse 21 of our text: *But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God*. When you trust in what Jesus did to deal the with condemnation upon you because of your sin you will confess your sin and rebellion. It will *be clearly seen* that you don't

have to live a *condemned* life. On the cross Jesus experienced the darkness of sin in all its weight when His Father forsook Him and He experienced your hell for you. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that this was darkness in all its eternal depth. It says: *For our sake God **made Him to be sin** Who knew no sin. Why? So that in Him **we might become the righteousness of God.*** The condemnation upon you and your sin has been dealt with once and for all in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ!

Is the light too bright for you? Absolutely! You will struggle in its brightness because you are still a sinner this side of heaven. Your sinful nature does not want to be exposed by the Light of Jesus Christ because then you will have to face your sinfulness and rebellion against God **again**. Ephesians 5:13-14 reassures you that *when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light.* At the same time **it encourages you** to *awake . . . and arise from the dead*—that place where you live a life of works reflecting the darkness of sin—**and Christ will shine on you.** He will shine on you with the light of His forgiveness of sins and His wonderful grace!

You do not have to view Jesus as sent by God only to point out your sin, rebellion and unbelief. If you view His purpose only in this way it will lead you to run and hide further into the darkness of your

sin and away from His grace. Such superficial acknowledgment of Jesus' Person & Work will drive a person to avoid the light of the forgiveness of God in Christ Jesus. It will keep one away from the means of grace as distributed in the gathered assembly of believers through Word and sacrament. That's why we're here in this place at this time. The Holy Spirit has brought you to this place by revealing the need for the forgiveness of your sins as it is distributed.

John began his gospel with this truth in John 1:4-5 → *In Christ was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* Notice, ***the darkness has not overcome it***. It's a confession of Jesus' victory over the power of sin, death and the devil for you, even as you have to live in the midst of the presence of sin, death and the devil. God sent Jesus into this sin-darkened world not just to make your sin plain to you but as an act of His grace to deal with the power of sin, death and the devil **for you once and for all!**

Placing your faith completely in Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection means that you will have no problem facing up to your sin because its condemning nature is finished in Christ. Confession of sin is an act of faith based upon the sufficient sacrifice of Jesus. Thus, we gladly live in the brightness the Light of Jesus where we experience God's forgiveness of sins and, empowered by His Spirit,

we get to serve Him in works which openly display Christ. Amen.

At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Walk as children of light

(for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true),

and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

(Ephesians 5:8-10)

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