

We Have Seen the Light!

2 Corinthians 4:5–6⁵ For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

In Christ Jesus, who loves us and gave himself for us, dear fellow Redeemed,

At Fire Station Number 6 in Livermore, California there hangs an odd-looking globe that has been serving the community since 1901. I'm talking about a light bulb that's been "burning" for the past 119 years, making it the earth's oldest functioning electric light. Would you believe that people come from all over the planet to see this curiosity? And, when they do, they take selfies to prove that they have "seen the light."

Today you and I have the opportunity to see something far greater and much older than that light bulb. Through our study of Scripture, we get to glimpse the shining glory of our God so that when we leave here today we will be able to say: "We Have Seen the Light!" 1) by the grace of God. 2) in the face of Christ.

Of course, it is the very nature and purpose of light to dispel darkness. This is the thought our God has in mind as he carefully sketches the word pictures before us today. Imagine each of us lost and alone in a place where the darkness is so deep, so dense, that you cannot see your hand before your face. You can't see where to go. You don't know which way to turn. That would be frightening, right?

It doesn't take much imagination to draw a comparison between the scenario I just described and the way we often feel as we live our day to day lives. Troubles and heartaches darken our doorsteps. The pain of failed relationships, the burden of guilt we bear, the weight of our worries, all these things and so many more descend on our lives like a fog of thick darkness. We don't know where to go or which way to turn. This is frightening, even terrifying at times.

Our situation is not unique. Listen to how a king named Solomon described these same feelings long ago: "**As a man comes, so he departs, and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind? All his days he eats in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger.**" (Ecclesiastes 5:16-17). It all sounds so hopeless, doesn't it? And it would be if we were left to our own devices. This is what Paul is getting at when he writes to us: "**For we do not preach ourselves...**" (2 Corinthians 4:5-6). What is he saying? Simply this: "I can't and won't put myself forward as the answer to your problems." Paul is not a self-help guru who has figured out how to pull himself up by his bootstraps and now wants to share the secret of success with all his readers. Paul doesn't preach himself because he knows very well that he is as much of a mess as the next person, even more so. In fact, that's exactly what he says in one of his letters in which he confesses to be "**...the worst of sinners...**" (1 Timothy 1:16).

Just like that, Paul puts his finger on the source of all this darkness we've been talking about. Sin is the problem—sin around us and sin in us. Sin is nothing other than defiance of God and his

will for our lives. With fists raised to heaven, we, as individuals and collectively as the human race, tell our Creator God to get lost. We know what's best for us. We don't care what God wants. So, we act on the impulses of our greed and lust. We let resentment and anger consume us. We take revenge where we can get it, whether it shows itself in a case of road rage or any of the other terrible things we say and do to those around us. And then for good measure, when the hurt and pain become too much and the guilt too great, we look to escape it all by turning to the addiction or addictive behavior of our choice. What does this get us? Darkness - the lonely, empty, anxious darkness we dread so much. And it only gets worse. You can't raise a fist to God, you can't defy him day after day and expect he's ok with that. He's not! If we insist on dwelling in darkness here and now, darkness will become the fate we earn for ourselves forever. Maybe you know that the Bible defines the sinner's death in hell as the outer "**...darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**" (Matthew 8:12).

This is why Paul could not, did not preach himself as the answer to his readers' sin. This is why we cannot proclaim and dare not pretend to be the answer to our own sin. There's nothing we can do to escape the darkness that is in us and around us. No matter how hard we try, we just sin more. What an awful note on which to end a sermon. But that's not where it ends – not for Paul and not for us. Listen! "**...we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.**" (2 Corinthians 4:5).

While it's true that Paul is not a self-help guru of any sort, it doesn't mean he has no help to offer. On the contrary, he has the best help, the only help there is – help that found him when he was a lost as lost could be. It happened as Paul traveled along a dusty road to place called Damascus. Paul, then known as Saul, was on a "search and destroy" mission. His objective was to find and kill those who followed Christ. Talk about defying God! It was in the middle of that mission that the Risen Jesus turned the tables on Paul. **As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.** (Acts 9:3–5).

In the hours and days that followed, Paul experienced firsthand the love of God in Christ. For God had sought him out, not to punish, but to pardon him. Suddenly everything was different for Paul. Guilt gave way to peace; worry gave way to hope; darkness gave way to light. Yes, Paul had seen the light, quite literally. And it all happened by the grace of God, by love unearned and undeserved.

God's love still works this way. We sinners can never hope to earn his favor. We'll never deserve his love, and yet the light of that love seeks and finds us, not because of what we are, but because of who God is and because of what God does, working through an amazing cycle! Consider how the light of God's love finds and transforms Paul. That love is so compelling, that Paul cannot keep it to himself. In fact, for the sake of Christ's love which has given him new and unending life, Paul becomes a servant of sinners, proclaiming this love to everyone he knows and meets. And so that cycle continues to this day. First, God's love brings sinners to know Jesus and then it compels them to share Jesus with the next needy soul lost and alone in sin's darkness.

Sound familiar? This is your story, mine too. When we were not expecting it, but in such desperate need of it, the light of God's love found us through efforts of someone who served us by bringing Jesus to us. This didn't happen by chance or accident. In the same love that sent Jesus to

this world, God sent news of Jesus to our hearts and with this message of his love, he performed a miracle. **For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts... (2 Corinthians 4:6).** By his word God brought light to creation’s dark night. By a similar command God kindled the flaming light of faith in our hearts. God did it all in love for us. So we say with great confidence: We have seen the light by the grace of our God!

This light of which Paul writes is not simply some warm or fuzzy feeling. It’s the light of God’s glory – glory that shows itself in different ways at different times. In the Old Testament, God would reveal his glory in flames and smoke. In our gospel reading today, Peter, James, and John saw God’s glory reflected in the brightness of Christ’s face and clothes. Like one born out of time, Paul saw something similar on that road to Damascus. Maybe we wish we could see something like that – the bright light of Jesus’ glory appearing for us on one of our darker days, letting us know that all is well.

Friends, our God gives us all this and more! He gives “**...us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.**” (2 Corinthians 4:6). God’s glory always shines brightest through the love he shows us in Jesus. So when our conscience torments us because of something awful we’ve said or done just recently or in the distant past, God holds before us the face of Jesus, promising that his Son carried our every sin to cross where he claimed our guilt as he own, and then suffered in the darkness of hell so that we will never have to. Because of Jesus, we live forgiven. It’s as if we had never sinned. The peace that this truth brings to our hearts is glorious, is it not?

When troubles come or sickness strikes, when we suffer great loss and there is no one in our lives to make things better, our God is with us. He holds before us the face of Jesus, assuring us in his word: “**He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?**” (Romans 8:32). God says, “I gave you Jesus to save you. In this same love I’ll protect and keep you safe.” The comfort that this promise brings to our hearts is glorious, is it not?

When our days on earth have come to their end and no one else can walk beside us, God holds before us the face of Jesus and so reminds us that the One who died to pay for our sins has risen from the dead. He lives to bring us safely to himself. God sends Jesus to light our path, and better yet, to carry us home so that each of us can say, “**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**” (Psalm 23:4). The joy that this knowledge brings to our heart is glorious, is it not? We have seen the light, by the grace of God, in the face of Christ.

That old light bulb I showed you earlier has grown very tired. It’s a 60-watt bulb that now glows at a mere 4 watts – no brighter than a night light. Time has not been its friend. The time we spend here in a sin-darkened world threatens to do something similar to the light God has placed in us. But our God transcends time and does away with every threat. How? By giving us his Word to read every day and to study together every week. Remember, it was the promise of his love for us in Christ that first brought us to faith. It’s by the power of this same promise that God will keep us his people until that day when see him face to face in the glories of his heaven. God grant this to us all for Jesus’ sake. Amen.