

## ***“See the Light”***

*Acts 9:1-20 • 2 Corinthians 4:1-7*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX  
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Let me ask you something. Where is the darkest place you have ever been? Today we rarely experience real darkness. At night when you turn off the lights there's usually still plenty of light in your bedroom. Your alarm clock, your cable box, that little LED on one of your wall chargers. And then there's the light that comes in through the window from outside, whether it's moonlight or a streetlight or your neighbor who stays up late writing a sermon.

But have you been somewhere really dark? Last year we went camping in the Grand Tetons in Wyoming. Without the city lights we had a spectacular view of the Milky Way and the millions of stars. I remember it being very dark in rural Wisconsin, also. You could easily see the satellites passing overhead. Again, while those places were darker than we experience here, they weren't completely dark. The darkest place I have ever been is Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. They lead you through a network of passages as you descend deeper and deeper underground. The path and many of the features of the cave are lighted so you can see them. Finally, however, you reach a large cavern with rows of benches and everyone takes a seat. At this point the ranger turns off all the lights. You are in total darkness.

When you turn off the lights at night in your house, your eyes will slowly adjust to the darkness and you will be able to see some of the light still coming in. But in that cave there is no light at all. It's complete darkness.

In the Bible, darkness always represents separation from God, the absence of God, or a lack of understanding about God, who is described as light. The Bible begins in Genesis with a description of the universe as chaos, represented by the waters, covered in darkness and God says, "Let there be light." And there was light. John 1, which uses the imagery of Genesis 1 to describe Jesus, says, "In the

beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." But John 3 tells us why God's people didn't receive him when he came into the world. Verse 19 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." The truth is that every one of us chooses darkness over light sometimes. We choose to have less of God in our life. That's the definition of sin – choosing anything in place of loving God with *all* your heart, mind, soul, and strength and loving other people as much as you love yourself.

After sitting in that cave, which is almost as large as our sanctuary, in complete darkness for several minutes you realize that your eyes can't adjust because there is no light at all. At that point the park ranger then lights a small candle, and the most amazing thing happens. A candle usually doesn't put out much light. But that little candle, in that huge, completely dark cave, lights up the entire room. Paul says that's what it's like when God shows up in your life. And he should know.

As we heard earlier from Acts 9, Paul (or Saul, as he was known by his Jewish name at that point) was persecuting Christians. He had convinced the High Priest to give him permission to hunt them down and so he was on his way to Damascus to arrest them. But the resurrected Jesus stops him on the road. Listen again to Acts 9, starting in verse 3: “Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’”

When the risen Jesus appeared to Paul and his companions it was in a bright light. But it wasn't the light that Paul could see that was important. Verse 4 of 2 Corinthians 4 describes Paul's condition before Jesus appeared to him. “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” After his encounter with Jesus, Paul was left blind. His companions led him into Damascus where he sat in darkness – physical darkness and also spiritual darkness – for several days until Jesus sent Ananias who helped Paul understand. His eyes were opened and he could see again. But also the “eyes” of his heart were opened to “see” Jesus for who he is – God in person.

Like Paul, you and I can only understand who Jesus is when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes. In Matthew 16, Jesus asks his disciples who people say he is. They say that some think he's John the Baptist back from the dead, others think he's Elijah or one of the other prophets. Then Jesus asks them, “who do *you* say that I am?” That's the question each one of us must answer. At that point Peter says, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God.” Jesus replies, “flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” In other words, God had opened Peter's eyes and he had seen the light. In 2 Corinthians Paul

says, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” In other words, when you see Jesus for who he truly is you are looking into the face of God, something that Moses couldn't do and live.

And that's why Paul is able to say, “Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.” Ministry is difficult and it's easy to get discouraged. Don't think I'm just talking about my job. Ministry is not just for the so-called professionals. If you are a Christian you are called to be in ministry. Every one of you. Jesus instructed each of us to “go, therefore, and make disciples.” It's hard. Many people don't understand us. Following Jesus is very different from the way the world operates. Some of you understand this discouragement. You have been praying for loved ones for years. You want them to see what you see. You want the light to come on. But Paul says they do not lose heart, they don't get discouraged, because the ministry is by the mercy of God.

His ministry, and your ministry, is what he called in chapter 3 the ministry of the Spirit. He also called it the ministry of righteousness. Last week we talked about how much more glory this ministry has than the ministry of the old covenant. He says that this new covenant is permanent, unlike the old that was already coming to an end when Moses' face was glowing. When you and I come face to face with God in Jesus, we will glow on the inside, even though we have the treasure in clay jars. People will see it. They will be pointed to Jesus who has the surpassing power. That's why we don't need to be discouraged and it's why we don't need to try to trick people into becoming Christians. “We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word.”

We don't need gimmicks or deception to get people to believe. What you and I are called to do is to “proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord,” and

seeing ourselves as servants, literally slaves, of those we are trying to share the good with. So let me conclude with a couple of thoughts. First, if you are still not sure that Jesus is truly God, make a commitment to search out the answer. Ask God to reveal it to you. Read the Scriptures that point to Jesus as the promised Messiah. Read Colossians 1 and the gospel of John. Come talk to me or to any of the elders and we will try to help you. Second, if you *do* know Jesus Christ as Lord, serve others by helping them to experience Jesus for

themselves. Join or start a small discipleship group or Bible study. Invite someone who is far from God to come meet his family. Get involved in the ministry of the church. *We* have this ministry. God does not call us to do it alone. And do not get discouraged. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. See the light and let your light shine.

*Amen.*