

God is Light I John 1:1- 2:2

When you hear the word “light” – what springs to mind? What does the term “light” convey? **Responses from the congregation.**

So John starts – this is the message – God is light. What does this mean? What comes to mind when we hear – God is light? This descriptive term “light” when it’s used in a spiritual or life related way, conveys that God is Pure. Holy. Illuminates. Glows. Reveals. Shines out. Guides. Is truth.

When I was young, just a few short years ago, my parents took us to Carlsbad Caverns. During the tour, the guide had us sit down, and turned off the lights. It was totally black. There was no ambient light. We could not see our hands in front of our eyes. We were warned to stay seated, to not panic, & to grab hold of someone’s hand if we were scared. We were assured the lights would go back on. As a child, it was quite an experience.

When we look around us, it’s a common experience to think about darkness and light. We tie this imagery to all kinds of truths and values and concepts about living. Here are just a few quotes that reflect this.

“There is no denying that there is evil in this world but the light will always conquer the darkness.” (Idowu Koyenikan)

“Always surround yourself with friends that have plenty of light in them. That way, you will always have candles around you when days are dark.” (Suzy Kassem)

Here are three quotes from Seth Adam Smith: “Darkness always tries to hide the truth!” “You can’t defeat the darkness by keeping it caged inside of you.” “Don’t give in to the darkness, for there is so much life ahead of you.”

So it’s not an accident that Scripture and Jesus contrast dark and light. Psalm 119 (105) declares to us, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”

Ephesians reminds us, (5:8) “for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.”

Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit & prophesied about Jesus saying, “because of the tender mercy of our God by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:78-79)

Jesus described his mission by telling us, “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.” (J 12:46) And he described himself by saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (J 8:12)

So it should not surprise us that the Apostle John, who heard Jesus, saw him with his own eyes, and touched him, continues this theme. He announces to us, “This is the message we have heard from Jesus and proclaim to you, that God is light.”

The book of First John does not pull any punches. The author is trying to correct some false doctrine about Jesus that some people were teaching. It might have been that there was a group who considered themselves as intellectual and spiritual elites. They claimed a superior anointing from the Spirit of God. They believed they had a knowledge and a revelation from God they considered an improvement on the gospel message that had been revealed to the apostles and passed down through the church to this stage in its history.

We have a hint in First John, chapter 2, verse 19 that this sect caused a schism with in the

church at Ephesus as they broke away. It's probable that what they were teaching denied the doctrine of incarnation, where Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human. This is a heresy called Gnosticism with various forms. It still exists today.

This is why John starts this book so direct and straight forward. He begins with his credentials, his testimony, his first hand experience, with Jesus. He points out that fellowship with God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ & being in fellowship together with other believers is what the Christian faith is about. John says he is writing this book so that our joy may be complete. And then at the end of First John he writes, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." (5:13)

Light and darkness contrasts are common imagery for good and evil because Jesus and Holy Scripture use it a lot. But people from all over the world use these two terms to contrast good and evil. Also, probably John is relying on the Jewish use of the image of light as a way of explaining God's flawless perfect nature. So this is not just a speculative exercise. It's about character. John is teaching us that Almighty God is the source of truth, authenticity and goodness.

This is in contrast to darkness. When you hear the term "darkness", what comes to mind? What does the word "dark" convey to you? What does it mean spiritually?

(Responses from congregation.)

In Christian spirituality, darkness stands for the very opposite of the Christian life. It stands for the Christ-less life. The dark is hostile to the light. John in the Gospel John says, "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." (1:5) So the dark and light are natural enemies.

Darkness is the symbol of life without Jesus Christ. It means lostness. The person who walks in darkness does not know where they are going. They can't see and can't find their way. The darkness stands for a life of chaos without Jesus. This idea ties into creation, but also connects with the idea that God's light brings order and sense.

Another connection with the word dark, is that of immorality. John in the Gospel quotes Jesus saying to Nicodemus and to us, "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." (3:19)

Paul picks up this theme in Romans: "the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light;" (13:12) So the darkness stands for things that seek the shadows because they cannot stand the light. Please note the armor of light has both a defensive aspect and offensive capabilities.

And the term darkness ties in with more negative aspects. Its character is unfruitful. If darkness grows anything it's spoiled, tainted. The fruit of the Holy Spirit cannot grow and develop in the darkness. We are warned, "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." (Ephesians 5:11)

As we will see as we go through First John, darkness is linked to lovelessness and hate. And Scripture is clear that the dark is where the enemies of Christ and God and the light live. Consistent and rebellious sinners are those for whom the darkness is reserved.

So John is really reacting to this probable church split as well as the new doctrine that the early church had to deal with. He uses the imagery of dark and light, with all its connotations and connections, to remind his

readers and us that there are two clear ways of believing, thinking, acting and living.

There is no middle ground. There is no gray area when it comes to light and darkness. Jesus – God was fully with us in human form on this earth. Bad theology is darkness. Good theology is important. John was emphatic that the spirit within us is not sinless as was being taught by the Gnostics. He is clear it's dangerous to downplay and brush away sin.

And then he sets up a set of contrasts that are listed in your sermon insert. These involve loaded concepts like fellowship, lies and liars, truth, deceiving ourselves, sin, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us. Spend some time mediating on these & the terms light & darkness this week. How do they speak to you?

Alan Culpepper summarizes the message of this section: “This scripture offers us a penetrating exhibition of the dangers of denying the presence of sin in our lives. This denial can take on a variety of forms, all dangerous. How do we deny sin today? By refusing to take God seriously? By assuming that how we live does not matter? By refusing to see how we are compromised and corrupted by impure motives and desires while exposing the dirty laundry of others?”

“The splinter & beam syndrome can be practiced by individuals, nations, ethnic groups, religious denominations or a local church. Perhaps one factor in the contemporary neglect of sin is that we do not seriously believe that any other style of life is possible. We do not actually believe that the Word of Life and Light can enable us to enjoy an entirely different quality of life as the children who share the fellowship of a faithful & just God.”

So how do we live a life bent in a Godward direction, Light oriented direction? Which way are our feet pointed – toward light or toward darkness?

Our scripture today gives us three specific ways, three assurances on how to deal with sin. First we are told, “If we walk in the light as God is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son, cleanses us from all sin.” So this is acting, doing those things that keep us in God's light.

Second, and we will look at this more next week, we are promised, “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” So this is trusting there is a way that our sin, our darkness, when we expose it to the light - cleans us, forgive us & makes us whole.

Third, we are assured “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world.” This calls for trust that the Bible's teaching about Jesus as the Light is true, and that God is powerful enough and loving enough to have solved ours and the world's sin problem.

These are three powerful promises we can count on. We've most likely experienced them in various ways in our days of following Jesus. These three assurances are talking points when we witness and help us explain that there is sin, and that sin does not need to hold us back from a holy life.

Growing up in Taiwan, my parents talked about a belief some people had. They thought if they ran right in front of a vehicle, & timed it just right – they would escape from the demons pursuing them as the vehicle would kill the demons. Fortunately there were not many people who did this. This could be a metaphor for sin. But we don't have to do anything so dangerous and foolish. We can trust in Jesus, the Light of the World, who came to give us joy and life, so that no one who believes in him should stay in darkness.