

“Truth and Light”

One thing I like to do on Mondays, which is my day off, is sweep our floor. I know that might seem a little odd to some of you, but I get a lot of satisfaction out of sweeping. I like to start at the top of the steps, sweep all the dust and dirt down each step until I get to the main floor. Then I work my way from the corners of the room where I meet in the middle with this nice little pile of dirt. I sweep it into the dustpan, then dump it in the trash. I like it. But here's the thing. No matter how much time I spend sweeping that floor on Monday afternoon, by the next morning, when the sun shines directly through the front door, I see about as much dust and dirt that I swept up the day before! When the light is low, everything looks good, and I feel good about my work. But when that sun hits the floor the next morning, the light exposes the truth. I'm not that great of a sweeper.

Light has a way of exposing the truth, doesn't it? It brings things that might not have been seen into focus. Trust me, the floor in the morning light allowed me to see all the dust and crumbs that I missed with almost perfect resolution. And this really helped me. I know it might sound silly, but I was not doing myself, my family or my house any favors by misunderstanding the effectiveness of my sweeping efforts. I needed the truth in order to see what was really going on.

Now, I share this story with you because it made me think about our Advent sermon series that we are kicking off today. Like my sweeping experience, this series also has light, truth and perfect resolution. But this series is not about what we think about the birth of Jesus. This series is based on God's truth about the promised Messiah. His truth spoken through the prophet Isaiah, and the glorious good news that it is for you. And we will be specifically focusing on chapter 9, the wonderful chapter of prophecy that allows us to see the baby born in Bethlehem with perfect resolution. And we begin today with verse 2: *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, in them has light shone.”*

Now these words from Isaiah were written over 700 years before the first Christmas. Around that time, the northern kingdom of Israel had been overtaken by the Assyrians.

The southern kingdom of Judah, including the city of Jerusalem, while safe at the time, was teetering on the edge of invasion and eventual occupation by the Babylonians. God's people as a whole were in great distress, and rightly so. But they could only blame themselves for the cloud of darkness that hung over them because of their sin. It seemed like all was lost, or at least it would be soon. But God loves his people too much for that. So in the middle of what I can only imagine as chaos and hopelessness, God delivers these words of comfort through the mouth of his prophet: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."

But it's kind of interesting, isn't it that Isaiah speaks as if everything had already happened? The light wasn't just coming, it had come. The darkness they walked in wasn't going to be driven away, that had already been done. God makes it clear that the light has come and the darkness has been taken away. Those who used to dwell in the land of darkness, in them has light shone.

How could this be for the people of Israel and Judah who had allowed themselves to fall so far from God? How can this be for you and me who have done the same?

You know, every time I hear this verse, I can't help but think of those miners in Chili who were trapped in the mine after it caved in back in 2010. Remember these guys? There were 33 of them who were literally in the dark trapped 2,300 feet under ground. They all survived after being down there a 69 days. But talk about dwelling in the darkness. I mean, from what they reported, for many days they couldn't see their hands in front of their faces. Can you imagine? No doubt, they all anticipated the worst. But for those 33 who dwelt in the land of darkness, in them light shone, because at the time when I'm sure all hope was lost, rescue crews who had been drilling around the clock, finally made it through.

No doubt God's people back in Isaiah's time anticipated the worst. The darkness was upon them, and there seemed to be no way out. But the whole time, God's truth and the light was upon them. They didn't know it. They couldn't see it. But God's promise of redemption had already begun. And it was for all people. Redemption for the Israelites who rejected the Word of God. Redemption for those minors in Chile. Redemption for your new-age spiritualist sister-in-law. Redemption for your cousin who doesn't really know what he believes. And yes, redemption for you and for me. On all of us the light has shone. This is not an opinion or some kind of a wish we hope will happen. It's God's objective truth for sinners, as the light of the world came among us

born as a baby in Bethlehem. When you really think about all this, isn't it amazing that God would do this for us?

So, why do we act like it's not that big of a thing? Why do our Christmas preparations and plans seem better suited for people who walk in darkness? We all have problems, some way worse than others, I know that. Believe it or not, I read that when one of those miners was finally free, his wife and his girlfriend were there to meet him. Imagine that. The wife apparently left by herself. Now that's darkness many here today can understand. That's darkness that makes people want to just go away and hide. That's darkness that makes us question how anyone in such a position could see this time of the year as joyous, because life as they knew it had been turned upside down. And it's not just infidelity or broken marriages that cause us to retreat. It's the hopelessness many of us feel because of our specific circumstances. It's the guilt and shame of past sins. It's the sadness and heartbreak we experience at the death of a loved one. The grace filled light of the Messiah, for many of us, seems out of reach and out of touch. Jesus? So what....?

But remember my story of sweeping? The light exposes the truth! And while I never thought I would equate sweeping the floor with Jesus, I'm going to do it because the same is true for you. The light of Christ shines on you exposing the truth of everything you are, exposing the truth of everything you've done, exposing the truth of your inability to save yourself no matter how hard you try. And this is actually the best news you will ever hear, even if you feel your problems are worse than anyone else's. Because His light is only for those in darkness, which means His light is for you, me, and everyone.

My friends, no matter what is going on in your life, or the lives of those closest to you this month, this year, or this decade, please remember something. Christmas is about God entering our dark world, broken by our sin to give us another chance— to take us out of the darkness— to give us the assurance of his everlasting love through faith in Him and Him alone! So, I ask you again. Isn't it amazing that God would do this for us? It is.

But between now and December 25, we all won't have smiles on our faces, dancing around, basking in the light of the promised Savior, I assure you. Things will happen. We'll get frustrated with someone or something. We'll worry about all we have to get done, and how much it will all cost. We'll get ticked off at our neighbors because their

inflatable *Yoda* with the Santa hat is blocking the view of our inflatable *Mickey Mouse* riding in Santa's sleigh. We might face surgeries or sickness. Many of us will continue to battle cancer and grieve the loss of loved ones. But through it all, I pray that we remember the words of the prophet Isaiah from chapter 9, verse 2. Maybe we even commit this verse to memory, and say it as a family before a meal, or say it before we go to bed as part of our prayers, because it's as a reminder of God's amazing grace for us. **"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, in them has light shone."** May Jesus, the Christ of the cross, who is the way, the truth, and the life, shine his light on you today and forever. **Amen.**