

# Light and Darkness

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Please turn back with me today to Luke's Gospel chapter 11. It's quite a long section, but I hope to look at the themes that are clearly taught in this passage, particularly I suppose in the light of light and darkness.

But before doing so, I meant to mention the prayer cards that are in the bulletin sheet today, and I've mentioned them at the prayer meeting, and it's simply an encouragement for us to pray specifically for specific requests for St. Columbus, for our own congregation, and we're going to test God on them, not in a frivolous or in a kind of cheap way in any sense, but to hold God to his promises.

There are many promises of answered prayer given on the back of that sheet, and I would like if you could to pray for these things in your own prayer times, and on Wednesday evenings right through till February, we're going to be looking at why we're praying for each of these things, particularly.

It's not an exclusive list at all, but it is something that it would be great, the elders feel would be great if we could all pray for both together and personally in our lives.

So this section today, I begin with a question asking, what do you think of evil? An unusual question maybe to begin a sermon with, but what do you think about the reality of evil?

[ 1 : 3 0 ] Do you find in reading such a passage like we read today, do you feel a sense of uncomfortableness? If that's a word, do you feel uncomfortable when we read a passage like that that speaks so kind of overtly about evil?

Do you just not think about it at all in your day-to-day living? Would you never really think about evil and you would feel it a bit strange to consider it? Or if you do think about it, do you think about it in kind of nationalistic or world terms, that you see evil, that you are aware of evil, that the newspapers make clear that there's evil happens in the world, but you don't associate it with something in your own life or something in your own heart?

Would that be a balancing kind of way that you think about evil? You would maybe think, yeah, I know I'm not perfect, but to use such strong terminology is not what I would do I feel uncomfortable and uneasy with the biblical emphasis here on evil and on the overtness and the clarity with which Jesus speaks about evil.

Well, I would like to look at this passage and see what Jesus says and why it's so tremendously important that we wrestle with and grapple with the concepts of good and evil outside of kind of Hollywood and the blockbuster themes that deal with good and evil in kind of clean cut and moralistic ways.

Because it's clear that the Gospel exposes spiritual darkness in the world and in our hearts. I mean, that whole section that we looked at in Luke 11 from verse 14 to 28, it's clearly a passage where Luke, the Holy Spirit, God threw him once, the readers and once ourselves to understand that the Bible is all about exposing spiritual darkness both in the world and much more solemnly and much more challengingly in our own hearts, spiritual darkness in our own hearts.

[ 3 : 51 ] And so again, which has been the theme of our worship for quite a long time and I suppose in many ways should always be the theme of our worship is that we're looking for Scripture and the truth of God's word to mould our thinking rather than for our thinking to be what Jesus should be like and what he should teach so that we're not coming to the Bible and to Jesus saying this is what you should be like and this is what you should teach but rather we're allowing the word come to us to transform, to realign and to mould our thinking and our understanding.

Evil then is a genuine spiritual dimension that Jesus highlights as he answers the objections of these religious leaders about the basis of his authority for casting out demons.

They claim that he is casting out demons because in the name of the Prince of Demons and that is a terrible accusation to make of Jesus and in Jesus' response it becomes clear that Jesus himself simply takes evil and a dark spiritual realm as read.

He doesn't really try and explain it or he doesn't try to justify it, he just recognises it as being something that is real. He knows their thoughts and he goes clearly and goes on immediately to speak about this spiritual realm of darkness and he simply recognises that that's true and that is the clear teaching of the Bible.

Not only is it a teaching here but it's a teaching throughout scripture that there is a dark satanic real kingdom and that Satan is the Prince of Demons as we're told in verse 15 of this passage that he is the source of darkness and the source of evil and the source of sin and that he has brought humanity from the very first days of its existence, brought humanity into his own domain. He's brought humanity down with him and the world today is his playground even though since Christ and since the crosses will go on to see he is a defeated and a destroyed foe.

[ 6 : 26 ] He remains under God's judgment and he as a fallen angel because he was a magnificent, beautiful, glorious, angelic being. There's a Prince of Demons, he is now one who has been separated from God and is under the curse of God's judgment and is in a domain, a kingdom of death, spiritual darkness of which this world is indicative, a world in moral confusion and chaos, a world which at its very core rejects God.

Whatever else we say about the world if it's fair for us to talk about the world in these terms if we can make sweeping judgments, but it is a world that is full of confusion and full of darkness spiritually and full of antagonism against God.

We know that people can do good, we're not denying that people can do good, we're not saying that there's lovely, glorious, beautiful, honourable, fantastic people in this world, we recognise that but the biblical definitions are reminding us of our spiritual condition before God, not just that God still allows us to be good and nice in ourselves and in relationship with one another, but spiritually we are separated from God and our hearts are inclined against God naturally.

We know this, don't we? We know in this world and it can't really be explained in any other way of the capability of darkness and of terrible evil that is in humanity.

It's there, it's clear and it is inescapable. You may think it doesn't apply to you, but we know that very often it's ordinary people who are capable of the most extraordinary evil and bleak deeds.

[ 8 : 28 ] It's not that people that do evil deeds are abject demons, they're ordinary people like you and me, they were mothers and fathers, they were children and yet they are able to engage in tremendously evil behaviour.

And it reminds us of the spiritual death and the bleakness of the future there is for humanity without Jesus Christ and without facing up to the reality of evil in this world, because it's a genuine spiritual dimension of this world in which we live.

But the passage also makes clear that it is a personal disease of the soul. Let's not just be content with putting evil out there in the universe or in the wider world, but let's draw it into our own hearts as well and recognise that, because here is people who make accusations of Jesus that are quite unbelievable, they accuse Jesus of being himself a demon.

It is in the name of demons that he casts out demons. Now these people weren't worshippers on the dark side. These people, as we're told in the other Gospel accounts of this passage, these people were religious leaders.

These were the upright moral people of the day, these were the Pharisees and the scribes. These were people who lived outwardly moral, upright, good lives, and yet they had this great antagonism toward Jesus.

[ 10 : 01 ] They didn't like him, they didn't like his message, they wanted him dead, and we know that's what eventually happened, that people turned on Jesus and crucified him.

We're also told in verse 16 that others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven. And the kind of picture behind this, it wasn't that they were genuinely looking for a sign, but they were kind of in a sarcastic way looking for a sign.

They didn't want to believe, they wouldn't believe, they didn't want to hear about him walking on water or breaking up the bread to feed 5,000 or any of the other miracles that had been done.

They just wanted more and more and more, because they were unbelieving and because they didn't want in their hearts to believe that Jesus was the Son of God. And so there's this personal exposure of the bleakness of people's hearts that they wouldn't believe who Jesus was, you know?

And it's not as if Jesus was a harsh religious leader, that he was hard to love. It's not that he was some kind of really unattractive character. Jesus was the most attractive character who's ever lived.

[ 11 : 16 ] And yet there was this unreasonable rejection of him, hatred of him, that came from ordinary people. Because the Bible makes clear there's a natural revulsion to light in our hearts, the light of God, because of this sinful nature that we have and the evil that lurks within us.

And that's why Jesus has come, is it not? And that's what we need to recognise, that the gospel message as much today as it was then is about spiritual redemption.

It's about being taken from one kingdom of darkness and being taken and placed into the kingdom of light. It mustn't ever be for us, Christianity must never just be for us, spiritual fine-tuning.

It mustn't just be a little thing that's nice. I really hate when people call Christianity nice, because it's much, much bigger than nice. In fact, nice is kind of horrible.

It's much greater than that. It's a recognition of a deep-seated spiritual need that we have to be moved from darkness into light. Let's debunk some ideas.

[ 12 : 27 ] We're not chainsaw killers, most of us, hope, most of us, none of us, I hope. Are chainsaw killers, I kind of, I didn't mean that when I said that. I don't know any secrets about your heart.

But you know, none of us, you know, it's not that we see ourselves in that light and that that's the kind of evil, the kind of Hollywood evil that's portrayed, although the potential, undoubtedly solemnly and seriously, it probably is within each of us.

But we need to be rescued because that inclination of our heart, if we have not come to Christ, is against God, is not to love God, is to be selfish and bitter and greedy, to cheat, to lie, to be hurtful, to be proud, all these kind of respectable sins, private sins, sins that nobody else would really need to know about, but that they're lurking, that they shape our heart and they shape our direction and they shape our motive away from God.

They might be nice and not obvious, or we might be nice and these sins might not be obvious, but the Bible makes clear that there is a deep-seated need that we have in our life for salvation, for being taken spiritually from that place where we are turned away from God, and we're turned to God through Christ.

Now are you outraged by that? Do you know people who'd be outraged by that summary? Do you reject it as a negative, fundamentalist, Calvinistic, Presbyterian, doer, summary, an interpretation of God's word, it's biblically, medievally out of touch, it's bleak.

[ 14 : 20 ] As your summary, or do you know other people who would say that the summary of life is that we are basically good and we just need a little bit of fine-tuning to bring us into fellowship with God.

The idea of a personal devil is laughable. I'm a scientist, I'm a rationalist, please don't speak to me about these ridiculous concepts in this modern, sophisticated society in which we live.

Can I just say two things in relation to that? We mustn't caricature the devil in that way. Horns, forktail, red, stoking a fire.

Please don't do that. The Bible doesn't do that. And please don't allow that caricature to be in your heads. The Bible makes clear that if there is God, then there is also the devil.

And we believe in God, we find it not too difficult, most of us, to do so. We must also believe when God says there is a devil and there are satanic beings.

[ 15 : 31 ] Black, angelic being. Highly intelligent. Now, I hope I've got a quote on the screen, hopefully, which will come up if I use this.

I'm going to try and use this today. A quote from the Bible. No. Now, coming up. There it is. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen masquerading as apostles of Christ, and no wonder for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

It is not surprising then if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be with their actions to serve. He's an angel of light. He doesn't come with the horns in the fort tail.

He doesn't scare us. And he's happy that that's the case. He masquerades as an angel of light. His great work is deception and lies, and allowing people to mock the whole concept of him.

And yet clearly the devil in biblical terms is not a caricature. And it's clearly God's declaration through his work that there is spiritual darkness, and that we need to be redeemed from that.

[ 16 : 52 ] That is the theme of the cross. The cross remains central to our belief, does it not, as Christians? And that we recognize even symbolically when Jesus did his work on the cross, that it was physical darkness, because as we saw only a number of weeks ago, that he was dealing with spiritual darkness.

And we need to be taken from that place where we can't see our needs, and where we are in spiritual darkness to be brought into spiritual light. That is what the gospel is about. That is what the truth is.

And that is what we profess and what we believe, and what we're to pray for protection from, and to live in the light of, and to recognize as we saw on Wednesday night, we've been moved from the present evil age, and we've been moved into the ages to come, from darkness to light.

So that is the teaching that is clear here in elsewhere in Scripture. There's a few things that Jesus says in response. They're really brilliant things. And I don't want to spend time, I don't have time to spend on them, but they are really tremendously challenging responses that Jesus makes.

In verse 20 of this passage in response to what was being accused of him, and of the whole concept of darkness and light, he reminds us in verse 20 where he says, But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

[ 18 : 12 ] And he's saying there that his miracles are a sign for everyone that darkness is being defeated by him. The finger of God, the power of God, he healed here a demoniac, someone who was satanically, he was filled with an evil spirit, and demon possessed a very extreme expression of the reality of evil in this world.

And yet when he was healed, it wasn't just a mere healing, but it was a sign that it was the end of Satan's deception, and Satan's reign and death as a grip on all who would come to believe in Jesus Christ.

That's the greatest message of the Gospel. That is what the cross is all about, and why it's so important for us today. Please don't allow the cross to be a sideshow in your life, because it's central not just to your life, but to the whole of humanity, where this great victory over death and the grave and evil was won.

So that Jesus goes on to say in verse 23 that it's impossible then to be spiritually neutral. He says that. He who is not with me is against me.

He does not gather with me, scatters. And Jesus says that. Jesus says in God's eyes it's impossible to be an agnostic.

[ 19 : 41 ] We can be an agnostic with each other, and we can say that we haven't come to commitment to Jesus Christ, but yet we don't not believe.

But Jesus says it's impossible to be spiritually neutral. There isn't any neutral ground that we either believe or that we don't. That he asks us to submit to him and to the truth that he speaks about himself and about us, and to cry out for him for redemption.

Otherwise we remain in enemy territory. A bleak and a challenging message for us today. Where so many of us just want to wait and wait and wait, and wait for a better day, or wait for more proof, or wait for more signs, and we just don't want to commit. We want to just stand back.

There'll be a better day, there'll be a better time. I'll clearly think through it over time, maybe even wait till I get old.

Jesus says it's impossible to be spiritually neutral. But he goes on to say something even more amazing in verses 24 to 26, where he gives us this picture of an evil spirit going through a man, and then leaving him and the man cleaning his house, and when he arrives the house is clean, swept and put in order, and he brings other seven spirits back in, and it's worse than the first.

[ 21 : 08 ] Now what all that says is there's a lot in it, but one of the central truths surely is that just being moral alone, trying to make ourselves clean, sweep our house clean as it were ourselves, doesn't make us a Christian.

It's a picture of trying to make ourselves right with God, and trying to make ourselves clean, and yet our heart not being filled with anything spiritual. It's simply an outward act that we do, we are outward living by resolutions, by stopping doing bad things, by going to church, by reading our Bible, that we try and do all these good things, and we try and be moral, we try and be upright, and we try our best, but ultimately, if our hearts aren't renewed by God, if we haven't come to recognise this inclination that's in our hearts to against God, then we will find that morality and just being a moral person will leave us defeated, legalistic, exhausted and empty, because it's not a new lifestyle we need, it's a new heart that we need, it's a new heart that God gives, a heart that is not inclined against Him, that is inclined towards Him, that looks to Him, that loves Him, and He gives that, He gifts that, that is the work of salvation, the work of the cross, because He gives us the power and the grace and the longing to be transformed, that changes everything.

If we just try to be moral and try to be good, it will never be good enough for God, and it will never satisfy us, it will make us horrible actually, probably, and quite ugly and a bit judgmental of other people.

Recently there was a program on Channel 4, I mentioned it before, didn't get a chance to watch it much, but I was reading about it on the internet, Make Me a Christian it was called, some of you may have seen it, but what disappoints me even in the literature or the stuff on the internet about it, is that it took the most extreme type of maybe people that wouldn't naturally think about becoming Christians, either by their lifestyle or by their philosophical position or whatever it is, and they are to try and live like Christians for two weeks, but it is doomed to failure, isn't it?

Because they are saying, if people who are together, maybe it was a young couple and they were living together, and they didn't go to church and they didn't read the Bible, and then this guy comes and makes me a Christian, so for two weeks you are not allowed to live or sleep together, and you are to go to church and you are to read your Bible.

[ 23 : 48 ] No wonder they didn't want to become Christians, because being moral and being upright is completely the wrong way round. That will never make anyone a Christian, it might just put them off being Christians, because they think we are moralistic anyway.

What we need is a new heart, not a new regime, not a new way of living. We say, yes, make me a Christian by coming to Christ, and seeing our need of a new heart and of a new obedience, then we can live that way, but please don't think by being moral and upright that somehow we are policing God.

But what was the point of the cross? Recognise that moralistic living is never enough, and Jesus makes that beautifully clear in that picture that he gives us.

It just leaves us empty. We sweep the house of our life clean. We think we are right, but there is nothing in our hearts. There is no love and there is no devotion to Jesus.

Then in verse 28 he says, a positive response to the truth is key. He says, there is a woman comes up to him and adores him, and gives him adoration saying, blessed are you the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.

[ 25 : 05 ] He replies, blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it. And that blessing for us comes when we recognise, and when we appreciate, oh there we go, that we have to respond to the message of God's word.

Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it. What does God say? He says, love me with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind.

Love your neighbour as yourself. What is your cry to that? You can't do it. It's impossible. It's absolutely impossible. And so he says to us, Jesus answered, I am the way, the truth in the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. He knows we can't love Him with all our heart, souls, gentlemen. It's impossible. But if we come to Him for a new heart to obey, to serve and to love, through the cross then we will know salvation and blessing.

He then says, I am the greatest sign from heaven. We don't have time to look at this, verses 29 to 32. He talks about the sign of Jonah, the wisdom of Solomon.

[ 26 : 30 ] But he's simply saying that people responded and repented to these Old Testament signs of God's blessing or of God's message.

And he's saying, I am now greater than Solomon. My wisdom is greater than Solomon. And he says, my message, my death and my resurrection is greater than Jonah's.

Because remember, Jonah was as good as dead in the Wales belly for three days, three nights. And it was as if there was a resurrection when he was spewed up onto the beach and went to preach to the Ninevites.

And he says, Jesus is saying, I'm greater than Jonah. My death and my resurrection is greater than Jonah's. My message is greater. My wisdom is greater than Solomon. I am the great sign, he says.

I am the great sign. This wicked engeneration, it looks for a miraculous sign. He says, I am it. What are you waiting for if you're not a Christian today? Are you waiting for some great sign from heaven?

[ 27 : 31 ] Are you waiting for something to be inscribed in the clouds, like a plane that goes round and round with the kind of thing after it, the train after it and it says someone's name?

Are you waiting for that from heaven? Come to Jesus, you know? Are you waiting for some sort of a miraculous sign when you open your Bible? Are you wanting a verse to just flash like a light and say, come to me? What are we looking for?

What sign are you waiting for? Because everything has been made clear. There's no greater sign than Jesus. There won't be anything more for us, because the problem isn't that you need more signs, or that you need, I wish God would speak to me personally.

There's no more signs. There's a change of heart. It's that you don't want to believe, ultimately. Is that not the case? Is that everything is there, but you actually don't want to submit to Christ.

You would rather not. It's not a matter of signs, a proof of knowledge more. It's a reflection of really your longing. You don't really want to believe.

[ 28 : 42 ] Because the sign, Jesus says, you know, there's no greater sign than Jonah or Solomon. He says there's greater than Jonah and Christ.

That is what it is. And so he concludes with that section about the lamp to the body. Let my light shine in the darkness of your heart. And that's what he's saying in that again, these pictures, these illustrations of light and darkness.

He's saying when your heart is changed, when I am in your heart. Because I am the light of the world, remember, he says. Then he says your whole body will be changed and you'll be able to serve him and follow him in the way he's been.

That is the work of John 8.12. Jesus spoke again to the people. He said, you will be the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

That's what he's saying. That's what he wants for us to know. Not relying on our own philosophies or our own efforts, but to see him as the solution to this world of evil and rejection to our own impending death and our heart which is inclined against God if we are not Christ's.

[ 29 : 55 ] In these dark realities, he says, I am the light of the world. Not only does he want us to have the light of the world in our hearts, as Christians, he wants us to shine.

Let that light that is within you shine. And that's a great thing to do. By his grace, everything that we do to shine for Jesus Christ.

Not to be ashamed of Jesus. Not to be embarrassed by him. Not to hide him. But to live for him because he has transformed us.

And he loves us like no one will ever love us. And we are meant to be ashamed of that or him in this dark world as we fight against that inclination of our heart.

So may that be the reality that we enjoy and experience as believers. And may we respond to Christ in our lives.

[ 30 : 59 ] That's our heads in prayer. Lord God, we ask and we pray that we would understand the Bible's verdict and diagnosis of the needs in this world and the solution to them.

And may we be believers in Jesus and live for Jesus and live in the shadow of the light of Jesus.

And above all, keep us from trying to be moralistic with an empty, cold and unchanged heart.

But may we rather see that we need a miracle of salvation, of simply coming and asking for a heart that has been touched and softened and redeemed and bought back and forgiven and made new and have life breathed into it by the power of the Spirit in order to live for Jesus Christ.

So help us God, we pray. Accept our worship and the offerings of worship and praise now for Jesus' sake. Amen.