

- ***READ Isaiah 60:1-3*** As many of us are well aware from our current study through Isaiah, the days in Judah and Israel were extremely dark during Isaiah's prophetic ministry. Even with the occasional mention of future restoration, **Chapters 1-34** are difficult to digest because they show the depths of rebellion that have been committed by not only the nations of the earth but also by God's own people.
 - However, once we get to **chapter 40**, there is a very obvious change in tone for the prophet. There the message has been one of "*judgment, judgment*"...now the message is one of "*Comfort, comfort my people.*" (**Isaiah 40:1**) The second half of Isaiah's book goes into great detail concerning the future hope that awaited for the people of God and the nations of the earth who would turn in faithfulness to God. The text we just read together paints the picture of the darkness that covers the whole earth on account of sin and the hopelessness that comes with it, but then comes the light which is "*the glory of the Lord.*"
 - Whoever could this possibly be referring to? Surely the glorious light of the Lord that is foretold of in **Isaiah 60:1-3** is fulfilled in Jesus as it is said of Him in **John 1:6-9**, "*There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light. The true light that gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.*" The words of Isaiah that John states as being fulfilled in Jesus ought to fill us with incredible joy knowing that God desires for lost souls to be taken out of the darkness of sin and brought into the light.
 - As we think upon living God in an ungodly world as our congregational focus in 2020, we would do well to consider the foundational truth that God desires for us to live in the light in this dark world. Really these terms are synonymous. To live Godly is to live in the light and to live ungodly is to live in darkness, so what we want to do this morning is look at what the Bible says concerning the light and the dark and God's expectations for us as His people and followers of His Son.
- I. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we have been called out of the world by God to live in His light.**
- A. Since the Eden account of Genesis 3 when sin is introduced, God's concern has been focused on redeeming mankind from sin and its consequences.**
1. We know this based upon the Messianic thread that we can follow from Genesis 3. The Light being Jesus that is recognized by John in **John 1:6-9** can trace His roots all the way back to God's response to Adam and Eve's sin in **Genesis 3:15**. "*I will put hostility between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head and you will strike his heel.*" This verse is known as the *protoevangelium* or "first good news." It is the first in a long series of texts that speak about the coming man who would put an end to the struggle between man and the forces of evil. Though the serpent, representative of the adversary, would strike a blow against the offspring of woman...he would turn around and land a deathblow to the head of the serpent. This verse clearly prophesies the coming Messiah who would gain victory over the evil one by redeeming men from the curse of sin.
 2. This Messianic thread continues through Abraham's lineage as is detailed in **Genesis 12:3**. "*I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*" We are given insight into the coming messiah by the fact that we are informed in this text concerning the exact family lineage he would come through. We can trace this lineage from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to Judah and so on even through men such David and Solomon as detailed in **Matthew 1:1-17**.
- B. This Jesus, prophesied of from nearly the very beginning, came into this world bring people out of darkness and into the light.**
1. This was something that Jesus was very clear about saying during His ministry. In **Luke 6:27-32**,

Jesus is rebuked by the Pharisees and Scribes for eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners, but Jesus responds by saying that those are exactly the types of people he came to save. *"Jesus replied to them, 'It is not those who are healthy who need a doctor, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'"* (Luke 6:31,32)

2. Jesus came to free mankind from the dominion of sin and its horrible consequences. Though we have willfully rebelled against God in order to seek our own wants and pleasures, Jesus still greatly desires for us to be redeemed by His perfect blood so that we might be freed from sin. *"For you know that you were **redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was revealed in these last times for you. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.**"* (I Peter 1:18-21)
3. This redemption of men by God is expounded upon by Peter as being for the expressed purpose of bringing us out of darkness into light and creating a new people that would proclaim the Lord's glories. *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."* (I Peter 2:9,10)

II. Having been saved by God, we are indebted to live according to His standard of righteousness.

A. Some would contend that God's grace covers any sins that we might have committed or even commit in the future so there is no need for truly righteous living.

1. The most recent example that comes to my mind of someone actually speaking this out loud comes from a popular reality show star who is quoted concerning a conversation about abstaining or not abstaining from sexual relationships outside of marriage, *"Regardless of anything that I've done, I can do whatever, I sin daily and Jesus still loves me. It's all washed and if the Lord doesn't judge me and it's all forgiven, then no other man, woman ... anything can judge me,"*
2. I'll be honest...sounds like a great prospect! To be saved by Jesus and washed in His blood in such a way that it already cleanses me of sins that I will commit in the future so that I don't have to give much attention to avoiding temptation and sin...that sounds great! And we might even think there is Biblical backing for this when we consider what Paul says in **Romans 5:17,20**, *"Since by the one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, **how much more will those who receive the overflow of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ... The law came along to multiply the trespass. But where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more...**"*

B. But this couldn't be any further from the truth because God's grace has redeemed us from the guilt of sin and we are no longer to live in that same sinful way...but in righteousness.

1. We have to keep reading in the text to recognize that righteousness must now be the standard we are striving for. *"The law came along to multiply the trespass. But where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more so that, just as sin reigned in death, **so also grace will reign through righteousness, resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**"* (Romans 5:20,21)
2. This must be the sense and the understanding considering that Paul seemingly answers the comment that would have been made by this reality star when he rhetorically asks, *"What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply?"* (Romans 6:1) But he actually answers his own question by emphatically stating, *"Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it?"* (Romans 6:2)

3. Those who have been freed from the darkness of sin and transferred into the light of God are now able to have fellowship with God as is spoken in **I John 1:5-7**, *"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him. If we say, 'We have fellowship with him,' and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."* Yes, we have been cleansed from our sins, but that comes with an expectation that we will strive to continue to live free of sin within our lives. Paul states this plainly in **Ephesians 5:8**, *"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light—"* Sounds easy enough, right?

III. The struggle we face in this life is in the fact that the vast majority of the world we live in is content with and even desires to live in darkness. (The Difficulty)

- A. Living godly lives in God's light is made easier when we are around those who are encouraging us to live in that way.
1. I won't say that it is simply easy, but it certainly is easier to be godly and righteous in our character when we are surrounded by others who have the same goal of striving for the same standard that we are striving for. This must have been on the mind of the Hebrew writer when he wrote in **Hebrews 10:24,25**, *"And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching."*
 2. However, the amount of time that we spend in the worship assembly is a very small amount of time compared to the rest of the week when we are not surrounded by saints. If we take our 3 hours of Sunday and add an hour for the total time we usually spend hanging around and talking and then add another hour and a half for the Wednesday Bible study and assembly then we come out to a grand total of 5 & 1/2 hours that we spend exclusively with other disciples on a regular weekly basis. Those 5 & 1/2 hours are great, but again they are a small part! If we're considering the total hours in a week then we only spend 3.2% of our time here at the church house. That isn't quite telling since we are asleep for a 1/3 of those hours, so we'll take out 8 hours a day for sleep. That still only leaves us at 4.9% of our time here among people we know and trust are trying to provoke us to good works and encouraging us. This means that 95.1% of our time is spent out in the world with people that don't necessarily desire what we desire or strive to live the way we live.
- B. Unfortunately, we are surrounded by influences that are pushing us away from God.
1. This isn't to say that it is impossible to be godly and righteous when no one else is striving for such goal...Noah did it after all. However, we do recognize that the current condition of this world does make it exponentially more difficult to be godly because the negative influences are nearly overwhelming at times. Even Jesus recognized the dark nature of this world in **John 3:19** when He stated, *"This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil."* As Jesus notes, the evil one has such strong influence in this world that Paul has to reassure the disciples in Corinth in **II Corinthians 4:1-4**, *"Therefore, since we have this ministry because we were shown mercy, we do not give up. Instead, we have renounced secret and shameful things, not acting deceitfully or distorting the word of God, but commending ourselves before God to everyone's conscience by an open display of the truth. But if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."*

2. How has the god of this age...the evil one been able to keep so many people blinded? It seems that John is under the impression that this is done through the pervasive temptations that abound in this world. John warns in **1 John 2:15-17**, *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever."* Every facet of life (body, mind, & possessions) is touched by the negative influences of darkness and evil. Again, it isn't easy to overcome, but the reward of immortality sure does sound great to me, and it most certainly beats the alternative of living in darkness now and being condemned to it for eternity.

IV. Our failure to walk in the light in this life will only lead us to spending eternity in darkness away from our loving Father. (The Danger)

- A. To walk in the light in this world is to prepare ourselves for an eternity of walking in the very light and presence of God, but there are far too many who will fail to be prepared for that day when we will be judged concerning what we have walked in. This point made exceptionally clear in Jesus's parable of the wedding banquet in **Matthew 22:1-14**.
- B. In this text, the kingdom of heaven is said to be like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent out servants and messengers to tell the people invited, but they declined. He sent out more servants with an even better message and people still declined. Some of those invited even took the king's servants, beat, and killed them. The king is enraged and begins to invite all people to his banquet and many came. However, there was one man who was not adequately dressed for the wedding, and the king tells his attendants to tie this man up and *"throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*
- C. This same scenario will play out on the judgment day when people are judged for refusing to walk in the light of God's way. Their choices to walk in darkness in this life will only lead them to being condemned in eternal darkness of hell away from the glorious presence of God. Where we choose to reside in this life...light or darkness...will eventually be our eternal home.

In no way shape or form am I going to stand up here this morning and tell you that it is easy to walk in the light when the entire world around us is stumbling around in the darkness. However, I will tell you that the effort that is demanded to walk in the light in this dark world is totally worth. Immorality is on the line, and I most certainly want to live in God's glorious light and presence for all eternity, but I cannot and neither can you forget that this demands that we strive to live in the light during our journey here on this earth. May God bless us and strengthen us to be diligent in living in the light regardless of how dark the world around us becomes. May we live out the words of the Apostle Paul as he encourages the Romans saints to remember, *"The night is nearly over, and the day is near; so let us discard the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light."* (**Romans 13:12**)