

Light

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One of the most familiar metaphors in the Bible is light. Jesus attached this description to Himself: "...I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

The context of this statement is worth noting. Jesus made this claim during the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths/Sukkot. This holiday commemorated the wilderness wanderings. During this period of history, Israel lived in huts. In Jesus' day, the people would construct make-shift huts or booths during this feast. Also, four large candelabras were used to illuminate the Temple complex. The lighting ceremony symbolized the pillar of fire that guided Israel in the wilderness.

These symbols were around the people when Jesus boldly declared He was the light of the world. Jesus was leading a new Exodus. He was the true light that the pillar of fire symbolized. He was the way out of a different kind of wilderness. Jesus is the way out of a wilderness of sin, death, and hopelessness. He can lead us out of darkness and to life. Consider how Jesus can lead us to life today.

The Light of Life

1). We live in a dark world. Most people would not be quick to admit that we live in a dark world. Despite the progress of humanity, people increasingly feel disillusioned and hopeless. Economic disparities are widening in society. Instead of trying to improve themselves, many have become bitter and given up on life. Others feel alone and isolated. The world is filled with greed, grievance, and depression. Just as Paul's world, ours remains crooked and perverse (Phil. 2:12-14).

We could go on and on describing the darkness in our world. However, this is not the point. The darkness proves our need for light. Darkness proves our need for Jesus. Jesus is the solution to our problems. He can heal the broken-hearted and give hope to those lost in despair. While this sounds simplistic, the implications of this are far reaching.

2). The light of the world leads to life. People living in darkness today do not know the purpose of life. Much of the despair and depression in the world comes from a lack of purpose. People do not have direction. They are stuck in an aimless malaise. The light of the world is the way out!

Jesus brings a new understanding. He teaches us that we have value and worth. As far as He was concerned, we are worth saving and transforming. He sees us as the broken image bearers of God. While broken, we can be restored.

Not long after Jesus made this claim, He spoke about the kind of life He wanted to give people. He said He wanted to give people life and give it more abundantly (John 10:10). Jesus offers an abundant life. This is a life of meaning and fulfillment. Christians know who they are.

Jesus gives us a new identity. Everyone who receives Jesus through faith are given the right to become the children of God (John 1:12). Also, Jesus gives us a new purpose. We are to serve Him by serving others. Jesus offers an abundant life of joy through self-giving service (Acts 20:35). Today, people need to know that Jesus, His ways, and His word can fill our emptiness.

3). We are lights in a dark world. The apostle Paul would use this image of light to describe our responsibility to the world. He wrote, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life...” (Phil. 2:14-16).

Surprisingly, Paul used the Exodus to make his point. As we work out our salvation with fear and trembling, we are to do so without complaining. This is a reference to the complaining of Israel in the wilderness. Then, he writes about Christians being lights in the world. Paul combines images of the Exodus/wilderness wanderings/Feast of Tabernacles with Jesus, the light of the world.

Jesus has already come as the light into a dark world. Now, He expects His followers to be His light in the world. We are to be symbols of God’s presence. As Christians, we are to be daytime people. This describes the quality of our lives. Following the example of Jesus enables us to become an example for those lost in darkness. We must help lead them out of the darkness.

4). How to be light in a dark world. Generally, we know we are supposed to be light in the world. Specifically, how can we do this? How can we be a Christ-like example to others? How can we lovingly help those who are in despair? Consider the following.

Invite someone to worship.

Offer to study the Bible with someone.

Be a listener.

Be hospitable.

Don’t use foul language.

Be an encourager.

Don’t be a complainer.

Be a problem solver.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that we live in a dark world. Just as Paul characterized it, our society is crooked and perverse. This is the world that we are called to serve. We must use the word of life to shine the light of Christ.

The Gospel will save people from the wilderness of sin, death, and hopelessness. The Gospel will transform people. The Gospel will give people a firm foundation of truth upon which they can build their lives. The Gospel of Jesus Christ will give hope to the hopeless.