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Beverly E.C.E., Chicago, IL

“THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD”

John 8:12; 9:1-7

☑ On the brink of World War I, British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Gray famously remarked, **“The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our life-time.”**

It feels that way now, doesn't it? Between the barbarism of ISIS, Russia's muscle-flexing, China's economic problems, and the fracturing of U.S. society along racial, ethnic, cultural, economic, and religious fault lines, the darkness appears to be spreading.

“The lamps are going out.” The world needs light.

Some of us are wrestling with what discipleship means in a changing culture. Our vision is clouded by unexpected complexities and unanticipated complications.

Some of us are struggling with addiction, mental disorder, broken relationships, or financial trouble. We cannot see a way out of these shadows.

Some of us are contending with death. Physical mortality looms large on the horizon, or we are stumbling through a dark night of the soul. The light has grown dim in our eyes.

“The lamps are going out.” We need light.

☐ Please turn with me to John 9:1-7. The Savior is in Jerusalem. He is walking away from the temple where his enemies just tried to stone him to death.

■ **Verse 1: “As he [goes] along he [sees] a man blind from birth.**

This man is in the dark, and he always has been. Darkness is his perpetual burden.

He has never seen flowers or trees. He's never seen the sun or the moon. He has never seen his mother's face.

☹ This man isn't merely missing out on the simple pleasures. Blindness impairs his knowledge.

In a culture that places a high value on male literacy, he will never be able to read. Blindness dooms him to illiteracy.

If an unscrupulous merchant decides to cheat him by skimping on the measure or mixing sand in with the flour, he man cannot perceive it until it is too late. Blindness exposes him to deception.

☆ {Is 56:10; Mt 23:16-17} Such darkness is a metaphor for confusion. The prophets say that those who do not recognize the truth **“are blind, they all lack knowledge.”** Messiah calls hypocritical Pharisees **“blind fools”** for assuming that they understand perfectly when they are unaware of the truth, and in some cases vehemently oppose it.

☹ And blindness robs him of his freedom.

Day in and day out he gropes his way to the same places along the same paths. If he gets turned around or winds up on a different street, he will become disoriented. Blindness restricts his physical movements.

Usually when he leaves his home it is to beg for handouts. What other choice does he have? Blindness reduces his work options to one: panhandling.

☆ {Is 42:7} Such darkness is a metaphor for bondage. Most famously, Isaiah foretells that the Messiah will **“open eyes that are blind...free captives from prison and... release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”**

☹ And blindness threatens his very existence.

He and his parents live hand-to-mouth as it is, and his deprivation will only get worse when they die. Blindness makes him vulnerable to starvation.

In a culture that puts a premium on carrying on the family line this man is completely ineligible for marriage. Blindness dooms his name to extinction.

☆ {Job 10:21-22} Such darkness is a metaphor for death. Job speaks of the grave as **“the land of gloom and utter darkness... the land of deepest night, of utter darkness and disorder, where even the light is like darkness.”**

This man is in the dark, and he always has been. Darkness is his perpetual burden.

His inability to see is the crucial fact of his existence. It is what defines him.

Consider that we know the name of the blind man in Mark 10. He is called Bartimaeus.

Not our man here. John refers to him exclusively by his disability. He initially identifies him as **“a man blind from birth,”** and then as **“the man who had been blind.”**

In my opinion this is not an insensitive oversight, it is a deliberate summation. Blindness is the man’s all-encompassing reality.

■ {Jn 9:34} That is how other people see him – and they take it for granted that his inability to see is a well-deserved punishment. Hence, in verse 2 the disciples ask **“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born**

blind?” Later, when he testifies that Jesus is God, hostile Pharisees try to invalidate his witness by blaming him for his blindness: **“You were steeped in sin at birth!”** In their view, being unsighted is proof positive of heinous sin.

This man, **“blind from birth,”** is in the dark in every sense of the word. He needs the light.

■ In verses 6-7 Messiah gives it to him. **“He [spits] on the ground, [makes] some mud with the saliva, and [puts] it on the man’s eyes. ‘Go,’ he [tells] him, ‘wash in the Pool of Siloam’... So the man [goes] and [washes], and [comes] home seeing.”**

Though the means are not dramatic, the effect is spectacular. Jesus shines into his ignorance and enlightens him, shines into his bondage and liberates him, shines into his death and regenerates him.

▣ Christ shines the light because he is the light. As he announces in John 8:12, **“I am the light of the world.”**

★ Shining the light and thereby dispelling the darkness is at the heart of his mission. It is why he became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

{Lk 4:17-21} He makes this brilliantly clear in his first sermon that is recorded in detail. First, he reads from Isaiah:

**“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom
for the prisoners**

**and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."**

{Lk 4:21} Then, while everyone's eyes are fixed on him he announces, **"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."**

{Lk 7:18-23} Later, when John sends his followers to ask, **"Are you the one who was to come?"** Jesus replies, **"Report what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, [the lepers] are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor."**

Messiah exercises his ministry of light physically in the healing of this blind man in John 9, of Bartimaeus in Mark 10, and of many other unsighted people as seen in Luke 7:21 and Matthew 12:22.

We cannot overstate the transformative impact this has on formerly sightless individuals and their families. It is as though they are born again.

▣ As amazing as these physical healings are, they are a sign of something even more significant: the opening of spiritual eyes. John 8:12: **"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."**

This darkness is not physical. It is ignorance, bondage, and death of the heart, mind, and soul.

Likewise, **"the light of life"** is spiritual. It is knowledge of God's truth that sets us free from bondage to sin and infuses our souls with abundant, eternal life.

This is Good News! If spiritual sight sounds like a poor substitute for physical restoration, consider this.

Those whom the Lord healed of natural blindness lost their sight again when they died. In contrast, those who receive spiritual sight by following Jesus **"will never walk in darkness."**

{Mt 6:23} Only a minority of us are afflicted with literal blindness. But apart from the light of Christ every one of us is spiritually blind, and **"If the light within...is darkness, how great is that darkness!"**

{Mt 6:22} But when the eyes of our hearts are made **"healthy, [our] whole [being] will be full of light."**

In the murkiness of complexities and complications, you and I need the light of truth. In the darkness of trouble and brokenness, you and I need the light of freedom. In the deep shadow of death, we need the light of life.

{Jn 1:4-5} We need Jesus. **"In him [is] life, and that life [is] the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."**

Do you profess faith in Christ? Wonderful! But it is not sufficient that you raised your hand or went up to the altar, or prayed the "Sinners Prayer" sometime in the past. We never stop needing to receive the light.

Ephesians 5:8-10: **"you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord."** (He is addressing Christ followers.) **"Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)."** The verb translated **"live"** is literally **"walk."** It is in the present tense and the

imperative mood. In effect Paul is saying, **“Keep on walking as children of light.”**

First John 1:5-7: **“God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”** **“If we walk”** is in the present tense. This implies continuous action: **“If we are walking.”**

It is not enough to know *about* the light. Without question the Pharisees knew the Old Testament far better than we do. In some respects, they had more information about Jesus than us. Even so, most of them rejected **“the light of the world.”**

“Walking in” is language of participation. It suggests sharing in, immersion in, or envelopment by, **“the light.”** **“Walking in the light”** is experiencing Jesus in such a way that we are enlightened, liberated, and transformed.

And transformation is not just a legal status, in which the Father announces that he considers us to be changed because of the actions of his Son. It is an actual, practical change in the ways we relate to God in trust and obedience, and to others in humility, service, and love, as we walk in truth, freedom, and life.

“The lamps are going out.” The world needs light. We need light.

Christ Jesus declares: **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”**

John 8:12 is the word of the Lord.