

## The Light That Won't Go Out

**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Have you ever tried to hide a flashlight under a blanket? Maybe when you were a kid, reading past bedtime? You stuff it under the covers, but something strange happens. The whole blanket starts to glow. The light seeps through every thread. You can dim it, but you cannot make it disappear. Light has a stubborn quality—it refuses to be contained.

Jesus says something jarring in our Gospel today: "You are the light of the world." Not "you should try to be" or "you might become." You are. Present tense. Done deal. But here's where the tension begins. Look around. Look at yourself. Do we really shine like cities on hills? Most days we feel more like a burnt-out bulb than a beacon.

And it gets worse. Jesus doesn't stop there. He talks about salt that's lost its saltiness, lamps hidden under baskets, righteousness that must exceed that of the Pharisees. The Pharisees! Those were the religious professionals, the ones who had the whole law memorized. How could our righteousness possibly exceed theirs? The pressure builds.

### The Performance Trap

Paul seems to make it even harder in 1 Corinthians. He talks about demonstrating the Spirit's power, about having the mind of Christ, about understanding God's secret wisdom. Meanwhile, we can barely understand our own minds half the time. We lose our tempers in traffic. We scroll when we should pray. We know what's right and do what's wrong anyway.

Isaiah piles on too. God's people in Isaiah 58 are doing everything right—fasting, seeking God daily, asking for righteous judgments. They're going through all the motions. But God says, "Not good enough." In fact, He calls them out: "Why have we fasted, and you see it not?" They're confused and frustrated. They're trying so hard.

Here's what's happening. They've turned faith into a transaction. Fast enough, pray enough, be religious enough, and God owes you. But it's not working. The light isn't shining. The salt has no flavor. And they can't figure out why. Sound familiar?

## **What Salt Really Does**

Think about salt for a moment. Real salt, the kind you shake onto your fries. What does it do? It doesn't become the food. It doesn't try to be a potato. It simply does what salt does naturally—it changes everything it touches. You can't pick out the individual grains once they've done their work. The salt disappears into the food, but the flavor explodes.

Here's what Jesus is really saying: You don't produce light and saltiness. You already are these things because of what I've done to you. The question isn't whether you're salty enough. The question is whether you're being used as salt or sitting uselessly in the shaker.

Paul understood this. Look carefully at 1 Corinthians 2. He says, "I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom." The Greek word he uses for "lofty" is *huperoché*—it means superiority, excellence, the kind of flashy performance that makes people applaud the speaker. Paul says, "I didn't do that." Instead, he came in weakness and fear and trembling. Wait. Weakness? Fear? Trembling? That doesn't sound very impressive. That doesn't sound like light on a hill.

But then Paul drops the key: "My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

## **The Power in the Message**

What was Paul's demonstration? Was it miracles on demand? Speaking in tongues at just the right moment? No. Look at verse 2: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

That's it. That's the whole demonstration. A crucified Messiah. A dying God. The foolishness of the cross. And somehow, when Paul simply told that story—when he pointed away from himself to Jesus bleeding on a tree—the Spirit showed up with power. People's lives changed. The light broke through.

This is what Isaiah was getting at. All that fasting, all those prayers, all that religious activity—it was just noise. God says through Isaiah, "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed

go free?" He's saying, "Stop performing for Me and start living from what I've given you."

And here's the promise that follows: "Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily."

Did you catch that? You don't manufacture the light. It breaks forth. Like dawn. You don't create dawn. It simply comes, whether you're ready or not, whether you're worthy or not.

The Righteousness You Cannot Earn

Now we can solve the impossible riddle. How can our righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees?

The scribes and Pharisees tried to earn their righteousness. They added up their good deeds like a bank account. But Jesus gives us a different kind of righteousness entirely—His own. When He died on that cross, He didn't just pay for your sins. He credited His perfect life to your account. His righteousness—complete, full, exceeding anything the Pharisees dreamed of—becomes yours through faith.

This is what Paul calls "the secret and hidden wisdom of God" in 1 Corinthians 2:7. The Greek word for "secret" is *apokrúptō*—something concealed, hidden from the wise and intelligent of this world. The rulers of this age didn't understand it. If they had, they wouldn't have crucified the Lord of glory.

But God revealed it to us. Not because we're smarter or better, but because the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God, and makes it known to us.

### **Living From What You've Been Given**

In 1953, a British expedition team finally conquered Mount Everest. Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay reached the summit on May 29. When they came down, reporters asked Hillary how he did it. His answer was simple: "We knocked the beggar off." No fancy philosophy. They just climbed because that's what climbers do.

You are light because Christ made you light when He rose from the dead and called you out of darkness. You are salt because His Spirit lives in you. You don't have to conjure it up or perform for it. You simply have to stop hiding it under a basket of fear, or burying it under the bushel of self-reliance.

When Isaiah's people finally understood this—that God wanted their faith to overflow into actual love, actual mercy, actual freedom for others—then the promise came: "Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'"

### The Light Shines in You

So here's where we land. Christ has filled you with His Spirit. His perfect life has been credited to you. His death has removed your sin. You don't need to become light; you already are. The city is already on the hill. The question is simply this: will you let the light shine?

Not through lofty speeches or impressive performances. Not through religious scorekeeping. Simply by living from what you've already been given. By loving because you've been loved. By forgiving because you've been forgiven. By sharing bread because Christ shared Himself.

Jesus is the light that will not go out. And He lives in you. That light is breaking forth like dawn, whether you feel it or not. The salt is changing everything it touches, whether you see it or not. The city glows on the hill because the King dwells in it.

Christ's righteousness exceeds all. And it's yours. Completely. Freely. Forever.

**The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him.**

Pastor Ron Bright

Christ Lutheran Church Forest Hills, Pennsylvania

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