

Series: Ruin to Renovation	Reference: Mt 28:18-20 / Jhn 3:19-21 / Eph 5:8-17	Title: Light	Date: 07.22.18
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Website Writeup:

What's our purpose? How're we to live? Where does that come from? Let's explore those questions together...

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Thanks to Dallas Willard, this series is born out of his book, *Renovation of the Heart*. Many of his thoughts & words make it into these sermons; read the book as you follow along.

The call of Christ upon His Church was given by Jesus himself in Matthew 28:18-20 & hasn't changed. God doesn't get bored, doesn't change, he's not indecisive, A.D.H.D., or wishy washy - he's dead set on his call going out & vision is clear...we know the Church hasn't always been about her calling. We can be wishy washy, distracted, disinterested, etc...but our lack of attention, or obedience doesn't change the importance of it....

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them & said, "All authority in heaven & on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go & make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

This series has had to do with our spiritual formation. Not a self-serving formation in order that we feel blessed, rather transformation into Christ-likeness for the purposes of Christ's calling. Jesus has the notion he's in charge! He's right! He's not just savior, but also Lord. He gets all of me for his purposes. Not 10%, or even 95%, not just Sundays, a Community Group meeting during the week, not 10% of my money, but all of it. He gets every single moment of every day & all I am! I am all his & should be absolutely given to his purpose for my life as short as that may be.

Not just me as an individual - individuals make up the Body of Christ; a spiritually formative call on the Local Church. Again for the purpose, as we go about life, we make disciples of all people groups, baptizing them into the name of the Triune God as revealed to us in the Scriptures, teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded, in the assurance he's with us until our corporate calling's accomplished. That being, a representation of all people groups will worship before his throne at the end of time. The Spirit of God working through the transformative work of the Word revealed to us - the heart of the Father expressed in order that we'd understand his character, emulate it & live as His light in this calling. Which makes our message one of life & death importance.

As Augustine said, our souls are restless until they find rest in Him & rest is found in his purpose for our lives. A life & death purpose - no one else has that kind of importance ascribed to their lives! And you never know who's listening, or when you'll get the chance to share it! At the hotel this week I met a man who owns car dealerships across the tristate area — growing up in NJ his name was very prominent since he has

dealerships from the South Jersey to NY. The conversation turned to life, family, reconciliation & his dissatisfaction with the Catholic Church. I listened, was struck by his honesty & thoughtfulness. I was able to remind him of the gospel he'd so long left behind & given up on. Before we ended the conversation I had the honor to pray for him. He was appreciative & I really was blessed by the interaction. Later I met his girlfriend, who immediately asked me to do their wedding! Go & make disciples of all nations, take the risk, be ready to give an answer for the faith you profess as the answer to this life & death issue of existence...

In order to be ready, we're talking about a constant movement into Christ, allowing his Word & Spirit to change us; as wrenching & counter-cultural that may be at times. A life of faith where we believe him that his way is truly the way of freedom, whether it concerns our thoughts, feelings, will (spirit/heart), body, social relations, or the all encompassing soul. Using our imaginations to grasp what kingdom life can be as our true reality. So, it matters what we do, but we must remember, what we do is born out of what we're becoming, or who we are. If we're becoming Christlike, it means we're naturally given over to doing things Jesus would do for people - living out his calling, vision & purpose.

As John 3:19-21 says, ¹⁹ *This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.* ²⁰ *Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.* ²¹ *But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.*

Light is energy & knowledge. In the spiritually transformed person, that energy isn't invested in legalistic angry morality, of simply trying to avoid doing wrong things. Rather, it's taken up in doing what's good, almost without thinking. Good becomes the natural order of things. That's the difference between the Legalistic & Spirit-Filled Life. The spiritually formed person has learned to orient & order everything in their life towards Christ.

Last week we talked about the Law & the misconception that it's a negative thing we're released from under Jesus. Nothing could be farther from the truth - God's standards expressed in his Law are good, holy & life-giving. Obedience to the Law goes hand-in-hand with redemption under grace. Although, for those still living in darkness it is negative, given that it denies them what they have their hearts set upon. So, what your heart's set upon is the matter. Light or darkness? If darkness, then you have to spend your whole life evading the law in order to do what you want. As you come into the light of Jesus though, the more natural it is to be loving good light to the world around you - overflow of a changed heart.

As Ephesians 5:8-17 tells us, ⁸ *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light* ⁹ *(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness & truth)* ¹⁰ *and **find out what pleases the Lord.*** ¹¹ *Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.* ¹² *It is shameful even to*

*mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible - and **everything that is illuminated becomes a light.***

¹⁴ This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." ¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

I love that...*everything illuminated becomes a light!* Have you ever seen something reflect light, even in it's reflection it illuminates things around it. One night I'd seen a tombstone which looked like it was glowing. Very eery. My friend & I got closer & realized, it wasn't glowing, but reflecting a spotlight off a farm house - but it reflected so strongly everything around it was lit up.

But we have something even more than that - we have the light of Christ which emanates from within us, we've become light! So, the real question is, what's on the inside of us, not the outside. The outside's a result of the inside. For the believer, that inside is transformed over time to reflect Jesus on the outside. Under the light of Christ the joyous conviction & resistance to sin is based upon the new & real vision of what sin really is - a damaging thing which brings death. The illusion that God's a cosmic killjoy just arbitrarily prohibiting all the fun stuff is dispelled. Instead we see with gratitude, his prohibitions are a kindness which bring freedom & life! Even when they fly in the face of our cultural inclinations. Faith is change from a life-sentence to life-abundant! Our outward character's simply a reflection of what lies under the surface.

Do you realize your calling, along with all Christians, is found in that Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)? Is that light overflowing to others from your changed inner heart with Jesus? You've been thought of, and commissioned by God to be his instrument to bring life & light to others through Gospel truth. Something which couldn't be hidden even if you tried, like a city set on a hill as Jesus taught in Matthew 5:14-16.

Right now, who tells us what's right, good & life-giving in society? There's no way to say it nicely - it's the godless cultural elite & intellectual; those in power who are governed only by their own human-centered philosophies. Our musicians, artists, scientists, politicians, professors & thinkers. Not that they're bad people, or stupid - but they wholeheartedly preach their gospel contrary to the heart of God revealed in the Scriptures. We don't usually perpetuate an 'Us vs Them' attitude at Six:Eight, but it is healthy to identify the difference at times. To remember we have something people need - the light of Christ. Even when they come close to getting it right, it's still wrong. The humanistic worldview is like trying to drive from here to California on a flat tire. Or making beef stroganoff without the major ingredient of beef. It's the equivalent of me only packing enough food for 400 miles on a 500 mile backpacking trip, saying, "That'll cover it." That won't get me there. In his arrogance John Lennon said the Beatles were more popular than Jesus, and that sentiment continues in others! What influencers espouse as moral & acceptable is consumed by the masses like baby birds with open mouths waiting for a worm. All authority in heaven & on earth given to Jesus - one day

everyone will know this as they bow their knee to Christ, John Lennon included! We're not anti-science or intellectualism, we're just anti-arrogance before the Creator & pro-Jesus who offers life to everyone in the world.

Some strong thinkers see the contradiction in their worldview, like David Foster Wallace did when he saw humanities sin eating each other up; but David killed himself since he didn't have Jesus to answer the hopelessness. His answer was a naive 'be nice' which is impossible at any sustained level without Jesus' transformation. Our calling's important. When the Church acts in disobedience becoming anemic, those who don't know God take over the cultural microphone telling everyone what they think rightness or goodness is; what they believe gives life. And as sincere, or close they are, they still miss the main ingredient - Jesus. And for those truly walking with Jesus, we're saddened to the core of not only that, but also that pedophile priests & sexually deviant or greedy pastors, who are the only representation of Christianity in society. Jesus name, drug through the mud for people who've not built up any inner spiritual formation themselves. We've failed in many ways over history - now, more than ever, it's important, not only what we say, but how we live - and it must be as children of light transformed by the power of Christ if we're to have integrity & credibility to share Jesus - and effectively save lives! They have to see Jesus in us.

Many of you work out. You're devoted in the belief that your core strength is the most important thing to develop physically. That out of that you can build on everything else. The same's true in the spiritual life. Our core inner strength must be from the transformative work of Christ in our lives - like turning up the dimmer switch of his light.

Phil Strout tells three stories of trees on his property. Firstly, of an apple tree which was in full bloom - beautiful, fruitful. Secondly, was of a giant 100 year old pine tree towering over his property, majestic. And thirdly, a small hardwood tree growing up entangled in another large pine, as if the pine was holding it up.

(How strong is your core?)

One day he lightly bumped the apple tree with his lawn mower & it snapped off at the base, since it was totally hollow inside with only about a 1/4 inch of outer wood under the bark - no core strength.

(How deep are your roots?)

The giant towering pine blew over in a six minute windstorm, since not one root went more than 5 inches below the surface.

(How reliant are you on the scaffolding?)

And finally, the last tree stayed standing when the pine, which it was entangled in, fell - but that was winter, when the tree had no leaves. When spring came it proved to be too weak to hold up even it's own leaves, it bent to the ground & died - having relied too much on the scaffolding of that large pine.

These are the images of many in the church, possibly of whole Christian communities. The core spiritual fiber isn't there, the roots aren't deep in Jesus, or the scaffolding - the

entrapments of cultural Christianity, your bank account, job, or whatever you rely on as identity outside Him - are all deceiving you & not building core strength. That strength in Christ doesn't just come by magic, it's developed hand-in-hand with the Holy Spirit, through the power of the Living Word, over time. If not, one small bump knocks you over, one small storm, you topple, take your support system away & you don't have the spiritual strength to stand on your own. **Right now we need to think hard about three things: Character, Creed & Culture.**

To be concerned for Character, the spiritual formation process, the whole package. Jesus has all authority over you, just because he doesn't force you to growth, that doesn't negate his authority to call you into it. Just because he's not dictatorial, doesn't give license for disobedience. Character's developed with time, in a thousand small decisions in the crucible of life. Everyday last week from hotel to conference, I'd pass by this old steel mill which had this great sign: CRUCIBLE. The Holy Spirit said, pay attention - the spiritual life is a crucible, one in which the dross & impurities are burned off, and we're left with something pure & solid. Spend the time with Jesus to develop it. Make those small decisions all day long, everyday, which will carry you deeper with him.

Secondly, we need to get back to our Creed - which is a devotion to Scripture. Do we still ask, what do the Scriptures say? Have we given up the nonsense of explaining away Scriptural truth through the lens of pop-culture? Realizing God's character isn't progressive in issues of morality & standard. The principles of Scripture are supra-cultural, they rise above it. True at all times, everywhere to all cultures. Like a timeless love song which speaks to the human condition. Do the Scriptures still have authority in your life, if not, then how can you believe anything? Where's your solidity? You can't have any, you have nothing to stand on. Do we allow the Scriptures to trump our inclinations even when they challenge some things our culture holds so dear? When it calls us to reorient ourselves in ways which challenge cultural affinities. It must, or we'll topple over.

Thirdly, we should be aware of our surroundings. Fully alert. Able to define culture to our church & church to culture. We should know what we're faced with, and I'm not talking about being informed by the news. That's information & opinion at best, and the opiate of the masses at worst. I'm talking, understanding worldview, philosophies, culture shifts, influences - measuring all that against the Scriptures. Discernment & Wisdom in spiritual & human matters as informed by the Scripture. Ready always to give an answer for what we believe.

Let me just end with another story. Going back a number of years a high school girl came to Six:Eight briefly & sporadically. I loved her to death as did a few others in this room. Her mom went to jail during the time we were acquainted for abusing her; the mother was an alcoholic. I felt for her all alone. I shared Jesus with her, as others did. I prayed for her. I wanted her so badly to know Jesus & his love for her. But she seemed lost. Closed. I wasn't sure where she stood in faith. Then when her mother went to jail a family took her in, I was concerned it was an unhealthy atmosphere. She stopped coming to church, I assumed someone had offended her, maybe me. Or, she was unduly

influenced away from Christ. I assumed she didn't want any of this Jesus stuff, and lost track eventually as she moved away. But I've thought of her often over the years with sadness.

Fast forward to the conference last week. I met a couple from Boston. The wife immediately, upon hearing which church I pastored said, "Oh, we have one of your people!" I asked who - they said this girl's name. They explained attends, is actively involved, on fire for Jesus, and is interning with them! I broke out in tears. What a mercy to this pastor - the Holy Spirit led me to that couple at that conference to hear that story! I needed it. To know, all my efforts weren't for naught. They explained, she considered us to be her church, and me her pastor in Philly. I'd never have thought that! I thought we had offended her. Apparently not, we'd been a good witness! I cried more. The absolute grace & justice of a young girl left on her own, mother in jail due to selfish reasons, dad absent, and God reaches down into her life saying, you're part of my family now, I'm your father! That's beautiful!

Between that story & the car dealership guy & his girlfriend, what do you think I thought about all week? My many first-world problems? NO...I was walking on clouds. I want more of that! When you're living as a child of light, it's not without it's suffering, but nothing is as exhilarating as sharing Jesus, and especially when the Spirit moves for that to take root in someone!

Let's end to today in quiet meditation over some Scripture. Close your eyes, let me just bathe you with God's Word a little as we end (Eph 5:1-2/6-13/15-16, NIV)

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² & walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us & gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering & sacrifice to God.

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them. ⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness & truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible - and everything that is illuminated becomes a light.

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(Matthew 28:18-20)

"...All authority in heaven & on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go & make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."