

## Contrast 3) of Darkness & Light

Ephesians 5:8-15 • 2020-03-15 • Lenten Epistle Series: Contrast



How deep is the deepest place that anyone has ever gone? I found the answer from someone who did some investigative reporting and went down into the deepest mine.

It is in South Africa. He describes how he went down the shaft of the mine. His journey started in a huge elevator. It carried him down at forty feet a second for one mile, straight down. He described how the darkness just takes over, apart from a few passing lights from the side tunnels. And then he traveled down another horizontal shaft by Jeep and by foot. And after that he descended a second vertical shaft and elevator. That one took him nearly another mile straight down. There the temperature of the rock is at 140 degrees. If it weren't for the system of ventilation with forced cool air and the system pumping ice water down through pipe the people couldn't even work in that environment. Down there the miners have nearly two and a half miles of earth and rock above their heads. Just think about that! There are two and a half miles separating them from the light of the sun. That's deeper down into the earth than the elevation of the highest mountain in Arizona! Four thousand people each day go down into these mines as they work for the company that operates it all in order to get the gold down there. Nearly forty miles of those shafts and tunnels exists underground for them to do their work. When I learned about all this I thought, "What darkness!"

The miners could get in the elevators and go up at the end of each shift. They can return to the light. But the investigative reporter also revealed that this mine had another type of people. These people were called "ghost miners." Whether it was by sneaking in, or some other illegal method they got past security and down into the dark mines. And they live in the mines. They live down there a life of darkness and hardships in order to get their own stash of gold. Whether they go down there by desperation or by a quick scheme to get rich they must live a very dark life down there. They are hard core. They often carry AK-47 rifles and are involved with organized crime rings. They infiltrate with mobs and gangs through the ranks of the workers. To survive underground they use extortion or bribery with all the legitimate miners. The reporter was saying that the mining company is unable to get rid of these dangerous ghost miners in all the countless abandoned caverns and tunnels. Just imagine being a ghost miner! It is said that some of them are down there for months before they find their way back to the surface and as they hope escape past the security. Such darkness!

The apostle Paul paints for us a picture of darkness that in many ways compares with the dark lives of those ghost miners. But he paints a picture of spiritual darkness. We continue our series looking at the contrasts found in Paul's letters. And this morning we see just what a strong contrast exists between spiritual darkness and light.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians states, "You were once darkness." Of course, we need to realize this isn't just for the Ephesians. Paul is describing the spiritual state of all people. Everyone is born into darkness. And it is a darkness far bleaker than being 2.5 miles under the earth. It is not just a separation from the sunlight and clean air. It is a separation from the glory of God. It is a bleak spiritual darkness. That's the kind of darkness that we all were a part of at one time. That darkness is what Paul described earlier for us in his letter to the Ephesians when he described us all as being "objects of God's wrath." And take note how Paul doesn't just say that we were like innocent victims walking down a dark sidewalk. The picture is much worse. He says, "you were darkness." Not just in the dark but being the darkness. This dark picture is just what Jesus said about the human heart, "Out of the heart come evil thoughts and wickedness." Spiritual darkness defines us by nature. And being that darkness itself we lived in it, we embraced it, and we produced it.

And as darkness, we were forever shut out from the light. It was impossible for us to change and become light on our own. Just as it would be impossible for those ghost miners in South Africa to dig their own shaft back to the surface or to scale the mile-high shafts, so it would be impossible for us to become light.

But then the Word of Christ comes as good news. "You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." Notice that this is not some light that we are someday going to see or reach. But it says "now" we are light. This light doesn't come by our own working or power. You are light "in the Lord." He lifted us out of that darkness and made us to be light. And we will forever enjoy that light as one who rises from the darkness of death enjoys the light of resurrection. He has taken away the darkness of our sin and all that we deserved as objects of wrath and darkness. He has made us to be his own new-born children of light! We are to be with him forever in light and glory.

"Now you are light in the Lord!" So now what? Then what does that plant do? It veers toward the light, bends toward it and will do all it can to reach more of the light. And through contact with the light it will bear fruit. So, we too are now light in the Lord. The NIV reads here "live as children of light." The word for live here means "walk about, conduct yourself" that is, make your whole life like a child of God born again into his light.

So how do we "live as children of light?" Well, the "fruit of light" consist in all goodness, righteousness, and truth. Paul says, "find out what pleases the Lord." And don't misunderstand. This is not a "finding out" as if we don't already know what it is that pleases the Lord. We don't have to google "what pleases the Lord" to find out something we could never know. We see clearly in his Word what pleases the Lord. And the word translated here "find out" more accurately could be translated as "test and approve" of what pleases the Lord. It is the same word that is used in the Bible when referring to "testing" gold to see if it is gold. In other words, when something comes your way you must constantly ask, "does this

pass the test of what is really God pleasing?" When someone receives gold, they like to determine that it is really the gold. In the past some would take a bite to see if it would give and bend. Today when you purchase an expensive gold item you want it certified and to be able to know it is 18 or 24 carat gold. We are to test and approve of everything to see if it pleases the Lord.



The fruit of light can be identified as "righteousness, goodness, and truth." When we were darkness, goodness consisted in asking, "What is good for me? What do I consider to be good in my own selfish desires?" But now as children of light we ask, "Is this good in God's eyes?" Once the darkness defined righteousness. The dark nature of the heart reasons, "If the darkness around me says this is okay then it has to be okay." But now that we are light in the Lord, we test everything first. We only approve of it if it meets the Lord's criteria for righteous. "Is this right in God's eyes?" And in darkness truth was always whatever came out of the heart of darkness. The truth was a lie. We were blinded to the truth. But now that we are light in the Lord we test and approve of what is true according to his Word. Whatever comes our way we always are to examine it, test it, and ask "Is this true according to the Word of our God?" God's unchanging Word is truth.

What ought we to do when something can't be approved as good, righteous, and true? Children of light are warned to watch out. "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness." The words "have nothing to do with" mean "don't join together with" or "don't have fellowship with" the darkness.

Do we always heed this warning to have nothing to do with the darkness? Or do we sometimes begin to join with the darkness? In what ways might we be tempted to go back into the dark or just hit the dimmer switch for a while? Who do we let define truth? Is it God's Word or fallen human minds? What is considered righteous? Is it what the faithful pastor preachers or what the famous actor practices? What forms of entertainment should the children of light be taking in? What words should be coming from the mouths of the children of light as they speak with one another and with those still lost in darkness? When we have fellowship with darkness, goodness becomes a fruitless deed of darkness. The music and movies we surround ourselves with sing praise of personal gratification and abuse of sex. When we have fellowship with darkness, righteousness becomes "this is the way everyone does it". When we have fellowship with darkness, truth becomes whatever the radio, the internet, or your gossiping friends want you to hear. We at times begin to step back down into the dark mine looking for earthly treasure. And in doing so we peak our heads back into the dark corners from which Jesus has freed us. We are in danger of turning back to a pitiful darkness which we do not want to return. So, Paul warns us, "don't have fellowship, don't join together with those fruitless deeds of darkness."

Instead of joining we are told to "expose the fruitless deeds of darkness." If you see a brother who is going back to the darkness of sin or a sister in the faith, warn them. "You don't want to go down there. That way is darkness. You have been brought to the light! Watch out for the dangers that lurk within that corner. Have nothing to do with that darkness! It seeks to pull you away from your Lord and the light!" A brother who is walking back to darkness or joining with darkness isn't always going to like that. And you and I will hesitate to have our own dark deeds exposed by the light. That's what Paul says when he mentions "It is shameful even to mention what deeds of darkness happen in secret."

But when we expose the terrible depths and darkness of our sin there is only one place left to turn. Those who have the light shine on them from the Lord can do only one of two things. They could go retreating into the darkness. But with the Word of Christ comes the good news. And instead of fear and darkness he changes us from darkness to light. He forgives and shines on us with favor. Christ shines on us. Christ's Word comes as a bright light. It not only shows us our sin but shows us his great shining love.

Christ, who is light, came looking for a treasure. A far greater treasure than anything he could mine or dig. It was his own people who he valued with the price of his own blood. Our Lord who descended to this very dark world was there for us in the darkness. And there he hung in the darkness from noon until three on the cross. Looking like he was alone in the darkness he faced the wrath that we deserved. He faced the torments and punishment that we deserved because we were darkness and wickedness. He did this to bring us to his wonderful light. We are now light in Jesus our Lord. Why? Because of his shining mercy and love for us! All who trust in him have a new status. And he promises we will live with him forever in glorious light! Someday we will be lowered into the darkness of the grave. But even then, as children of light pulled out of that darkness. And we will shine forever like the stars.

You see why we want to live as children of light? The picture is like a ghost miner who deserved death and darkness and could not make it back to the light, but was forgiven, brought back to the light, and given new life. And we look forward yet to even brighter and better things! With our new status also comes a new heart of faith. That is a resurrection faith!

Paul ends here with an ancient Christian song or creed that speaks to the resurrection. Our Lord who hung in the darkness on the cross and was placed in the darkness of the tomb came back to life. And that new resurrection life is our power today. God's Word brings about a strong contrast in our lives now and forever. It's not just a dim candle that makes us into different people. It is life-changing, transforming us altogether. God sends transforming light by his gospel of Jesus Christ. And this morning we see just what our we really are in Christ. Once darkness, now light in him.