



## Life Guide

applying God's Word to life

### We Have Seen the Light February 23, 2020

2 Corinthians 4:5–6 <sup>5</sup> For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

1. Tell the group about the deepest, densest darkness you have ever experienced. Where were you? How did you feel? What did you do? **Answer will vary. For me it was in a cave in South Dakota. The tour guide led us into the cave. Once we were assembled, he turned out the lights for about 30 seconds. I remember a child being scared and crying (or maybe that was me). It was so odd because usually after a few seconds in the darkness one's eyes adjust, and you can begin to make things out. That was not the case in that cave. I couldn't see a thing. It was an eerie feeling. I was very glad when the light came back on. Thirty seconds felt like an eternity.**
2. "As a man comes, so he departs, and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind? All his days he eats in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger." (Ecclesiastes 5:16-17). The man who wrote these words was the wisest, richest man who has ever lived on earth – King Solomon of Israel. Why would he have felt this way? Have you had similar feelings? If so, when and why? **As time went on, Solomon drifted from the truth of God's Word. He tried to find meaning and purpose in his life by working hard, building things and studying every subject under the sun. None of it brought peace to his heart or gave his life real**

meaning. This same sort of thing happens to me when I try to find purpose and meaning for my life apart from God. Money and success are fleeting. Without God, life is meaningless. We muddle and stumble through it as we do the darkness. When we place our value in and build happiness on the things of this life, and then realize that it will one day all be gone, we get frustrated and angry. Only when we know Christ and, through him, the life that doesn't end, do we find purpose, peace, and joy.

3. Why did Paul refuse to "preach" himself as the solution to his reader's problems? (Hint: Consider the source of all trouble.) What lesson can we learn from Paul? **Paul refused to preach himself as the answer to the Corinthians' troubles because in and of himself, he had nothing to offer them. He was a fellow sinner, and by his own admission, the worst of sinners. (Sin is the source and cause of all that is dark in our hearts and in our world.) In and of himself, Paul had no wisdom to offer his readers. He had no philosophy that would make them happier and feeling more fulfilled. From Paul I learn that when troubles come, it's a waste of time to turn "inward." So often I try to rely on myself to solve whatever problem I'm facing. When my conscience bothers me, I rely on reason to try to justify my actions. When worries come, I try to "problem-solve." I forget to turn to God in prayer. I fail to recall and rely on his promise. It happens time after time. What fool I am!**
4. The Bible describes hell as a place of "...darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." What's the cause of...1) the darkness? **The Bible says that in heaven we won't need the sun because God will be our light. The darkness described here reminds me that the worst thing about is the fact that it is completely devoid of God's presence. Here on earth God "causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good." Not so in hell. No God, no light – only darkness.** 2) the weeping? **Uncontrollable sobbing will be caused by any number of hell's tortures – physical pain, spiritual anguish, the realization that God's grace was tossed aside and for what?** 3) the gnashing of teeth? **I imagine (not happily) people in such pain that they clench their jaws and grind their teeth in misery. In a number of**

places in Scripture, people gnash their teeth in anger. I wouldn't doubt that to be the case in hell. In hell it will be every person for himself/herself. There will be no commiserating. Hell is a place of intense anger and hatred. What's the purpose of thinking about this? It causes us to appreciate all the more all what Jesus endured for us in hell and, by doing so, what it is he rescued us from.

5. Paul preached "Jesus Christ as Lord." Explain the significance of this title, "Lord." "Jesus" our Savior's given name means "He Saves." Christ means "Anointed One" – the One God chose and appointed to save the world from sin. "Lord" means "ruler." In the context, Paul has just told the Corinthians that he is not the answer to their troubled lives. He can't fix what's wrong with them. Jesus, on the other hand can. He's the Lord of life. He is our God who rules all things. As Lord he defeated sin, Satan, and death. He rules our hearts in love and with the peace he won for us. Paul writes in Colossians 3:15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...
6. Rather than "Lord," Paul and his companions preached that they were "servants for Jesus' sake." What was the nature and purpose of their servitude? Whose servant are you? Paul is not talking about slavery, at least not in a negative way. Rather he is so grateful to Jesus for what he has done for him, that he wants to serve Jesus. And how can he best do that? By sharing the saving love of Jesus with the people he knows and meets. Paul sees himself as the servant of his fellow sinners. He wants to serve them with the gospel. He wants them to know and possess all the blessings Christ has won for them. I have the same reason to serve Jesus and my fellow sinners. What a difference this makes in all my relationships – when I see myself as servant to the people Jesus places in my life. I have what everyone needs. I'm here for a reason – to share Jesus.
7. Peter, James, John, and Paul got to see Jesus' glory as a shining bright light. God reveals his glory to us in the face, that is, in the person of his Son. Explain how you experience this glory in Word and Sacrament when you are 1) burdened by your sin; I

experience God's glory through the love he shows me in Christ. I experience that glory in the peace that Jesus earned for me when he offered himself as the sacrifice for all sin – mine included. God's glory comes to me in the peace of sins forgiven (proclaimed in the gospel and administered in the Lord's Supper). Because of Jesus, my sin is not counted against me. God doesn't punish me – not now, not ever (Romans 8:1). Take note – my knowledge of this peace goes beyond intellect. In other words this not simply something I have studied and learned. I experience this peace as it calms my troubled conscience. 2) when you are feeling pain and loss; I experience God's glory in the promise he makes me -- that he will not leave or forsake me (Hebrews 13:5). He promises to make pain and loss serve my good (Romans 8:28) and connects this promise to his saving love, assuring me in Romans 8:32, that the same love that gave me Jesus will never fail to meet all my needs. Again, this is something that I experience on a daily basis. This is the glory of God at work in my life, shining brightly in the love he shows me for Jesus' sake. 3) when you are feeling frightened and alone. In the sermon I reference the time of our death. Death threatens to separate us from everyone and everything. But God has changed all this in Christ. Because of Jesus suffering, death and resurrection, the grave is not a dead end. Instead, death is the way to heaven for all who believe in Jesus. It isn't a lonely time. The Risen Jesus knows all about death. He meets us there, lights our path, and carries us home to heaven. In that moment everything will change. Here we see God's glory through eyes of faith. In the moment of our death we will see God face to face in all his glory in heaven. That's something to look forward to!

8. How might the light of God's love grow dim within us? What can we do to make sure this doesn't happen? How can we help one another in this regard? The light of God's glorious love in our hearts grows dim when we are disconnected from the gospel promise that gave birth to our faith in Holy Baptism. We do not have to be afraid that this will happen to us when we stay connected to the gospel in Word and Sacrament. God's gospel promises feed our faith whenever we read the Scriptures and recall and remember those promises during the course of the day. We can

help one another stay strong in the faith by meeting with one another at church, celebrating the Lord's Supper together in God's house. We can encourage one another with God's gospel promises all the way to heaven. (Think about using notes and email to keep each other gospel focused.)

## 2 Corinthians 4:5–6

**<sup>5</sup>For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup>For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.**

With these words, Paul is apparently coming back to the thoughts expressed in verses 1 and 2, verses 3 and 4 being somewhat parenthetical. In verse 2 Paul had said, "By setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." In verses 3 and 4, he accounts for the fact that, even though he has set forth the truth plainly, not all believe. The devil works hard to keep people from seeing the light.

Now in verse 5 Paul explains what he means by "setting forth the truth plainly." It is simply a matter of preaching "Jesus Christ as Lord." Paul uses this expression elsewhere in his letters. In 1 Corinthians he writes, "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (12:3). He tells the Philippians that on the Last Day "every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (2:11). It is the basic Christian confession of faith. In his explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed, Martin Luther puts it the same way: "I believe that Jesus Christ ... is my Lord."

Paul says, "We do not preach ourselves." This is again an apparent reference to the way his opponents operated. Using secret and shameful ways, deception and distortion, they were

really in it for themselves. In contrast, Paul says that he and his coworkers were not serving themselves; rather, they were servants of the Corinthians "for Jesus' sake," literally, "because of Jesus." In view of all that Jesus had done for them, they were inwardly compelled to preach Jesus to others.

In the final verse of this section, Paul thinks back to what the Lord had done for him. At the time of creation, God had said, "Let light shine out of darkness." That same God had removed the veil from Paul's heart and brought light to it. He defines that light as knowing, that is, personally experiencing "the glory of God in the face [or person] of Christ."

This appears to be a reference on Paul's part to the day of his conversion when quite literally a light from heaven penetrated the darkness of his heart. On that day he came face-to-face with God's greatest glory. He saw Jesus and, seeing Jesus, saw the glory of God's love. A light receiver, as Paul was privileged to be that day, cannot help but also be a light reflector (see 3:18).

That is why Paul does not lose heart, even though the gospel remains veiled to some. If Jesus Christ could bring light to his dark heart, he could do it for anyone (see 1 Timothy 1:16). And Paul's message was Jesus Christ, for Jesus is the heart and center of the new covenant. That is what makes the ministry of the new covenant a triumphant ministry, a ministry that far surpasses the ministry of the old covenant.

All believers today are given that same ministry, some by virtue of a call into the public ministry but all by virtue of their call as priests of God (see 1 Peter 2:9). We too can be bold in our proclamation of the message of the new covenant, the good news that "Jesus Christ is Lord." The message is just as powerful and effective today as then, for it is the message that, unlike the old covenant, never fades away.

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<sup>1</sup> Valleskey, D. J. (1992). *2 Corinthians* (pp. 61–64). Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House.