

Monday Morning Prayer: Read Isaiah 6:1-7. Ask God to give you a glimpse of His holiness as Isaiah saw Him, a glimpse that leaves you brought low by your sin and lifted up only by Jesus Christ.

Monday Morning Question: What does it mean to live in darkness, and how does this darkness produce pain and sorrow?

- Read Isaiah 8
 - This chapter is a chapter of both hope and of judgement. In the chapter before, God gave a promise of hope to the king of Judah and the people: “The Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel [meaning, ‘God with us’]” (7:14). Nevertheless, before this happens, God is going to send Assyria, one of the enemies of Judah, against them to punish them for their sin. This is why God says what He does in verses 6-8. Read these verses again carefully.
 - Notice how Judah rejects the symbol of God’s provision for them in v. 6, so the punishment in v. 7 is a “therefore.” God punishes them because they have turned from Him. Verse 8 tells us that this is going to be extreme punishment, almost to the point where Judah is entirely annihilated. However, God ensure that they are not entirely taken over.
- After these pictures of judgement and pain, the Lord speaks commands of hope to Isaiah in vv. 11-15. Fast forward and focus particularly on verses 19 until the end of the chapter. These verses are going to especially help us in answering our question.
 - What do the people of Judah who are being punished by God to in response to His punishment in vv. 19-22? They want to speak to ask the other false gods of the world through occultic practices (v. 19), though they should turn to the living God for life! Therefore, they lose God’s blessing and word (v. 20; this is what “dawn” refers to).
 - Look what happens as they are taken away into the land of the Assyrians in their punishment... They are “greatly distressed and hungry,” making them speak with anger against God and the king (v. 21). And finally, since God will not help them as they angrily speak against Him, they look for comfort and peace through the world (“they will look to the earth”), but this only increased their misery, darkness, distress, and pain.
- Think about how we see these verses today. All pain and sorrow today is a result of our fall into sin. Without Christ, we are just like the people of Judah in Isaiah 8. To live without Christ is to live in this darkness for all of life, and even more for all of eternity after we die. Though all of the pain around us is an opportunity for us to turn to the Lord and find life (just like the Assyrian’s invasion was for Judah), we so often respond just like Judah. We get more angry at God, we become discontent with our circumstances and speak against Him, we look to the world for the comfort and light that only He can give. Though we are hungry for the bread of life (Jesus),

we seek to satisfy our hunger with television, substances, sex, pornography, popularity, attention, video games, sports, and even more. We willingly choose even more darkness, producing more pain and sorrow, since this is not how God has made us to live.

- Application: As you read verses 19-22, what stands out to you the most? What are ways that you speak against God in your pain, even often if not directly done out loud? What are ways that you look to the world to answer your problems? How do you seek to satisfy your hunger with things other than God?
 - There are many things that are totally outside of our control when talking about the pain and the sorrow in the world due to the darkness brought in with sin. However, there are also so many things that we can control by the grace of God. In His mercy, He has granted His people freedom from every single one of these sins through Jesus Christ. Think deeply about these above questions so that you can control those sinful impulses by the power of the Holy Spirit. Without Him, we are hopeless and can only stay in the state spoken of in verses 19-22.

Monday Evening Prayer: Read Ezekiel 36:26-27. God *promises* to give a new heart and spirit in all of His new covenant people. Pray that God will give you a heart like this and that the Holy Spirit would open your eyes as you read the word of God tonight.

Monday Evening Question: How does the light of Jesus Christ give hope and joy to the people of God?

- Read Isaiah 9:1-7
 - Coming off of the darkness of Isaiah 8, chapter 9 is a proclamation and promise of hope and light. Look at the certainty of Isaiah's word in verse 1 when he writes this: "But in the latter times He *has made glorious* the way of the sea..." Isaiah speaks in the past tense about the events of vv. 1-7 because this is how certain God's word is—even though it is in the future, since it is God's word, it is 100% certain!
 - Then look at v. 2. What does God promise for the people of darkness in 8:19-22 (the people we looked at this morning)? Light! Notice that God shows this light on His people; it is not they who look to the light. The people of Judah will see a great light, but this is because a great light has been shown upon them. God shines the light and they see the light!
 - What kind of people does this create? Look at v. 3. When light shines on those in darkness, the only possible response is joy and rejoicing! Having been delivered from their state of darkness (vv. 4-5), the only thing left to do is rejoice before the Lord for His work!
- How does God shine light upon the people? How does He deliver them from darkness? Through Jesus Christ, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The promised child of verses 6-7 will deliver His people.

- The light of Jesus is seen here in that He is all that we are not. He is the very Wisdom of God, the eternal God, the One who brings peace to all of His people. He is ruling over all of the world and is conquering souls whenever He pleases, and He has never once committed a single wrong to anyone. What a wonder!
- You see, for all those who have true, saving faith and trust in the Lord Jesus, these verses describe their experience. Upon them has the delivering, freeing, joy-creating light of Jesus been shown. Though they still live in a world of darkness and still commit sin, the dominating force of their life is the light of King Jesus.
 - The light of Jesus Christ gives hope and joy to His people not because of who they become after knowing Him, but instead because of who He is unchangeably. He has delivered them from their bondage to idolatry, self-reliance, and love for the world through His royal rule and reign. Looking to Him, having His glorious light upon yourself, is the only way to escape the pain and sorrow that our love for darkness creates.
- Application: Before you continue this week, it is of the utmost importance that you can say that, by God's grace, you have seen the light of Jesus Christ. Praying a prayer does not guarantee that this has happened. Search your heart honestly to ask yourself if your life would be described in these terms. Is the dominating force of your life the light of King Jesus? Do you regularly rejoice with supernatural, Spirit-filled joy at the sight of Jesus Christ? Do you know what it is like to be delivered and freed from sin and idolatry—not just to “do better,” but to have even the attitude of your heart and your love for a certain sin be transformed into hatred for that sin?
 - If you do not know these things in any way, if your “Christian life” is really just a life of trying harder and seeking to do better, you are not a Christian. This is a really hard reality, but you must come face to face with this reality; you *must* if you wish to be saved from sin. God speaks to you today through this text and calls you come to Him, but to come to Him you must first realize your complete helplessness to save yourself. Trust Him with your everything, running from self-righteousness and moralism, and you will find the Savior and King of light.

Tuesday Morning Prayer: Read Isaiah 66:2. Bring this promise to God through Christ, coming low before Him in the recognition that you do not deserve Him or His mercy, and with an open hand to submit to anything that His Word says.

Tuesday Morning Question: Yesterday morning, you read a little bit about how darkness relates to sorrow and pain. We want to further explore the darkness that is in us and that consumes the world apart from Christ by asking this question: How does darkness relate to confusion and anxiety?

- Read 1 Corinthians 2
 - Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2 about the message that has been given to him by God. He especially builds on the distinction between those who know God and those who don't in this passage. He notes in v. 8 that the rulers of this earth

didn't understand the wisdom of God, and they clearly showed this when they crucified Jesus. He really presses down this in v. 14. The "natural person" is the person without the Spirit of God, the person living in darkness without Christ. Any person in this state is in a state of confusion. Since they have turned away from the light of the world (John 8:12), all of their thinking is clouded with darkness and they can't make sense of the greatest truth in all of the world. There is constant confusion about life's greatest questions because the answers to these questions can only be answered with the light of Jesus Christ.

- Since there is constant confusion about the most important things in life, darkness is a place of anxiety. When image bearers created for God forget Him and turn from Him, it only makes sense that they would then feel constant anxiety and worry about that which is around them. God is over and above every problem, He is the Creator and sustainer of all of the universe. Therefore, the only way to then be freed from confusion which leads to constant anxiety over fear is to regard Him and His role in the world, remember Him, turn to Him.
- Read Psalm 94:19; Matthew 6:25-34; 1 Peter 5:6-7
- Application: To be in the darkness and away from Christ is to be filled with all sorts of confusion and anxiety. Why are we here? What is our purpose? What if I die tomorrow? Such questions cannot be adequately answered apart from the light of Jesus Christ shining forth from His word. If you wish to be someone who is freed from confusion and anxiety (I know I certainly am!), you must commit yourself to the diligent study of God through the memorization of His word. It must be to you more precious and desirable to you than anything the world can offer (Ps. 19:7-10), for it is here that you can find Jesus, the "Wonderful Counselor" and "Prince of Peace." Commit yourself to knowing God as He has revealed Himself in the word that you might be more and more freed from confusion and anxiety.

Tuesday Evening Prayer: Read Jeremiah 9:23-24. If the list in v. 24 is what God delights in, pray that you might deeply *know* God, as He describes Himself to be, through His Word.

Tuesday Evening Question: How exactly does the light of Jesus produce wisdom and peace in His people?

- Read Proverbs 9:7-12
 - Solomon teaches us throughout the book of Proverbs that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (1:7). Here, amidst his writing about the importance of humility and reproof of others, look at what he says in vv. 10-11. He affirms his "thesis" that he said in 1:7, but he also goes on to say that "the knowledge of the Holy One is insight."
 - Solomon is talking here not just about intellectual knowledge, but the knowledge of the soul—an intimate knowledge. In the way that a husband doesn't only know facts about his wife but *knows* her, this is how Solomon talks

about “knowing” the Lord here. Note that this knowledge is not merely the beginning of insight, but knowledge here *is* insight. We do not graduate from the knowledge of the Lord, since He is who He is (v. 11). Instead, we press on to continue to know Him. We come to know Him by faith and repentance, but we continue to press on to know Him daily (Hosea 6:3) by increased faith and repentance.

- Read Colossians 2:2-3; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31
 - The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge *because* all knowledge and wisdom is hidden in Christ. Jesus Christ, being God, knows all things exhaustively. What is more is that Jesus is our only way to God, since He is both fully God and fully man. Therefore, if we want to know about the world around us and make sense of things, we must know Jesus Christ. Only through being united to Him by faith can we have access to God’s wisdom about the world. Jesus Christ is not merely our Savior from sin, but for the Christian, He has become “wisdom.” All of our relationships, callings, decisions, belongings are seen beneath the word that He has declared to us.
- Read Isaiah 26:2-6
 - Look at verse 3 and take God at His word... Isn’t this amazing?! Though we are born in darkness and choose it daily, though we live in a constant state of anxiety and confusion apart from Christ, by the grace of God, the Christian can be in a state of “perfect peace!”
 - Our anxiety remains after coming to Jesus not because He is not strong enough to lead us to peace but because we take our eyes off of Him—the One who is the Wisdom and Peace of God. When we don’t trust in Jesus, when we don’t set our minds upon God and His promises, we inevitably fall back into the state of darkness that we are born in to.
- Application: Think of all the chaos in the world around us. We are constantly hearing of wars and turmoil within our country. For many, even having peace about their home situations, past, or present obligations can create crippling fear and anxiety. No matter where you fall in this spectrum, these verses call us to pursue wisdom and peace in Jesus Christ. He moves His people to wisdom in this world as they know Him more and more, and He moves His people to peace as they gaze upon Him in trust that He is sovereign over all things.
 - What are 3 things in the world that cause you to take your eyes off of God and trusting in Him (think about that which creates anxiety or confusion in you internally)? How can you work to give those to God? What promises can you cling to that you might move forward in peace and wisdom?

Wednesday Morning Prayer: Read James 1:18-25. See the command to receive God’s Word with meekness and to be a doer of the Word. Ask God for the grace to do what He commands you in these verses.

Wednesday Morning Question: Yesterday morning, you read a little bit about how darkness relates to confusion and anxiety. However, one of the most often things we hear about darkness is how it relates to sin. Let's look at this further. How does darkness relate to immorality and wickedness?

- Read Romans 3:1-20
 - In this chapter, Paul makes the case clear of the power of sin over the unbeliever. The power of sin, for those apart from Christ, is an absolute, all-encompassing power. Look in verses 9-18 to see this clearly spelled out.
 - In these verses, Paul begins by saying that "no one is righteous." Of course no one is perfect—many unbelievers are even willing to say this. But look at what he means by this... Those who are in darkness do not even seek God (v. 11), but instead suppress the knowledge that they have of Him (Rom. 1:18). All those who are under sin do not do anything that is good, not meaning that they can't do anything good from an earthly perspective, but instead meaning that even earthly things that are "good" are only pleasing to God if done for His sake (Rom. 14:23). *Every single person in the world* is in this state apart from Christ (v. 12).
- We see in these verses how the darkness of life apart from Christ is a life that is fully engrossed with sin. Since the unbeliever cannot do even one good deed before God, every single thought, action, and deed they have is that of wickedness. It stands against God's law (summarized in the Ten Commandments) and only is a further, increasing actions of the suppression of God's truth.
 - More than this, the unbeliever loves their sin; they love being in this state. In fact, this is why they do not come to Christ. This is what John says in John 3:19-21:
 - "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light *because their works were evil*. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."
 - Though the Son offers all sinners everlasting life, they will not come to Him in their own strength. Their minds will not submit to Him (Rom. 8:7-8) because submission would mean laying aside their sin, which they are not willing to do.
- Application: Spend time this morning wrestling with these difficult truths. If this is the case, what a fearful thing it is to be in a state of unbelief! In this state, the wrath of God abides upon, hangs over, those who do not believe the gospel (John 3:36). The second God's patience runs out, there is nothing awaiting those who do not savingly know Christ except for everlasting misery beneath His anger.
 - Pray for those who you know who do not believe in Christ. Pray that the Spirit of God would convict them of their sin and that they would turn to Christ. Pray that in light of these truths, God would work in you a love for those who have not

been born again and that this love would change the way you relate with those around you.

- If you are in a state of unbelief, if you have not truly turned from your sin and trusted in Christ *alone* for the forgiveness of sins, take God's word seriously this morning. He will not deny His word; all those apart from Christ stand condemned. Receive the love shown for sinners on Calvary and trust in Christ!

Wednesday Evening Prayer: Read Philippians 2:12-13. Work out your salvation in such a way that your salvation depends upon it. Do it with fear and trembling. And do so while always remembering God's promise to work in you, so that you will do good works for Him. Pray for a zeal for holiness and a love for Christ that is greater than you knew yesterday.

Wednesday Evening Question: This morning we looked at some difficult but needed truths about being apart from the light of Christ and how it produces only increasing sin and unrighteousness. However, what about for Christians? How does the light of Jesus create purity and righteousness for those who trust in Him?

- Read 1 John 1:5-2:11
 - John writes this epistle so that those who read it might "know" that they "have eternal life" (5:13). Many profess to be Christians, but how can one know if their faith is genuine and true? This is the question John is answering in this epistle.
 - In light of this, observe how John does this in these verses that you read. He makes clear that those who know God, who is the light, will walk in the light (1:6-7). This means obeying God's word (2:3, 5), loving those within the church (1:7; 2:9-10), regularly confessing particular and named sins (1:8-10), and walking (imperfectly but really) like Jesus (2:6).
 - Note how John is repeatedly using the theme of darkness and light throughout this. This darkness and light has a relationship to all people, and they show to whom they belong to according to their fruits (Mat. 7:16).
- Jesus said that the one who loves Him will keep His commandments (John 14:15). John helps us explain in our text today how this is so. Trusting in Jesus and turning from sin is not only how the Christian life begins, but it is the heart of the Christian life. We never graduate from turning from sin and trusting in Jesus. When God saves someone, when He transfers them from darkness to light (Col. 1:13), He makes a people who love Him. Because they love Him, they love His purity and His righteousness, they want to look just like Him! We imitate and become like that which we love and treasure most.
 - God creates a people of purity and righteousness through faith and repentance. Christians are, by definition, "little Christs." Though they are never perfect as He is, they strive, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, to look more and more like Him every day. The Christian life is therefore not a life of a decision, but is a life of continually growing in righteousness and holiness.

- Application: Are you growing in righteousness and holiness? Where can you see God's work in your life in moving you from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light? List at least 3 ways that you have seen the fruit of God's salvation in your life, not primarily in what you do externally but in what you love and desire internally. When we are honest with ourselves here, this is where the truthfulness of fruit is tested. Then, list at least 3 *particular* sins (not generic "I could be a better son/daughter." In this example, how *specifically* have you sinned against your parents?) that you will confess your sin to the Lord today and will seek to grow in.