

## Sermon – 04/01/2009 pm

### Walk as Lights

Study Text: Ephesians 5:7-8

When we first arrived in India we went to stay at a guesthouse. On the mantle piece I noticed some candles and a box of matches. In the bathroom there was candle and matches again – and the same in the bedroom. What was it with all the candles I thought – and these were not fancy perfumed candles either.

We soon found out why there were candles in every room. There was a sudden power cut that evening. All the lights went out and it was completely dark. We reached out for a candle and a match to give some light in the dark room. We ended up using candles on many occasions – eating by candle light, washing by candle light, and reading by candle light.

The candle sort of symbolised why we were in India. The Lord took us there to be lights in a spiritually dark place. Most people bowed down to idols of stone or wood, idols in the form of monkeys, elephants, cows or some grotesque form of man. The people with darkened understanding thought that making an offering to these gods would bring them good luck, or at least stop the gods from being angry with them. They were worshipping what the true God had created rather than worshipping God the creator.

What or who do you worship? You can tell me the answer, but I and others know the answer by the way you live. The true God is a jealous God and will tolerate no rivals. You cannot worship God and money, or God and sex, or God and anything else. It must be God first and last.

### Darkness

Darkness came over the heart of man when he disobeyed God in Eden. When Eve and Adam sinned against God they tried to hide from him. They could no longer stand in the light of God's presence. They knew God but chose to ignore his word and listen to Satan. Their foolish hearts were darkened (Romans 1:21). It was not just momentary darkness but darkness that leads to death. There is no light in death.

So it is that everyone born into this world is born with a darkened heart. We were born without the knowledge of a redeemer. The natural man continues to walk in ignorance. The Ephesians were like that once. Their understanding was darkened, their hearts were blinded, they walked in the darkness of death (Ephesians 4:18). 'The fool says in his heart there is not God'. That is what those who walk in darkness say. *The light has shone into the darkness but the darkness has not understood/comprehended it* (John 1:5).

The Dark Ages is how historians refer to the second half of the first millennium. After the fall of the Roman Empire, Europe entered this period of violence and barbarity. They lacked culture. It was a time of spiritual darkness also, because the knowledge of God became dim.

Theologians would refer to a much longer period as the dark ages. In fact from the time Adam and Eve sinned until the glory of Christ's death and resurrection was a dark age. Jesus Christ came as the light of the world. Even now darkness remains where Christ is not known. Darkness remains in the heart of all who reject Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Modern man speaks of recent centuries as the age of enlightenment – despite two world wars. To be sure knowledge has increased enormously. We have learnt how to split the atom and how to travel to the moon. We have learnt so much about the human body, how to fix it and keep it alive longer – yet the grave still wins in the end.

But have we been enlightened about the meaning and purpose of life. Does Darwin's theory of evolution make life more meaningful for us, or Freud's theories on psychology? Is it not that the human heart has been darkened by the theory of evolution. How enlightening is it for man who is made in the image of God to be told his is made in the image of a monkey. In this darkness men seek to learn from monkeys and other creatures rather than from God our maker. Again we state 'the fool says in his heart there is no God'. Even the ignorant idol worshipper has some sense that God is great and is to be feared.

*You were once darkness* writes Paul. Not 'you once walked in darkness' but you 'were darkness'. Darkness was inside you. Your foolish heart was darkened. With a darkened heart we were in a helpless and hopeless situation. We could do nothing to dispel the darkness. We could not find the way of life. Jesus changed all that. He brought the light of life, the light that shone into our hearts when we believed and dispelled the darkness of death.

## Light

*But now!* We have heard these words before. These two words tell of a total change, a change from darkness to light. *But now* the light has come and there is no more darkness. Back in chapter 2 we read 'but now you who were far away have been brought near in Christ Jesus'. And prior to this we read *But God* – God made us alive in Christ. *But now you are light in the Lord*. Again it is Jesus who is at the centre of the change. Only Jesus can bring about a total and lasting change to the heart of man.

Many have made New Year resolutions. 'I am going to change my ways this year' they said. They are going to give up drinking, go on a diet or give up something else. Maybe they made a positive resolution. They decided to speak to someone they have not been speaking to, to forgive someone or maybe they resolved to come to church. All this is good and people do change their ways, but often only for a time.

When Jesus comes into your heart the change is total and permanent. Think of the apostle himself who hated Christians and wanted to kill them. When he met Jesus on the Damascus road he became a Christian. A brilliant light shone upon him blinding him for a while. But that light of Jesus burned into the depths of his heart. His heart was totally changed. He no longer walked in darkness – in hatred and violence – but in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It was interesting working among the poor of India. We could do many things to change their lives and help them live longer and more comfortable lives. Medical help was very effective. Agricultural help was effective. One economist concluded that the greatest need was education. Education was the best way to help poor people in the long term. But at the end of the day, was this the answer? Even with education they continued to worship gods that were corrupt and immoral. Education did not bring a change of heart with regard to moral and upright living. They still remained in the darkness.

We live in a society bursting with knowledge. With so much knowledge why has man not changed? We are supposed to be evolving, we are supposed to be masters of our own destiny.

Yet all men end up in the grave. In fact many are so disillusioned they want to escape life in this world.

But still people reject the light of the gospel. Learned men like Richard Dawkins strut the world stage ridiculing Christians. ‘God is just a myth’ he says. ‘Why don’t you wake up and realise that God is dead’ he shouts at preachers across America. ‘We know that man is just an animal. We live and die like the animals. There is no purpose to life beyond that’. This is the end of knowledge *per se*, knowledge without the light of Jesus Christ.

Many in the media blow the same trumpet as Dawkins. They love to deride Christians. When a preacher declares what is written in the Bible about sexuality and marriage they denounce him as being behind the times. ‘The world has moved on’ they say. ‘We have discovered new patterns of marriage. In fact we don’t even have to get married’ they say. ‘Moreover, we can have no fault divorce where no one gets hurt. We can have homosexual marriage’. This is the so called enlightenment of science and psychology. But God declares they *have their understanding darkened ... because of the blindness of their heart* (4:18). In fact that is how we all once lived. But now?

*But now you are light in the Lord.* Where did the light come from? It did not come from the newspaper or the TV. It did not come from school or university. It does not come from any human source. It comes from one place and that is Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus said *he who follows me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life* (John 8:12). If you are not in Christ you are in darkness.

The Pharisees, experts in the law, challenged Jesus about these words. Jesus was up to the challenge. Though a man born in this world he was also God come down from heaven. He had God the Father as his witness. His works were a witness to his divinity. Jesus would prove his words by rising from the dead and returning to heaven. Will you dispute these claims of Jesus? Will you draw back when others dispute his claims or will you stand up against the experts, those who are wise in their own eyes, but fools in God’s eyes.

## **Walk in the Light**

*You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven* (Matthew 5:14-15). If you are now light in the Lord, and are walking in the light, you will be noticed in the world. You will be a light shining in a dark place. You will be different – so accept this and get used to it.

Do not try to conform to the pattern of this world. Do not be partakers with them in their blindness. Do not accept lying or stealing or sexual immorality or covetousness. Have no part in filthy conversations or gutter gossip. *Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them* (5:11).

Is this how you will walk in this New Year? You need only make one resolution and that is Christ. Resolve to follow him and walk in the glorious light of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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