



## I HAVE COME INTO THE WORLD AS LIGHT

John 12:44-46

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### Introduction – Conversion as Giving Sight to the Blind

This time of year, this precise time of year, always makes me think about my own conversion. I came to Christ in the most unlikely of places: the corner booth of a McDonald's restaurant. It was December 17, 1992, the Friday of Christmas break, my junior year in high school. I'll never forget the experience of hearing the Gospel for the first time: sin has brought a separation between God and me, but Christ, through his death on the cross, has made a way for me to find my way back to God. I'll also never forget arriving home just an hour or so later. Little did I realize at the time, but I had been made new in the McDonalds, a new creation in Christ. I could now hear things I'd never heard before, like "Joy to the World, the Lord has come." I could also *see* things I'd never seen before; or, at least, not really seen. Like the scene depicted in our Advent Calendars, we hung from the windows, with all those little windows for each day of the month of December leading up to Christmas morning. Of course, I'd seen the Advent Calendar every year; but I'd never seen the beauty of it.

The interesting and indeed assuring thing to me was to realize that this was the experience of many saints. They too experienced the giving of sight. Listen to David Brainerd narrate his own conversion experience. Agonizing over the state of his own soul for quite some time, Brainerd had gone out into the woods for a solitary walk. He attempted to pray, he said, but to no avail.

Having been thus endeavoring to pray—though, as I thought, very stupid and senseless—or near half an hour; then, as I was walking in a dark and thick grove, *unspeakable glory* seemed to open to the view and apprehension of my soul. I do not mean any *external* brightness, for I saw no such thing; nor do I intend any imagination of a body of light, some where in the third heavens, or any thing of that nature; but it was a new inward apprehension or view that I had of *God*, such as I never had before, nor any thing which had the least resemblance of it. I stood still; wondered; and admired! I knew that I never had seen before any thing comparable to it for excellency and beauty; it was widely different from all the conceptions that ever I had of God, or things divine.

So, you see, then, conversion is the giving of sight. It is an experience of the lights coming on in one's life, in one's heart.

This is because of who Jesus Christ is and why he came to the earth. This is also because of who we are and what we need to remedy our fallen condition. This passage speaks to both of these issues: who Jesus is and what we as fallen humanity need. This is a passage that not only helps us better understand why Jesus has come to earth; it is also a passage that reveals the heart of our Lord and Savior. For we see Jesus here lifting up his voice and crying out and saying:

Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. <sup>45</sup> And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. <sup>46</sup> I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness (12:44-46).

## **Darkness is the Condition of the Fallen World**

Jesus here speaks, you will note, of our condition; indeed, the condition of the fallen world, the condition of fallen humanity. It is the condition of darkness. This is where we as fallen creatures find ourselves: in darkness.

Now, biblically speaking, darkness is not a condition of the atmosphere, but of the heart. It is the condition of blindness, spiritual blindness. It is the inability to see. But what can you not see? Is it that you cannot see 'spiritual', that is, non-physical, realities, like angels and demons? No, what you cannot see is this: you cannot see spiritual beauty or what the Psalmist refers to as 'the beauty of holiness.' This is how the Bible describes our fallen condition, the condition of the fallen world.

This spiritual darkness is, then, the condition in which we *live*. This is the situation we find ourselves in as a fallen race, a world that has lost its way. Last weekend we saw Handel's *Messiah* at Orchestra Hall in Chicago. The *Messiah* is a truly masterful production; one of the wonderful things about it is the putting to music of Scripture. This year what stood out to me was the Bass, with his hefty voice, repeating again and again in song, Isaiah 9:2: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined." He leaned into the word, "darkness," and with his voice stretched it out like an impenetrable veil over the world.

We find ourselves in this condition of darkness because of the Fall. Like Gandalf says of Sauron, that his finding the ring would plunge Middle Earth into a second darkness; so, too, Adam and Eve, when they made that fateful decision to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, plunged this earth, this whole world, into its own darkness, a spiritual darkness, a moral darkness. As a result, every human being born into this world is, as the Bible says, "darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart" (Eph. 4:18).

We find ourselves in this condition of darkness because of our Enemy, as well. Scripture tells us plainly, "the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (2 Cor. 4:4) The unregenerate mind cannot see the light of Jesus Christ; Satan has power to put blinders on the fallen human heart, leaving a person in darkness.

But we also find ourselves in this condition of darkness because of our own rebellion. The Apostle Paul explains how this works in Romans 1. There he says fallen humanity, through rebellion and idolatry, has turned the lights off on itself.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup>For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup>For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and

exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things (vv. 19-23).

So this is our condition: spiritual darkness. Yet here's the surprising, or better, scary thing about it: not only is spiritual darkness the condition in which we live; it is the condition we *love*. Apart from the saving influence of Christ in our lives, we love darkness rather than light. This is truth about who we are in ourselves. Jesus put it this way in John 3:

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. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> 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 (vv. 19-21).

As fallen creatures, we don't like light because it exposes and reveals. We love darkness, however, because it *covers* and *conceals*. Growing up, my dad had an insightful way of pointing this out to me in very non-theological language. I heard him say this to my older brothers, and when I was a teenager, he would say it to me as well: "Todd, nothing good happens after 10:00 PM." Why? What happens after 10:00 PM? Not only is it dark outside, but people begin to turn the lights off inside as well. And darkness, as we all know, has a way of providing a cover for doing, well, "nothing good."

Yet this is, according to the Bible and the testimony of Jesus Christ himself, the condition of the fallen world; this is the condition in which we find ourselves apart from Christ: not only do we live in spiritual darkness, but we love spiritual darkness. And because we love darkness, we cannot escape. We cannot escape because we don't *want* to escape. And, left to ourselves, we could never find the way of escape even if we wanted to. Without the Light of the World, we would, as our passage implies, remain forever in darkness (v. 46).

## **Jesus Christ Has Come Into The World As Light**

However, friends, we must also understand that while spiritual darkness is the condition in which we live and the condition we love, it is also the condition from which Jesus has come to *liberate* us. And he has come to liberate us from spiritual darkness by coming into the world as light. For he says, "I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness" (John 12:46).

But what does it mean for Jesus to have come into the world as light? It means, first of all, that as light Jesus Christ is the *radiance* of the Father. He is the beauty of God the Father shining forth in all of its splendor. He is the Father's luminosity, his glory, his effulgence, his fullness spilling over, his moral beauty radiating out.

I recall vividly, as no doubt many of you will, the day I was married. And what I vividly recall was how my bride looked. We made the decision not to see one another before she was presented by her father and walked down the aisle. That was a good decision, a really good decision. Seeing my bride for the first time, all adorned and made ready for her wedding day – what shall I say: she was radiant. It was of course her, as I'd always known her; but there was something more. There was a radiance, a shining forth, a glow you could see and, as it were, almost touch.

Now, imagine a Being so beautiful, so glorious, so excellent, that the radiance of this Being shines forth *as a distinct person*. For this is the case with God the Father and God the Son. God the Son, Jesus Christ, is the radiance of the Father, his holiness and glory and beauty shining forth. As the opening verse of Hebrews puts it, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (1:3). This is who Jesus is as Light: he is the radiance of the Father.

But, as light, Jesus Christ is also the *revelation* of the Father. You see, the Son is, and always has been, the radiance of the Father. So that quite apart from creation itself, the Son is the radiance of the Father. But when the Father chose to create, he chose to communicate; and he communicates in and by his Son, who is the revelation of the Father.

This is really what the opening chapter of John’s Gospel is all about.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
<sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it (1:1-5).

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (1:14).

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him know (1:18).

Jesus Christ, as God’s only Son, is the radiance of the Father, but he has also come into the world to reveal the Father as well. So you can see why, then, Philip’s request to Jesus was met with disbelief on Jesus’ part. Philip said to Jesus: “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus, astonished, replied to him:

Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? (John 14:8-10)

Philip, of course, is not alone in wanting to see God the Father apart from God the Son. Many in our day would like to do this very thing. Many assume they can do an end-run around the Son to get to the Father. But it cannot be done. Nor does it need to be done: to see the Son is to see the Father. This is the point of verses 44-45 from our text:

Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. <sup>45</sup> And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.

Jesus Christ has come into the world as Light, as both the radiance and the revelation of God the Father. To see him *is* to see the Father.

### **Believing in Jesus Christ Means Seeing Jesus and the One Who Sent Him**

Now, because fallen humanity is in darkness, and because Jesus Christ came into this fallen world as light, to believe in Jesus Christ means, therefore, to see Jesus Christ and the One who sent him. Listen, again, to verses 44 and 45, but note this time the parallelism:

Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. <sup>45</sup> And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.

Thus, to believe in Jesus is to see Jesus.

In our scientific and rationalistic age, we often get this turned around. We say, “Seeing is believing.” As if to say: unless I can see it with my own two eyes, I cannot believe it. But if I can see it, then I will believe it. Here, however, Jesus turns this piece of human wisdom inside out, saying, in effect, that *believing is seeing*—not the other way around.

If you want to see that which is truly worth seeing, then you must believe. Seeing will never get you to the point of believing, for believing is seeing. Yet when you believe in the One who came into the world as Light, you can see—spiritually. And you then find yourself singing the lines of Amazing Grace: “I once was lost, but now I’m found; was blind, but now I see.”

## Conclusion – Seeing Jesus

*But how do you know if you’ve seen Jesus?* You know you’ve seen Jesus—truly seen Jesus—if your life begins to look like Jesus’ life. It’s that simple. Listen to the Apostle Paul speaking to the Ephesians: “for you at one time were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (5:8; cf. Phil. 2:14-15; 1 Thess. 5:4-6). You know you’ve seen the Light, when your life begins to *reflect* the Light. For spiritual darkness is also moral darkness. Because you cannot see the beauty of holiness, you do not desire holiness and thus are not drawn to holiness. However, when the veil has been lifted, and you are able to see the glory of the Lord for the first time, you will then be transformed from one degree of glory to the next (2 Cor. 3:18).

That’s how you know you’ve seen Jesus. But, taking a step back, *how are you able to see Jesus?* Here is a profound biblical paradox: while seeing Jesus is something we do, seeing Jesus is ultimately something God must enable us to do. Indeed, giving sight to a fallen creature is one of God’s great acts of creation; *recreation* may be more accurate. In fact, the Apostle Paul draws an analogy between God’s creation of light, and the creation of light in your heart to enable you to see Jesus. Quoting from Genesis 1, Paul writes, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Cor. 4:6).

So, you see, it is no small or insignificant thing to come to faith in Christ; this is not something *you* simply get up and decide to do one day. Nor is it something you do by raising your hand, signing a card, or walking an aisle. Instead, coming to faith in Jesus is as profound and powerful as God’s calling into existence light itself.

Yet all this leads to one final question: *Have you seen Jesus?* I’m not asking whether you could identify his picture in a stained-glass window, or a children’s picture Bible. I’m asking have you *truly* seen him: his beauty, his splendor, his glory, as the radiance and revelation of God the Father. All you need to do is look.

It’s really that simple. At least, it’s proven to be the case for countless thousands of converts. As a young man, Charles Spurgeon, found it really was that simple. Spurgeon was on his way to church, when because of heavy snow, he had to turn aside. Listen to him describe the whole experience:

When I could go no further, I turned down a side street, and came to a little Primitive Methodist Chapel. In that chapel there may have been a dozen or fifteen people. I had heard of the Primitive Methodists, how they sang so loudly that they made people’s heads ache; but that did not matter to me. I wanted to know how I might be saved, and if they could tell me that, I did not care how much they made my head ache. The minister

did not come that morning; he was snowed up, I suppose. At last, a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. Now, it is well that preachers should be instructed; but this man was really stupid. He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had little else to say. The text was, - "LOOK UNTO ME, AND BE YE SAVED, ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH."

He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in that text. The preacher began thus: - "My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, 'Look.' 'Now lookin' don't take a deal of pains. It ain't liftin' your foot or your finger; it is just, 'Look.' Well, a man needn't go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn't be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. But then the text says, 'Look unto *Me*.' Ay!" said he, in broad Essex, 'many of ye are lookin' to yourselves, but it's no use lookin' there. You'll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some look to God the Father. No, look to Him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, 'Look unto *Me*.'"

Then the good man followed up his text in this way: - "Look unto Me; I am sweatin' great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin' on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin' at the Father's right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! look unto Me!"

When he had gone to about that length, and managed to spin out ten minutes or so, he was at the end of his tether. Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I daresay, with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger. Just fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart, he said, "Young man, you look very miserable." Well, I did; but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance before. However, it was a good blow, struck right home. He continued, "and you always will be miserable—miserable in life, and miserable in death,—if you don't obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved." Then, lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist could do, "Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothin' to do but to look and live."

I saw at once the way of salvation. I know not what else he said, —I did not take much notice of it, —I was so possessed with that one thought. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, "look!" what a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to Him. Oh, that somebody had told me this before, "Trust Christ, and you shall be saved."

It's really that simple: trust Christ, and you shall be saved. Look to him! Look to him! Look to him!

Amen.