

THE LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS - *"The Light to the Nations"*

This is the 2nd lesson in our series. I appreciate Pastor Joel's message last week from **Genesis 1** entitled "**Light into Darkness.**" God, in the very beginning, brought light into the world to illuminate His creation and to bring life to everything. I also believe this source of light was the Divine Presence. Because of man's rebellion, darkness moved across the earth once more_ in a sinister way that threatened to separate mankind from their Creator. But, God had no intention of leaving it that way. In fact, in the 2nd verse of **Isaiah 9** we read: ²The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. And then in **verse 6** the familiar words: ⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

The concept of "light" is rich in meaning. Its splendor is used throughout the Scriptures as the symbol of all that is good and healthy in our physical, emotional, and spiritual existence. Meanwhile the eternal God, because of His holiness and perfection, is pictured in **1st Timothy 6:16** not only as "dwelling in unapproachable light"_ but also in **1st John 1:5** as being "Light in whom there's no darkness at all."

I'm calling today's lesson "**The Light to the Nations.**" For your convenience, the text of **Isaiah 49:6-7** will be on the screen, but we encourage you to follow along in your own Bible or on page **1138** of the pew Bibles. Here. Jehovah God says: ⁶It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth. ⁷This is what the Lord says—the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel— to Him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: "Kings will see You and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen You."

In context, God speaks through His prophet Isaiah to Israel. He speaks of His plan to use Isaiah to illuminate His people and then for them to bring light to rest of the world. Orthodox Jews do not see this text to refer to the Messiah_ but believe it speaks of their own future glory. Many Christians see the Messiah in the passage, but overlook God's plan for Israel. Neither of these groups have it right. This prophecy is about Israel_ but it is about so much than them. Matter of fact the first phrase in our text says that to limit it to them would be "too small a thing" for God to do. Think on that a moment. Isaiah predicts that light would come out from them. The New Testament clarifies this for us.

By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul writes in **Galatians 3:8** that "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." And then in **verse 16** that "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed' - meaning one person, who is Christ." (*The Messiah*) But who is this "*Christ?*" There was a time when Paul didn't have a clue. But when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, he saw a bright light and was told: "I am sending you to (the Gentiles) to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." (**Acts 26:17-18**) If you know the rest of the story, you know that once Paul had his eyes open, he wanted everyone else to see as well.

Let's take a look now at **Luke 2**. In this section we find a young Jewish couple taking their **8** day-old son to the temple in Jerusalem to be dedicated. And while there, they have a rather strange encounter.

As Mary and Joseph fulfill the requirements of God's law we read: ²⁵ "Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for Him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took Him in his arms and praised God, saying: ²⁹ 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, You now dismiss Your servant in peace. ³⁰ For MY EYES HAVE SEEN YOUR SALVATION, ³¹ which You have prepared in the sight of all people: ³² A LIGHT FOR REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, and the glory of Your people Israel.'" So, the Holy Spirit tells us "the Light to the Nations" was the Messiah_ and the Messiah was Christ Jesus. Case closed. But what does this mean to us? **What is the revelation** Simeon received_ and that God wants for us to receive as well?

Well, if you're a Jew, it means that God still has a plan for you_ to bless you and to prosper you. Yet, that plan is to be fulfilled when you accept Jesus as the promised Messiah_ and then serve as His vessel to share that light with the world. You are descended from His chosen people, and He wants you to see His salvation as clearly as Simeon did. He wants you to see Jesus. Then He wants you to show Him to the rest of mankind.

And if you're a Gentile_ whether you happen to be Asian, African, Czechoslovakian, Chinese, Dutch, East Indian, English, Egyptian, Filipino, French, German, Hispanic, Italian, Native American, Norwegian, Portuguese, Puerto Rican, Russian, Scottish, Swedish, Turkish, Ukrainian, or any of the **120** or so other ethnic groups_ Jesus Christ is the revelation of God's love and mercy for you, too. He wants you to see Jesus. Then He wants you to show Him to the rest of mankind.

In fact, the Holy Spirit led Paul to also write in **Galatians 3:26-29**: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This is good news.

We all long for "*light to lead us*" out of our confusion. We all ache to feel the warmth of "*the light of love*" and acceptance. We all have eyes that peer through the darkness_ straining to see some ray of "*light of hope*."

The concept of "**a light to the nations**" may be this simple: Isaiah was like the flashlight in the hands of God. He would speak the Word of God_ the source of power (*batteries*) that would illuminate Israel (*the bulb*)_ and **Jesus would be the Light**_ the light that would shine into the world_ and God has made it clear that He wants us all to see Him.

Lyrics to a Hank Williams song come to mind. Of late, we've sung the David Crowder version here. I think most of you can at least sing the chorus with me: "**I saw the Light, I saw the Light. No more darkness, no more night. I am so happy. No sorrow in sight. Praise the Lord, I saw the Light.**" The truth is that when we see the Light of Christmas, we find more than temporary illumination. More than pretty little lights for a season, we find light that bathes our soul and chases away the dark gloom of despair. We find light in our heart that not only exposes wounds and scars, but anoints them in the healing glow of the love and grace from God.

When we see the light, we see **Jesus. He is the Light of Christmas.**