

3 SPIRITUALLY DARK

John 3:1-21

Introduction

When did darkness become our friend? As a child, we wanted the nightlight on when we went to bed to keep away the imagined “monsters” under the bed. Light was our friend. But as we got older, the imagined monsters were not as scary as the thought of others knowing the real monsters we hid in our thoughts and habits. Then darkness became our friend because it could hide our doubts about ourselves that we hoped no one would notice.

The Pharisees were the ones who focused on external performance for their spiritual assurance. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night, when it was dark, to find out if there was a faith assurance he could have that was not dependent upon his performance.

Too many people today try to get these equations to add up, only to realize it is just bad math.

Legalism + Works = Christianity

Good Behavior + Performance = Forgiveness

Rules + Self-Control = Faith

The terrible darkness of self-condemnation leaves us “hating the light,” fearing what thoughts and deeds the light might expose. We find ourselves avoiding the Bible and its glaring truths. *Maybe that is why our Bible is accumulating dust on our shelf!*

I. The Light Exposes Us

A. Our Efforts

The Apostle Paul was also among the Pharisees – the performance oriented people. He summarized well the ultimate frustration we experience when our performance doesn’t even meet our own expectations, not to mention, God’s expectations.

“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. . . . For I have a desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it but it is sin living in me that does it” (Romans 7:15-20).

B. Our Failure

Our failure exposes the immaturity of our faith. Trying to do it all in our own strength. Nicodemus was called to recognize his immaturity when Jesus said, “You must be born again.” Your faith must be born from above. Our failure is exposing our lack of dependence on God. The inability to draw upon the power God provides.

Illustration: After Thomas Edison’s seven-hundredth unsuccessful attempt to invent electric light, he was asked by a *New York Times* reporter, “How does it feel to have failed seven hundred times?” The great inventor responded, “I have not failed seven hundred times. I have not failed once. I have succeeded in proving that those seven hundred ways will not work. When I have eliminated the ways that will not work, I will find the way that will work.”

God’s light exposes our failures so that we will discover how God wants us to truly live. We discover He is the God of second chances.

II. Light Reveals God’s Love

A. Freely given. (John 3:16)

“For God so loved the world...” is more than a slogan or religious graffiti. It is declaring forever the extent of God’s love. God shines His light broadly upon all who believe in Him. His light that breaks through our darkness is a witness to his generous love. If God loved the world, then God surely loves you without any conditions.

B. Without condemnation (John 3:17)

God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world. This is good news. He is not the cosmic inspector, waiting for us to fail forever. He is revealing His love that is not conditional upon our performance. It changes the formula, so that it finally adds up.

Christ + Salvation = Christianity

Love + Grace = Forgiveness

Surrender + Freedom = Faith

III. The Light Draws Us

A. From the past

Leave the past in the past. “...But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13-14) Since God has forgiven past sins, Paul let them go. And then with every ounce of strength, he strained to follow Christ—to obey and to love Him.

Surrender control. (Over the past, present and future.) At times, we all get caught up in an illusion: We think that we control our steps. When life is smooth, we feel good about ourselves. But when the rug is pulled out from underneath us, we’re devastated. Paul knew this all too well. “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

B. To the present

Pursue obedience. While maintaining an accurate picture of his humanity, Paul made it his goal to live a changed life. The light of God’s Word draws us to take the next step in obedience. What is

the last thing that God asked you to do, that you are not doing yet?

Maintain focus. Whenever he failed, Paul didn't despair in his sin. He embraced Christ's forgiveness through confession and repentance, and he got back in the race. When you're in a race, you may stumble, but you can still make the finish line if you get back up and keep running. Focus on what is before you today.

Conclusion

As Jesus closed his teaching to Nicodemus he said, *"But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."* The light is not about you. It is always about God. **You step out of the dark and discover that the spotlight is not on you but on God who is doing the work in you!** In John 19:38, we find Nicodemus mentioned again. He clearly stepped out of the shadows when he accompanied Joseph of Arimathea in burying the body of Jesus. While he was mentioned, the spotlight was clearly on Jesus who died for our sins.

God so loved the world ... so we could love the light again. Will you humble yourself and step into the light right now?