

A Sermon  
Rev. W. Kevin Holder  
Grace Baptist Church  
Bryans Road, Maryland  
July 31, 2022

## **Radiant Christians**

Luke 11:33-36

One person tells about a friend named Dorothy who spent several weeks in prayer and training to lead a Bible discussion group. When the big day finally arrived, getting her family of six out the door was even more hectic than usual. Breakfast didn't turn out right. The children were arguing with one another. Dorothy was getting frazzled, and tried to regain her composure. That's when her husband entered the kitchen, surveyed the uproar, and tried to calm the atmosphere. He said, "Kids! Settle down! Your mom has only 45 minutes until she has to become a radiant Christian."<sup>1</sup>

I don't know how radiant you normally feel when you arrive here on Sunday morning. It may depend on the Sunday, or what your life was like during the preceding week, or what it was like to make it here this morning. Whatever your level of spiritual brightness, we still arrive, find our places in pews, and combine our voices to sing, "Shine, Jesus, Shine," trusting that in the experience of worship we'll take on some of his radiance.

He is, after all, the "light of the world" (John 8:12). We can grow so accustomed to that familiar declaration, and to the Bible's widespread use of "light" imagery to speak of God, that we lose sight of the difference that Jesus makes. Apart from him, we live in darkness, and darkness dwells in us. But Christ's coming marks the dawn of deliverance. As he himself stresses in the verses right before today's text, God has always been in the business of sending light into the midst of human darkness. For instance, through Solomon and Jonah. But now one greater than either of them is here. What God is doing through Jesus gives unsurpassed illumination. And that kind of light should be revealed not concealed. "No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light" (v. 33).

That latter phrase, "those who come in," may be an allusion to converts, those who were coming into the early Christian house churches. These new disciples had "seen the light," but also needed further illumination in the reality of God's kingdom and the way of Jesus. So in verse 34 our Lord takes the metaphor of a lamp in a different direction. He says, "Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body is also full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness."

These can be confusing and puzzling words, partly because Jesus and those around him weren't operating with exactly the same understanding of human physiology that we now do. In some of the Greco-Roman and Jewish literature of antiquity, the common understanding was that the eye emitted light or cast light onto the physical world around it. In other words, the eye functioned as a sort of projector. But others maintained that the eye acted more like a receiver and processor of externally generated light. This would help us understand why Jesus describes the eye as a lamp. The eye receives light from outside the body and acts as a lamp to the interior of the body. So if your eyes are good and clear, your whole body is filled with light. On the other hand, if your eyes are not clear, your

whole body remains in the dark. "See to it, then," says Jesus, "that the light within you is not darkness" (v. 35).

He's not talking about a divine light that's already there within you, and all you have to do is figure out how to flip the switch and turn it on. No, Jesus is talking about God's light, the good news of the kingdom, a light that comes to us and needs to be taken in, needs to be received. When you're receptive to the light of the gospel, Jesus illuminates you. He enables you to hear his teaching and to obey his word. This is discipleship. Becoming a disciple means taking in God's light given in Jesus. This is what makes for spiritual health and spiritual radiance.

This spiritual health isn't just a matter of listening to the Lord and adding to your mental storehouse of religious information. Following the exorcism that opens this section of Luke, Jesus says, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (11:28). So gospel enlightenment involves both knowing and doing the will and way of Jesus. Being filled, in your whole body, with the light of God, involves both the listening and the living.

And there in the midst of living the word of God is where Jesus goes to work, removing what's evil and filling us with what's good. It's not as if Jesus comes to us and finds us already free of our own personal demons, needing only a few minor moral adjustments. No, we need to be cleansed of those attitudes and actions that are contrary to the kingdom and to the way of Jesus. Author Patrick Morley has written, "The American gospel has evolved into a gospel of addition without subtraction. It is the belief that we can add Christ to our lives, but not subtract sin. It is a change in belief without a change in behavior. It is a spiritual experience without any cultural impact. It is revival without reformation, without repentance."<sup>2</sup>

Being filled with God's light is impossible without also being emptied of dark habits, dark patterns of behavior, and dark mindsets that war against God's reign in your life. That's why you have to be vigilant, wise, and discerning about the things that you take into yourself and incorporate into who you are. The things that you watch. The things that you listen to. The things that you read. The things that you eat. The people with whom you engage. The activities in which you invest your time. The projects and programs to which you devote yourself. I like the way that Tim Goble has put it when he says, "It's tough to be in the dark and not let the dark get in you. The unending struggle for the Christian is to walk in the light and at the same time keep moving into the shadows."<sup>3</sup> "No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden," says Jesus. He doesn't fill us with his light, and then tell us to conceal it. No, he puts us on a stand, so that his light can be seen. He sends us into the world. But he also warns us about letting the world's darkness get into us.

Christian activist and author Shane Claiborne tells about a woman he and one of his community mates met when they were walking to a store in north Philadelphia. The street was riddled with prostitution and drug trafficking. This particular woman approached Claiborne, but he declined her offer and proceeded to the store. When he and his friend got back to their house, they discovered a tear in their bag of bread, and decided to return it. As they walked down the same street, they spotted the woman huddled in the alley, shivering in the cold. After exchanging their bread, they stopped to ask her name, and invited her back to their place for some warmth, conversation, and food. So she jumped up and followed them to their house.

As soon as she entered their house, she broke down and started weeping. She eventually gathered herself, looked at Claiborne and his friend, and said, "You guys are Christians,

aren't you?" They said, "Yes, we love Jesus." She said, "I knew it, because I could see it in your eyes. You guys kind of shine. I used to shine like that. I used to shine like the stars in the sky. I was so in love with God that my heart was on fire." And then she said, "But it's a cold, dark world, and I lost my shine. I lost my shine on these old streets." They surrounded her and prayed for her, that she would hear God telling her that she was beloved and that she would light on fire again.

Weeks passed, and they weren't sure if they would ever see the woman again. One night there was a knock at the door. Claiborne opened it, and a woman standing there said, "Hey!" And Claiborne said, "Hey, do we know each other?" She said, "Yeah, you just don't recognize me because I'm shining again!" That's when Claiborne knew who she was. She said she just wanted to come by and thank them for connecting her to God again and helping her get on fire again. She even brought them a gift of gratitude. It was a box full of Marlboro Miles, the proofs of purchase from packs of cigarettes that she had smoked over the years.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus says, "If your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you" (v. 36). None of us in the church are as radiant as God intends us to be, and we don't expect our full glorification until Christ comes again to raise his people to life, with new bodies fit for the brilliance of the world to come. But the redeeming light of God has already broken into our darkness through Christ, and his glory is already creating in us a kind of brightness that shines forth into the world. I think of Paul's words to the Corinthians when he writes, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

We come here on Sunday morning to be illuminated, not only in the head sense but also as wholly embodied beings. We devote our whole selves—minds, eyes, hands, arms, legs, emotions, wills—to our life-giving and light-giving Lord. We take in his word. We obey his word. And through the listening and the living our luminous Lord inhabits more of who we are, in a way that defies being hidden. As Pastor John Piper says, "Christ is the glory we were made to see. His light alone will fill us and give the light of life and meaning to every part of our lives. And when that happens, we ourselves will shine and give off the rays of Christ."<sup>5</sup>

Journalist and author Malcolm Muggeridge wrote:

I am the light of the world, the founder of the Christian religion said. What a stupendous phrase! And how particularly marvelous today, when one is conscious of so much darkness in the world! Let your light shine before men, he exhorted us. You know, sometimes ... someone asks me what I most want, what I should most like to do in the little that remains of my life, and I always nowadays truthfully answer—and it is truthful—"I should like my light to shine, even if only very fitfully, like a match struck in a dark, cavernous night and then flickering out."<sup>6</sup>

God intends this to be a radiant church full of radiant Christians. That doesn't mean taking our fallenness, our problems, our sufferings, and our own struggles with darkness, and concealing them with a facial façade that declares all is well when in reality it's not. Actually, Christ often reveals his light most effectively through our weakness and brokenness. He enters our own spaces of darkness, fills us with God's light, and makes us shine into the world.

<sup>1</sup> Roseanne Hill, *Christian Reader*, "Lite Fair."

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Morley, *I Surrender: Submitting to Christ in the Details of Life* (Aurora: Woglemuth & Hyatt, 1990) n.p.

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Goble, in *World Christian* (March/April 1988). Quoted in *Christianity Today* (Vol. 33, No. 1).

<sup>4</sup> Shane Claiborne, "Dirty Theology." A sermon at Duke Chapel on April 3, 2011. <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=claiborne+dirty+theology&&view=detail&mid=DFCE7E3B53C9CC896A15DFCE7E3B53C9CC896A15&&FORM=VRDGAR&ru=%2Fvideos%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dclaiborne%2Bdirty%2Btheology%26FORM%3DHDRSC4> (July 27, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> John Piper, "Be Careful Lest the Light in You Be Darkness." *Desiring God*. July 22, 2009. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/be-careful-lest-the-light-in-you-be-darkness> (July 28, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Malcolm Muggeridge in *Jesus Rediscovered*. Quoted in *Christianity Today* (Vol. 41. No. 11).