

The Light No Darkness Can Overcome

John 1:1-14 (NIV)

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Night vs. day. Light vs. dark. The light side vs. the dark side. Good vs. evil. Our world understands that there are two universal opposing forces. Some will teach that you need both of them, the light and the dark, in order to achieve a balance, a harmony. This is the idea of the Yin and the Yang, you know, those white and black blobs that equally fill a circle. Or, you know, the Force from Star Wars – a balance of the light side and the dark side. The idea is that you can't have one without the other, that both must exist equally in the world.

Here's the thing, though: darkness does not shine. It does not overpower the sun. Darkness exists only when the light is no longer shining or when the light is blocked out. Can darkness overcome light?

Generally, when you turn on a light in a dark room, there's instantaneous light. Even if it's just a candle or a flashlight, a phone light, it penetrates the darkness and you can see. The darkness scatters from any light, no matter how big or small. Even when the light is on and you close your eyes, there is still light glowing through your eyelids. About the only way to have darkness overcome light is to wrap yourself in darkness, to put cardboard up in the windows, draw the blinds, close the shades, put a thick blanket over your head, and put on an eye mask. You have to block out the light in order to have darkness while the light is shining.

This is what the people did as the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. (verse 9) "He [Jesus] was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." (verses 10-11) The people who had heard of Jesus' coming had hid themselves from the light. They covered themselves in darkness, blocking out the light, refusing to see what is plainly shown to them by John the Baptist and many others. They found comfort in the darkness because it was what they knew. They felt as if they could hide there and not be found, not be exposed. They had seemingly escaped the light.

Do you feel the darkness? Do you resist it, or do you welcome it? Do you wrap yourself in darkness, board up the windows, pull the covers over your head? Do you block out the true light that gives light to everyone? Are you afraid to be clearly seen? Do you want to hide in the shadows?

Darkness has that comfort to it: you can hide there. Do you seek out those places covered in darkness as they have been shaded from light? Are there things that you want to hide from other people, things you say, but you say them in the cover of darkness, whispers so that the person won't hear what you are saying about them? Do you hide your addictions, indulge in them in the cover of darkness when you are all alone in a room with the door closed? Do you lie to keep those deeds shrouded, trying to keep people from bringing light on your dark deeds? Are you afraid that people will see you for who you actually are and reject you for it? Are you afraid of being shunned and forced to be all by yourself because no one would accept you knowing what you have done?

It's this kind of reasoning that leads us to think that darkness is necessary and even is our friend. We think that it can protect us from the judgments of others. It can let us go on in life without having to rethink what we are doing because we are hiding from it all. We can pretend to be so much better than we actually are.

Hiding in the darkness can work for a while, but you can't live in darkness. If you live in darkness, it will consume you, paralyze you with fear. Without the light, you will die.

It's just like plants. Plants need light to live. They need the sunlight to nourish them and cause them to grow and produce oxygen. If you hide a plant in darkness, you can water it every day, but eventually it will die without sunlight.

People feel that effect too. We call it Seasonal Affective Disorder. You might be feeling it, feeling that things just aren't right. You're a little down. You try to brush it off as the winter blues, but you may actually be depressed. This is caused by lack of sunlight, by gloomy, dreary days, even by the fact that there are more hours when the sun is down than there are while it is up here in the middle of winter. You get in a funk and you can't seem to crawl your way out. The best way to get out and get better is to bask in the light, have your skin drink in the sun.

While trying to hide from the light, we can experience this same kind of depression, but spiritually. If we do not have the spiritual light, the true Son-shine, we will be left in darkness. Life without Jesus leaves us without light. Without Jesus there's no guarantee for a life that is better, a life without pain, a life without suffering, a life free from depression and gloom. Without Jesus, the true light, then life is just doing a bunch of stuff and then dying, ceasing to exist. Without Jesus, what hope do I have? Is there a light at the end of the tunnel, or is it all just black at the end, darkness consuming me, overtaking me? Without Jesus, spiritual darkness overcomes my life and I die, left in darkness and gloom forever.

But we have come today on Christmas Day in the light of the morning to rejoice with our fellow believers, to sing praises as the angels and the shepherds did, to bask in the light of God, the light he shines through his Word. The light has arrived! Jesus has been born! He is the life, the light of all mankind. (verse 4) "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (verse 5) He breaks our spiritual darkness, spiritual depression.

We fear the light at first because we don't want to be exposed. We like hiding our deeds in the shadows. We don't want it clearly seen everything that we are and everything that we have done. We want to hide from the light because we don't want it revealed that we have failed God as his children.

Yet Jesus shines the light on us. This is not like an interrogation room light meant to make us sweat, to make us feel guilty. This is not a light meant to blind us from seeing our accusers. No, this light, this Jesus, shines on us in a way that God saves us from spiritual death. He shines the light on us so that we believe in his name, so that we would not rely on the shadows and hiding to save us, but to realize that he is the one who will give us life. We can't claim the right to be children of God. We can't be his children by natural descent or of human decision or of a husband's will. God gives us the Light, gives us Jesus, so that we are children born of God.

Jesus is the light of all mankind. His light can never be turned off; it can never be extinguished. Darkness cannot overcome it. It cannot stand before him. Like the light on Christmas Eve while we held our candles high and proud, like the candles we light on the altar at the beginning of service to symbolize Jesus' presence with us, Jesus, the true Light, disperses darkness.

Jesus did not come into this world to balance out light and darkness, to keep good and evil in harmony with one another. He came to disperse it, to send it running. When darkness seems to overwhelm us, his light penetrates it. When depression comes into our lives, he is the one who breaks the gloomy darkness because he is not just a child; he is God himself, God made flesh. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (verse 14) That glory of the Christ Child shines on us and has brought us life, brought me the joy of belonging to him. Because Jesus has come into this world, I will live with God as one of his children.

Jesus' light continues to shine, Christmas after Christmas, day after day. The child born in the manger is the one that we hope in, is the one who will see us through the darkest moments in our lives and will bring light to us in those moments, to have hope - a sure hope, an expectation that this world and its pain and suffering and darkness will pass away and I will live with God forever. Christ is our light and he is our life. His light chases away the darkness. God and his light win. Amen.