

# The Darkness is Passing

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## **Text:**

I John 2:3-11

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

## **Introduction:**

The question I want us to begin with today is: "What comes after Easter?" Each year we make our way from Christmas to Lent to Easter and maybe on to Pentecost remembering God's great saving acts in sending Jesus Christ and sending the Holy Spirit. Just to remember them, however, is not enough. We must act upon them. We must learn to live in light of them. This is the reason I want us to take this time after Easter and work our way through John's first letter. The reason I want to do that is because it teaches us how to live in light of Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost. It starts where the Gospel leaves off. It answers the question that we have asked: "What comes after Easter?"

This is the reason I have not begun at the beginning, but have rather taken this paragraph from the second chapter. I especially call your attention to the words in verse 8: "The darkness is passing, and the true light is already shining." This is a historical statement. It points to that key moment in human history when God acted decisively for our salvation by sending Jesus Christ to be our Prophet, Priest, and King; to show us the Father, and teach us his ways, to die for our sins, and to be raised victorious over death, to ascend into heaven from whence the Holy Spirit was sent to complete God's great work of salvation. This is what John means when

he says “the darkness is passing, and the true light is already shining.” Before these events salvation was a promise; since they have taken place, it is a reality.

Remember last week I said that almost any New Testament text could be an Easter text. The present New Testament book, I John, is an example of what I said. Nothing in it would make sense if the events recorded in the Gospels had not happened. Towards the end of his letter John will give us his primary reason for writing this letter. He says: “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.” John writes about eternal life and how we can know that we possess it, but that eternal life would not be possible if Jesus had not come to earth, lived, died in our place, and been raised again from the dead.

Remember when we talked about Jesus’ interview with Nicodemus in John chapter 3. We said that the passage could be summed up with Jesus’ double use of the word “must”. First, he tells Nicodemus that in order to have eternal life and enter into the Kingdom of God he must be born again. Then, when Nicodemus asks him how this is possible, Jesus says: “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. Remember we learned that for Jesus being “lifted up” first represented his being lifted up on the cross, but that it also represented his exaltation by the Father through his being raised from the dead, and ascending to the right hand of the Father. We also pointed out the relation between the two “musts”. For us to be born again, Jesus must be “lifted up.” Before he came, the new birth was not yet possible, now it is.

Now the whole theme of this letter is that we can be born again because of what Christ has accomplished, and that when we are born again it produces a radical change in us. We are different people than we were before. John insists in this letter that there are recognizable signs of new life. The book is filled with expressions like: “he that is born of God”, and “we know that we have passed from death unto life.” The whole book is based upon the fact that in Jesus Christ God has acted to shine the light of salvation and dispel the darkness. Furthermore, it insists that there is radical difference between the darkness and the light, and that those that have passed from the darkness to the light of salvation can be recognized by certain characteristic traits. One of the better books that has been written on I John bears the title *The Tests of Life*. The author’s thesis is that throughout this book John is laying down certain distinguishing evidences of the possession of eternal life through new birth.

Another characteristic of this book is that it is repetitive. The same subjects come up multiple times and in different contexts so we will have ample opportunity to examine each as we make our way through the book. For the present I simply want us to look at the paragraph we have read as an example of the fundamental idea of the book—Because Jesus Christ came, died for

our sins, rose again from the dead, ascended to the Father, and sent the Holy Spirit, i.e. because he was “lifted up”, he is now drawing all kinds of people to himself. When he does, he forgives their sins and gives them new life, and this new life demonstrates itself in specific ways. Three ways in which it is demonstrated that are stated in this paragraph are:

- Verse 4, Anyone who says: “I know him, must keep his commandments.”
- Verse 8, Anyone who claims to abide in him “must walk (live) as Jesus walked (lived).”
- Verse 9, Anyone who claims to be in the light (the light that is now shining because of the incarnation) must love his spiritual brothers and sisters.

## **I. We Must Keep His Commandments**

We will come back to this at a later time and explain in more detail what is meant by the commandments of Christ, but for the moment let us simply say that a true relationship with Christ is demonstrated by obedience to him. John insists on this. We find this expression, “the commands of Christ” or “my commandments” 12 times in John’s Gospel, 6 times in his Epistles, and 6 times in the book of Revelation. Let me remind you of one case that we examined together recently.

In John 15 when Jesus is speaking to his disciples on his last night with them on earth and he is explaining their future relationship with him; he tells them that they are to abide in him and he in them as a branch remains connected to the root stock of the vine. In so doing, he says, we will bear fruit and glorify the Father. Furthermore he makes it clear how he is to abide in us and how we are to abide in him. In verse seven he says: “If you abide in me and my words abide in you.” He abides in us by his words. Notice that in our text keeping Christ’s word is the same as keeping his commandments. The two are synonyms. For Christ to abide in us we must know his very words, his commandments. We cannot do his will if we do not know his will. Christ cannot abide in us if we are not carefully listening to what he is saying to us.

At the end of the passage in John 15 about the vine and the branches Jesus tells us how we abide in him. In verse 10 he says: “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.” We abide in him by keeping his words or commandments. In our text John tells us that this is one of the ways we demonstrate that we possess that new life made possible by the coming of Christ. By this, he says, “we know that we have come to know him, in that we keep his commandments.” To reinforce this principle he then states it negatively: Whoever says “I know him” but does not

keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected (2:4).

## II. We Must Walk as He Walked

If there is any doubt about what this obedience looks like, he reinforces the idea of obedience to the commands of Christ with a second evidence of eternal life. In verse 6 he says: “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” Everything that Jesus expects us to do, he has already done. Remember what he said to the disciples on the same night we referred to earlier in speaking of the vine and the branches, after he had washed their feet:

“So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him” (John 13:12-16).

The best way to know the commands of Christ is to study his life. The simplest definition of the Christian life is the life of Christ. This is the reason Paul's goal in Christian instruction was to see Christ formed in the believer. We must have the eyes of Christ so we can see the world as he saw it. We must have the mind of Christ so we can make our decisions as he would. We must have the heart of Christ so that we can love as he loved, and do all that we do to please God.

Remember the words we quoted from John 15 in speaking of obedience to Christ's commandments: “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.” Our obedience to him is to be modeled from his obedience to the Father, and he, himself, could say: “I always do the things that please the Father”(John 8:29).

Christians throughout history who have pursued this idea, who have found that new life in Christ freed them to live out the life of Christ have demonstrated the beauty of the Christian life over and over. It is not a complicated thing. It is possible because Christ by his coming has overcome the darkness and caused the light to shine. All we need do is walk in the light as he is in the light.

### III. We Must Love One Another

The final test of life in this passage is one that will reappear many times in this letter, love. He closes the paragraph with these words:

“Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”

Love is not unrelated to the two previous points. Christ’s one new commandment was that we love one another as he has loved us. Christ, himself, said the entire law consisted in loving God with all our heart soul and mind and our neighbor as ourselves. To keep Christ’s commands is to walk as he walked, and to walk as he walked means to walk in love. This will become abundantly clear as we make our way through this Epistle.

So, what do we do after Easter? We rejoice because Christ has conquered death and sin, because he has sent the Holy Spirit into the world, because our sins can be forgiven and we can receive new life, then we embrace that new life in Christ; we reject the darkness and its sinful works; we put on the life of Christ, and we walk as he walked. When we do we become easily distinguishable from those who have not yet come into the light; we become bearers of the light. This is the reason Jesus could sum up our mission by saying to us: “Let your light (which is the light of Christ in us) so shine before men that they may see your good works (love always manifests itself in action), and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5: 16). This is just another way of saying if you abide in me and I abide in you, you will bear much fruit and the Father will be glorified. In the end God gets the glory, and it is for this that we always pray and do all that we do: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done”.