

## **“Putting on the Armor of Light”**

*(A sermon for the first Sunday of Advent)*

Ephesians 5:6-14 and Romans 13:11-12 (NIV)

By John Gill

One night many years ago, a farmer noticed a light in his barn. He went to see what was going on and found one of his farmhands, all dressed up, holding a lantern. “What are you doing all dressed up with that lantern?” he asked. “I’m going to call on my girlfriend,” the young man said, “but I’ve got to go through the woods, and it’s dark.”

“When I was your age calling on my wife for the first time,” the farmer said, “I went through the woods WITHOUT a lantern!” “I know,” replied the farmhand, “but just look what you got!”

Light and darkness. What a difference a little light can make in your life! We’ve all had the experience of suddenly finding ourselves in the pitch black of a moonless night, or in a strange room without windows when the electricity went out. How frightening it can be to have to grope around in the darkness, hoping that we won’t trip over something or bump our heads, as we search for a candle or flashlight to bring light to the darkness. I’m sure you could share a story of a time this happened to you.

It’s no wonder that, throughout the Bible, we find a contrast between light and darkness – between good and evil – between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan: Just a few examples:

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light . . .”

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out . . .”

“The light has come into the world, but people love the darkness rather than the light because their deeds are evil . . .”

“Jesus said, ‘I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness . . .’”

Indeed, we DO all know what it’s like to “walk in darkness,” – to grope our way through life without a light to guide us. Yes, it IS frightening to be lost in the dark – literally and figuratively!

Our world today is a world shrouded in shadows. More often than not, it seems we are blinded by the darkness of sin all around us. Yes, our world is frequently a dark and scary place in which to live. But often, our personal lives also seem dark and hopeless, as if we were wandering through a forest on a moonless night without a lantern.

One dark night, a young girl was shivering on the streets of a large city and she slipped inside a church to warm herself. There was a service going on. As she sat in the back, she heard the preacher quote the Bible verse, “I am the light of the world.” After the service, she approached the minister and asked if he meant what he had said. At first he was confused. Then he realized that she didn’t understand who was speaking the words he had recited. He said, “Oh, no, I am not the light of the world – Jesus is. I – I’m just one small light.” She looked at him and said, “Well, sir, then I wish you’d come down and hang out in my neighborhood – cause it’s awful dark there.”

Yes, it seems that darkness is everywhere – from the Middle East, to North Korea, to Somalia, to Venezuela, to Yemen, to The Ukraine – to many places right here in the USA – and certain streets here in

Sebastian; there is even darkness in lives of many of us here this morning: For far too many people in our world, there is not much hope for the dawn.

But then comes the Season of Advent! This morning we are reminded that we “walk in darkness,” – a frightening darkness that blinds us from seeing God present among us.

And so, in the midst of the pitch blackness of this world, this morning we light one small Advent candle – one flickering flame – to chase away the shadows. That one flame will grow Sunday-by-Sunday bringing more and more light until, on Christmas Eve, the world will be awash with light as we celebrate our Savior’s birth.

As our scripture from Romans reminds us, although we walk in darkness NOW, “the night is nearly over and the day is almost here.” Advent, then, is the twilight before the dawn, when the Light of God will break upon the world in all his fullness, and we will walk in darkness no more.

This, of course, has been the vision and hope throughout the ages. For centuries, the Jewish people longed for a day when the light of God would shine upon “the people who walked in darkness.” And that day finally came with the birth of the Baby Jesus in Bethlehem. With the coming of Christ, it was as if a candle was lit against the blackness of sin, chasing the darkness away, exposing Satan’s ugly face - but yet, not defeating Satan altogether.

That’s why, in Paul’s day as in ours, Christians have also longed for a new dawn - that day when Christ will come again – this time in glory – a second Advent – when the Prince of Darkness, Satan himself, will be defeated once-and-for-all, and Jesus, the Light of the World, will banish darkness forever. Friends, THAT is the hope and the promise of Advent. Christ came – and will come again!

But that raises another question... What do we do in the meantime as we await the second Advent of Christ in glory? As I said, Advent is the twilight before the dawning of the morning light – the inbreaking of God into our dark world in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ has come as the Baby in Bethlehem, and we have seen his light, and that light brings us hope. But, just as that lonely Advent candle burning this morning reminds us, the world around us is still a dark and frightening place.

So, in the meantime, what shall we do? How shall we live in a dark and frightening world, waiting for the ultimate dawn that is sure to come?

In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, he tells us how we are to live in the “in-between times” – this time between the two Advents of Christ. Paul writes, “The God who said, ‘Out of darkness the light shall shine’ is the same God who made his light shine in our hearts.” In other words, even though we live in a dark world, we are to live our lives as children of the Light . . . Because we have encountered Christ, the Light of the World, his light now shines in our hearts, that we might be “the light” to shine on this dark and frightening world

Remember, Jesus not only said, “I am the Light of the world” – he also said, “YOU are the light of the world!” We are to reflect his light into the shadowy places in our world!

In the Gospel of John, chapter one, verse 14 we find this idea. I especially love the way The Message translations expresses it: “The Word become flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.”

That's what that homeless girl who wandered into the church that night was really looking for – someone to care. She didn't know it, but what we wanted was Jesus with sin on. She was looking for the Light of God.

One of my favorite quotes is the motto of the Christopher Society (according to Google, it may have started as a saying by Confucius: "It is better to light one candle, than to curse the darkness.")

So today, we have "lit one candle," the light that shine in our hearts, that WE might shine the love of God to a world shrouded in darkness.

It's just as Jesus said: "Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Or as Paul says in our scripture for this morning, "So let us put aside the deeds of darkness, and put on the armor of light."

So, this Advent, remember that you are God's light, given to brighten a dark and hopeless world. We no longer walk in darkness! We walk as a child of the Light!

One of my favorite Advent hymns is "I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light." The first verse and refrain goes like this:

*I want to walk as a child of the Light, I want to follow Jesus.  
God sent the stars to give light to the world, The Light of my life is Jesus.  
In Him there is no darkness at all, the night and the day are both alike.  
The Lamb is the Light of the City of God. Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.*

This Advent Season, may Jesus be the "Light of your life." May He "shine in your heart," that your light might shine brightly for all the world to see.

Let us pray:

O Lord, help us walk as children of light as we await the advent of Christ in glory, when darkness shall be no more. O God of Light, shine on us this holy season, that we might shine your love on others.