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# Out of Darkness and into the Light

## SCOTT HOEZEE

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And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we are right now in the middle...this is the third episode of a five-episode series that we are doing for Advent and Christmas...and the fifth episode we will look ahead a little bit to Epiphany as well; and the light of the world is our theme for this Advent/Christmas/Epiphany series. In the first program, we looked at scripture from Genesis to Revelation, and looked at all kinds of places where the imagery of light came up. In the previous program, we talked about how do we get ready for light? How do we, at Advent, or any time, get ready to receive the light? We talked about John the Baptist and we talked about the need for repentance. We talked about the need to shine that light by immersing ourselves in scripture and in prayer and in deeds of mercy and kindness. Now, in this program, we are going to look at a few more of the results of what it meant that Jesus, as light of the world, came into the world.

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## **DARRELL DELANEY**

Yes; the fact that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it is something that we hold in tension and in anticipation, knowing that we live in a world that seems to be overcome with darkness; but we serve a God who has already shined, and the light shines, like you said in the last episode; and we talked about, in the book of Isaiah, some things that happened to prepare the way for the Lord's coming, but we want to go back to the prophetic literature of Isaiah again, because he talks about this in Chapter 2.

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## **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Isaiah 2 at the second verse: In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. <sup>3</sup>Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

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<sup>4</sup>He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. <sup>5</sup>Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

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## **SCOTT HOEZEE**

So, Darrell, here is a prophetic vision; I think it is just breathtaking in its sweep and in its scope. We are promised that the day will come when God's temple will be established forever. Isaiah says it is going to be like the highest of all the mountains and it is going to be like a magnet that is going to draw all nations to it; and we are told that when they arrive...all those nations...when they arrive at the holy mountain and the temple that sits atop it, the nations will be transformed.

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## **DARRELL DELANEY**

Transformation for the people of God. It is a way for them to be trained by the law of God and the ways of God; and God is the schoolmaster, so he is the one who is actually going to teach his ways to the people. He has been trying to do this for years and years, and realizing that they keep falling off and they keep falling off; but he said: No; this time it is going to be different. When they get to this holy mountain, they will learn a new way of doing things. It is interesting how they come up the mountain, isn't it?

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## **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Well, it is interesting, and this is one of many places in Isaiah, and you think also of Jeremiah...Jeremiah 31...where, you know, as you just said, the law, the ways of God, God's instructions for flourishing in God's good creation, they remained external to people; but that is going to change, God says. That is going to change. We are going to get a heart transplant. No longer a heart of stone that is impervious to God's law, but a heart of flesh that will be soft enough to absorb God's ways and make them an internal reality. It is going to be like the internal commands and control center for every person who is now drawn to and transformed by this God. But, you know, as you were also just hinting at, Darrell, the nations will stream to the divine mountain, but they are going to come with some baggage. As is true right now, so it has been true all through history, that nations have what Isaiah 2 calls disputes; and we know that those disputes cover a wide range: economic friction, disputes over national borders, diplomatic rifts, the list could go on and on. The nations will bring that baggage with them, but God is going to address that, too, we are told, and he is going to settle all that once and for all.

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I have always found it interesting, Scott, that they bring their swords up on the mountain, and the spears up on the mountain. They are going up. I don't know what their intention is when they are on their way up, but they wanted to make sure they were prepared for whatever they encountered up there. What was interesting is that that transformation began to happen. So, in Jeremiah 31, this is the difference between the old covenant that is external and the new covenant that God says I will write the law on their hearts so they will know me. No one will say: Know the Lord; know the Lord because they will all know me from the least to the greatest; and that transformation begins to be the reason why they beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

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## **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Exactly; and that is just such a delightful image that you just said there from Isaiah. They are going to repurpose weapons of war into agricultural tools. Swords will become like blades for planting crops and plowing fields. Spears will be converted into something to prune grapevines and fruit trees. As Neal Plantinga once said, updating the imagery for today, he said: It will be like God will take all the rifles and turn them into garden stakes for vines to grow on. We will take howitzer tanks and we will transform them into John Deere garden tractors, right? So, not only will there be no more weapons of war, there will be in their place, gardening and farming equipment through which to feed the whole creation, and that is simply a beautiful and breathtaking image.

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## **DARRELL DELANEY**

It is a breathtaking image, and I think it is really powerful to see that they will cease to have the desire to take up swords to go against other nations. They will cease to have the desire to train for war because of what that light has done in their hearts, and how it has transformed them; and the beseeching that happens at the end of this verse, that God is saying: Let us walk in the light of the Lord...that is what the plan is and he knows that that is a process for us.

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## **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Exactly; and that is, you know, another reason why we are including this passage in this Advent/Christmas series on the light of the world: Let us walk in the light of the Lord. So, there is going to be glory streaming from this temple on that highest of all mountains; there is going to be glory streaming from it, and that glory in scripture was always associated with light, and that is the light in which we will walk.

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So, here again, the coming of the kingdom of God in scripture is often depicted as a great banquet, as a great feast, and you kind of get that sense here as well, that this is going to be a time when we walk in the light of the Lord. This is going to be a time of great abundance...it is going to be a time of great abundance. It is sort of like when Jesus fed the five thousand, right? He didn't give them just enough bread...one piece each...no; they all ate their fill and then there were twelve baskets left over. That is the sense you get of this hyperabundance, that is what the coming of Jesus as the light of the world will bring with him.

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I think also it is important for us to note that we are all called to be walking in the light of the Lord. We are invited to walk in the light of the Lord; and in the first program, we noted how often the followers of God and disciples that are Jesus' disciples, are told that spiritual darkness that they are enduring will be lifted, and we won't have to be afraid of the dark, because our hearts will not be dark any longer, and that is good news. So, in a moment, we want to talk about the New Testament and think about a few more passages there. So, stay tuned.

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*Segment 2*

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## **SCOTT HOEZEE**

And Darrell, as we continue to think about the effects that the presence of the light of the world has, let's dig right back into scripture. This time, let's go to John 8, which is maybe the most iconic passage on the theme that we are doing for this Advent/Christmas series. Verse 12:

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And Darrell, as we continue to think about the effects that the presence of the light of the world has, let's dig right back into scripture. This time, let's go to John 8, which is maybe the most iconic passage on the theme that we are doing for this Advent/Christmas series. Verse 12:

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." <sup>13</sup>The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid." <sup>14</sup>Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my [own] behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. [But] you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. <sup>15</sup>You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. <sup>16</sup>But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. <sup>17</sup>In your own law, it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. <sup>18</sup>I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father who sent me." <sup>19</sup>Then they asked him, "Where is your father?" "You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also."

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So, I know that because we have had the scripture for a long time, and some of us grew up reading these, we think it is normal for Jesus to say: I am the light of the world. Oh, yes, right; that makes sense to us because we have the whole witness of scripture and history and tradition to inform that for us; but if this is the first time that he has ever said this, it makes a lot of sense that the Pharisees would challenge him, not only because of what he is claiming, but because of how he is claiming it. Because they have a way in their law that they are supposed to testify. You have to have a witness who will vouch for you, and Jesus is standing there alone, saying: I am the light of the world; and they have an issue with him on both parts.

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Yes; John 8...the whole chapter is probably one of the most contentious passages in the whole New Testament, especially in terms of Jesus' back and forth arguments with the religious leaders of his day. In fact, if we were to read the entire chapter, Darrell, we would find a number of these very terse and testy exchanges. Jesus, here in John 8, more pointed than usual, in just out and out calling the religious leaders liars...

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He pegs them as downright clueless as to what is truth, and for their part, before the chapter is finished, the religious leaders will actually accuse Jesus twice of being demon-possessed. And you know, Darrell, if Jesus was who John said he was in John 1, that he was the Word of God who was with God in the beginning, through whom all things are made...if that is who Jesus was, well, accusing the Word of God of having a demon is probably one of the worst things anybody has ever said in human history.

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**DARRELL DELANEY**

Yes, that is actually really bad. It seems like, in this chapter, the gloves are coming off on both sides, because Jesus is making sure that his truth is made known, that his light does not dim down for the comfort of the people. He is not worried about how he is going to be liked or received. He is interested in obeying his Father and telling the truth. He is the truth. So, it is not surprising to see the opposition that would come when he decides that he wants to tell the truth in this way.

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**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Exactly; but, you know, when you think about it, we think of the saying...we just kind of isolate it. We've got all of these "I am" sayings that pepper the Gospel of John, and we kind of isolate them: I am the light of the world; we think that is just so beautiful; and yet, to see that that saying actually emerged in the middle of a hugely argumentative and contentious chapter, that is like: Wow, that is not what I would have guessed to be the context of the first time Jesus is saying: I am the light of the world; and yet, Darrell, I think that it is very instructive that that is the context in which this came out, because it reminds us of the fact that this is a dark world, and the darkness does not always welcome the light. So, it is surprising that John 8 is where we get this lovely "I am" saying, but it is instructive too, because it is like: Well, yes; the world does not always want the light. You would think they would, but they don't.

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## **DARRELL DELANEY**

That reminds me of what Jesus taught. He said that no servant is greater than his master. If the world hates me, guess what. The world is going to hate you if you follow me. The world is going to hate you on account of me. So, if you are saying what I am saying, just like I am saying what the Father is saying, don't be surprised if you are persecuted if people do not want to hear it; if people try to silence you; if people want to mute you; if people want to cancel you. Do not be surprised by that, because it happened to Jesus himself; and they even challenged the Father. He said: The Father is my witness; and they are like: What father? What are you talking about? So, they even challenged him on that.

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## **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Yes; we don't see any father; and Jesus said: Well, of course you don't see any father; you are blind; that is the whole point; but indeed, you know, you wonder: Why would anybody, Darrell, want to stay in any kind of darkness...literal, metaphorical, physical, spiritual, mental darkness...why would anybody want to stay in dark... If you have the light of the world arriving at your doorstep, wouldn't you want it? Wouldn't you want it? We have talked before, like in Psalm 130, that sometimes waiting for God is compared to a nightwatchman, you know; these guys who are up all night guarding the city; it is pitch black, there is no moon, and they just keep watching the eastern horizon. They keep watching. When is it going to pink up? When is it going to pink up? When are we going to get back to the light, where we can feel safer? The Bible says: That is how much you should long for Jesus as the light of the world; and yet, we find that sometimes, Darrell, people don't have that longing, and even when the light comes to them, they resist it.

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Yes; we don't see any father; and Jesus said: Well, of course you don't see any father; you are blind; that is the whole point; but indeed, you know, you wonder: Why would anybody, Darrell, want to stay in any kind of darkness...literal, metaphorical, physical, spiritual, mental darkness...why would anybody want to stay in dark... If you have the light of the world arriving at your doorstep, wouldn't you want it? Wouldn't you want it? We have talked before, like in Psalm 130, that sometimes waiting for God is compared to a nightwatchman, you know; these guys who are up all night guarding the city; it is pitch black, there is no moon, and they just keep watching the eastern horizon. They keep watching. When is it going to pink up? When is it going to pink up? When are we going to get back to the light, where we can feel safer? The Bible says: That is how much you should long for Jesus as the light of the world; and yet, we find that sometimes, Darrell, people don't have that longing, and even when the light comes to them, they resist it.

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I think there are a couple of reasons, Scott, why people would want to stay in the darkness. I mean, sin in and of itself is illogical and irrational. It doesn't sense for us to choose death when life is before us, that is one thing; but the second is that it becomes a comfortable place. If you become institutionalized, so to speak, by your sins and by those things that are going on in the environment around you, now the light is an intruder. Now the light is invasive. Now the light is convicting and challenging to my comfort zone. So, I have to give up my comfort in order to surrender to the light of Christ, and that is where the rub is.

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I think there are a couple of reasons, Scott, why people would want to stay in the darkness. I mean, sin in and of itself is illogical and irrational. It doesn't sense for us to choose death when life is before us, that is one thing; but the second is that it becomes a comfortable place. If you become institutionalized, so to speak, by your sins and by those things that are going on in the environment around you, now the light is an intruder. Now the light is invasive. Now the light is convicting and challenging to my comfort zone. So, I have to give up my comfort in order to surrender to the light of Christ, and that is where the rub is.

## **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Exactly, exactly; and if you are a sinful person...if you are an evil person...light has a way of exposing that, right? Sunlight is the best disinfectant, they say; and some people don't want to be exposed. You are right; they would rather stay in the darkness, so that we cannot see their deeds of darkness. It reminds me...and we may have mentioned this on another *Groundwork* program at some point in the history of our show, but at the very end of C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Aslan, the lion, the Christ figure, takes the children to the new Narnia, and everything is absolutely gorgeous; everything is higher and deeper; every pear you bite into is more luscious than all the pears you had ever eaten in your life; this is just a gorgeous place. Every blade of grass seems to mean more. But then, in the middle of all that, the children run into this group of dwarves who are miserable, and in their minds, they are convinced they are in a stinky barn, huddled by a weak little fire, and that any food people give them tastes like cow manure; and they cannot see the light around them; and one of the children says to Aslan: Is there anything we can do for them? He says: No; they are trapped in the darkness of their own minds. I am afraid, Darrell, that sometimes that is just the way of it in this world.

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## **DARRELL DELANEY**

Yes; and so, in John 9, Jesus says: (verses 39-41 paraphrased) I come that those who are blind will see and those who see will become blind. If you think you see, then you are actually blind. But if you admit you need help, then you actually can see the light.

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*Segment 3*

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## **SCOTT HOEZEE**

I am Scott Hoezee, with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this third out of five programs we are doing for the Advent and Christmas and Epiphany seasons on the light of the world. Darrell, we were just in John 8, which is the place where Jesus declares himself to be the light of the world: I am the light of the world; and yet, we saw that that emerged from the context of a lot of contentiousness and argument; but now, let's jump ahead about four chapters to John Chapter 12. This is coming after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, so we are only six days out from Passover...six days out from Jesus' crucifixion. So, we are getting down to the final matter. So, here we are in John 12.

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## **DARRELL DELANEY**

Picking up in verse 44, it says: Then Jesus cried out, "Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. <sup>45</sup>The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. <sup>46</sup>I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. <sup>47</sup>If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. <sup>48</sup>There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. <sup>49</sup>For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. <sup>50</sup>I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."

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Again, that unity of Jesus and the Father; it is all through John's gospel. It is going to be a major theme in what is coming up next in John 13-17, the Farewell Discourses in the upper room...lots to talk about in the

unity of Father and Son.

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It is interesting, in verse 44 where you just read there, Darrell, that Jesus is described as crying out: Then Jesus *cried out*: Whoever believes in me and so forth. I think, Darrell, that underscores the urgency of these final days of Jesus' ministry while he is on his way to the cross. He is crying out these things. These are ultimate matters. You have to accept Jesus as the light or you are lost.

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I think that the cry out was an echo to me because we remember John the Baptist was the one crying out in the wilderness that the kingdom of God is here; repent. He couldn't believe the good news. He is crying out...John the Baptist is...and now we see Jesus crying out, because Jesus knows that his time is drawing to a close, and it doesn't seem like people are responding in the way that he would want them to; and his heart would want them to. So, this is an urgent matter for him.

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### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

And it is interesting, too, that here we get it again, where Jesus is basically saying: If you have heard me, you have heard the Father; if you have seen me, you have seen the Father; and we know that the disciples, in particular were affected. If we jump ahead two chapters to John 14, Philip is at some point going to say to Jesus: (verses 8ff paraphrased) Show us the Father; and Jesus says: Have I been with you so long, Philip, and you still don't know me? If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. The disciples are thinking: What? Really?! Yes, we have seen you. We have seen you get tired and nod off in the back of a boat; we have seen you eat; we have seen you clean your teeth; we have seen you giggle; we have seen you cry; all of that was the Father?? And Jesus says: Yep, yep; you were seeing the true God in everything you saw in me. So, this connection with Jesus and the Father and how that does make Jesus the light of the world, that was very surprising to the people who knew the very human man and master and teacher who was Jesus of Nazareth.

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**DARRELL DELANEY**

And the intimate connection that Jesus has with the Father, that he made known to us, is actually one of the ways that the light is shining to us. So, just like when he was born, it was a very unexpected way that he came into the world. The light was invited into this world in a very unusual way that we didn't expect. He is showing the Father and the essence of God's character through what he does and says in such a way that is so unexpected; and nobody really could follow and understand that that is really the essence of the Father there.

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And this is who he is; and as Jesus says in John 12: <sup>46</sup>I have come into the world as a light...he says, so you don't have to stay in darkness. You don't have to stay in darkness.

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And this is who he is; and as Jesus says in John 12: <sup>46</sup>I have come into the world as a light...he says, so you don't have to stay in darkness. You don't have to stay in darkness.

We just saw in John 8 where the Pharisees rejecting Jesus claiming to be the light of the world, that they kind of are opting to stay in the darkness, but Jesus says you don't have to. You don't have to stay in the darkness; you can come to the light; and that, of course, Darrell, is finally good news. I mean, that really is kind of the gospel...

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**SCOTT HOEZEE**

In a nutshell. But practically speaking, Darrell, as we round out this program, we know how much we need this good news, right? Because, as we have said all throughout this series, we have the light of Christ shining in our hearts through faith, but the world around us is pretty dark. You know, we talked earlier about nations rising up against nations, you know, in that Isaiah passage; and indeed, Gaza, Lebanon, Ukraine, Sudan...war everywhere...innocent children...men, women and children dying. War is about as dark as humanity can get, and there is a whole lot of that going on right now.

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## **DARRELL DELANEY**

Yes, there is; and there is a lot going on in our hearts and in our minds and in our families and in our neighborhoods as well. So, it is not just far, but it is also near; and sometimes we look into the mirror and we see some of the challenges that we struggle with internally that no one knows about, and even the Church does not always shine the light as brightly; let's just be honest about that; the Church is not always the beacon that it has been called to be over the history of the Church. I mean, the theology, we argue about that; and then we bicker with one another; sometimes we split and we go our different ways; and that sometimes also shows the brokenness and the darkness coming in; but we do know a God who is definitely in control in the situation and can address that stuff.

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## **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Exactly; and we have to believe, as we have said in this series from John 1, that the light shines in the darkness, even when the darkness is somewhat caused by the Church...even when we are part of the darkness in the Church, we have to believe in Jesus. We believe in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that they are the light...the bright light that shines at the center of everything in the cosmos...and that gives us hope when the surrounding darkness gives the light a run for it's money, as it sometimes does. So, you know, Darrell, I think in the Church, we just have to constantly be reminding each other that Christ's light is shining. Don't be discouraged; or when you are discouraged, remember that. I mean, I don't think as preachers we cannot proclaim that word often enough. We cannot remind one another to lean into the promises of Jesus often enough. These days, more than ever, Darrell, that part of the witness of the Church just has to come through.

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I think it is a beautiful thing for us to be reminded of the character of God in the midst of darkness, because where else will we borrow our hope from? Where else will we get our encouragement? Because we cannot get it from the news; we cannot get it from social media; we cannot get it from those places; but we can look to scripture; we can look to the Word of God...the preaching of God...to find that.

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Jesus cried out those words we just read from John 12, and we need to hope by the Holy Spirit that we have that same sense of urgency, Darrell, in witnessing to our friends, witnessing to our neighbors about the one who we really know and is always will be the light of the world. By grace, this can happen for us. For that, we give God our thanks.

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