
Reflecting the Light of the World

SCOTT HOEZEE

Twelve days after Christmas each year, we come to the day of Epiphany on January 6th. It is a day when, among other things, we ponder the epiphany, or the appearing of the star to the Magi from the East. So, epiphany also ponders just generally the appearance to all of us to the one who called himself: *The Light of the World*. Today on *Groundwork*, we are going to wrap up our Advent/Christmas/Epiphany series on Jesus as the light by thinking about some of the effects of our encounter with Christ's light. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now program five in a five-part series on Jesus as the light of the world. We have spent the first three episodes of this really kind of an Advent mode. We reflected on the Bible-wide theme of darkness and light; we brought that to Advent, the time of anticipation every year that leads up to Christmas. In the previous episode, we talked more directly about Christmas, including the Luke 2 story and its fulfillment of a wonderful prediction from the prophet Isaiah from many centuries before. So, now we are going to go just to the other side of Christmas to the day of Epiphany, January 6th.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and Epiphany is going to help us ponder how we live in the light of Christ, and how that affects our discipleship. So, Scott, let's dig right into scripture with verses from the second chapter of Paul's pastoral letter to Titus: Titus Chapter 2, where he talks about this, and he says: ¹¹For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹²It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. ¹⁵ These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Titus 2. So, first, Darrell, we can know that twice in these verses Paul uses the verb in Greek *to appear*, and in the original Greek, that is the verb *epiphaino*, from which we, as you can hear, get the English word epiphany. So, first, Darrell, Paul says that the grace of God has epiphanied, or it has appeared, and this offers salvation to everyone, but the appearance of that grace does more than just save us, it also equips us for faithful living as Christ's disciples. This epiphany of grace gives us the ability to say "No" to temptations of all kinds; but then, on the positive, flip side, there, Darrell, it helps us to say "Yes" to good things like self-control, being upright and godly. Paul does not repeat here the nine fruit of the Spirit that he lists in Galatians 5, but he could have, because this epiphany of grace is what lets us bear that fruit on the branches of our lives, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; this is a shorter book that Paul writes, and so, he doesn't go into great detail like he does in Colossians, where he tells you: Here is what you don't do in your old life—this is what you used to do; here is what you need to do now in light of your putting on the new self in Christ; but he is doing that in shorthand in this book. He is saying: You said no to the ungodly things; and you are saying yes to the things that God wants because he has appeared to you and empowered you to live this life as a disciple and as a Christian. So, Paul is making sure that we know that it equips us for faithful living.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, that is the epiphany that has already come. It has appeared, but then Paul mentions an appearance...another epiphany...that is yet to come. Grace has appeared, but Jesus has not yet appeared in his second coming in glory; and that epiphany is the one we are waiting for. You know, most of this series was in Advent, Darrell. In Advent, we always talk about the two advents: Advent one: Bethlehem. Advent two: Second coming at the end of history; and traditionally, Advent puts us in mind of both. Also, epiphany has that same doubleness...epiphany has that same twoness to it. Grace has appeared to save us and make us more righteous and holy, and because that grace has already appeared, we have confidence that the epiphany still to come is going to happen for sure, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, when I teach this or preach this about Epiphany, or the already/not yet, I usually bring up two hula-hoops, and I have them overlapping each other. So, one is the darkness of this world and the other is the glorious appearing and Revelation of Christ meaning the kingdom of God is here. So, we see an overlap because it is already here, but not yet fully; and people can see that there is brokenness, but there is also joy; there is pain, but there is also peace. That is happening in this world, where the twoness is happening that Epiphany explains very clearly.

In this final episode, we want to focus on how we need to reflect and shine that same light around us, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I like that hula-hoop. It is kind of a hula-hoop Venn diagram...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, that's exactly what it is!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, so Titus 2 tells us this, but we can go back and see something similar from Isaiah 60; so, in the previous episode, we saw the prediction that on the people living in deep darkness a light has come; then a little later in Isaiah, in Chapter 60, now that that light has come, Isaiah is able to say: ¹Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. ²See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. ³Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. ⁴Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the hip. ⁵Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Scott, we have been talking about darkness and light through this entire series. In the first episode, we did this survey. I mean, everything starts with: Let there be light in Genesis. Then it is repeated again in the Gospel of John, let there be light; The light has shown in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. So, the first order of business has often to be bringing light and illuminating this, and Isaiah is making this clear in his chapter, that the light is coming and it is here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so, the first business of creation in Genesis, as you just said, was: Let there be light; but unfortunately, not too long after that, in the telling of it, we fell into the darkness of sin; and we ruptured our connection to the light of God; and that is sort of the thick darkness Isaiah 60:2 is talking about in the passage we just read. We have ruptured our connection, and now we again wander around in kind of a chaotic confusion. Some people cannot tell right from wrong, and sometimes when they can tell right from wrong, they choose the wrong anyway. But here, Isaiah promises that God's light had come upon Israel of old; and now we believe for sure that God's light in Christ has dawned upon the new Israel...that is, simply the Church; and you know, Darrell, I think more than a lot of people admit maybe more than a lot of people fully recognize they really do, deep, deep down...no matter what they might think about religion; no matter what they might think about the Church or the Christians, they long for that kind of light, don't they?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, they do; and the scripture makes it clear that the nations will come to your (Jesus') light. So, that means that they need to see a representation of God's light shining through us. We have not always done a good job with that, but it is still our call; and when people are longing for the hope of the gospel, they should be able to look to another image-bearer of Christ and get that light and get that illumination and get that hope. So, how do we live as encouragement to those around us by shining that light?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because again, deep down in places that maybe they don't talk about or they cannot articulate it, a lot of people at the end of the day would say: I don't like living in the dark; I don't like feeling afraid; I don't like feeling confused; I don't like to think about what is going to happen to me after I die; I don't like to think of what happened to my mother. Where is my mother now that she did die? People really have those questions; and not just Christian people. So, Isaiah says: Let your light shine, and then when the nations come...when the kings come and they bring all those good things, everybody's hearts are going to swell and throb with pure joy.

We are going to read something very similar, Darrell, next on this program from the Sermon on the Mount. So, stay tuned for that.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Darrell, let's dig right back into scripture, as we tend to do, this time from Matthew 5, near the very beginning of the three-chapter-long Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has just declared his Beatitudes, in which he counts as blessed the very people who a lot of this world would regard as losers or as down-and-out and of no account. But not so, Jesus says. When you are a disciple of Jesus, even if you are meek and lowly, sad and poor, hungry for a better world, working against all odds to bring peace to this world of conflict; if that is you as a disciple, then you are blessed indeed. Then Jesus says that the disciples could expect persecution and resistance: true; but then he goes on and says this in verse 13.

DARRELL DELANEY

He says: "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. ¹⁴You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, for obvious reasons, due to the nature of the series, we will just set the salt image to one side and we will pick up on that second part of being light. Now, it is curious, Darrell, that in John 8...we saw this in the third episode...but we mentioned it in the previous episode, too, in episode four...Jesus famously says: I am the light of the world. But here, Jesus looks at his disciples and says that *they* are the light of the world: *You* are the light of the world, he says. So, if we put John 8 and Matthew 5 together, then we see something, I think, rather startling. We share with no less than Christ Jesus the Lord, this identity to be the light of the world; and again, Darrell, Jesus is not calling them to *become* the light...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is not saying, you know, wish for this, pray for this, that one day by and by, you will become the light. Huh-uh; Jesus is in the present tense indicative here: *You are* the light.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, the image I get when you talk about this, Scott, is that Christ has a candle. He has a candle, and he takes his candle and lights my candle. Then I take my candle and light the next person's candle. So, the candle that we are holding is the light that is the truth, that is the gospel, that is the good news. Jesus himself is the Word made flesh. He embodies that, and then he shows us as disciples how we need to live as that same light. So, it changes who we were, it changes what our goals and our intentions are; and then we lead the striving away from it so that we can live into the identity and not just gain and try to earn and add it on to who we are. It fundamentally changes who we are and how we live.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; but, a couple things that we need to think about, Darrell, for a few minutes: Let's face it, some days we just don't feel like we are very luminous. Some days I don't feel like I am part of the light of the world; and let's admit a second thing: Sometimes when the world looks at the Church, they don't see a lot of light either. They see more hypocrisy than light. So, why do we sometimes feel like we are not all that luminous, and why does the world sometimes deem that the Church is not all that luminous?

DARRELL DELANEY

I think that why we don't feel luminous all the time is because sometimes we can be wishy-washy in our faithfulness to Christ. I have broken a lot of promises to myself when I said I wanted to live according to his Word and then I fall short and sin or I lose the battle of temptation one day, or I was rude to my spouse when I said something that was offensive to her that I didn't know hurt her feelings, or even, I was angry and I just went too far. So, you know, sometimes we don't always live according to the Word; we stray off the Word, and I am thankful that we have 1 John 1:9, where we can confess our sins and be forgiven; but at the same time, because my spiritual walk is sometimes up and down, that would make me feel discouraged, and I don't feel like I am the light at those times.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Again, just before Jesus said: You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world; he said: You are going to get persecuted; I mean, you are going to get roughed up. Jesus doesn't sugarcoat it here; and that is true. It is still a broken world; it is a rough and tumble place; and we...you know, we get discouraged. We would like to be some shiny beacon of hope, but when you get the stuffing knocked out of you in one way or the other, it is a little hard to feel that way; whether it is physical persecution, which some of our sisters and brothers in the world do face, or psychological or just being ridiculed...that kind of persecution...sometimes that makes us feel like: Oh, man; I am not some shining light; I am just some dim, smoldering wick at most. But then, you touched on something a minute ago, too. Jesus says: Now, nobody sensibly lights a light and then hides it under a bushel, right? Nobody has a light and then prevents its light from being seen. Well, of

course, we never intentionally do that, but as you said, Darrell, sometimes we do hide the light of Christ because we sin; and that is why sometimes when the world looks at the Church, it doesn't see light, it sees hypocrisy, and sometimes the world is right about that. Sometimes they are not; sometimes they are just being mean; but sometimes the world is pretty accurate in saying: So, what dims our light? What is the equivalent of the proverbial hiding your light under a bushel? Church controversies will do the trick.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, in this situation, we have to think about God, who is perfect. He is allowing imperfect people to be a part of his plan; and because we are imperfect people, we often sometimes line up with sin instead of lining up with righteousness; and there have been times when the Church has used their power inappropriately; there have been times when the Church has been complicit to injustice and racism and brokenness and abuse; and we see a lot of things that we know are wrong, but the Church, unfortunately, has fallen into line with those things; and when we recognize that, we should repent and leave it alone. But it has taken time for God to show us, and also for us to move in the direction he has called us to move.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, yes; so, you mentioned, you know, the Church being complicit with slavery and the slave culture in the US South, or churches that distanced themselves from the civil rights movement and were critical of Martin Luther King, Jr. In more recent times, Darrell, unfortunately, there has been some sexual abuse scandals. The Roman Catholic Church had it, but Evangelical churches, Protestant churches have just had the same, where we find out that church leaders are aware that there has been some physical or sexual abuse of younger people; and they perpetuate it or they say nothing about it; and if you want to find a surefire way for the Church to kind of extinguish the light of Christ in the Church, you couldn't do much better than allowing the abuse of children; and the world sees that.

So, as you just said, all we can do, if we do not want to take the light of Christ and hide it under a bushel...if we want to be that shining city on a hill...if we want to put the light on the stand so it gives light to everybody in the house, very often step one toward doing that, again for the Church, is repentance. We have to be sorry.

DARRELL DELANEY

We have to be sorry; and then, when we repent and we come to God with a sincere heart, he takes that light and he rekindles us; he takes that light and he allows us to be cleansed and shining again; and that is a process that he wants us to go through; but then, we also have to remember that this is part of the spiritual warfare that we go through, because our true enemy doesn't want us to shine our light. He doesn't want us to live in righteousness, and that enemy is not flesh and blood.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is the powers and the principalities that the Apostle Paul especially talks about in the New Testament. The light is shining in the darkness, as John 1 says, the darkness is not overcoming it, but it tries; and so, these are spiritual battles that make us discouraged; these are spiritual battles when the Church falls and fails. So, we need to live as children of the light by confessing our sin and asking God to rekindle that light in us again.

We are going to wrap up this program and this whole series with just a few further reflections and takeaways. So, stay tuned for that.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, let's pick up where we left off, and now go to these words from Paul in 2 Corinthians 4.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it says: Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. ²Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the Word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. ³And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of (Jesus) Christ. ⁷But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Darrell, we have noted at the end of the previous part of this program, that we are engaged in a spiritual battle against the powers and principalities, or the one in this passage that Paul identified as the *god of this age*, which would be the evil one. We also noted that sometimes that battle plays out in the Church or when individual believers genuinely behave badly, we cave in to temptations to sin; but that is not always the case; and in this passage, Paul reminds us that there is a different side of all this that prevents people from seeing our light, and that is because they are blind, Paul says. They live under a veil. They cannot see the spiritual light of Christ in us, even when it is shining brightly, because they are blind.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, the enemy is trying his best to make sure that no one understands or responds to the illumination of the Word of God; the presence of God's people; and he does everything he can to make these people blind to the truth. So, not only is the flesh that we currently carry not wanting to do what is right, but at the same time, you have the enemy, who is trying to blind and block the message to distort and stop the message; and if he can use ammunition against the Church by using their own mistakes against them, then it actually hardens the heart of a person and they become less receptive to the gospel, unless God intervenes with his light.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, sometimes our mistakes keep our light actually from shining. Sometimes, even when we do it right and the light does shine, people still cannot see it. They are blinded by it. You know, you think of the man born blind in John 9; the whole story is about who can really see; and so, Jesus cures a man born blind, now he can see, but all the Pharisees are trying to deny the miracle the whole chapter long; and at the end, the Pharisees say to Jesus: Are you saying that we are blind? And Jesus looks at them and basically says: Well, you said it, not me; but yes. You cannot see the light of the world that is standing right in front of you the way this once blind man can.

So, Darrell, one of the things we need to do is to pray that that veil be lifted from the eyes of our neighbors; that that spiritual blindness that is afflicting them that is such a weapon of the enemy can be lifted so that they can see truly, you know. We did a series here on *Groundwork* not long ago on the missionary journeys of Paul from the book of Acts; and the real motif or pattern we saw was Paul, Barnabas and Timothy were pleading with people to come to believe. They would plead with ordinary people in the synagogues; they would plead with extraordinary people, like kings and governors; and over and over in those stories in Acts, we saw demonstrations of what, in 2 Corinthians 4 Paul describes as: Preaching not ourselves, but ever and only the light of Jesus Christ as Lord.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Paul wants the readers to know this is not about how cool I sound; this is not about how eloquent I speak; it is literally God and his power that brings light to people's hearts. So, he is saying: I know nothing but Christ crucified. This is what you need to know: That Jesus died; that Jesus rose from the dead; because the

light of the world that you need to change your life is wrapped up in this message. It is not wrapped up in anything else, and you cannot muster your way there; you cannot will-power your way there; but the light that you need and I need to change our lives comes from Jesus Christ himself.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, as we wrap up this series, Darrell, that has brought us from Advent to Christmas to Epiphany and to living in that light today, let's think of four takeaways—four practical things. When we think about Christ as the true light of the world, first let's be thankful; let's be grateful for Jesus' declaration that we already now the light of the world, as we saw in Matthew 5. We should be grateful for that. When we hear Jesus say: You are the light of the world, we should say: Wow! And then, right after the "wow" we should say: Thank you, Jesus. Let's be grateful.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and then the second thing we need to do is just...we need to come clean and we need to confess our sins. I mean, the passage in Matthew 5 says: You don't light your light and put it under a bowl; and sometimes we might inadvertently put it under a bowl. We might not intentionally want to do that, but sometimes we end up doing that because we are not perfect and we make a lot of mistakes; but if we confess our sins individually, and we confess them corporately, the Lord promises to cleanse us of all unrighteousness. That is 1 John 1:9; and we can do that together. That way, we can agree with the light that we are called to live in, and then we can show others the way, so that we don't turn a blind eye to the things that happen in our lives and in their lives, but we also hold ourselves accountable to his Word.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is what Paul refers to as a perpetual, daily dying and rising with Christ. We die, we rise; we die, we rise. So, let's be thankful; let's confess our sins. Third: Let's pray for strength in those spiritual battles that we talked about that we are fighting against the god of this age, as Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 4; These are battles that are trying to snuff the light of Christ. The light shines in the darkness; the darkness has not overcome it, but it is trying. So, let's pray for strength. We cannot win those battles on our own. We can only do so with the power and stamina and the gifts of God through the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the final one, the fourth one, is that we pray that God lifts the veil of sin that keeps everyone from seeing the light of Christ, even when we intentionally do shine it the way that God has called us to, sometimes it is still hard for them to see. So, only God can remove that veil so they will not be blinded. We pray for that illumination.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And thanks be to God. We know that God receives our thanksgiving; he forgives our sins; he hears our prayers for strength; and he listens to the pleas for our neighbors to come to see his light. We do thank God for that.

DARRELL DELANEY

Thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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