
Waiting for the Light of the World

SCOTT HOEZEE

All through history, writers, poets and artists have regularly played around with imagery contrasting darkness and light. Yes, there is the well-known line: It was a dark and stormy night. It is often hailed as one of the worst opening sentences of a novel ever, but all through literature and art, darkness represents things that are threatening or scary, and light is something we are drawn to as representing things that are safe, hopeful and secure. The Bible uses contrasts of dark and light a lot, too; and today on *Groundwork*, we open an Advent series about Jesus as the light of the world. To begin, we are going to survey the Bible to see where this theme occurs. Stay tuned.

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And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we are starting an Advent and Christmas series with this program. We are going to have four episodes that correlate with the four Sundays in Advent, and then Christmas as well; and then a final fifth episode in this series will look ahead to the day of Epiphany as well. Throughout, Darrell, our focus is on how Jesus is the light of the world.

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So, the word *advent* means arrival; and what we teach in church time during this time is we help people to prepare and walk with us through the scripture to prepare for the arrival of Jesus on his birth at Christmas. In this series, we are looking to do that. So, we are going to dig into a lot of biblical passages that help pave the way for this theme of Advent, and with a theme of light and darkness in mind.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

So, most of the passages in this program will play with that imagery of light, and some of them will just also remind us of prophetic passages predicting the coming of Jesus; but no better place to start, Darrell, than the very beginning of it all: Genesis 1: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ³And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light “day” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening and there was morning—the first day.

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So, we have, right here in the beginning, where God is creating, and it says the earth is formless and empty. So, I have a concept of what light is; I have a concept of what darkness is; but I do not have a concept of what formless is and how there is this is chaos that is right there and God speaks order into it. It doesn't give us a lot of detail on that, Scott, but this is kind of where we start when we talk about this thing.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, I mean, you assume that the earth is probably the globe that we now know. How empty we could get, but formless is like, how could it be formless? But I think that word that you used, Darrell, is the exact, right one to use: Chaos. There is no organization here. There is no cosmos, there is only disorder. God needs to create cosmos and superimpose it on the chaos that we sort of see going on here; but the main thing that we are told about that formlessness...that chaos...is that it was dark.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, I mean, you assume that the earth is probably the globe that we now know. How empty we could get, but formless is like, how could it be formless? But I think that word that you used, Darrell, is the exact, right one to use: Chaos. There is no organization here. There is no cosmos, there is only disorder. God needs to create cosmos and superimpose it on the chaos that we sort of see going on here; but the main thing that we are told about that formlessness...that chaos...is that it was dark.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, the Spirit of God is hovering over the waters, and right after that moment, God says: Let there be light. So, this is the creation of what light is, and it is different because it is not the sun, it is not the moon, it is not the stars...we don't get that until the fourth day of creation...

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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DARRELL DELANEY

So, what exactly is this light, but it is being separated from the darkness? So, God is actually saying: Okay, this is light; this is darkness; this is the illumination in the beginning of what I create. I gotta start somewhere.

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It says: Let there be light. Now, in Genesis we are told God said, but you know, Darrell, we have noted before on *Groundwork* programs in the past, in the New Testament, particularly John 1 and Colossians 1, we are told...we get a fuller picture. We don't really know about the Trinity in the Old Testament; but in the New Testament, in John 1 and Colossians 1, we are told that it was the Son of God...the second Person of the Trinity...who went on to become born as the incarnate Jesus of Nazareth. He is the Logos...he is the Word of God. He does all the speaking: Let there be, let there be, let there be. That is Jesus...well, he is not called Jesus yet, but that is the Son of God, who is the one speaking all of that. So, that gives, Darrell, the Bible some lovely symmetry. The one who goes on to declare himself later in the New Testament to be the light of the world is the one who originally did light up the world: Let there be light.

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So, it is beautiful that when he says in John 8: "Before Abraham was, I am!" He says the same "I am" that he says to Moses in Exodus Chapter 3 and 4; if you also look at the word God in Hebrew, it is *Elohim*, which is a plural word, and you see that God the Father is creating, you see the Son in every word that is spoken, and

the Spirit hovering over the waters. You have the Trinity there, all part of the process of creating this light...this illumination...and making order in the midst of chaos. So, you see it right there.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

And you picked up a key thing a minute ago, Darrell. This is not the sun; this is not the stars; this is not sunlight bouncing off the moon, you know, making the moon shine at night. This is just light. It is like there is light all around, and you know, the author of Genesis knew what he was doing here, right? This was not written in a vacuum. Genesis 1 was crafted, not just to establish that God is the creator of all things, but there is a polemic here; there is an argument that is taking on alternate creation stories that existed in the ancient Near East.

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Now, if we think about this; Moses is writing this, because God gave him the revelation of the first five books of the Bible when they were at Mount Sinai after they had left out of the exodus of Egypt. So, you know, they are sitting around, and I can imagine them saying: How did we get here? And then, they say: No, no; how did we *all* get here? So they hear the entire creation story and God gives, by inspiration of his Spirit, Moses this to write about Genesis; and this is happening in real time, where there is Egypt, who is worshipping Ra, the sun god, and they've got Atum, who is doing these different things. So, there are different Egyptian gods that they had come from...pagan gods they had come from...and God establishes himself and says: No; I am the real, one and true God, who made all of this.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; do not worship the sun up in the sky; worship the God who can make light and doesn't even need the sun. That is how much greater Israel's God is over Egypt's gods. God will make the sun eventually, but he doesn't even need it. He just has light, which is very mysterious, but very wonderful to see here; and another thing...and you mentioned this, too, a minute ago, Darrell...God separates light from dark. He calls the light "day;" he calls the darkness "night," and you know, Darrell, we know that in the ancient world, the nighttime was often feared, you know. They didn't have street lamps; they didn't have artificial sources of illumination.

They didn't have flashlights. They had candles and lanterns maybe; but when it was dark...it was, you know, a cloudy or moonless night...when it is dark, it is dark, and that can be a little scary. Even today, we sometimes talk about things that go bump in the night, you know, just bad things can happen after dark; but here, the author is saying: There is day; there is night; you don't have to fear the night; God has that one, too. God made both of these things. God's got this thing: day and night; day *or* night.

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So, physically speaking, if you cannot see your hand in front of your face when it is dark, you know, it is a scary thing. You don't know what is out there. You cannot see; and so, the fact that God is sovereign over that darkness...Psalm 139: (verse 12b) Darkness is as day to you. So, we don't have to fear the things that we cannot see; the things that we don't know about, metaphorically speaking; and even in our own lives; because the God who made the light is the same God who is God over the darkness as well.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, what we see in Genesis 1, God imposed cosmos onto the precreation chaos. He introduced order to the disorderly and formless earth that existed before. In other words, when it comes to the night, even God is sovereign over that; and above all, God is the God of light.

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That is probably why, Darrell, this comes up a lot in scripture. So, in just a moment, we are going to move to other parts of the Bible to see where this imagery of light and darkness is played off against each other. So, stay tuned for that.

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Segment 2

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I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we have just seen that light was the very first order of business for the creation of the cosmos. In the ancient Near East, as also today, light was a positive and much to be desired reality, since darkness represents the things that threaten human life and flourishing. So, literal light is very important in the Bible.

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Also, you know, it is really important for us to think about spiritual light. So, the Bible has a lot to say about physical light, as God is the Creator; but it also talks about: 1) Illumination in helping us understand what and who God is. 2) What he wants from us; how he desires us to live, and 3) How we are to embody what it means to live of children of light.

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Yes; you know, when you said that just now, the first thing that popped into my head is that in a lot of church traditions, before the Bible is read for the sermon, you have the prayer of illumination...

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Oh, yes.

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Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You want to be illuminated; and that, in turn, reminds us Psalm 119:105; this is the longest psalm:

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You want to be illuminated; and that, in turn, reminds us Psalm 119:105; this is the longest psalm:

Your word is a light for my feet, a light for my path. ¹⁰⁶I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws.

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So, what we need in our lives, and God knows this...he inspired the psalmist to write this...we need God's Word to illuminate the way we should go, because often we stumble around in darkness, metaphorically speaking. We do what we think we should do; we often offend and hurt each other, sometimes unintentionally or intentionally; but the Word of God can bring us back to the right path on how we should live, and that is what this psalm is getting at.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; it is a dark world; it is a broken world; there are a lot of different paths you can go down. You want to find the right path...the godly path of discipleship, as we will talk more about it a little bit, as it is God's inner light: Your Word is a lamp for my feet; a light on my path. That is what keeps us there.

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Something similar is echoed in Psalm 18: ²⁷You (God) save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty. ²⁸You, Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.

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DARRELL DELANEY

So, I mean, it is not the literal, physical example of light like we had in Chapter 1 of Genesis, but it is, again, illuminating the path. This also shows up... I did a Lectio Divina, Scott, with some inmates in the jail, because I work as a chaplain in the county jail, and when we did this, we did it on Psalm 25, and the one that kept rising to the top for them was the one where it was a prayer that says: Show me the right path; you are the God who guides us; who shows us the right path. That is what the illumination and the light in my heart means. It means that God is showing how we should live, and we should live in the way of humility; we should not live in pride. So, I think it is really powerful that this continues to echo in scripture.

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You know, when I talk to inmates in the Calvin Prison Initiative as well, when you talk to people who are now walking in the light of Jesus, people who are prisoners in jail, they can tell you all about the wrong path...

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DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

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Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They were on the wrong path. That is why they are where they are now; but now, they are on the right path and they don't ever want to deviate from that again. So, right; not an actual source of light...it is not like a flashlight you take on a camping trip when you have to go use the bathroom at night, so you need a flashlight to get you through the woods safely. This is a spiritual light; metaphorically the light of illumination; and it is the path of holiness, Darrell; and that is really a theme in the entire book of Psalms.

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DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, it actually... In the first Psalm, it talks about this. It says: ¹Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, ²but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. ⁶For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

I like the German word for discipleship. It is *nach folge*, which means to follow after...literally following...to follow the path God provides for us. That is all in the Psalms. We could also go to Proverbs here, as other wisdom books, like Job.

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I like the German word for discipleship. It is *nach folge*, which means to follow after...literally following...to follow the path God provides for us. That is all in the Psalms. We could also go to Proverbs here, as other wisdom books, like Job.

So, first Proverb 6: ²²When you walk, they (the commandments) will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. ²³For this command is a lamp, this teaching is a light, and correction and instruction are the way to life.

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So, we consider this genre of scripture wisdom literature, and it is designed to help us to live the way we are called to live, do what we are called to do, say what we are called to say in the right time, in which it is supposed to be done; and he is letting us know...the writer is letting us know...that the commands of the Lord are a lamp and his teachings are a light. So, this metaphor of light and being able to understand what God requires of us is shown clearly in this passage.

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Yes; and then there is also something Job says to his friends in Job 29.

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He says: ²How I long for the months gone by, for the days when God watched over me, ³when his lamp shone on my head and by his light I walked through darkness! ⁴Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God's intimate friendship blessed my house.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

So, you know, Darrell, sometimes dry seasons are called the dark night of the soul; and that is what Job is...Job is in the dark night of the soul, but he is remembering when he wasn't. He is remembering when God's light shined on him and he wants that inner light to come back.

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So, you know, Darrell, sometimes dry seasons are called the dark night of the soul; and that is what Job is...Job is in the dark night of the soul, but he is remembering when he wasn't. He is remembering when God's light shined on him and he wants that inner light to come back.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; also in Proverbs, though, we are also told there are more than one way to have a source of light, but some sources of light are secular ones that lead to destruction; and our hope is that people who are picking their way on wrong paths with wrong illumination... So, here are some sentiments about how we don't want the wicked to be able to find their way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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So, first from Job 18: ⁵The lamp of a wicked man is snuffed out; the flame of his fire stops burning. ⁶The light in his tent becomes dark; the lamp beside him goes out. ⁷The vigor of his step is weakened; his own schemes throw him down.

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DARRELL DELANEY

So, there are some things that the wicked do that they consider to be light, but the God of justice, he will make sure that his true light will shine, and he will deal with injustice...those who try to make their own way and try to use their artificial light, if you will, to find a path that may not be filled with integrity or character; and God wants to make sure that everyone knows at the end of the day where the real light is coming from.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

We want that illumination of God's Law; God's Word; God's Commands for us, but we want it for all people. So, you know, it is not nice to say: Oh, may the lamp of the wicked be snuffed out, but it needs to be snuffed out to hopefully drive them to the true source of illumination through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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You know, Darrell, we have been tracing the theme of light to darkness all through scripture; and now...we began in Genesis 1...now, just as this segment is about to conclude, we will go to the end of the Bible, to the

book of Revelation, and the new Jerusalem comes down; the new creation comes, and we are told, though, in the creation we are not going to need a sun. The Lamb of God is going to provide all the light we need. It may even be a shoutout back, you know, to Genesis 1 that we looked at earlier in the program. The Son of God created just pure light in the beginning, before any proximate sources of light, like the sun; and in the new creation, we are going to go back to that: Just pure, radiant light. No sun; just light; just like in Genesis 1.

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Segment 3

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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DARRELL DELANEY

So, we are going to close this program, but we want to look at a couple of prophetic passages that they may not actually mention or allude to light in the same way, but, I mean, it is still in the background of the theme that we are talking about today; and we want to make sure that you see that the prophecies that are promising the coming of the Messiah are a form of illumination as well. So, we want to get into some of those, starting with Isaiah 7.

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¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

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And Darrell, as many of us know, these are the lines that Matthew quotes in Matthew Chapter 1, after God appears to Joseph in a dream to tell him not to divorce his pregnant fiancée, Mary. That child within her really is a miracle child of God, not a sign that Mary had cheated on Joseph with another man. Joseph has to give him the name Jesus, which is a form of Joshua, which means savior; but the child will also be known as Immanuel—God with us.

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DARRELL DELANEY

And Matthew, I have said this in previous episodes, in different aspects, especially when we are talking about Easter, we talked about Matthew when he does his gospel, he is speaking to Jewish readers and listeners, who want to know where the Messiah is—when is the Messiah coming? He doesn't want them to miss this. This is Isaiah's prophecy, talking about Immanuel. Here is the child who is being born. Let's put those together so you can see this is the promised Messiah who is coming—that we have been waiting for.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

So, the light of the world, who was Jesus, was the with-us God; the very presence of God on this earth; and now, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus remains the very presence of God in each of our hearts. So, yes; as we have said, the one who said: "Let there be light" in Genesis 1, and the one who will be the light for the new creation, as we just remembered from the end of the book of Revelation, that he is now our inner lamp. In between that original light and that final light, he is now our inner lamp—a light for our paths—because he is Immanuel—God with us.

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So, let's continue in Isaiah, because he has a lot more to say about the Messiah who is coming. It is crazy because seven hundred years before Jesus was born. We call him the eagle-eye prophet because he sees really far down, and knows that the Messiah is coming. He has another prophecy in Chapter 11 that says:

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¹A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. ²The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—³and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

So, he is going to embody everything we aspire to be as followers of Jesus. We too want the Spirit of wisdom and understanding. We too desire the knowledge and the fear of the Lord; and we too want to delight in a reverential fear of the Lord; so that, Darrell, as we said a bit ago in this program, we can navigate our way through a sometimes dim and confusing world with the inner illumination of God's Holy Spirit, through whom we have union with Christ. Union! We have union! We are one with the very light of the world, and that is an awesome thing to even think about.

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I mean, to be honest, I don't know...there is no other way that I can see that we can make it in a world that has a lot of darkness in it. It is to only be united with God and to do it the way God wants us to do it. Now, the Old Testament is not the only place where we see these passages that refer to who Christ is and what Christ has done; and we see this in the New Testament in Paul's writings as well.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Here is from Romans 13. Paul writes to the Romans: ¹¹And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹²The night is nearly over, the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

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I love the way Paul does this. You know, he does this, not just in Romans. He does it in Ephesians, he does it in Colossians, where he talks about: Here is the old way you used to live; this was the dark way; the dark way

where you were doing lust, you were doing pride, you were doing envy, you were doing malice, you name it. He would list these things, and says: No, no; that is the dark way. The world thinks that is light, but it is really dark. I need you to wake up and allow the gospel to cleanse your heart so you can live the holy and righteous way that pleases God. So, he does that in this, letting us know it is high time for that. We do not need to do the things we did before.

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So, it was a kingdom of darkness. Now we can live in Christ's kingdom of light, and so, we will not commit the deeds of darkness, but we can commit the deeds of light; and as you said, Darrell, Paul talks this way in lots of places. Here is another one: Colossians 1:

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It says: ⁹For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, ¹⁰so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience; ¹²and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

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That is great stuff; and here again, what we have seen throughout the entire Bible: Playing off light against darkness—darkness being bad—darkness being the place where the deeds of darkness are committed under the cover of darkness, as opposed to being delivered into a kingdom of light.

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So, this really is, as we have seen, Darrell, on this episode of *Groundwork*, our first in this Advent series on Jesus, the light of the world; this is a Bible-wide theme, and anything that comes up that often, you know that that is a very, very significant image that the Bible plays with; and from Genesis to Revelation and all the way through the Bible—sixty-six books—God consistently shows us that we were created to live in God's light; and if sin has introduced darkness and chaos, God is going to bring us back to the light.

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It's a beautiful thing, because once we realize the true light of God, we realize that we have a heart that needs his illumination and cleansing so we can repent, we can ask him to forgive us, we can ask him to show us the way, then we can open the Bible and we can see how he wants us to live. We can see God's character in the Word; we can see God's requirements of how we live as Christians; and how we embody that light and share it with others.

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