

The Light is Already Shining

Real Week 3: August 19, 2018: PBO Roadhouse Edition!

1 John 1:5-7; 2:7-8

Welcome/intro/vision [already done some of this in announcement earlier]

This is week 3 of a four-week series called Real, doing the work that we all need to do in our day and age to actually get to what's real.

Whether it's fake news or the ways that we all feel some pressure to manage our image to people around us and especially in the social media space

It's probably never been harder to get to what's REAL in the people around us AND there's probably never been more pressure to be LESS REAL than ever before ourselves!

All of this creates this tension in each of us because we believe and the Scriptures teach that what we want and what we were actually made for is something that is absolutely REAL

The story of Christianity is that Jesus is the most real human being who ever lived and that he is the one who has come to invite us into the REAL that we long for

And today we're talking about this particular challenging slice of reality, here's where we're going today in case you have a very short attention span:

Darkness is real but passing. Light is more real and permanent. (repeat with me?)

This is really hard to believe sometimes, isn't it? When darkness descends into our lives, it packs so much emotional weight and pain and fear and anxiety that it can feel all-pervasive and all-consuming

This morning we're here to celebrate and declare this good news: darkness is real BUT PASSING, the light is MORE real, more permanent, and ultimately the Light triumphs over darkness

Even if this morning you're so deep into darkness that you can hardly believe it.

A couple of months ago I had a conversation with someone whose commitment to sticking with the light and trusting in the light in the midst of so much pain and difficulty was so overwhelmingly compelling

that right after we got done talking I knew I had to get her up-front to tell her story

So this morning to help us get started to believe that this is true and to share her story of how she navigated a seriously difficult season of darkness is Victoria Pridgeon, welcome her?

Question 1. Let's do a quick overview of the events of the past 9 months--give people a sense of how absolutely crazy it's all been. (This will need to be brief, but obviously it's important!)

2. For many folks when life gets crazy and chaotic faith gets shelved for what feels like more urgent things. But you did the opposite--can you tell us why you did that? What compelled you to lean into faith when life was so crazy?

3. What has been the result of making that decision? How would you say you've grown as a result?

4. What would you say to folks who are struggling this morning who are here?

Prayer transition over Victoria, thank her...

Darkness is real but passing. Light is more real and permanent.

That's the good news that John is going to help us to get our hearts and minds around today.

Bible/no Bible: 1 John 1 [BACKGROUND]

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

Last week we looked at John's opening greeting, here is John's first real teaching, his first assertion in this letter he's writing to instruct these fledgling churches

it's a summary of the message the he's heard from and learned from Jesus: God is light. In him there is no darkness at all

As you read the Scriptures, it's important to remember that they've got 4 key questions that matter most to the writers in this order

Here are the **4 Key questions** that the Bible is interested in answering:

1. **WHO (or what) is God?** What's God like? Character, essence

Ancient world had ALL KINDS of Gods, remember your Greek mythology from late elementary school? The ancient Roman world had gods that acted like Real Housewives of Rome! Drama, drama, drama, drama, drama!

Jesus had come to show us who God is, what God is like, the character and essence of God, and so the first Christians were eager to re-frame the ancient Greco-Roman understanding of God—AWAY from all that drama and towards a richer, fuller understanding of a God that you could actually trust.

2. **What is God up to?** The world is a mess—is God making it worse or better? Is God far off watching us from a distance? Or is God involved in this mess?

3. **Who are we?** Are we good or bad or both? Are we part of the problem or part of the solution or both? Are we loved or are we in trouble or both? Are we orphans or children of God or slaves to God? Or both? Are we lost or found? Are we valuable or just a giant cosmic accident that exists just through random evolutionary processes?
4. **What are we to do?** IN LIGHT OF ALL OF THIS: who God is, what God's up to, and who we are--What's our purpose here? How do we navigate life here?

Because life can get so confusing and overwhelming, we are often eager to get help with question #4 from God and the Scriptures

I need help! What should I do about this job situation or this conflict with my in-laws or my medical situation

But the most important question over all of this is that first one: Who is God?

Getting the answer to that question is like finding True North. Once you've got that part figured out, you can then navigate the situations in your life that are urgent and pressing but very often very much passing

And here, John answers that all important question with simple, wonderful, great news—here is the True North around which you can build all your plans, navigate all your challenges, overcome any obstacles, and by which you and I are called to make every single life decision:

God is light, in him there is ZERO darkness

The reason why there's hope for the world, hope for the cosmos, the reason why there's hope for Victoria in the midst of all her pain and difficulties of the past 9 months

And the reason why there's reason for hope for you and for me this morning whatever you've got going on out there is this: God is light. In him there is ZERO darkness at all.

The darkness is real, but it's passing. The light is more real, and it is permanent. That's true north

Question #1 today: for everyone, whether you've been a Christian your whole life or this is your first time ever in a kind-of church setting

are you able to embrace the good news of a God who is all light and in whom there is no darkness at all?

Can you not only begin to get your mind around that but your heart and imagination and will around it? Build your life around it?

If you can't yet embrace that, there's too much pain or brokenness or anger in you or in your story or in the world at large

if this is your hang-up, welcome to the party!—all of us at points have wondered if God was actually as good as we wish he was

And the invitation as you hit resistance with your head or your heart

is to hear Victoria's story and the literally hundreds and hundreds of millions of others who have gone before us and who are worshiping with us from around the globe and to be willing to take that small step of faith to push through the doubts and questions and receive the good news

Just one step at a time: today, right now, in this moment, can you begin to maybe believe that God is all light and in him there is no darkness?

Can you begin to hope or believe it in an area where you're feeling stressed or anxious or fearful or angry or hurt?

Begin to hope or dream that it might be true? Because there's this thing in me and this thing in you that longs for and hungers for a better world. Maybe it exists. And maybe the only way it could exist is if there's a God who is all light who created it and rules there perfectly

John turns now from answering the question "Who is God?" to now answer the question "What should we do in light of who God is?"

If God is light and in him there is no darkness, what does that mean for us?

Here's what John says next:

⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

When I was in high school I took a class on Entrepreneurship and back in the early 90's before Al Gore invented the internet the number one rule of business was anyone remember?

Location, location, location!

Sam Walton from Wal-Mart was famous for getting in a helicopter and flying over locations where they wanted to open up a new Wal-Mart

And what he was looking for was where were new houses going up? Wherever new development was fast-moving, he would just reach out and point: "We want our next Wal-Mart RIGHT HERE!"

And then the internet came along, and people thought for a while that location didn't matter any more—until Google came along and helped to organize the internet and suddenly location DID matter again!

You want to be at or near the top of any Google search: location, location, location

God has put a longing in every single one of us for eternal joy, eternal life that is free of tears and sorrow and mourning—we LONG for a world where there is NO darkness

Do you know how you get that life you long for? **Location, location, location.** Where is eternal, joy-filled life? In the light. That's where you want to be. That's the path you want to walk.

We long for a world where there is no darkness

AND SPECIFICALLY wouldn't it be great to have a world where relationships didn't constantly fall apart, turn ugly or nasty or abusive or people didn't exploit or use or lie to one another?

All the worst ills in human history from wars to human enslavement to sex trafficking of 14-year-old girls all over the globe to RACIAL violence and conflicts all over the globe
Have to do with the breakdown of human relationships

And so John calls us to walk in this pure light location where we can have fellowship--here, finally my friends, is the place where relationships won't break down.

Here, finally, one day, we'll be in the light as God is in the light and here, finally, one day, we'll share in community that doesn't collapse in on itself or use or exploit one another

If you read through the New Testament and look for how the writers of the New Testament describe **what God was doing through Jesus on the cross**, you'll get a whole host of answers that can roughly be broken down into four buckets:

1. **Forgiveness/Reconciliation with God**
2. **Setting us from sin and death**
3. **Showing us how to live: "this is what love looks like"**
4. **Reconciling us to each other (especially across racial lines)**

In predominantly white churches we've missed #3 and so we have an understanding of the cross that is way too small

And as our country comes apart at the seams along racial lines, we have wisdom and power to love our neighbors and demonstrate to them the power of Jesus

But we have no fluency around how it all works

Racial division was the #1 issue in the New Testament church. AGAIN: racial division was the #1 issue in the new testament church—every letter in the NT deals with this issue. every single one!

all throughout the New Testament there's these statements like this of sharing in fellowship together because of the work of Christ

And part of the reason WHY they're having to talk about this so much is because there's these racial tensions that they're having to address and overcome that could seriously undermine the whole project

And the early Christians are adamant that it is the power of the cross that makes it possible to build this new thing called the church that was going to demonstrate the power of Jesus across ethnic and racial lines

And so John calls the churches reading this letter to walk in this new light that shines because it's in that place that we can have fellowship together, even and especially across the lines that typically divide us.

And John writes something that at first glance feels a bit abrasive

John writes that If we say we want real joy, if we say we want real life, but then we consistently make choices over and over and over again to walk in darkness, we lie.

One of the biggest objections that I hear from people who aren't church people about Christians is that they're hypocrites—ever hear that one, church people?

Well here's the deal, you know what? They're totally right. Absolutely right. I'll be the first one to volunteer myself here

I SAY that I believe that God is light and in him is no darkness. I SAY that eternal life is in the light and I say that I believe there's no life in the darkness whatsoever

And THEN I turn around and talk about someone behind their back. Or I indulge my pride in a kind of sick, smug, self-righteous kind of way and excuse it by calling it self-esteem

Or I refuse to forgive someone who has hurt me

Or I don't quite tell the whole truth about something

And whenever I make those kinds of choices, what I'm communicating by my actions is that I think there's LIFE to be found in darkness instead of relentlessly living in the light.

And so GUILTY: every Christian at some level IS a hypocrite, we fall into the lie of believing there is more life in darkness than there is in the light

And so we meet the key Jesus idea of **REPENTANCE: repentance means to change direction, Greek: meta-noia, literally to change your mind**

When Jesus first burst onto the scene, his very first message to the crowds was a call to repentance, to turn and follow him

and this is the Bible word for the turn we take when we first come to faith—to become a Christian is to repent from life apart from God's light and to walk in God's light

But the problem is that even after I make that initial turn of repentance

I continue drift into believing and thinking over and over again in my daily life that there's more life in the darkness than there is in the light

And so, as one old dead theologian said, "***The whole of the Christian life is repentance from beginning to end.***" -Martin Luther

John here is calling me and calling everyone to be relentless about your pursuit of living in the light.

There is no life in the darkness of talking about someone behind their back, no life in feeding our egos, no life in refusing to forgive someone, no life in withholding the truth when the full truth is required

There is no life in the darkness, real life is all about location, location, location, and so John calls his readers and us into a life that is relentlessly committed to walking in the light

Question #2: Where are you currently believing that there's more life available to you in the darkness than in the light? Because darkness is real but passing, light is more real and permanent.

And later John makes an almost passing statement that sums up the hope we have in this dark world:

Chapter 2:

...⁸ the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

John is writing to 1st century churches that are facing all kinds of opposition. The jail cells they inhabited and their friends or family inhabited—that darkness was real

The loss of family and loss of jobs or income that some of them endured when they became Christians, that darkness was real.

The martyrdom that some of them experienced, that darkness was real

And in the midst of more darkness or pain than most of us will experience in our own lifetimes, John has the audacity to declare this

Darkness is passing, and the true light is ALREADY shining

He's writing this because he's met the resurrected Jesus. John knew darkness. For a couple of days he was absolutely sure darkness had crushed and snuffed out the light and there was no hope for the light to overcome it ever again

But the resurrected Jesus is the assurance and the confidence and certainty that God is light and the light went head to head with the deepest darkness on this planet in death

And what happened was the light of Christ plunged into that pit of the darkness of death

And it was like he had a bungee cord around his ankle, God pulled him back out, and he turned death and darkness inside out

What that means is darkness and pain and sadness, as urgent and pressing and difficult as they can be, actually barely exist

They are passing and temporary

And the really real thing? That's the light. What's worth building your life around? That's the light. What's eternal? That's the light.

Where's real joy in the midst of your heartache and my heartache? In the light.
Where's real hope? In the light?

What about all the temptations that seem so overwhelmingly strong and powerful to chase after life in darkness?

whether that's to lie and cheat on your taxes or manipulate a situation to get the outcome you want or to have the affair or to bully people into your way or to feed an addiction that you know isn't that good for you but seems to offer you relief from your stress or pain or sadness?

That's all a lie, and that's all passing. It's a vapor, it's a mist

it presents strong and impressive and powerful but there's nothing substantive to it, there's no life it can offer you

Because LIFE is God's property. Joy is God's idea. He is the source of all joy and he has the monopoly on all real joy

Evil and darkness has ZERO creative power. Evil and darkness has no ability to deliver us life or give us life because evil and darkness can't create ANYTHING

Evil and darkness can ONLY and ALWAYS ONLY be a parasite on what is good. Evil has never created anything, only God who is Light can create something from nothing

All evil can do is take what is good and twist it, distort it, and mangle it. Darkness and evil has not substance in and of itself, it cannot create, it can only destroy

And so darkness we come back to what we said at the beginning: Darkness is real but passing. Light is more real and permanent.

And from that, here's your **Wildly Important Take-Home:**

Given the passing of night, let us walk in the light!

Do you believe God is all light?

Is there a place you're living as if darkness has more life than the light?

ALL of us will experience pain and darkness in this life. The question is will you live as if the darkness is more real or will you live as if the light is more real?

AND all of us will be tempted and will at various points and in various ways will end up walking in the darkness

This morning, the call is to wake up to the passing of darkness and the passing of night and to come back and walk in the light

there is no real life, no real joy, no real anything—it's all shadow and vapor and passing and temporary

And finally, some of you are here and you're not yet sure you believe any of this—not sure you believe that God is all light when there's clearly so much darkness

And you're not sure that you can trust or believe the Light of Christ

But there's this thing in you and this thing in me that longs for a more wonderful, more REAL world

And maybe, just maybe it exists. And maybe, just maybe, you were made FROM it and made FOR it

And maybe, just maybe, Jesus has come to usher us into it

Because the darkness is real but passing; the Light is more real and permanent