
Shine God's Light into Your World (1 Peter 2:9-12)

2/5/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



As people, we're always learning. And sometimes it's funny to look back and remember things we used to believe when we were younger that now don't make sense.

For example, I remember when I was a child I learned that there's light in the daytime and darkness at night. Simple enough. But as I grew older, I learned it's not that simple. I remember quite clearly my surprise when I went outside on a night with a full moon and found that I could see almost as clearly as in the day! It was another lesson I had to learn: even though it's not the sun, the moon can be very bright as well.

Last week, Pastor Pries talked to us about how Jesus is the light of the world and as Christians we have the blessing of living in his light. Today, we see that God has made us lights to the world around us, to the people we see every day. The new worldview that Jesus brings to us has a dramatic impact on how we live. The new way that Jesus teaches us to live is different from the unbelieving ways of the world around us. And people take notice. Even though we are not the Son of God, God has made us very bright as well. Today, as we take a closer look at 1 Peter 2:9-12, Peter encourages us to Shine God's Light into Your World.

I've got a good friend whom I haven't seen in a good number of months. Almost every time we talk, one of us says, "We should get together for a weekend." The other says, "Yeah, that'd be great!" And then another month goes by and we don't meet up at all.

You ever find yourself talking like that? "I should start exercising." And then you don't? "I should get that project done finally." And then you don't? Maybe it even gets to some more serious things like "I should really stop this sin." But then you don't? That phrase, "I should do this," over time becomes pretty much meaningless.

Note the difference in how our God speaks to us today. He doesn't say, "You should really keep my commands," and then drop the issue. He doesn't say, "You should shine," and then allow us to just put that on the back burner for a while. No, instead God says, "This is who you are in Christ, so be."

At the beginning of our passage today, Peter tells us just who we are in Christ. First, he says *you are a chosen people*. God has chosen us to be his people. It was no accident that you are a Christian. It was not luck that brought you to the faith. It was God's hand carefully guiding history so that you might be one of his people.

Second, Peter says *you are a royal priesthood*. Not only has God brought you into his kingdom, but God through your faith in Jesus, has made you a part of the royal family. God has given us a place to rule alongside Christ himself!

And not only that, but God has also brought us into the priesthood. In the Old Testament, the priests prayed to God on behalf of the people and they brought God's word to the people. Today, you have full and free access to God. You do not need someone else to pray to God for you because Christ gives you full access to him.

We do not need priests, but the unbelieving world around us does. Those who do not know Christ have no access to God. We therefore can serve them as priests. We can pray to God on their behalf. We can ask for God's mercy on the sinful world around us. And we have opportunity to bring God's word to the people around us.

Third, Peter says *you are a holy nation*. We are united with the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, as the Creed says. We are a nation united, not by geography or by political ideologies, but we are united by our shared connection to Christ through faith. We are a people set apart from the unbelieving world. Together, we form a nation unlike any other earthly group of people: we are a nation of saints; made holy, not by our own obedience, but because Jesus has taken away our sins, because Jesus has fulfilled the law in our place, and because the Holy Spirit works in us the power and desire to live according to God's will.

Fourth, Peter says *you are a people belonging to God*. We are God's special possession. Through our connection to Jesus, God views us as his very own children, just as he considers Jesus his very own Son! We have this special connection to God. We have this place in God's family where we truly belong. We have this special purpose in life to be God's people in this ungodly world. And our God will seek our good as a holy Father provides for his dearly loved children.

Peter goes on to tell us what this practically means for us. He says that we are all these things *so that we might declare God's praises*, so that we might tell the world what he has done.

Peter tells us, "*Once you were in darkness*." Once we lived in spiritual darkness, stumbling around in life with no purpose. Like the rest of the world we chased after all kinds of things that we thought might satisfy us. We meet someone new and think, "Maybe this relationship will give me what I've been longing for." But we find that even the best relationships still don't give us what we are looking for. We learn about some new career path or hobby and think, "Maybe this is what I've been working for!"

But we find that even the most fulfilling tasks leave us unsatisfied in the end. The world stumbles around from relationship to relationship or pursuit to pursuit desperately hoping that *this time* they've finally found something fulfilling. But everything they find in this world finally leaves them disappointed. Even the greatest of relationships, even the most fulfilling of pursuits leaves us unsatisfied in the end. They leave us wanting something more.

God calls us out of this darkness and shows us that we are a people made for heaven. Those desires we have for happiness, for something that will finally satisfy us are meant to point us to heaven, not to this world. God shows us the light so that we know exactly what it is that we are all longing for; heaven. And God graciously promises us that very goal.

Peter tells us, "*Once you were not a people*." When we were born in our sinfulness, God could only look at us and say, "These are not my people." Even to this day, as we try to live trusting completely in our God, as we strive to live perfectly as our God commands us, if we try to do this on our own efforts, we would have to throw our hands up in despair and admit, "We are not God's people."

But now we are the people of God. We are God's people because God has made it so. God has credited Jesus' perfect life to our account. Now, through faith in Jesus, and clothed in his perfection, God is proud to call us his people.

Peter tells us, "*Once you had not received mercy*." The people of this world think that they are good enough on their own. They think that by themselves they have something to offer God. They think that God owes them something for the good they've done. Such people do not ask God for mercy, and they receive none.

God knows just how sinful even their good deeds are. God is not fooled by the person who does good just to feed their own egos, just for the self-satisfaction. God does not consider it a

loving act when people are generous only because they believe God will *owe* them something better than what they gave up. When we measure ourselves up to God's law, we see clearly that even when we are at our best, we desperately need God's mercy for our sins.

But now we have received mercy. Through faith in Jesus, the story changes. We recognize that we have nothing to offer God by ourselves. We see that it is God who has to give us the will, the power, and the motivation to truly do anything good. We see that our good works for God are more like a little child who wants to buy his father a birthday present. The father has to drive his child to the store to get the gift. The father has to get the gift himself and carry it to the counter. The father has to pay for the gift himself. But even though the father did all the work, he is pleased with his child's gift to him. In the same way, our Father in heaven must work our good deeds in our lives. He has to give us the desire to do good, the power to do good, the motivation to do good, and he does that out of his own love and mercy. And even after he had done all the work, he is pleased with us.

Peter describes our identity in yet another way. He calls us *aliens and strangers* in this world. I once went to Argentina. I was never really comfortable there. Everything was very strange and I was always aware of the fact that I would soon be coming home.

This is how we live in the world. We cannot remain comfortable here. We find the sin and corruption in this world strange. We find the pain, the death and the decay in this world to be unnatural. When Jesus shines his light into our lives, we realize that our home is not here. This world does not contain what we, what all people truly desire. Our home is in heaven. We are just passing through this world and we live always aware of the fact that we will soon be coming home.

This is what makes us live differently from the world around us. This is what makes us desire to be like Christ rather than being content with our sinful ways. This is what makes us truly shine.

Peter tells us that living as strangers in this world means *abstaining from sinful desires*. Our faith in Christ means that we trust him. How can we trust Jesus if we do not listen to what he says? So we pay attention to what God's law says. We trust that when Jesus tells us that something is wrong that it truly is wrong for us, it is truly harmful for us.

How many of you would willingly cut off your own fingers? Not many! We instead care for our physical bodies. Peter tells us that our sinful desires wage war against our souls. Every sin damages our souls; is like spiritually cutting off your own fingers. And it's true! How often have you been discouraged from speaking up for what is right because you were ashamed of your past sins? How often has your confidence failed because you know deep down that sometimes you say things that aren't true, that sometimes you do things that aren't right?

But in Christ, that is no longer who we are. Instead, as God's very people, we learn from our Savior Jesus, who willingly set aside his power and glory as God so that he could become a humble human like you and me. He set aside his personal rights and desires, so that he might put us first. As God's people, as lights in this world, we too learn to shine by putting aside our sinful desires and putting others first, loving others as our God has loved us.

As Peter tells us, *live such good lives that even the pagans must glorify God on the day he comes*. That may sound like a tall order. It is. But again, it is God who works in us to create these good lives.

One practical point we can make here, however, is that God calls us to do objectively good deeds. God wants our acts of love to be physical, obvious, tangible. Compare two husbands for a second. Both find themselves in an unhappy marriage. The first makes a big show talking about how he just wants his wife to be happy, and so he divorces her and sends her on her way, washing his hands of the matter. He talked about how much he loved her, but what physical evidence was there of his love?

The second husband got to work showing his love. He made time in his schedule when he could give his wife his undivided attention. He read a book on marriage and how to make it work. He remembered that his wife always appreciated when he would help with the dishes and so he made the effort to work on the dishes at least 4 times a week. Do you see the difference? The second husband has physical evidence of his love. He didn't just talk about it.

This is the kind of love that we show as Christians. God created us to live in a perfect, loving relationship with him, but when sin entered the world, God found himself in an unhappy relationship with us. At that point, God did not just talk about his great love and send us on our way. He physically showed his love by sending Christ.

Jesus showed us his love when he got down into this sinful world with us. He made that effort and took the time to understand us. He did not just sit in heaven and talk with the Father about loving us. He did not come to the world simply to tell us how we ought to live or what we should have done. He did something physical, tangible that showed clearly that he loved us. He took our sins onto himself and he suffered and died in our place. That's love.

So we learn how to love those around us. We learn that loving does not mean telling others how they ought to live and what they should be doing. Most of us already know we aren't doing what we should be. Love does mean speaking the truth to people, but love also means getting down into the pits with them. Love means making the effort to understand them. Love means doing something physical, tangible that clearly shows our love for someone else. It means sharing in other people's suffering. It means shining on them by pointing them to the healing that we have found in Christ through our words and actions.

That is a tall order. But remember that God is the one who works in us the motivation, the power, the desire, and the will to live this way. We spoke at the start about how the moon can be very bright, even though it's not the sun. But did you know the moon has no light of it's own? It only reflects the light of the sun.

So too, we shine in this dark world, not because we have any light of our own, but because we reflect the light of Christ. It is God who lights up our lives. It is God who works in us to will and to do what he desires. And so we shine. Shine God's Light into Your World. Amen.