

The light of the World

1. Light and darkness as universally used imagery for good and evil

On physical level, darkness a neutral state: default/natural state (Gen 1.2).

- Light comes into and overcomes darkness for half the day
- But does not eliminate darkness. When the light is put out, the room is again in darkness: the darkness never left.
- Yet both are declared 'good' – the whole cycle

But metaphorical level:

Darkness = represents evil; light = good

hidden v's open

evil deeds done under cover of darkness/something to hide

good deeds done in the open/nothing to hide

The world's darkness = spiritual and mental/intellectual, and social – alienation, violence etc.

God and good = associated with light

1 John 1.5

“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. “

Satan and evil = associated with darkness. His is “the kingdom of darkness” (Col 1.13).– John 13.30 }It was night”

2. **God is 'light' - good.** He is the creator of light – Gen 1.3-4. Apart from his activity/ presence, darkness reigns, therefore the absence of God = equated with darkness.

Theophanies typically involve fire, bright light, radiance of God's glory.

Moses' face shines after being in God's presence (Exod 34.29-35)

3. Jesus is the Light of the World - John 8.12ff

Set in context of 7.45-52.

The Pharisees declare that “none of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him” (v.48), only “this crowd that does not know the law (and) is accursed” (v.49), i.e they are in spiritual darkness/blindness.

light = one of the great symbols of the Feast of Tabernacles. At its climax four large oil-filled elevated bowls were set alight surrounded by devout men dancing, bearing burning torches. It was a spectacular sight. Most likely, this light-based ritual looked in hope to the coming of the Messiah and the new age of the Kingdom of God. Jesus pointed to himself as this messianic ‘light’ shining and attracting people to him. He invited all people everywhere to come out of the darkness and to ‘follow’ him.

He declares he’s not only a prophet (cf. 7.40ff.) but the light of the world.

“Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (v.12)

Light and life = inextricably bound together, Darkness goes with death.

Jesus is *the* light, a messianic claim in terms of zech 14

Again the connection is with God’s glory

Isa 9.2

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

Isa 60.1

Arise, shine, for your light has come, the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Luke 2.9

“And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear,” and the pillar of fire in Exodus.

4. The uniqueness of Jesus' claim: light to *all* the world/all people

The light = itself universal AND intended for all people (not just some – as in Gnosticism and many religions). See John 1.9,12; 3.19 and 8.12.

V's Gnosticism, Platonism

5. Coming to the light is the only way to life

Light = associated with healing – Isa 61 which Jesus quoted

John 9 and healing of blind man follows immediately after

Jn 10 – the Good Shepherd/gate and 10.10 “life in all its fullness”

Light image coupled with streams of living water overflowing... Jn 7.37ff.

6. The light wins – obliterating the darkness altogether

When Christ's kingdom comes there will be no darkness any more
Rev 21.23f.

“And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk...and its gates will never be shut by day – and there will be no night there.”

And Rev 22.3b-5

Once all darkness is removed, the servants of God and the Lamb will see His face:

...but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:3-5 ESV)

7. The penetration of the darkness by the light creates a crisis which demands a decision – a choice between the light and the darkness.

So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.” (John 12:35-36)

R. C. Sproul : *“The crowd must grasp this while Jesus is with them so that they will not be overcome by the enemy later on.*

Furthermore, no double life, living in light and darkness:

“If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth, 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 cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1.6-7)

8. The example of Nicodemus

John’s use of light and darkness imagery to show progress to the light

In John, as grow in understanding, come into the light, cf. John 3, 20.1. It is the world of darkness that refused to believe in Jesus (John 7, 7; 15, 18)

Nicodemus is cast as a figure coming out of the darkness – ch.3 to 7.50 to 19.39ff.

You can’t follow Jesus while still in the darkness. You have to make the move into the light.

3.19-21 not everyone loves the light; many love the darkness rather than the light because their works are evil.

But to those who do believe in the light... children of God.

Suggested discussion questions

1. In what ways have images of darkness and light been abused, including by the Church (e.g. racism, colonialism, nationalism...). In what ways do we need to be wary about how we apply this imagery (e.g. people may feel judged for wearing black clothing...)
2. What do you think Isaiah meant when he spoke of a people walking in darkness? (Isa 9 reading).
3. In what ways do we walk in darkness today – as a nation, and as individuals?
4. Why do people prefer the darkness to the light?
5. What do you understand by the Light (Jesus) 'giving life'? What does that life look like, especially for the poor/oppressed/crippled/sick?
6. What does it mean for us to "shine the light of Christ"? How might you do that – at home, or work, or...?
7. Thinking of the journey of Nicodemus, who are you praying for to come fully into the light? What may be blocking them at present?