Light out of darkness

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Preacher: Mr Ken Macleod

[0:00] In seeking the Lord's help, we turn again to the chapter that we read together, 2 Corinthians chapter 4, and words that we find in the 6th verse.

The God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
In seeking to prepare for this morning's service, I tried to visualize who would be present.
Knowing that there would be some adults and some children. And knowing also that the variety of personalities present, together with our individual experiences and our own particular needs, is faced with all the difficulties of life, with its problems and its disappointments, with its pains and its anguish and its sorrows.
And looking for a word of encouragement from the Lord himself, I could but exclaim with the author of this letter, in another instance, when he said, who is sufficient for these things?
[2:04] Coming out to the house of God morning and evening to worship him, one comes with the expectation, or ought to come with the expectation, that the Lord himself will meet with us.

That's his promise. And that his word will come with relevance to our own situation. It has the ability to transform.
It would not be surprising, in any gathering of people, to find that one here and there is at rock bottom.
Their hopes have been dashed. Their disappointment is very real. The future is bleak. Perhaps in terms of employment, or of health, or of family, or whatever.
No one gets through this life unscathed. The day when paradise was on the earth is long gone.
[3:23] And all of Adam's sons and daughters experience pain sooner or later. But it's over against this sense of need that the word comes to us, and only the word, to lift us out of our despondency, and to transform our perceptions.

We see the small picture. The jigsaw has many missing parts.
But there is one who sees the end from the beginning, and whose purposes for his people are purposes of mercy and of grace, and who has a design for them that cannot be frustrated.
His will shall be done. Well, it's with that short preamble that I would like to look at the verse before us, and setting it in its context, and relying entirely on the Lord to help us, that we come together for the remainder of this service to concentrate and to focus on his word.
The author of this letter, and of many of the other books in the New Testament, is, as you well know, the Apostle Paul.
[4:59] A man who was gifted with a brilliant mind, with an exceptionally high IQ, whose own life was transformed on that memorable and unforgettable encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus.

His life has been changed. He has a new focus, a new direction. Henceforth, he is no longer to be the perfect leader of the Christian church, but his greatest advocate.
And he has founded a church in Corinth, that busy seaport in Greece. And whenever you have a seaport with all the trade and the movement of peoples, you have inevitable difficulties and problems of all kinds, not least in the moral sphere.
And Paul's converts have come out from heathenism, and pagan darkness. And they have become true believers.
Now, inevitably, they're going to have difficulties as a small congregation of God's people. And the first letter that he writes to them is in response to these difficulties.
[6:29] There are issues of serious moral behavior. They tolerate the intolerable in their congregation.

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There are squabbles of all kinds. Believers falling out with one another. And one group taking another group to the law courts, to the civil courts.
And one might be tempted to say, what's new under the sun? There were problems in connection with the Lord's Supper.
There was the abuse of the privilege of celebrating the Lord's death until he come again. There was the problem of lovelessness among the believers.
And surely one of the greatest, if not the greatest characteristic of a company of believing people is love. Didn't Jesus himself say in the upper room, by this shall all men know that you are my disciples.
[7:50] How? That you have love one towards another. That marks out, or it ought to mark out, the Christian believer. There were these, and there were other difficulties.

There was the sin of pride. There were the believers who were greatly gifted. And Paul was saying to them, all these gifts count for nothing.
If you don't reckon with the highest and the best of these gifts, the gift of love. And so he pens the immortal 13th chapter of that first letter.
He has now sent, he has now sent his friend, Timothy, back to Corinth. And he's awaiting Timothy's return.
Paul himself is in, is in Ephesus, in modern day Turkey. And he's awaiting the return of, not Timothy, but Titus. And he's wondering what the response will be to his letter.
[9:00] Titus is delayed. But the apostle doesn't waste time. Time is that precious commodity. We ought to make best use of it.

Every day is a bonus. And as he waits for his friend to return with the news as to how they have received his letter, he himself makes his way to the coast, crosses the Bosphorus Sea, and comes across to northern Greece, to that part that is called Macedonia, still Macedonia, and to the seaport at Neapolis and at Philippi, its city, its capital city.
There he meets Titus. And there he hears the news that delights his ears. Yes, they had repented. They had acted on Paul's instruction.
They had excommunicated the immoral man from their company. They had humbled themselves before the Lord. And this lifts up Paul in worship and adoration for the love that the Corinthian believers clearly expressed towards himself and, of course, towards the Lord as well.
That on the one hand. On the other, the news that Titus brought was disturbing. and it was this, that false teachers had infiltrated the Christian church at Corinth and they had claimed to be apostles and they had sought to discredit the apostle Paul and they said that this man is an imposter.
[10:54] There is no evidence to suggest that he is a real apostle. Very few are following him. We engage in that hideous practice of character assassination and it is so easy to destroy someone by the use of the smallest member in their body or one of the smallest members, the tongue.

The tongue says James can set the world on fire and it ought not to be that the same tongue that blesses God curtses others.
We ought to put the practice of gossip and mudslinging behind us. It has no place in the Christian life.
We'll leave that to others. And these false apostles were discrediting Paul. And as he listens to the inroads, as he listens to Titus, and he hears the inroads that these men have made and the pain that they have caused in the Christian church, he takes up his pen and he writes this second letter.
And we have it before us. And for ourselves, the particular section that we're looking at is the fourth chapter. I'm seeking to focus on one small verse in that chapter.
[12:30] Paul says in this section, the outset of chapter four, he says, therefore, having received this ministry, we faint not.

The ministry of the word had been committed to the apostle. and it's the highest honor that can be bestowed on any person to be entrusted with the work of the ministry.
It is that high calling of God. He calls his own out and they devote their lives in his service to the ministry of the word.
And that ministry is all embracing. Paul labored in the gospel. That didn't make him idle with his hands.
He was fully engaged, hands and mind, in the service and in the work of the Lord. There is no higher service for a Christian.

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[13:40] And it's not just the minister of the gospel, it is the individual believer. God, we all have our own part to play in the work of the gospel.

And if you in small corner and I in mine, let our light shine before me, there will be a remarkable transformation in our own lives and in the lives of all with whom we come in contact.
Paul never forgot that he was the recipient of mercy. And in the scripture, mercy is set over against misery.
It is the only answer for the misery that sin has brought into our experience, the mercy of God. by the Lord.
And here this man had received mercy and he said, for that very reason, I faint not. This mercy of the Lord strengthened him, no matter whose enemies were and no matter what difficulties he had to face.
[14:53] And he then goes on to talk about his own preaching. And one of the dangers that the preacher of the gospel has to face is this, that he preaches not himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord.

And another co-equal danger is this, in preaching, to preach to please people. As long as the sense of their feelings is not disturbed, many fall into that trap in the preaching.
And that trap leads to unfailfulness. The apostle was not of that type. He preached to affect the conscience. He directed his words to the conscience.
And the conscience is still fallen as it is. It is still that voice within us. that enables us to recognize to some degree the difference between right and wrong, good and evil.
And then he goes on to talk about how the gospel is hid. He says, if the gospel is hid, it's hid to those whose minds have been blinded by the God of this world.
[16:27] Calvin has an interesting comment to make on this verse. He says something like this, the sun does not lose its brilliance if the blind do not see its ways.

And we were talking about blind people a little while ago. A blind person cannot see the brilliance of the sun. Well, says the apostle, the fault is not in the gospel if it is clearly and simply presented.
The fault is not in the gospel if people remain blind to it. The fault is in their own mind. The God of this word has blinded the mind of those who do not believe.
And then he comes on to the words that we hope to consider. For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined into our hearts.
He brings us back to the order of things at the beginning of creation. And you recall that there in Genesis we're told that at the beginning of creation there was darkness darkness over the face of the earth.
[17:52] And associated with darkness there is always a disorder. There's no life in this darkness in the chaos that existed there at the beginning.

But that darkness was dispelled and it was dispelled with a word of command. God said let there be light and there was light.
Darkness and light cannot coexist. It's one or the other. And that command dispelled the darkness the natural darkness and created light shone and then life in all its fullness appeared on the earth.
But then Paul says God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness he does not say hath commanded the light to shine in our hearts.
What he does say is quite different. He himself shines in our hearts. Now there's an eternity of distinction between the natural light the created light light and light.
[19:14] The light that God is the uncreated light. The time is coming when the natural light will be extinguished.

It will be no more. John says I saw in the temple I saw no sun. There was no need of the sun or of the moon to give its light.
light. The sun is there for a purpose and for a definite period. And when it has served that purpose it will be extinguished. God himself shines into the heart.
And for a little we'll contrast see to contrast the natural light and the spiritual light. The sun shines from outside the earth on to the earth.
But there are places where the sun's rays never reach. There are the dark caves in this earth.
There are the ocean depths where the light of the sun never penetrates.
[20:34] And they remain in darkness. So different to the light that is God himself. God's light shines in the darkest region of all.

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And there is no region more dark than the human heart. And when the light of God shines into the human heart it exposes what's there.
there is a story toward an ancient story of a community of people of blind people generation after generation of blind people.
And then in one generation there came there arose one man with one eye. And this man with one eye said to himself I will make myself king over these people.
And so he reigned under certain authority over the kingdom of the blind. And he said to them do you realize you cannot see?
[22:00] I said what do you mean we cannot see? Do you realize that you have no light? And he said what do you mean we have no light?

And so on. Now they couldn't understand the concept of sight or light. It was impossible for them. and it's the same still. Someone who has never seen the light doesn't know anything about darkness.
That's the way the human mind is constituted. We learn by antithesis or by comparing and contrasting things. Sometimes the Lord's people complain of having a hard heart.
Their heart is hard. How do they know? How do they know that the heart is hard? Well only if they know what a softened heart is.
[23:15] If you're here today and at one time or another maybe even today itself your heart is melted and broken your heart is soft and you can go back to a time when it wasn't like that when your heart was hard.

That's the way that we learn and so if we know nothing of light if we're blind we can't know the concept of darkness.
darkness. Now it's into this darkened heart that God himself shines. It's himself that shines. No other light but himself.
And when he does shine into the darkened heart is to give light. But to give a particular light is to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ when he shines into the heart for the very first time that person recognizes and realizes their true condition that they are under condemnation they are convicted of their lostness but the light is more than that.
The light brings comfort and the gospel becomes precious. It is the gospel that delivers from darkness.
[25:00] The gospel is the good news. And this is the gospel that Paul preached. It is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. Jew and Gentile.

And so their life is transformed and the believer becomes a different person. Prior to this there was no knowledge of light and therefore no knowledge of darkness.
God had removed himself as he did in the case of Adam and when God removed himself he removed light and order from the soul of man.
The same as if the sun was to be removed. The planets would lose their order and their place in the universe or at least in our solar system. But when God comes back into the heart and assumes his rightful place in the heart things fall into place.
For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness says the apostle has shined in our hearts. Why? The effect is to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
[26:31] We gain knowledge of our physical environment, the world around about us via our senses. We see and we hear and we touch and we smell, we touch and we smell, and so on.

And so we receive all the information that we need to know about the physical environment. What we need to know about the spiritual environment is the knowledge that he himself shines into our hearts.
and it comes from a particular direction, from the face of Jesus Christ. It's the knowledge of the glory of God and there is no higher concept for any created being than that of the glory of God.
Once we lose sight of the glory of God, we've lost everything. We can narrow it down to two, the creator and the creature, the created being.
We either live for ourselves or for the creator. There is not a third option. glory of God.
[27:57] And the moment that we are shown a glimpse of the glory of God, everything else pales into insignificance.

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It is of no consequence. The glory of God. Who is this glory for? God, it's for those who ask the question, how can I be saved?
How can I be delivered from this darkness? And it's the glory of God in its fullness in mercy and in grace.
And it is shown in the face of Jesus Christ. Now, this face is not the face of refusal.
It is the face of acceptance. Not once do we read in Scripture that he turned any away, sort of earnestly and genuinely.
[29:05] It is the face of acceptance. Now, if you're here today, and you know, hand on heart, you know that this light, the light that God is, has shone into you heart, what does he require of you as a result of this?

He requires this, in his own words, let you light so shine before men that they may behold your good work and glorify your father who is in heaven.
And if you haven't yet done so, you will have the opportunity in a few weeks' time to do that publicly, this too, in remembrance of me.
If he has done everything for you, if he has given his life for you, he asks you to remember him in his death.
Are you going to be disobedient? God, he loved me, said the apostle, and he gave himself for me.
And he went on to say in another place, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.
[30:43] And for those present, you cannot yet say that the light of the knowledge of the glory of God has shone in their hearts.

Can you say this? I desire that that will be so. Is it your desire, is it your greatest longing, that this light would shine in your heart?
Well, if it is, let me encourage you. He will respond to your request. wherever there is a desire in connection with salvation, he will not deny it, he will grant it.
And our duty is to seek him while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near. May you bless to us these few thoughts.

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