

Christmas 2015  
**The Light Brings Illumination**  
John 3:16-21

Well... I know it's been done already... but let me warmly welcome you all once again. It's great to have you along to our annual Carols event.

My name is Rick... and I am one of the pastor's here at Grace Christian Church... and I have the privilege of sharing something from God's word... with you all tonight.

Now... if you have seen our Christmas Flyer... you'll know... that we have entitled our Christmas series...

**Jesus - Light in the Darkness**

And we're going to be thinking about... what Jesus meant... when He said... *I am the light of the world!* **It's an incredibly rich analogy.** And it pops up again and again... in the Bible.

And in some ways... LIGHT... is one of those things... that we kind of take for granted. We expect... the sun to come up. We expect... roads to be lit up at night. We expect... to be able to flick a switch... and have a light bulb... flood the room with light. **Light is one of those things... that we kind of... take for granted.**

And it's not until that light is taken away... that we realise... just how much we **DEPEND** on light... to illuminate our world!

A number of years ago... I remember hearing about a bit of an experiment... where a dozen or so people... were seated in a restaurant... and then the lights were turned off. **And then waiters... began to serve them food.** And everyone rummaged around... found their knives and forks... **IN THE DARK**... and then tucked into their meals.

**And it was good tucker.** Everyone was happy with it. Everyone was raving about the taste. And it wasn't anything scary... it was all fairly common food. **EVERYONE was enjoying their meal... in the darkness.**

But then... half way through the meal... the LIGHTS were turned back on.

**And everyone was shocked!**

Because all of the food they were eating... had been dyed different colours. They had been eating PURPLE mashed potato... and GREEN meat... and BLACK carrots... and so on.

There wasn't ANYTHING wrong with the food. It was completely safe... completely good... it's just that... **in the light... the meal looked disgusting!**

And BECAUSE... it looked so disgusting... half the group... couldn't actually finish the meal... while the other half... really had to force it down.

**In the DARKNESS... it was delicious... but in the LIGHT... they saw this horrible looking food... that was really hard to swallow.**

And this is the nature of light.

Light **illuminates** things... **SO THAT**... we can see things... as they really are.

Now... OFTEN... this is a positive experience... but **SOMETIMES**... this is a negative experience. **In the case... of the dyed food... the people would have been happier... if they had stayed in the dark.**

Sometimes... ignorance can be bliss!

BUT... whether it's a positive experience... or... a negative experience... Light illuminates things... SO THAT... we can SEE THINGS... as they really are.

And this is what Jesus is GETTING AT... in the section of the Bible that we just read together. Only... Jesus isn't talking about light bulbs and dyed food... He is talking about Himself... and sinners. He's talking about Himself... and... people like you and like me.

Let me re-read verse 19.

**Jesus says this about Himself... and about some of the reactions... to Him.**

*...the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.*

In other words... when Jesus... God's Son... came into the world... He illuminated the world... in a way that it had never been illuminated before. His TEACHING brought illumination. His MIRACLES brought illumination. His PERFECT LIFE brought illumination.

**Jesus was the LIGHT of the world!** God's Son... came down from Heaven... to ILLUMINATE... a dark world!

But people's reactions to JESUS... were very mixed! Some people responded WELL. Some people BELIEVED Him and TRUSTED Him! But sadly... other people... didn't respond well! Other people wished that Jesus had never come... and had never brought illumination.

Why? Because... as Jesus says... *people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.*

**Some people... didn't want to hear... what Jesus had to say!** They were happy doing things... THEIR OWN WAY. They were happy... living FOR THEMSELVES. They were happy... trying to KEEP A FEW RULES... to impress God. They were happy... attending the odd RELIGIOUS CEREMONY... to make themselves feel spiritual.

They were HAPPY... clunking around in the darkness... **but THEN... Jesus... arrived from Heaven... and illuminated the whole situation.**

And He told people... that God's standard... was perfection... NOT... *close enough is good enough*. He told people... that they were sinners... who needed to REPENT! He told people... that God cares more about your heart... than He does about religious ceremony. AND... He told people... that most of their religious leaders... were phonies!

**Jesus... God's Son... just turned on this FLOODLIGHT... illuminating the whole situation.**

And just like... the people in that restaurant... really didn't want to know... that their mashed potato was PURPLE... so too... many people in Jesus' day... really didn't want to know... that they didn't TRULY know God... and they weren't TRULY going to Heaven.

**Jesus... turn the light off... Jesus... go away... we were happier in the DARKNESS.**

Now... fast forward 2000 years... and cross from Israel to Australia... and it FEELS LIKE... a lot of people... are pretty comfortable with Jesus. Right? **I mean... during the Christmas season... millions and millions of Australians... acknowledge Jesus.**

And we put up nativity scenes in shopping malls... picturing baby Jesus. And we loudly sing carols... remembering baby Jesus. Any we give gifts... commemorating... God's gift... of baby Jesus.

And all in all... it FEELS LIKE... our country... is quite comfortable CELEBRATING... BABY Jesus.

**But the thing about babies... is that they don't stay babies for ever!** Rach and I... have had 5 babies... and our ever increasing grocery bill... is proof that babies don't stay babies for ever.

### **BABIES GROW UP!**

And the baby Jesus... that our country LOVES to celebrate... actually grew up... into the man Jesus... that FAR LESS PEOPLE... are REALLY... willing to celebrate. **He grew up... into a man... whose teaching... whose life... whose death... whose resurrection... BROUGHT SO MUCH ILLUMINATION into our dark world... that it can make us... feel really, really uncomfortable!**

And we can be tempted to think... BABY Jesus... I like baby Jesus... but grown up Jesus... I kind of wish... that HE... would just go away! I'd rather... just live my life... in the darkness... blissfully ignoring... all the realities that Jesus BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

I won't read the Bible... I won't go to church... I'll try to avoid any DEEP conversations with my Christian friends... because the LIGHT that Jesus sheds on my life... just makes me feel UNCOMFORTABLE!

And if this describes you this evening... let me just say... that I GET... that you might be feeling that way. I GET IT! Because the teaching of Jesus... CAN BE... very confrontational. I mean... **it's hard to hear**... that we don't measure up to God's perfect standard. And **it's hard to hear**... that God wants us to put HIM first... Rather than OURSELVES first. And **it's hard to hear**... God is ANGRY with our rebellion... and that we deserve punishment. And **it's hard to hear**... that showing up to church... and being religious... ISN'T the way to earn God's favour.

The ILLUMINATION of Jesus' teaching... can be REALLY HARD TO HEAR... **because that LIGHT reveals... that we are not as GOOD... as we would like to believe we are!**

And so... when it comes to Jesus... there is temptation... to celebrate Him as a BABY... but to ignore Him as an ADULT.

And we think... we'll I'm HAPPY in the dark! My job is great... my house is big... my family is close... I live on the Sunshine Coast for crying out loud! Life is GOOD!

**And I'd rather happily eat in the dark... than be confronted with the reality of the situation... by reading a bible... going to church... or listening to my Christian friend!**

Now... maybe at this point... some of you are thinking... I thought Jesus was supposed to bring GOOD NEWS... and none of this is sounding like GOOD NEWS!

All I'm hearing SO FAR... is that my mashed potato is purple... and I can either IGNORE it... or ACCEPT it! All I'm hearing so far... is that I'm a guilty sinner... and I can either IGNORE it... or ACCEPT it!

**Where's the GOOD NEWS?** If I'm condemned ANYWAY... then I think I'd rather... keep the light switch OFF... and at least enjoy THIS life!

But... hang on a minute. I want you to listen to what Jesus says about Himself in verse 17.

**He says...**

*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

And so... Jesus' mission... **wasn't** to come down from Heaven... in all His perfection... simply to tell us... and to show us... that we're all sinners... and God is going to judge us... and punish us... for our sin.

His mission **wasn't** to come into the world... to CONDEMN us! Rather... His mission... was to RESCUE us! To SAVE us! To DELIVER us!

And just like a doctor... needs to DIAGNOSE the problem... before He can OFFER A SOLUTION to the problem... Jesus... the light of the world... has put us under the spotlight... to DIAGNOSE the problem... SO THAT... we run to Him... for a SOLUTION to the problem.

The ILLUMINATION He brings... isn't simply a CONDEMNING illumination... it is MEANT TO BE... a SAVING illumination.

And when we understand this... when we REALLY understand this... it should change the way... that we approach Jesus... and the Bible... and Christianity... because the LIGHT that they shine... on your heart... on your life... on where you are going to spend eternity... is all about accurately DIAGNOSING the situation... SO THAT... **you can be eternally SAVED!**

And so... EVEN IF... that diagnosis is uncomfortable... and hard for you to hear... you need to HEAR... that diagnosis... SO THAT... you can run to God's Son Jesus... to be saved!

*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

**But... how does this work? How does Jesus SAVE... anyone?**

Well... let me read you... the most famous verse in the Bible... John 3:16.

**It says there...**

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

For God so loved the world...that He GAVE his only Son!

**God... GAVE His only Son! It was the GIFT... that surpasses all GIFTS**

And at Christmas time... this is what we are particularly remembering! We are remembering THE GIFT... that God has given. The GIFT of His Son.

But when the Bible talks about God GIVING His Son... it's not simply talking about God sending Jesus to earth... EVEN MORE THAN THAT... it's talking about God sending His Son... to DIE... on a cruel wooden cross!

**You see... Jesus PRIMARY mission... in coming to earth... was to DIE!**

And SO... when we read about God GIVING His Son... it's a really, really... big deal! He GAVE His Son TO DIE!

**But WHY? WHY did Jesus need to die?** Well... the last bit of this verse tells us.

**It says there... that THE GIFT of Jesus was given... SO THAT sinners... should not perish but have eternal life.**

In other words... Jesus PERISHED... SO... that **we don't have to** PERISH! Jesus PERISHED... so that WE... **don't have to** spend eternity... separated from God in Hell. Jesus PERISHED... so that WE... **are able** to enjoy eternal life in Heaven!

**But how does Jesus' DEATH... how does Jesus PERISHING... help anything?**

Well... to answer that... we need to understand that GOD... is a God of JUSTICE! And God's JUSTICE... demands that all rebellion against His law... be punished.

And because NONE OF US... have OBEYED God perfectly... because none of us have LOVED God perfectly... because none of us have LIVED FOR God perfectly... we are all guilty... of breaking God's law!

And we DESERVE... to be treated like criminals! We DESERVE to be punished! We DESERVE Death and Hell.

But the great news of Christmas... is that God GAVE... His only Son... to TAKE that punishment... for sinners.

And God's Son, Jesus... agreed to face God's wrath... to face death... to suffer all those consequences... that WE deserve to face!

**And as Jesus' hung there... dying on that cruel wooden cross... it wasn't because circumstances had gotten out of control... and the bad guys had won.** He hung there dying WILLINGLY... in order to suffer the punishment... that WE deserve to face!

And THAT... is the PRIMARY reason Jesus came to earth. He didn't come to earth... to be the most famous baby in history... **He came to earth... DIE!** He came to earth... to be a SUBSTITUTE! He came to earth... to take the punishment... that WE deserve to face... because WE... have broken God's law!

**Quite simply... He came to earth... TO SAVE SINNERS!**

But that leaves one remaining question doesn't it? WHO does Jesus actually save?

Well... John 3:16 tells us doesn't it?

**It says there... that...**

**WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM... should not perish!**

And this isn't a *yeah... I suppose Jesus existed*... kind of belief. This isn't an *ok... I accept the facts about Jesus*... kind of belief.

**This is a REAL BELIEF!** This is a strap on a parachute and JUMP... kind of belief. I BELIEVE... with everything inside of me... that Jesus is able to SAVE me! This is a set the GPS and GO... kind of belief. I **BELIEVE... with everything inside of me... that Jesus is able to tell me... exactly which way I need to go!**

I BELIEVE... that Jesus is my Saviour... I BELIEVE... that Jesus is my Lord. **All my HOPE is in Him! My LIFE belongs to Him.** This is an ACTIVE belief!

And please notice that word WHOEVER! WHOEVER believes in Him! That is an invitation to ME... that is an invitation to YOU... that is an invitation to ANYONE... no matter... what their past might look like!

*WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM... will not perish!*

And so... as I wrap things... let me ask YOU... what are you going to do with Jesus?

**Are you going to IGNORE the light?** Are you going to IGNORE... the TRUTH of Jesus and His message? Are you going to IGNORE... Jesus' diagnosis... that you are a sinner who needs saving? **Are you going to leave here tonight... FLICK OFF the light ... and happily continue in the dark?**

OR... are you going to COME TO THE LIGHT! Are you going to find out MORE... about Jesus! Are you going to find out MORE... about why you need saving? Are you going **to respond to John 3:16... and BELIEVE in Jesus... so that you won't perish... but will have eternal life!**  
**Jesus brings ILLUMINATION! Jesus shows things... as they REALLY ARE!**

Will you come into the light... because ETERNITY is at stake... OR... will you flick off the light... because IGNORANCE is bliss?

Something to think about... this Christmas season!  
**Thank you for listening... and God bless.**