

Sermon – August 11, 2024  
“Proclaim Light”  
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Acts 26:6-32

*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill open hearts, and anoint the sharing of these words. Bless those who hear them, and through them fan the flames of our continuing transformation into Christ's image and lead us in fruitful labor in Jesus' mission right here, right now. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen*

The Spirit of Jesus in me greets the Spirit of Jesus in you and brings us together in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Good morning. This is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Each day when we wake up, we should let these two statements come to our mind and praise our risen Lord not only for another day to rejoice and be glad but for the reason for our rejoicing, that Christ is the first born from the dead. Today we have come to Acts 26. There are only two more chapters left for us in Acts. Kay and I are planning to be on vacation for the last two weeks of August so there is only one week left in our Acts series and then we are moving on to Exodus. Starting in September and running until Advent, we are going to journey with the people of God from Egypt to the Promised Land. Seedbed's Wake Up Call will be working through Exodus during that time as well, so let me encourage us to listen to the daily Wake Up Call as we journey through this key book in God's redemption plan. We can find the Wake Up Call link on the back of our bulletins

and maybe this fall we will take time to watch *The Ten Commandments* movie during our journey.

Let me give a little background to develop context for this morning's sermon. At the end of the previous chapter, Agrippa and Bernice have come to welcome Festus, the new governor of the province, and Festus has asked Agrippa to listen to Paul in order to help him identify charges he can send in a letter with Paul to the emperor in Rome. Let me remind us who Agrippa is in the history of Israel. He is the great-grandson of Herod the Great who tried to kill the infant Jesus after the wise men did not return to him and share where they found the newborn king. Herod the Great's son, Antipas, when he was the tetrarch or ruler of Galilee, had John the Baptist beheaded and was called "the fox" by Jesus. Antipas' grandson will have James, the son of Zebedee, killed with the sword. Agrippa is the son of the Herod who sent Jesus back to Pilate to have him killed. We should be mindful of the reaction that runs in Agrippa's family when confronted with the things of God. Yet, Paul will gladly stand in front of Agrippa and share about Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>i</sup> Paul's defense here will be his third trial, the third time Luke shares how Paul is a witness to Jesus, this time to a king, governor and all the leadership of the province ruled by Festus.

Paul comes in chains before the king and governor and all of the important people of Caesarea. Those present are dressed in their best robes and outfits, robes worn only for an audience with a king. Paul comes as a prisoner to witness to Jesus before a king. Paul comes to share with Agrippa, who is Jewish and will understand the testimony of Paul as he references the Jewish beliefs. In his defense, Paul needs to make the case that following Jesus is consistent with the Jewish worship of God so that he is not seen as creating a new religion not yet approved by Rome, and he also has to show that the charges the Jews have brought against him, including that he has defiled the temple and deserves to be put to death, are false. What Paul does in this short time of witness is make the case that he was and still is a devout, Law-following Jew, that Jesus Christ is divine, has appeared to him, and has commissioned him to speak to Gentiles about Jesus that Jesus is alive and as such fulfills the hope of all Jews. Agrippa will be able to follow Paul's arguments as he is familiar with the Jewish religion. Festus will not understand much of what Paul is saying. Paul's testimony is clear and makes an effective defense, as seen after the hearing in Agrippa's comment to Festus that Paul could be set free if he had not already appealed to Rome.

Paul sums up his arguments by telling his listeners, “To this day I have had help from God, and so I stand here, testifying to both small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place: that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”<sup>ii</sup> I want to point out this morning that as Paul shares his commissioning, he tells those listening that Jesus told him to proclaim light both to the Jews and Gentiles, or to all people. I want to help us grasp what Paul is saying when he speaks of proclaiming light. Now if we let our minds take the science path, we might wonder what Paul is talking about. Is he speaking to the light that comes to us from the sun at  $3 \times 10^8$  meters per second? Is he speaking about light that warms us, makes our crops grow, and lights our days? The answer to these questions is “not really.” Paul has a biblical understanding of light. Let’s look at what the Bible tells us about the light that we are to proclaim.

Let’s start with the first book in our Bibles, at Genesis Chapter 1 verses 1-3. And while we are turning there, let me share that the word “light” occurs over 380 times in our Bibles. There is a lot of discussion about light found in the scriptures. Let me read from Genesis this morning: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.”<sup>iii</sup> The first of the acts of creation is light. And when that light comes, it separates light from darkness. When there is only a formless void, out of nothing God creates light, and as that light shines it drives out the darkness. Light changes everything it comes to. When we walk into a dark room and turn on the switch, light replaces the darkness. God is the source of light.

Next let’s move to the prophet Isaiah and catch one of the many prophetic words Isaiah is given about light. Turn in our Bibles to Isaiah 9:2 and there we will find these familiar words: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.”<sup>iv</sup> Into God’s creation, humanity brought sin or darkness and the people walked in the darkness of sin, but God told His people through the prophet Isaiah that light would come into their darkness and drive it out once again. Isaiah speaks to the coming of light into the world to drive out the darkness of sin. We should all hope for such light to come.

Now let's jump to the Gospel of John Chapter 1:1-9. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."<sup>v</sup> John tells us that the light the people of God have long hoped for is coming, true light from God. This is the light that will shine into darkness and darkness will not overcome it. The true light that is coming into the world that enlightens everyone is Jesus. Jesus is also the light that Isaiah speaks to who in the Gospel of John arrives. Jesus is the light that will drive out the darkness of sin through his suffering, death on a cross, and resurrection. Jesus is the true light that drives out darkness and we receive the true light when we believe in Jesus.

Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, which he might have written during his two-year stay in prison at Caesarea, will write about the light of Jesus. Turning now to Ephesians 5, we read, "For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, 'Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'<sup>vi</sup> We are to awake and rise from the dead so that Christ might shine on us. When we come to belief in Jesus, we are to be those who wake up to who Jesus is, the true light that drives out darkness, our sin, and the fact that now that we are in the Lord, we are light and we are to live as children of the light. Turn to those next to you and tell them, "We are to live as children of light." To live as children of light we, just as Paul told Agrippa and those listening to him, are to repent, turn to God, and do deeds consistent with repentance. I am convinced that part of those good deeds consistent with repentance is proclaiming light to other believers and to the Gentiles, those who have not heard. We, as children of light, have the same commissioning as Paul: we are to proclaim light. Part of our good deeds that are consistent with repentance is our witness for Jesus, telling others about the

source of light we have within us that has driven out the darkness of sin. Deeds related to justice and mercy are certainly deeds consistent with repentance when done for God's glory and not our own, but we also are to be those who are out in the world proclaiming light.

For one last scripture text for our quick journey through the Bible looking at what it means to proclaim light from a biblical context, let's turn to Revelation 22: "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there."<sup>vii</sup> At the end of time, when heaven comes down to earth and God is again with mortals, we see the return of light. God and the Lamb are the light of the new creation. The place where the children of light will dwell for all eternity is with God and the Lamb, and the nations once more will walk by the light of God and the Lamb.

Now, that is a quick, very abbreviated walk through the Bible looking at how light is described. My hope is that having heard these references to light, we have a better understanding of what Paul means when he speaks about proclaiming light. Paul is standing in front of a king, a governor, and Gentiles, and he is proclaiming light. Festus will call Paul crazy as he has no idea what Paul is speaking about. Paul will challenge Agrippa by saying that if he believes the prophets, then he should believe that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead and the door is open for Agrippa to become a child of light. Agrippa is not ready for that step but leaves the room hopefully to become a child of light as he considers Paul's words. The reaction of Festus and Agrippa may be some of the saddest moments in our Acts journey. Both men hear light proclaimed to them. One cannot understand it and the other is not willing to accept it and the cost that being a child of light would seem to bring. These are some of the reactions we must expect when we proclaim light. We must leave Paul and his witness before a king in Acts and return next week to see where God is moving Paul to be a witness.

Before we go, I think we should stop and ask ourselves, "If we are children of light, what are we doing to proclaim light?" Let me remind us that as believers we have the light of Christ in us. When we leave this place each Sunday and head out into the world, we take our little light and go out into the world to let our light shine into the darkness. Jesus tells us in Matthew 4, "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the

same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”<sup>viii</sup> When we leave our time of worship, we are not to try to hide that we are children of light, but boldly carry the light of Christ wherever we go. We are to let our light shine before others by being those who do small things with great love. We most likely will not be asked by Jesus to do something great, such as testify to our President and his staff or to work among the world leaders such as North Korea’s Kim Jon Un or Russia’s Vladimir Putin as witnesses. But we are asked daily by Jesus to do deeds consistent with repentance and share the light we have within through small acts of love and through our willingness to be Jesus’ witnesses, testifying to how we received the light and what its transforming power did for us when it drove out our darkness, our sin from within. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send us out as workers into his ripe harvest. This past week as I met with pastors and we talked about passages from Acts and how we might preach them, one of them shared that he met a lady who decided that if she were a child of God filled with light, she should take that light into the darkest places and let the light of Christ shine there into the darkness. She has been going to dark places where Christ is not welcomed or typically taken, such as the yearly Burning Man event. She goes, sets up a prayer tent, and prays with anyone who comes. She goes around the country praying with people at similar events who are drawn to the light of Christ that she takes into the darkness. I think that as Christians we tend to stay in places where there is light and avoid the darkness where people need light. I became convinced of this in my life years ago when an evangelist at a Christian concert we attended with our children told us an easy way to begin to shine light into the darkness was to send a text message to all of the non-Christians in our contact lists. If we had no people in our contact lists who were non-Christians, then we needed to get out into the world and make new friends. I had none in my list at that time and I struggle to add them to this day. I tend to spend my time among other Christians. If we have non-Christians in our contact lists, then we have already started to let our light shine. We just need to begin to do deeds consistent with repentance and let Christ shine through us into the darkness. Let us ask ourselves, “Where can I shine the light of Christ this week?” Maybe we could go and pray at the high school on Thursday as school starts. Maybe we could help with the Good News Club this semester at the elementary school and let our light shine there. Maybe we could send a non-Christian friend in our contacts a simple message such as, “Hey, I heard something interesting about light in church on Sunday and want to tell you about it. Can we meet for coffee?” Maybe our hearts are open to

visit the lonely around us and shine the light of Christ in that way. Let me suggest that we all pray this week, asking Holy Spirit to lead us to someone or someplace where we can let the light within us shine through words and deeds of love. Let us turn our hearts to Jesus and as children of light, let our light shine before others. Let's get on our knees, pray, listen, and then go out into the world carrying the light of Christ and letting it drive out darkness where we are led. And then let's come back next week ready to share how we let our light shine in our community where we were led by Holy Spirit and encourage each other through our sharing to let our light shine in the dark places all around us.

*Pray with me: Jesus, we confess we are hesitant to proclaim light in the dark places. Jesus, we confess that we don't want to go into the dark places or be with those who are filled with the darkness of sin. Jesus, help us to be strong, courageous, and filled with your love, and then send Holy Spirit to guide us to where you are moving us so that we might be children of light. Let your light shine through us so that the darkness of sin will be driven out. We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent us to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Go into the darkest places where

Jesus leads us and let the light of Christ in us drive out the darkness.

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<sup>i</sup> Stott, John. The Message of Acts (The Bible Speaks Today Series) . InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>ii</sup> NRSV Act:26:22-23 Kindle Version

<sup>iii</sup> Bibles, Harper . NRSV Bible with the Apocrypha (p. 31). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

<sup>iv</sup> Bibles, Harper . NRSV Bible with the Apocrypha (p. 1595). Zondervan. Kindle Edition. Isaiah 9:2

<sup>v</sup> Bibles, Harper . NRSV Bible with the Apocrypha (p. 3190). Zondervan. Kindle Edition. John 1:1-9

<sup>vi</sup> Bibles, Harper . NRSV Bible with the Apocrypha (p. 3455). Zondervan. Kindle Edition. Ephesians 5:8-13

<sup>vii</sup> Bibles, Harper . NRSV Bible with the Apocrypha (p. 3630). Zondervan. Kindle Edition Revelation 21:22-26

<sup>viii</sup> Bibles, Harper . NRSV Bible with the Apocrypha (p. 2964). Zondervan. Kindle Edition. Matthew 5:14-16.