

“How to Be Filled With Light”

Luke 11:29-36

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And 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.

Those opening verses of the Genesis account of creation remind us that light was the first thing God created. There are logical reasons for this. Life as we know it, be it plants, animals, or human beings, cannot exist without light! In addition, God is the source of light. John writes of Him, “...*God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.*” I John 1:5. And in John 1:9 we read that “[*Jesus*] *is the true Light, which enlightens every man, coming into the world...*”

As you read through the Scriptures, almost every time God sent a heavenly messenger to mankind, that messenger was accompanied by light. That light was the radiance of the Shekinah glory of God. We recently celebrated the Birth of Christ and the shepherds, to whom the initial announcement was given, were terrified by glory of the Lord that shone around them.

John further writes in the book of Revelation that in the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, there will be no need for the sun or the moon to shine it. That is because the glory of God and of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, will be all the light that is needed!

When Jesus was here on earth He said to His followers, “*You are the light of the world.*” He knew that His stay here was only temporary; and after His departure, His followers would become the reflectors of His light. His light, shining in their souls, would shine out to those who had not seen Him or heard of Him. You and I as His followers today carry that light.

So then, if the followers of Jesus are identified as the light of the world, and if you and I claim to be His followers, then how do we “live out” this description and responsibility Jesus gave to us?

Our text for study today is Luke 11:29 to 36. In this text, Jesus has some specific things to teach us about “How To Be Filled With Light.” So I urge you to stay with me as we open this text and learn from these words of our Savior recorded for us by Dr. Luke. Listen carefully now as read Luke 11:29 to 36.

In this text Jesus reveals several PROCESSES that teach us “How to Be Filled With Light.”

The First PROCESS is,

Acknowledge the Light

Our text opens with the crowds around Jesus growing rapidly. For most people, this would be a heady experience. “You mean all these people are coming to see me?” And there would be the accompanying tendency to say or do things that would appeal to the audience.

But look at Jesus’ first words; they come as somewhat of a shock! “*This is an evil generation who are seeking for a sign...*” In order to better understand Jesus’ statement we need to go back to our previous exposition from verses 14 to 28.

In verse 15, some in the crowd accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Others, in verse 16, were testing Him; they were trying to trap Him. So they asked for a miraculous sign from heaven. From verses 18 to 28 Jesus addressed the accusation about casting out demons by the prince of demons. Then in our text for today, He addresses the request of the people for a sign.

Jesus said they were an evil generation. The word evil is *poneros*. It means morally wicked, corrupt, malicious, and worthless. In Matthew’s account of this incident he adds adulterous, or spiritually unfaithful. What a stinging indictment. Probably not the way to begin if you want your audience to like you and hear what you have to say! But sometimes, before you can show people the light, you have to help them understand the depth of their darkness.

Many in the audience Jesus was addressing had seen the miracle of exorcism. The Light of the World stood before them in human form, and by His power He dominated the forces of darkness. But they refused to acknowledge the light!

That is the first process in being filled with light; to acknowledge its existence. I’m reminded of the words of Hebrews 11:6; “*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he who comes to God must believe that he [exists], and that he rewards them that diligently seek him.*” But instead of acknowledging His power and believing on Him through what they had just witnessed; they demanded a sign from heaven.

Jesus tersely informed them they would receive no sign; except the sign of the prophet Jonah. Just like Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh, Jesus would be a sign to the people of His day. In this text, Jesus did not explain what that sign would be, but Matthew's record explains it. Matthew 12:40 tells us *"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."* In addition, Jonah's preaching was sign to the people of Nineveh that judgment was coming. Jesus' preaching to the multitudes was also a sign of impending judgment.

Jesus was dealing with an increasingly hostile audience; an audience predisposed to reject the light. You and I face similar conditions today. Jesus said, in John 3:19, that many people will reject the light because their deeds are evil. That is one of the ways of coping with the light – by refusing to acknowledge its existence. We'll talk more about this in the closing verses of the text. But if you and I want to follow the example of Jesus and His commands to us, then we will begin by acknowledging the light and its ability to influence our lives.

So what about you, my friend? Are you one of those who refuse to acknowledge the light? You know that light will expose hidden areas of darkness; are you afraid to allow that light to shine in your soul? Yes, the light will expose the evil in your soul, but if you embrace the light it will bring you life – abundant life.

Now, if you refuse to acknowledge the light, you'll discover that the alternative is to be filled with darkness. And those who walk in darkness are condemned by their refusal to acknowledge the light.

The Second PROCESS is,

Acquaint Yourself with the Light

Here again I remind you of a detail that is peculiar to Luke; his narratives often pair a man and a woman in the teachings of Jesus. It is just one of the ways we see the elevation of women's status in the New Testament.

Jesus continues to address the crowd by introducing the Queen of Sheba. We read the account of her journey to Jerusalem from southern Arabia in First Kings chapter 10. She heard of Solomon's fame and glory and came to check it out for herself. As far as wealth was concerned she was no slouch! She came with a huge train of camels loaded with spices, gold, and precious

stones as a gift to Solomon. We have no indication that she was a God-fearing woman, but she was interested enough in seeing Solomon's kingdom and inquiring about his wisdom to make the long trek of about 2,400 kilometers or 1,500 miles!

After asking Solomon lots of questions and getting his answers, after eating at his table, and seeing how he managed his affairs, she was completely overwhelmed by his wisdom and the glory of his kingdom. She told him how she had heard much about him and his kingdom; but she really didn't believe it. But now – she had seen it with her own eyes and said; “...*the half was not told to me; your wisdom and prosperity exceeds your fame of which I heard.*” How did all this happen? Because the Queen of Sheba had a desire to acquaint herself with the light! She said, “I heard about it, but now I've seen it.”

And then the Queen blessed Solomon's God, Jehovah. She said, “*Blessed be the Lord your God which delights in you, to set you on the throne of Israel: because the Lord loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king to do judgment and justice.*” She recognized the hand of God in Solomon's great wisdom and wealth.

This is an example of what God wanted to do for Israel under the promises of the Old Covenant, Deuteronomy 28:1-10. God promised Israel that if they obeyed Him, He would bless them so tremendously that the world would take notice and give glory to the Lord GOD of Israel. That's what the Queen of Sheba did and Jesus holds her up as an example to be followed.

Jesus had some further words to say to His audience. He warned them that the Queen of Sheba would rise up (this word is sometimes used to denote rising from the dead) at the time of judgment and condemn His hearers for their unbelief. She travelled 1,500 miles (a tremendous undertaking in that day) to hear the Wisdom of Solomon; who although he was wise, was still only a man. Now a greater than Solomon was among them - and they refused to hear Him.

Jesus words irritated some of His listeners. That they would be condemned by a Gentile woman at the judgment was preposterous. After all, they were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; children of the covenant! Therein lies an important lesson for us. No matter what family or people group we are born into, we are all born with a bent toward the darkness, toward evil. It takes a conscious effort to acquaint ourselves with the light.

The Queen of Sheba is a good example for us today. She spared no expense or effort to come and see for herself the Wisdom of Solomon. What price are you and I willing to pay in

order to acquaint ourselves with the light? I'm reminded of Solomon's words in Proverbs chapter 2. I don't have time to read this chapter, but I encourage you to read it later; at least the first nine verses. In those verses there are at least ten verbs, imperatives, which describe the pursuit of wisdom as something that takes diligent effort.

Acquainting yourself with the light is not something that just happens. In Proverbs 25:2 Solomon writes, "*It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out.*" Let's not be like the people in Jesus' audience who refused the light even though it was right in front of them. There is severe judgment for those who refuse to acquaint themselves with the light.

The Next PROCESS is,

Accept the Light

As Jesus continues speaking to the crowd He returns to the example of Jonah. Many people today are familiar with the dramatic account of Jonah being swallowed by the great fish. But they don't know the end result of Jonah's experiences.

Remember, God sent Jonah to Nineveh to warn them of coming judgment. Nineveh at that time was the capital city of the Assyrian empire. The Assyrians were known for their brutality and they ruthlessly conquered many surrounding nations. One relief from the palace of Tiglath-Pileser III shows scribes making a record of the number of prisoners and the amount of plunder. At the feet of the scribes are the severed heads of victims to insure an accurate count. That's the kind of people Jonah was told to go and preach to!

The focus of Jesus' example here is not on Jonah; it's on the Ninevites. These brutal, ruthless pagans repented at the preaching of Jonah. They didn't know who this fellow was or where he came from. All they heard was the message he proclaimed. And it was no elaborate sermon. It was just eight words; "*Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*" That's it.

But what happens? Immediately the people begin turning to God. The news of Jonah's message reaches the king; the man by whose word you live or die! And what does he do? He strips off his beautiful royal garments and sits on an ash heap. Then, in repentance he proclaims a fast and orders everyone to put on sackcloth and ashes; even the animals were to be included and

all were to (quote), “...*turn from their evil way and from the violence that is in their hands.*” Amazing, but this is what happens when people accept the light!

Jonah was the sign of impending judgment to the Ninevites. His supernatural appearance and preaching triggered widespread repentance. Likewise the supernatural appearance and preaching of Jesus and the repentance that accompanied it signified impending judgment. But there was a difference. There was a positive response to Jonah's ministry, by Gentiles no less, that postponed God's judgment. The negative response to Jesus' ministry did nothing to postpone God's judgment on Israel. This judgment consisted of the postponement of the kingdom and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The rejection of Jesus' preaching was even more serious because miracles accompanied it.

Jesus stated that those formerly wicked men of Nineveh, who had repented at the preaching of Jonah, would rise up at the judgment and condemn those listening to Him. Now, one much greater than Jonah was here; but the majority refused to hear Him. And the consequences of that refusal would be devastating; both individually and for the nation.

You see my friend, the light demands a response. Though God's revelation of Himself at the time was much less than what we have today, both the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites chose to respond positively to the light. Most of Jesus' hearers, with the True Light in their midst, did not accept Him. We face the same choice today.

The Final PROCESS is,

Apprehend the Light

To apprehend means to grasp, to comprehend, or to understand. In the final verses of our text Jesus teaches His listeners and us how this process works. He gives an object lesson.

First, the KJV translation candle is unfortunate. Candles as we know them didn't exist. Jesus was referring to the small oil lamps of that time; small clay vessels with a receptacle for holding the oil, usually from olives, and a place for a wick to be inserted. We have a number of these lamps on display at our offices. Dr. and Mrs. Yoder acquired them during their travels to the Holy Land. Most of them are replicas, but a few of them are artifacts; you can tell where the wick was because the clay is burned black in that area.

Jesus said that no one lights a lamp and then puts it in a crypt or cellar. The Greek word is *krupton*. And you don't put the basket over it either. It is interesting that the Greek language uses the definite article, which refers to a specific basket. We learn that every Jewish household had one of these baskets, about 8 quarts dry measure, that was used for measuring grain. To put a lighted lamp under a basket like that defeats the purpose of lighting it!

But that's what Jesus' hearers were attempting to do; they were trying to hide, not just any light, but **The Light**. Instead, Jesus told them, you put the lamp on a stand; again we have the definite article suggesting that each house had only one. The lamp stand elevates the lamp so the light it gives will spread more widely and give greater illumination. Then, those who are coming in will be able to see clearly the interior of the house.

This last usage of the word, light, in verse 33, is a different Greek word than is used for the other references in this text. The word is *phenggos*, and it is used only two other places in the New Testament; both of them in connection with Jesus' return and the sun and moon refusing to give their light. The word expresses the idea of brilliance or clarity.

As a teacher, Jesus excelled at taking everyday objects and using them as a starting point for some spiritual truth. That's what He does with this discussion about light.

So He transitions from the physical to the spiritual by saying; *"Your eye is the lamp of your body..."* What does He mean? Just as the physical eye allows light to enter the body and enables us to see objects clearly, so also the eye of the soul allows moral illumination to enter us and enlighten our spirit. Paul affirms this concept in Ephesians 1:18 where he prays for his readers that *"...the eyes of your hearts – understanding - [will be] enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints..."*

Because the eye is that member of the body that allows light to enter and enables perception, it is imperative that the eye admits sufficient light to focus properly. That's what Jesus meant by saying the eye needs to be single. You know from experience how lack of light hinders proper vision. Lack of proper vision curtails activity. If you can't see properly, you stumble around; losing your balance and you can't perform at peak proficiency. When you attempt to work in the dark there is a lot of wasted effort.

In addition, if one tries to focus on more than one object at a time, vision is distorted. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus gives this same teaching and emphasizes that no person can serve two masters. Success in life calls for a single focus!

Here in our text, the emphasis is on the light. Jesus' point is the importance of admitting the light, in this case the gospel message, by accepting His teaching. Failure to receive Jesus' teachings results in spiritual blindness. The clear or healthy eye represents the ability to comprehend truth as it is; to "see" clearly, whereas the bad eye represents the inability to do so.

In contrast to the eye being single and the whole body full of light, is the eye that is evil and causes the whole body to be enveloped in darkness. Remember, we said earlier that evil meant wicked, worthless, malicious, and corrupt. Those without the light do not have the ability to make moral distinctions; they are captive to the lusts of the flesh and are not aware there are other alternatives available. That's why Jesus gives the solemn warning of verse 35.

Watch out, pay attention, and make sure that your soul is not so diseased that it cannot perceive the light of Christ. The English words "take heed" are translated from a single Greek word, *skopeo*. This is the root of our word scope, like a rifle scope or a microscope; something we use to narrow the field of vision for clearer observation of the target. Jesus' words remind us that this matter is critically important; it is not something to be given just a casual glance!

What a tragic situation to be in; to be unable to distinguish between right and wrong. Many of the people listening to Jesus were purposely and deliberately refusing to accept the penetrating light of His teaching. It made them too uncomfortable; it exposed their hypocrisy and their feelings of superiority. So instead of trying to refute what He taught, they attempted to destroy Him as the messenger of God. That's still happening today.

Jesus closes His teaching on a positive note by contrasting the body filled with darkness with one that is filled with light. When the eyes of your soul are completely filled with the light of God and you reject the darkness of sin and Satan, then your whole being will be filled with light. Your life will exhibit the "bright shining," the radiance of God's presence. Your ability to see life through the perfect light of God's Spirit within you will transform your life and touch those around you with the Light.

My friend, Jesus' teaching in this text clearly establishes the processes by which you can be filled with light. Where are you in this sequence?

Have you acknowledged the light? Do you believe that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him in faith? If not, then you cannot know Him until you enter that first process. If you, like the people in Jesus' day, have already decided that you will be the final authority on truth, and you reject the words of Jesus, then you will continue to live in darkness. And that darkness will ultimately condemn you to an eternity of darkness, separated from God. My friend, I don't want that to be your fate; so I urge you acknowledge the light – TODAY.

Or maybe your one of those who would say “Yes, I acknowledge the light; I know what the Bible teaches.” Well, that's step in the right direction! But are you continuing to acquaint yourself with the light? I know people who have good knowledge of what the Scriptures teach, they can quote chapter and verse; but they don't allow it to impact the way they live. Being acquainted with the light is a necessary process, but if you stop there, you'll miss the blessing of being filled with light. In fact, your judgment will be greater than those who've never heard!

It's when you enter into the third process - accepting the light - that you will experience a dramatic change. That's what happened in Nineveh when the people accepted the preaching of Jonah. They went from being devoted to destruction to being devoted to God! Not only were their physical lives spared, they were spiritually transformed by their repentance.

If they had only acknowledged the preaching of Jonah, and become acquainted or familiar with his message, they would have still been destroyed by God. But they accepted Jonah's message and proved it by their repentance. Their action proved their acceptance.

And you know it's still true today. In fact, Jesus said in John 14:15, “*If you love me, keep my commandments.*” You and I can make whatever claims we want. But if we claim to have accepted the light, then we are obligated to walk in obedience to the precepts and principles of God's Word. The proof of acceptance is obedience.

And finally, when we accept the light we begin to understand it better; we begin to comprehend it more fully. Paul told Timothy that God “*...desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*” Did you catch the order of Paul's statement? God wants all people to be saved; that's what happens when you accept the truth. But then notice the second part of the sentence. “*...and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*” That's apprehending or comprehending the light. You continue the process of learning God's ways.

Salvation is only the beginning, my friend. Too many people today make it the goal, when Jesus said the goal is discipleship. Evangelism is important, but evangelism without training in discipleship is like taking a newborn baby and leaving them on their own. The end result will be death! God's goal for you and me is having a spirit, soul, and body so filled with light that there is no longer any room for darkness.

As we close, I invite you to join me, here at the beginning of a new year, in a renewed commitment to follow these processes and learn how to be filled with light.

Heavenly Father, source of light, we come to you with thanksgiving and praise. You have rescued us from the darkness of sin and selfishness and placed the light of your Holy Spirit in our hearts. And as we begin this New Year we commit ourselves in a fresh way to follow these processes so we can truly be filled with your light. In turn, may that light be reflected to those around us and point them to you. This I ask in the name of Jesus, the Light of the World, Amen.