

Light in the Midst of Darkness
Ephesians 5:7-14 Sunday AM, December 31, 2023

Prelude – Scripture: Ephesians 5:1-14 (NASB95) Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. 3 But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; 4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light 9 (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. 14 For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you."

Life and change mark true believers, direct results of the gracious work of God to use individuals to display His love and power to the unlovely and change the unchangeable. Christians under the Headship of Christ are purposeful in their work among the people of God, speaking to each other's souls with the goal of each growing in ALL aspects into Christ. While the growth WILL be noticed, the saving difference of this change will be internal as God works through the personal work of the Holy Spirit to show us the greatness of God's love on our behalf. These chapter 4 realities lead to chapter 5 living. Seeing His care, His great love for us leads to treasuring His commands and seeing His provision to carry them out. **Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us.** Loving others THIS way demands change of focus—from them, from yourself to God. To imitate His love necessitates constantly looking to Him—studying His love even as you have a growing awareness of being a recipient of that love. This love is a love like none other. How do we know? It was pleasing to God—an **offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.** Do you know God's love for you? Do you study/ponder it? You can't love others as you are commanded if aren't loving like Him. Obey Him by first learning to treasure God's love for you. You won't treasure it unless you see it as a treasure. Notice others who seem to treasure God's love, and they ARE testimonies of God's love as they live it, but don't settle for their love for God alone. Look again and again at God's love until you can say with Paul, **may it never be that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.** THIS cross love is not only a clear sign of God's love for you, but also the path of love and obedience we must follow if we would imitate God's love. Continue to learn this song w me.

***Hymn (Powerpoint): All My Boast is in Jesus**

There are boundaries to this love. No **immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting,** these do NOT fit! So much so that NONE who practice these things will have **inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.** The **wrath of God** comes on those characterized by these things. What DOES fit among those walking in love? **giving of thanks.** These things are not arbitrary—we are NOT merely arguing about how many video games, how many hours on your phone, whether you ever raise your voice at someone, or whether others THINK you are selfish or ARE you selfish. NO, you can not name the name of Christ/be called Christian without addressing the goals of chapter 4 and the behaviors of chapter 4 and 5. Why? Our passage today says that **now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.** The light is not you. You don't even imitate it, you follow/imitate the One who IS light. Contemplate the glory of God as we say goodbye to the advent season for this year with the song we learned last week. The glory of the Lord includes more, but not less than what shepherds saw.

***Hymn (Powerpoint): Before the Skies *Pastoral Prayer: Pastor Jahn Choir: Let Me See Jesus Only Scripture: 1 Peter 2:11–25**

(NASB95) Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. 13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. 15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. 16 Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. 17 Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. 18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. 19 For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. 21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Offering: *Doxology:

What is your ambition? Young ones? When I grow up, I want to be a _____? Don't hear much of that anymore—focus on super heroes, focus on the moment—when I can play more games, have a phone. But then what? Marriage, house—all big things, can be good—but not high enough. **9 (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.** You can't have as your ambition to please the Lord unless the choir's message burns within you—Let me See Jesus Only. You can't please Him if you are not with Him—He not with you. Draw me nearer, blessed Lord.

Hymn #358: I Am Thine, O Lord

You may Be seated. Get that posture correct—draw me nearer, nearer blessed Lord, and THEN you have work to do. Expose the darkness—in you, in me **11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.** but MUST do it looking to Him or you will look for final justice/perfection down here. You can't do it by seeking to make everyone stop annoying you or even to make everyone as holy as you—you do it because His light WILL shine, it exposes you and me. We must be ready for His assessment. You say, this seems impossible to live under His perfect light. I can't live under, "Never enough." Then you have much to learn about how One so holy can change His people so much and still bring His peace and joy to our hearts. **14 For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you."** Then why don't you pray this as Pastor preaches . . .

***Hymn #390: May the Mind of Christ My Savior**

Message: Light in the Midst of Darkness Eph. 5:7-14

***Hymn #567: Another Year is Dawning**

***Prayer**