

Darkness Destroyer

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Preacher: Archie Winnington-Ingram

[0 : 00] Thanks, Rebecca. Why don't we pray together before we start? Heavenly Father, would you prepare our hearts to hear your word?

Would you speak through me this evening? Amen. Marina Chapman was only four years old. She remembers very little from that day when she was kidnapped, taken from her village in rural Colombia.

The story that I'm about to tell you is unbelievable, to be honest. It's an unbelievable story. And as far as I'm aware, it is a true story. Marina was four years old. She was playing in her back garden. And she remembers a strong, sweaty arm. She remembers a bag going over her head and the smell of a chemical making her sleep.

She remembers then slipping in and out of consciousness as she was dragged for hours and hours through the jungle, branches whipping against her face.

[1 : 09] And after hours of being dragged and abused by her captors, well, they simply left her there in the middle of the jungle. A four-year-old. She would have been barely this tall, terrified, crying.

A little girl, she climbs under a bush and spends the longest night of her life. Can you imagine the sounds of the jungle, the snake slithering past her?

She could not move. And I know this sounds impossible, but bear with me. A troop of monkeys in the trees, they notice Marina on about the third day.

And she is terrified that they're going to attack her. And in a way, they sort of do. They run at her. They pull her hair. They're curious. Eventually, they get bored of her and leave.

But not knowing what to do, she follows them. And eventually, they begin to start throwing food down to her. Bananas, nuts, that sort of thing. And she watched the monkeys and she stayed with them.

[2 : 19] And the days turned into weeks. And the weeks turned into months. Can you imagine the months literally turned into years? She was accepted by this troop of monkeys.

And she literally began to live a life of monkey see, monkey do. It's an almost unbelievable story. She says she copied them as they catch rain in leaves and drink it.

This is how she survives. And it's amazing. It's amazing that she lives this long. As I said, the months turned into years. Ten years she lived this life of monkey see, monkey do.

And sometimes, I think it feels as though we're bumbling along in this life with a similar sort of direction.

Surviving by monkey see, monkey do. And our passage today urges us that we do not need to live like that in order to survive.

[3 : 23] Our passage comes from the book of 1 John. And in this book, John has a very particular purpose. He states that purpose in chapter 5, verse 13.

Let me read that for you. It says this. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

And so this book is first and foremost a book of assurance to the Christian, that we might know who we are and what he has won for us.

And in our passage today, John is writing to us to show us who is a Christian and who is not. In chapter 3, verse 10, at the end of the passage that's just been read for us, have a look at it.

Verse 10, he says this. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are. Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

[4 : 30] Christians are, John says, very different to the world around them. They no longer play monkey see, monkey do. They have been born again for a different purpose because of Jesus's appearing.

And that's the question that we're asking in this series at the moment. Why did Jesus appear? Why did he come? What is Christmas all about? And in verses 1 to 3 of our passage, we'll get a real quick recap of the wonderful truth that Dave told us about last week, that we are children of God. But more than that is what we get in verses 4 to 10, that Jesus appeared to destroy the darkness. We are, I'm sure, familiar with the idea of Jesus being the light of the world.

That classic Christmas reading from Isaiah chapter 9, we saw it at the end of that video. Let me remind you of it. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

On those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned. Or another classic from the first chapter of John's gospel, in him was life.

[5 : 48] And that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. We are familiar, aren't we?

I think particularly at this time of year, with the idea of Jesus being light. And it sounds lovely, doesn't it? But what on earth does it mean?

What exactly is this image getting at? Two reasons for Jesus' appearing from today's passage. Two things for us to see about the light.

Firstly, there is freedom in the light. Because in verse 5, he has appeared to take away our sins. And secondly, there is purpose in the light.

Because in verse 8, he has appeared to destroy the works of the devil. We'll get there in a second. But first, I just want to remind you of this wonderful truth.

[6 : 48] Last week, we saw that Jesus appeared to make us children of God, to adopt us into his family. J.I. Packer, the late great theologian, said this, if you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity.

Find out how much he makes of the idea of being God's child and having God as his father. And the start of our passage this week reminds us of exactly that, doesn't it?

These verses are a beautiful reminder of the identity given to the Christian. Have a look at verse 1 with me. See what great love the father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God.

This is the mind-blowing truth, right at the heart of the Christian gospel. I don't know what picture you have of God, but here, John describes God as a loving father.

We often think of God, don't we, as the creator God, as the ruler or the almighty, and he is those things. But first and foremost, he is a loving father.

[8 : 02] Not an imperfect or abusive earthly father, but a loving heavenly father. Because before he created the universe, he existed eternally in loving relationship with the Son by the Spirit.

And get this, he has lavished that love on us. So thoroughly that we should be born again as children of God. Born, as the end of chapter 2 puts it, of him.

And have a look with me, halfway through, back in verse 1, halfway through verse 1. And that is what we are.

This is an emphatic reminder of what Christ has won for us on the cross. That incredible hope in a future perfect reality. And an incredible family identity today.

And that is all very well and good, but what difference does that make for us? What difference does Christ's appearing make for you and for me today?

[9 : 09] What does the light really do? Well, here's our first point. There is freedom in the light. Have a look at verse 4 of our passage with me. Everyone who sins breaks the law.

In fact, sin is lawlessness. This is a vital place to begin. And I think it's a really helpful way to understand what sin and darkness is.

Because yes, sin is to break the law. It is to disobey God and his perfect standard for how we are to live as humans in this world. But more than that, it is a state of lawlessness.

Sin is not primarily an action, but a legal position. It is the human condition of pursuing our own way instead of God's.

And there's a price to be paid for that condition, that state, that legal position. And Jesus came to pay that price. Have a look in our passage at verse 5.

[10:17] But you know that he appeared that he might take away our sins. So here's the first reason for Christ's appearing in our passage. To take away our sins.

Jesus has dealt with the penalty of sin. We know that he did that on the cross. And there is freedom in the light because there is freedom at the cross.

But more than that, to take away our sins also means freeing us from the power of sin in our lives today. Get this, this is so important.

Freedom from the power of sin does not mean that we will no longer be tempted by sin. It doesn't even mean that we're no longer ever going to give in to that temptation. What it means is that as our sin is brought into the light, we are no longer held captive by it.

It's still there, but it's no longer in the dark. Let me illustrate with a story. I recently went on a Bothy trip with a friend of mine. We set off from the car park at about 3 in the afternoon.

[11:24] We knew that the walk was going to be about 10 kilometers. We reckoned it would probably take us about two hours. Except that the walk was uphill the entire way. We had quite a lot of kit with us.

And it was pretty awful weather. So it ended up taking us a lot more than two hours. Which meant that when we got to the Bothy, it was very definitely getting dark. In fact, as I pushed open the door to the Bothy, it was literally pitch black inside.

Luckily, I had just bought myself a nice new head torch, which I was proudly wearing. And so as I stepped into the Bothy, I switched on my head torch. And what happened? Well, the room was lit up.

That's what light does, isn't it? It does away with darkness. It allows you to see. And what I saw was a mess. Whoever had used the Bothy before us had left the place in a complete and utter state. And because of the light, I could see that mess clearly. So when Jesus is described as the light of the world, it sounds like a lovely thing, right? What exactly does this light cause us to see?

[12:35] Well, I take it one of the things that it causes us to see is the mess. It causes us to see the sin in our lives. And the surprising thing is that in seeing that, there is real freedom.

And we all desperately need that freedom. Have a look at verse 6 of our passage with me. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning.

No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. That is uncomfortable to read, is it not? It's uncomfortable because we're all a little bit like Augustus Kloot.

Do you remember Augustus Kloot? Charlie and the Chocolate Factory? He's one of the kids who wins a golden ticket, wins the opportunity to go to Willy Wonka's incredible chocolate factory. And in one scene, at the heart of the factory, the children are told that they can eat whatever they like in that room.

One instruction they're given. Do not drink from the chocolate river. Unable to control his love for chocolate, Augustus Kloot runs straight to the chocolate river, doesn't he?

[13:43] He starts to feast. Before long, he loses balance. He falls into the river. He can't swim. He's sucked up a pipe. He gets stuck. It looks as though he will surely die.

Why? Because he knowingly broke the rules. When was the last time you knowingly broke the rules?

When was the last time you knowingly committed a sin? When did you last knowingly disobey God? Take what you know he has said is best for you and trample it underfoot.

Our passage says no one who lives in him keeps on sinning. My guess is for most of us, this is a deeply uncomfortable passage.

We all pursue our own way instead of God's in some way, don't we? Is John saying that the Christian should be perfect, completely free from the presence of sin in their lives?

[14:48] Well, no, I don't think he is. If that is what John is saying, then it contradicts what he says elsewhere in this letter. Keep a finger in our passage and just turn back with me. It might be just one page to chapter one of this letter.

In verse eight, have a look at verse eight with me. John says this, If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Is John saying that the Christian will never sin? Well, clearly that's not what he's saying. Bit of context here. John was writing to a church where a split had occurred.

It seems as though a group has emerged who were claiming that they could be absolutely free from sin in this life. How discouraging that is to a real human being.

But John is writing to give real human Christians assurance. And he responds here in chapter one very clearly. We cannot claim to be without sin.

[15:51] Instead, I think he means to say that before we understand what it means to live in Christ, we need to see him, the light. And by that light, see the mess and sin in our own darkness.

And to see that brings real freedom. Because for each of us, there will be ways and places that we are living our own way instead of God's.

Maybe even without realizing it. Living in light of the world around us rather than in light of Christ and what he's shown us in his word.

Living monkey see, monkey do. It's simply the human condition. Areas of our lives where the light has not yet shone. I think so often as Christians, we seek to cover over our sin and our shame, to pretend as though we've got things sorted.

I've often heard Christian friends say something like, yes, I do that. I try and be perfect in order to be a good witness to my non-Christian friends. But the reality is that our non-Christian friends, they see right through that kind of behavior.

[17:07] What they see is a Pharisee. They see someone praying that Pharisaical prayer from Luke chapter 18. God, I thank you that I am not like other people.

And they see right through it. It's no wonder that Christians are so often accused of hypocrisy. Because pasting over the cracks simply does not last.

Even the most shameful private sin has a horrible way of displaying itself publicly as it changes us from the inside out. But there is real freedom available in living in the light.

In acknowledging that we are sinful human beings. Not in accepting or wallowing in that fact. But like the tax collector in that same story from Luke chapter 18.

Praying God, have mercy on me, a sinner. In that prayer, real freedom is found. Sam Albury, a Christian writer, said something like this.

[18:14] I'm paraphrasing, but I think it's brilliant. We don't need to be perfect to make Jesus look good. We need to be honest so that people see that Jesus is perfect.

Let me say that again. We don't need to be perfect to make Jesus look good. We need to be honest so that people see that Jesus is perfect.

Friends, we need to be honest about our sin. Because there is freedom in the light. And there is also a wonderful purpose in the light.

This is the second reason for Christ's appearing for Christmas in our passage. Purpose in the light. It's pretty dark in Edinburgh at this time of year, isn't it?

But you know, today in Iceland, there are only four hours of sunlight. Four hours of sunlight. That is wild. And as a result, there is very little plant life in that part of the world at this time of year.

[19:16] It's basic biology, isn't it? Plants need light to live. And we need plants to live. Light is so key to life. Imagine a world where it was literally dark all of the time.

Not even four hours of sunlight. You can't, can you? That is an unimaginable world. Because light is so key to life.

Because light has a wonderful, transforming, life-giving purpose. How does that purpose come about? Well, have a look at verse 8 of our passage with me.

Here's our second appearing.

Did you notice at the start of that verse that the one who does what is sinful is of the devil? You'll often hear, won't you, people say that they are absolutely free to do whatever they like in this life.

[20:31] But the reality is, as soon as someone says that they are free to live a life that goes against God's good plan, the devil is right there with them. Absolutely thrilled that they cannot see him.

But there is good news. This is the purpose of the light in this verse. To destroy the devil's work. To fulfill the promises of Genesis 3.

To crush the serpent's head. And as Christ destroys the devil's work in us, we are enabled to become what we already are. Children of God.

Free from the clutches of the devil. There is a great purpose in the light. As Christians, we are people who are becoming increasingly like Jesus.

How does that happen? Well, have a look at verse 9 with me. No one who is born of God will continue to sin. Why? Because God's seed remains in them.

[21 : 36] What is God's seed? Well, some of the commentators say God's seed is God's word. Others say that it is God's spirit. For me, you can't separate the two.

Since the word and the spirit work together as we grow as Christians, I suspect John is talking about both. The word is applied to the heart of the believer by the Holy Spirit.

As we read, listen to, and sit under his word, the Holy Spirit causes us to be born again. This is how it happens. This is how we become increasingly like Jesus.

This is how we become what we already are. Children of God. Remember that story that I began with, Marina Chapman?

Well, after 10 years of living this monkey see, monkey do life, something remarkable happened. She looked down from where she was now, up in the trees, living with the monkeys.

[22 : 38] And on one of the trails where they used to run backwards and forwards, she saw something, something shiny. And it captured her curiosity. So as now a 14-year-old teenager, she comes down out of the trees and she begins to explore.

And eventually she finds this shiny object that had captured her curiosity. And she picks it up and it terrifies her. She picked up this shiny object and she noticed that it had eyes and a nose and a mouth.

She said, actually, that she put it in her mouth to test what it is, just like any animal would. But as she brings it out of her mouth, it's there, still got eyes, it's still terrifying.

And it was in that moment that she suddenly realized, as she looked in this mirror, that she was looking at herself. It was at that moment that she suddenly realized, as she saw her reflection staring back at her, terrified.

It was then that she says she realized, I am not like them. All of her life, she was trying to be something that she was not, living this kind of monkey see, monkey do sort of life.

[23 : 59] But for the first time, when she looked into a mirror, she says that she discovered, I am not what they are. I was born not to be like them.

I was born for a different purpose. I was made for more than this. This is not who I am. In James chapter 1, verses 23 to 25, God's word is compared to a mirror.

It says this, anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

We live in a monkey see, monkey do sort of world. And the truth is, if we are Christians, we are still humans. Humans who are so easily influenced by what we watch on TV, what we read, what the people that we surround ourselves with are doing.

And it is, I think, so important and worth being aware of what we are filling our heads with, what we are filling our imaginations with, because we will end up reflecting the culture that we let ourselves be captured by.

[25 : 23] I read an article yesterday, came across it on Twitter. It was written by a non-Christian, and the author said this about the church in 2020. Instead of making me want to become more like them, it looks very much as if they want to become more like me.

That makes me sad. Doesn't that make you sad? But it can be different for the Christian. It can be different for the true Christian.

What does the Christian see? What does the Christian do? Well, the true Christian sees what they might become. They see the purpose of the light as they are exposed to the word of God, this mirror.

And the Christian is transformed as they see it. And they don't simply read it to tick a box. They don't simply come to church and hear it taught in order to be puffed up and grow in their knowledge, or to continue to attempt to paste over the sin and shame in their lives.

No, as we pick up our Bibles, as we sit under its teaching, as the Holy Spirit works in our hearts, Jesus begins to reveal to us what we were really made for.

[26 : 49] We start to see that there is something more than this monkey see, monkey do for us. And instead of being impacted by the people around us, we begin to impact them.

Because as we read God's word, we see that we are children of God, called into the light, where there is real freedom and real purpose.

Let me pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much that you sent your son as a magnificent bolt of light into our world.

Lord, thank you that in that light there is freedom and purpose for those of us who have been born again as children of God. I pray for each of us that we would be transformed by the light, that we would allow it to work in our lives and have such a great impact on us that we cannot help but impact those around us who do not yet know you.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[28 : 16] Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.