**JESUS: THE LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS**

**(Isaiah 9:2; John 1:4-9; 8:12)**

 It took more than 42 years, but it finally happened. In May of 1977 a movie was released that became nothing less than a cultural phenomenon. On Thursday of last week, a ninth and last movie directly related to the first hit the theaters. I am referring, of course, to the Star Wars saga. The Star Wars series consists of a trilogy of trilogies, three sets of three. The first sets of movies were made between 1977 and 1983. The next set were produced between 1999 and 2005. The final set of three came out between 2015 and 2019.

 The last three movies introduced some new characters. Whereas Luke Skywalker was the original hero of the story, the last three have featured a heroine, somewhat of a female version of Luke. Her name is Rey. Since 2014 fans have been wondering, “Who is Rey? Where does she come from? Who were her parents? Why does she have the powers of a Jedi?” I am not going to include any spoilers, but I will say, those questions concerning Rey’s origin are answered in the new motion picture—*The Rise of Skywalker.*

 As Jesus walked this earth 2000 years ago, many people had questions concerning His true identity. They wondered: “Who is He really? Where does He come from? Why does He have the powers that He has?”

 The Jewish faith and the Muslim faith both recognize the existence of Jesus, and they offer their own answers as to who Jesus really was and who Jesus is.

 We, however, are going to turn to the Bible in an effort to answer those questions. First, we will consider the words of an OT prophet. Then, we will examine the testimony of a contemporary of Jesus. Finally, we will let Jesus speak for Himself concerning His real identity.

 There is one word in particular that is common to all three passages, and it is the word light. Last week we looked at *Jesus: The Hope of Christmas.* Today, our study will be, *Jesus: The Light of Christmas.*

1. **JESUS IS THE PROMISED LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS.**

 Let’s look at the prophecy of Isaiah 9:2. We will start with the last verse of the previous chapter—8:31. Isaiah was an 8th century prophet. He lived long, long ago in a land far, far away. He lived and wrote more than 700 years before the coming of Jesus. With clarity, Isaiah saw the coming invasion of the Assyrian Empire upon the northern land of Israel. With the coming of that brutal, foreign enemy, the people of Israel were thrust into deep darkness.

 Yet, Isaiah held out a ray of hope. In v. 2, Isaiah uses the past tense while making a future prophecy (“have seen a great light” and “has light shone”). How can you use the past tense regarding something that has not yet happened? When God makes a promise, it is as good as done. Isaiah was signifying the certainty of this future event.

 The Bible often uses the figures of darkness and light to highlight spiritual truths. Obviously, living or walking in darkness has nothing to do a lack of proper lighting in your home. It has everything to do with a lack of spiritual illumination in your life. The person walking in darkness is the one who does not know God, who does not have a personal relationship with Him. Such a person does not understand what God’s will is and thus does not live in accordance with God’s word. Such a person lacks divine direction. It is not that God is withholding it. Rather, the person has no desire to know it.

 We have a saying, “There is none so blind as he who will not see.”

 Since Isaiah was prophesying about a light that would come, we must ask, “Has it been fulfilled, and if so, when?” Let’s look at Matthew 4:12-16. For some time, we have studying the Book of Matthew. When we return to our journey through that gospel, we will be in Matthew 18. It is not until Matthew 19:1 that Jesus leaves Galilee for good. So, from chapter 4 through Matthew 18, Jesus is in and around Galilee teaching, and healing, and ministering. He is shining the light of truth upon a people who for centuries have walked in spiritual darkness.

 Have you ever taken a tour a cave where at some point, deep down in that cave, the tour guide turns off the light? It is an eerie feeling to literally put your hand up to your face and not be able to see it. That is what you call darkness—physical darkness.

 Spiritual darkness is when God puts truth right up in front of you, and you don’t recognize it as truth. In this world there are some things that are true, and there are some things that are false. We need the spiritual perception to distinguish between the two.

 We can’t learn to see truth. This ability doesn’t come from reading a book or taking a course. Spiritual truth is spiritually discerned. We need the Spirit of Christ living and reigning within us. It is His Spirit that gives us that light by which to live and act and think and serve.

 Let me tell you a story told by Suliasi Kurulo. Suli, as he is known, pastors a church in Fiji. This church has planted 1,000 churches around the globe. Years ago, he was on the island of Madagascar and his translator told him about an old man who lived up in the mountains who was considered to be a holy man. They climbed up to find this man who had lived there all his life. There was no electricity, no running water, and very little contact with the outside world. The translator introduced Suli and a pastor who had traveled a long way to tell him the good news.

 The old man asked, “Did you bring me a Coca-Cola?”

 Suli laughed and said, “No. Have you ever had a Coca-Cola?”

 The old man answered, “No, but I have heard that it is delicious.”

 Suli promised, “I have something better than Coca-Cola for you. I’m here to tell you about the one true God and His only son Jesus.” Suli then shared the Gospel with this old, wise man.

 As Suli spoke, tears trickled down the cheeks of the old man. When Suli finished, the old man said:

 I have always known deep in my heart that there is one great God who created everything. I have always resisted the witchcraft and tribal magic of my people. There always seemed to be a flicker of light that I couldn’t reach. I have asked the Creator many times to send someone to teach me about this light. And today, the torch is burning brighter than ever before!

 As a result of that one visit, many people have come to Christ, and many churches that have been planted on that island because of this man’s faith.

 When Jesus shines on you, He will use you in the process of shining on others.

 I said we were going to examine the testimony of a contemporary of Jesus. Look with me at John 1:4-9.

1. **JESUS IS THE PRESENT LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS.**

 When the author of this gospel writes about a man sent from God whose name was John, he is not referring to himself. He is talking about the one we know as John the Baptist. That John was given a divine mission. He was to bear witness about the light. In other words, he was to tell others that Jesus is the light.

 Light is a big word in the Gospel of John, but it is also an important word in the Bible. The first time it is used is in the third verse of the Bible. We read in Genesis 1:3, “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”

 I have heard people say: “God said it. I believe it. That settles it.” You can do away with the second declaration because if God said it, that settles it, whether you believe it or not. When God said, “Let there be light,” that settled it.

 The reason God issued that command is found in the second verse of the Bible: “And darkness was over the face of the deep.” This world was covered in darkness, and God chose instead to bathe it in light. That was a physical truth.

 John chose to take this physical truth and turn it into a spiritual theme in the gospel that bears his name. The conflict between light and darkness is found throughout its pages. Satan loves darkness as do men who don’t know God. God combats that darkness by sending His Son who is the light. Guess which one wins? The light always wins. Light dispels darkness, but darkness can’t extinguish the light.

 If you flick your Bic in a cave, that lighter will dispel some of the darkness, but the darkness can’t drown out the light, and the brighter the light is, the more the darkness recedes.

 Whereas Isaiah used a past tense to prophesy about the light that was to come, John does something interesting in v. 9. He uses a present participle (coming). At some point while John the Baptist was performing his ministry of bearing witness to the light, Jesus began coming into the world. He began to minister publicly.

 I would say that Jesus is still coming. He is still making Himself known. He is a present light.

 The 2020 presidential race has begun. Twelve years ago, John McCain was running for president. In 2008, *Time* magazine asked John McCain to share his “personal journey of faith.” You will remember that McCain was a fighter pilot. He was shot down over North Vietnam, survived the crash and was taken prisoner. McCain shared a powerful story of something that occurred while he was a prisoner of war in Vietnam:

 When I was a prisoner of war in Vietnam . . . my captors would tie my arms behind my back and then loop the rope around my neck and ankles so that my head was pulled down between my knees. I was often left like that throughout the night. One night a guard came into my cell. He put his finger to his lips signaling for me to be quiet and then loosened my ropes to relieve my pain. The next morning, when his shift ended, the guard returned and retightened the ropes, never saying a word to me.

 A month or so later, on Christmas Day, I was standing in the dirt courtyard when I saw that same guard approach me. He walked up and stood silently next to me, not looking or smiling at me. Then he used his sandaled foot to draw a cross in the dirt. We stood wordlessly looking at the cross, remembering the true light of Christmas, even in the darkness of a Vietnamese prison camp.

 Regardless of the dark circumstances in which you may find yourself, the light of Christ can always come peeking in because He is the present light.

1. **JESUS IS THE PERSONAL LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS.**

 Let’s look at one final text—John 8:12. Isaiah prophesied about a Light. John testified to the Light. Jesus claimed to be that Light. Consider those first three words—I, am, the. We will start with the third word first. He said He is the Light. He is not a light, not one among many. He is the one and only Light of the world.

 Back in 1988 when the first George Bush accepted his party’s nomination for president, he gave an acceptance speech in which he talked about a 1000-points of light. He was referring to those many clubs and volunteer organizations across our land that are doing good and making life better for multitudes of people.

 If we embrace our mission as the church, we will be millions of points of light throughout the world. We all, however will be reflecting the Light of one source. Jesus is the Light of the World.

 Consider the second word—am. Jesus didn’t say, “I was the Light” or “I will be the Light.” Jesus is the Light. As we talked about earlier, Jesus is the present Light.

 Do you remember when God told Moses to go to Egypt. He really wasn’t interesting in going. He had all kinds of excuses as to why he wasn’t the guy for the mission. At one point, he asked, “Well, who am I to say sent me.” God told Him, “Tell them, ‘I Am Who I Am sent me’” (Exodus 3:14).

 God is not a *was* or a *will be.* He is the eternal am.

 A black preacher preached a sermon he entitled, “The Isness of God.” Our God is.

 We looked at the words *the* and *am.* Now, think for a moment about the first word Jesus said. He said, “I am the Light of the world.” Jesus is the Light of the World. He is the personal Light. The Light isn’t a Force like the theology of Star Wars. Jesus is a Person, the Second Person of the Trinity.

 Because Jesus is the Light, we can make one of three choices. One, we can walk away from the Light. Two, we can walk in the Light. Or three, we can walk toward the Light.

 Paul Tripp is a Christian author, counselor, and speaker. One weekend, he gave his teenage son permission to spend the weekend at a friend’s house. But during the weekend, Paul received a call from the friend’s mother, informing him that Paul’s son was not at her home. (Her son had felt guilty about covering for Paul’s son and confessed to his mom.) After Paul told his wife about their son’s deception, Paul said, “Luella could feel my anger, and she said, ‘I think you need to pray.’ I said, ‘I don’t think I can pray for him right now.’ She said, ‘I didn’t mean for you to pray for him; I think you need to pray for you.’”

 Listen to what Paul wrote:

 I went to my bedroom to pray for God’s help, and it hit me that, because of his love, God had already begun a work of rescue in my son’s life. God was the one who pressed in on the conscience of my son’s friend, causing him to confess to his mom. God was the one who gave her the courage to make that difficult call to me. And God was the one giving me time to get a hold of myself before my son came home. Now, rather than wanting to rip into my son, I wanted to be part of what this God of grace was doing in this moment of rebellion, deception, hurt, and disappointment.

 After giving his son a couple of hours to relax upon his return, Paul asked him if they could talk.

 “Do you ever think about how much God loves you?” Paul asked his son.

 “Sometimes,” he answered.

 “Do you ever think how much God’s grace operates in your life every day?”

 His son looked up but didn’t speak.

 “Do you know how much God’s grace was working in your life even this weekend?”

 “Who told you?” his son asked.

 Paul said to him:

 You have lived your life in the light. You’ve made good choices. You’ve been an easy son to parent, but this weekend you took a step toward the darkness. You can live in the darkness if you want. You can learn to lie and deceive. You can use your friends as your cover . . . You can step over God’s boundaries. Or you can determine to live in God’s light. I’m pleading with you: don’t live in the darkness; live in the light.

 Paul wrote:

 As I turned to walk away, I heard his voice from behind me saying, “Dad, don’t go.” As I turned around, with tears in his eyes, he said, “Dad, I want to live in the light, but it’s so hard. Will you help me?”

 Jesus never said living in the light is easy, but He stands ready to help us if we come to Him seeking His help. By prayer and in faith, step into His light today.