

**The Gospel of John (77);
“The hour has come” (5)**

Introduction:

It is our desire and intention to complete our consideration of this passage in which our Lord announced that the hour had arrived for Him to be glorified, that is, to die upon His cross. We had proposed a five part division of John 12:20-36 of which we have addressed the first four. Here is that outline once last time:

1. The desire and request of “the Greeks” (12:20, 21)
2. Jesus speaks of the necessity of His cross in order to inaugurate and advance His kingdom (12:22-26)
3. Jesus’ appeal for help from His Father to endure His cross (12:27, 28)
4. The Father purposed to glorify Jesus before the people through His cross (12:29-33)
5. Jesus exhorts those Jews who heard Him to believe that which they had been taught and had witnessed regarding Him (12:34-36).

Today we will consider the meaning and implications of the fifth division of this outline, which is verses 34 through 36, in which read of our Lord’s exhortation of His hearers. One last time we read our passage, which is **John 12:20-36**.

²⁰Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. ²¹Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”
²²Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

²³But Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. ²⁴Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. ²⁵He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.

²⁷“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour.’ But for this purpose I came to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify Your name.”

Then a voice came from heaven, saying, “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.”

²⁹Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to Him.”

³⁰Jesus answered and said, “This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. ³²And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” ³³This He said, signifying by what death He would die.

³⁴The people answered Him, “We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; and how can You say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this Son of Man?”

³⁵Then Jesus said to them, “A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them.

After our Lord Jesus had declared that when He was glorified, that is, when He was crucified, risen, and enthroned, then He would draw all peoples to Himself. In other words, the death of Jesus upon His cross would result in His exaltation to be seated on the throne of God in heaven. This would be the onset of His reign as the King over the promised kingdom of God. His kingdom would then expand and extend to

encompass the world, bringing salvation to Gentiles as well as Jews, even unto all who believe on Him. Citizens of the kingdom of God would include not only His disciples from among the Jewish people, but His kingdom would include His disciples from the Gentile nations of the world. The “Greeks” had wished to see Jesus (John 12:20f), and if they had faith, they would see Him as the Lord of all the world.

But as we have pointed out, the death of Jesus Christ on His cross was not only the means by which salvation was secured for His people and then proclaimed to the world through the gospel. The cross of Christ was also a passing of judgment upon the fallen world. Here is a good word regarding this judgment.

The death of Jesus is not a defeat but a victory. The cross is not where Jesus is judged but where the world and the ruler of the world are judged. When the world puts Jesus on the cross, it is from its perspective a judgment on Jesus’ person and work; in reality, however, the crucifixion of the Son is in fact the exact reverse—it is the judgment of the world. The cross is the pinnacle of the paradox, for it is the throne upon which the King of kings is crowned—His glory. Yet it is also the point of decision for the world, either as *the place of their salvation*, in which the cross is the sacrifice of the Lamb of God on their behalf, or *the place of their judgment*, by which they stand already condemned (3:18). It was the death of Christ “that was the true beginning of a properly ordered state [the kingdom of God] and the complete restoration of the world.” The cross is not the defeat of Jesus; it is the victory of God!

This victory is not just a moral victory of a martyr but the physical and spiritual victory over all opposing forces and powers. By this victory, all humanity is either judged or saved, and all challengers have been defeated—even death itself (1 Cor. 15:55). Even satan, the long-standing opponent of God, is defeated, exorcised from the world he too long had tried to rule. The mission of God was not merely about the soul of humanity but the entire created order. The ruler of this world is cast out and replaced by a new ruler, the rightful King. The cross is therefore the dethronement of satan from his tyranny over the world and the enthronement of the true King, Jesus Christ, the Son of Man. In the story John tells—an entirely true story—God wins.¹

We could cite many passages from the Old Testament that speak to this great event of God establishing His promised kingdom through Jesus Christ. If we had time we could read the entire second chapter of Daniel, in which it was declared that in the days of the Roman Empire God would establish the kingdom of His Son. Daniel had declared to king Nebuchadnezzar the interpretation of his dream of a great image. Daniel declared to him,

⁴⁴And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. ⁴⁵Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.” (Dan. 2:44-45)

Daniel had proclaimed 490 plus years in advance the exact year in which the Messiah would be crucified, that the “Messiah shall be cut off” (crucified), but not for Himself.” This would result in His enthronement and reign as the promised Messiah (Dan. 9:24-27).

Isaiah proclaimed this great establishment and enlargement of the promised Messianic kingdom in Isaiah 55. He first foretold of the gospel preachers who would announce the new of the Messianic kingdom to the world. And then the prophet spoke of the Gentile nations entering His kingdom.

How beautiful upon the mountains
Are the feet of him who brings good news,²
Who proclaims peace,

¹ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 565.

² This is quoted by Paul in Romans 10:15ff.

Who brings glad tidings of good things,
 Who proclaims salvation,
 Who says to Zion,
 “Your God reigns!”
⁸Your watchmen shall lift up their voices,
 With their voices they shall sing together;
 For they shall see eye to eye
 When the LORD brings back Zion.
⁹Break forth into joy, sing together,
 You waste places of Jerusalem!
 For the LORD has comforted His people,
 He has redeemed Jerusalem.
¹⁰***The LORD has made bare His holy arm
 In the eyes of all the nations;
 And all the ends of the earth shall see
 The salvation of our God.*** (Isa. 55:7-10)

And our Lord had announced on this occasion (John 12:23) that this hour had come, because it was in the eternal purpose of God that He would enthrone His Son over a kingdom that would reconcile a fallen and alienated world unto Himself. God had purposed through Jesus Christ to bring about peace between Himself and His people who had been estranged from Him through their sin. And so, God purposed to make “peace through the blood of His cross” and by “Him to reconcile all things unto Himself by Him, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Col. 1:20).

All of these purposes and promises of God would be realized due to His Son being glorified, that is, being lifted up upon His cross, whereby God reconciled alienated sinners, strangers everywhere, bringing them into the realm of His glorified Son. As Daniel had foretold in his prophecy, God would cause through the death of His Son:

To finish the transgression,
 To make an end of sins,
 To make reconciliation for iniquity,
 To bring in everlasting righteousness,
 To seal up vision and prophecy,
 And to anoint the Most Holy (One).³ (Dan. 9:24).

Let us no give attention to the concluding details of this episode in John 12:20-36, in which...

V. Jesus exhorts those Jews who heard Him to believe that which they had been taught and had witnessed regarding Him (12:34-36).

Now, when Jesus had announced His impending death before the crowds of Jerusalem, a question was posed that reflected the error and confusion of the Jewish people regarding the promised Messiah and His kingdom. We read in **John 12:34** these words:

The people answered Him, “We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; and how can You say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this Son of Man?”

³ Dispensationalists wrongly interpret these verses to be a prophecy not of Jesus Christ and His death on the cross, but to a future endtime political antichrist, who will put an end to sacrifices in a rebuilt Jewish temple in Jerusalem during a future seven year tribulation. But this is a prophecy of Christ, not the antichrist.

We read that “the people” answered Him. These people would not have been the “Greeks”, that is, the Gentiles who had wished to see Him (cf. v. 20), but of the Jews in Jerusalem. Some of them had hoped that He was the Messiah. They had welcomed Him as such before this on Palm Sunday. Others among these Jews opposed Jesus and His claim vociferously, for they saw Him as a threat to their own position and power. They refused to believe on Him, as we will read several verses further. They were not sympathetic to His teaching, but were skeptical, and therefore they challenged Him with caustic cynicism rather than inquiring of Him with sincerity to understand what He was telling them. [So it is that if we are confirmed in a position that is supported by our sinful pride, truth itself will not correct our error or inform our understanding.]

They said to Him, “***We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever.***” Here their reference to “the law” is not to be understood as restricted to the Torah, the first five books of Moses, which is often called “the law.” Rather, here, “the law” speaks of all that they regarded as the Hebrew Scriptures, which is our Old Testament.⁴

Where does it say in the Old Testament that the Messiah would dwell forever? It does so in numerous places. Here are several references. We read in Psalm 110:1 and 4:

The LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”

⁴The LORD has sworn
And will not relent,
“You are a priest *forever*
According to the order of Melchizedek.”

In addition we read of the Messiah in Psalm 45:

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.
The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; (Psa. 45:6)

And in **Psalm 89:36f** we read of the Messiah:

*“His offspring shall endure forever,
His throne as long as the sun before me.
Like the moon it shall be established forever,
A faithful witness in the skies.”*

And in **Daniel 7:13f** we read of the reign of the Messiah:

“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and He came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. ¹⁴And to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him; ***His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.***”

And so, the Jews challenged Jesus when He declared to them that He as the Messiah would be “lifted up”, that is crucified. “How could He die when the Scriptures declare that He would live to reign forever?” Here are the words of **John Gill** (1697-1771):

⁴ In John 10:34 we read of Jesus saying, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods?’” But this quotation is of Psalm 82:6. Clearly Jesus was referring to all of the Jewish Scriptures, i.e. our Old Testament, as God’s “law.”

The Jews have entertained a notion that Messiah the son of David shall not die, and they lay down this as a rule, that if anyone sets up for a Messiah, and does not prosper, but is slain, it is a plain case he is not the Messiah; so all the wise men at first thought that Ben Coziba was the Messiah, but when he was slain it was known to them that he was not. And upon this principle these Jews confront the Messiahship of Jesus, saying, “*and how sayest thou, the son of man must be lifted up?*”

It is clear that these Jews understood that when Jesus spoke of being “lifted up” that He was speaking of being crucified. This would have presented a problem for virtually everyone listening to Him, probably even to His disciples, even though He had taught them of His impending death on a number of occasions. Here is an assessment of the attitude and reaction of the Jews to Jesus’ announcement of His imminent crucifixion which immediately followed the voice of God from heaven:

The crowd hears the sound of the voice from heaven, but does not understand its meaning. Some judge it to be the sound of thunder (Exo. 9:23ff; Job 37:4f; Psa. 29:3-9; Jer. 10:13), others suppose an angel to have spoken to Jesus (Gen. 22:11; Luke 22:43; 1 Cor. 13:1). No one perceives it was the voice of God (Acts 11:7; Rev. 10:4) and that He has spoken to them words of supreme importance. The people do, however, understand the meaning of the words of Jesus. At least, they now understand His removal to be imminent, and they perceive that He has shattered their hopes that He would act as the Messiah. He had said the Son of man would be lifted up from the earth (3:14; 8:28); but the Law (i.e. the Scriptures, cf. 10:24) promised them a Messiah who would abide forever. Who then is this Son of man? It seems almost as if they rightly understood the words *lifted up* to mean *die*. The scandal of the Cross is meaningless to them (1 Cor. 1:18-25; Gal. 5:11) and the paradox, the Christ must suffer (cf. Mark 8:31), puts an end to their welcome of Jesus as the Messiah of the Jews. They had welcomed in Him the permanent and glorious messianic king; He declares the necessity of His imminent death and removal. To their question, *Who is this Son of man?* that is, *Who is this Messiah?*—for in this passage the Jews rightly understand the phrase *Son of man* to be equivalent to the Messiah. Jesus gives them no answer that can satisfy them.⁵

The Lord Jesus answered their query with the words of verses 35 and 36a:

Then Jesus said to them, “A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

Here Jesus is again calling Himself “the light.” “Light” is a common metaphor that we have read many times in John’s Gospel.

John 1:4f. “In Him was life, and the life was the *light* of men. And the *light* shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”

John 1:6-9. “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the *Light*, that all through him might believe. ⁸He was not that *Light*, but was sent to bear witness of that *Light*. ⁹That was the true *Light* which gives light to every man coming into the world.

John 3:19-21. “And this is the condemnation, that the *light* has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than *light*, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For everyone practicing evil hates the *light* and does not come to the *light*, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹But he who does the truth comes to the *light*, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

⁵ Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, **The Fourth Gospel** (Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), p. 426f.

John 8:12. “Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the *light* of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the *light* of life.’”

John 9:5. “As long as I am in the world, I am the *light* of the world.”

John 11:9-10. “Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the *light* of this world. ¹⁰But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the *light* is not in him.’”

And then here, in **John 11:35f** we read, “Then Jesus said to them, ‘A little while longer the *light* is with you. Walk while you have the *light*, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶While you have the *light*, believe in the *light*, that you may become sons of *light*.’ These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them.” When Jesus spoke of Himself as the “Light”, He was describing Himself as the one who reveals God. Jesus as the Light imparts knowledge of God through which the true life from God and before God may be experienced and enjoyed.

There is one more place in John’s Gospel in which Jesus is set forth as light, which wonderfully sets forth this essential idea. It is recorded in this chapter, farther down in verse 46. There Jesus declared, “I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.”

Now Jesus declared to them that His presence among them would only be a little while longer in duration, but then He--the light--would be taken from them. But He was not speaking only of His physical removal from them through His death. Jesus was warning them of their responsibility and accountability, while the opportunity was available to them, to embrace Him for who He was and to follow Him as His disciples. Their opportunity for responding to Him in faith was brief; they had only a short time remaining to them.

The light/darkness contrast is prevalent in John’s Gospel (cf. 1:4-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:1ff). The crowds are strongly urged to trust Jesus, the light of the world, based on what they do know of Him: *Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light*. The last expression, ‘sons of light’, reflects idiomatic Hebrew: a ‘son of light’ displays the ethical qualities of ‘light’, and has become a disciple of the ‘light’ (cf. 1 Thess. 5:5; and Eph. 5:8, where the expression is ‘children of light’). It will not be any easier to place trust in Jesus *after* the cross; the crowds should commit themselves to Him in trust and discipleship now, before He, as the light of the world, is taken from them, and they found themselves in total darkness.⁶

Through our Lord’s words we may detect a sense of urgency being pressed upon His hearers. The door of opportunity was open before them, but it would soon be closed to them. They must act and do so immediately. Procrastination would be fatal for them. It would be a loss of opportunity, a forfeiture of great prospect. The opportune time is present, but the time is also short. He urged them, pressed them, to consider His claims--who He was and what it should have meant to them. In doing so they were to become “sons of light”, that is,

that they might appear to be such who are enlightened persons; and such are truly so, who are made light in the Lord, or who are enlightened by the Spirit of God to see their own sinfulness, impotency, and unrighteousness, and their need of Christ, and His righteousness and strength, and of salvation by Him; and who are made meet (ἅγι), by the grace of God, to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; and which is made manifest by believing in Christ, and walking on in him, as they have received Him, and by walking honestly, as in the daytime, and circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, for such walk as children of the light. [John Gill (1697-1771)]

⁶ Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 446.

And so, here we see the Lord, even though it was so short a time before His arrest, trials, and crucifixion, nevertheless, was seeking the well-being of souls about Him. We see...

(1) The concern Christ has for the souls of men, and His desire of their welfare. With what tenderness does He here admonishes those to look well to themselves who were contriving ill against Him! Even when He *endured the contradiction of sinners*, He sought their conversion.

(2) The method He takes with these objectors, *with meekness instructing those that opposed themselves*. Were but men's consciences awakened with a due concern about their everlasting state, and did they consider how little time they have to spend, and none to spare, they would not waste precious thoughts and time in trifling cavils.⁷

We see here our Lord dealing with these people in a manner that Paul would later instruct Timothy:

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient,²⁵ in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, (2 Tim. 2:24f)

Let us take some lessons from our Lord's words. First, it would be good for all of us to consider what little time that we have the light with us in this lifetime. The Scriptures speak of the brevity of life, which should lead us to prioritize spiritual and eternal matters. James wrote of this:

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit";¹⁴ whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. (James 4:13f)

Matthew Henry (1662-1714) admonished his readers respecting this matter:

Note, it is good for us all to consider what a little while we are to have the light with us. Time is short, and perhaps opportunity not so long. The candlestick may be removed; at least, we must be removed shortly. Yet a little while is the light of life with us; yet a little while is the light of the gospel with us, the day of grace, the means of grace, the Spirit of grace, yet a very little while. The warning given them to make the best of this privilege while they enjoyed it, because of the danger they were in of losing it: *Walk while you have the light*; as travelers who make the best of their way forward, that they may not be benighted in their journey, because travelling in the night is uncomfortable and unsafe. "Come," say they, "let us mend our pace, and get forward, while we have day-light." Thus wise should we be for our souls who are journeying towards eternity.

Note, [1] it is our business to walk, to press forward towards heaven, and to get nearer to it by being made fitter for it. Our life is but a day, and we have a day's journey to go. [2] The best time of walking is while we have the light. The day is the proper season for work, as the night is for rest. The proper time for getting grace is when we have the word of grace preached to us, and the Spirit of grace striving with us, and therefore then is the time to be busy. [3] We are highly concerned thus to improve our opportunities, for fear lest our day be finished before we have finished our day's work and our day's journey: "*Lest darkness come upon you, lest you lose your opportunities, and can neither recover them nor dispatch the business you have to do without them.*"

Then *darkness* comes, that is, such an utter incapacity to make sure the great salvation as renders the state of the careless sinner quite deplorable; so that, if his work be undone then, it is likely to be undone forever.

⁷ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 4 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 1076.

Now for some, who are just beginning to seek Christ, the light seems to be rather dim to them. They have come to see a little light, they have a little knowledge of Christ, but very little. What is one in this condition to do? He is to act upon that light that God has given him. He is to be guided in his thinking and his living by that bit of illumination that God has given him.

I was reminded of the illustration of this by **John Bunyan** (1628-1688) when describing his Character in *The Pilgrim's Progress* who knew that he needed to escape the city of destruction where he had lived, in order to flee unto salvation that would take him to the Celestial City. Here is the interchange between "Christian", who was known as "Graceless" before his conversion, as he spoke with "Evangelist", who was directing him to flee for his salvation.

Then said Evangelist, "If this be thy condition (convicted of his sin and fearful of God's judgment), why standest thou still?"

He answered, "Because I know not whither to go." Then he gave him a parchment roll, and there was written within, "Fly from the wrath to come" (Matthew 3:7).

The man, therefore, read it, and looking upon Evangelist very carefully, said, "Whither must I fly?"

Then said Evangelist, (pointing with his finger over a very wide field,) "Do you see yonder wicket-gate?"

The man said, "No."

Then said the other, "***You see yonder shining light?***" (Psalm 119:105; 2 Peter 1:19).

He said, "I think I do."

Then said Evangelist, "***Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto:*** so shalt thou see the gate; at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do." So I saw in my dream that the man began to run.

Now, he had not run far from his own door, but his wife and children, perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on, crying, "Life! Life! Eternal life!" (Luke 14:26). So he looked not behind him (Gen. 19:17), but fled towards the middle of the plain.⁸

And so, if you purpose to begin your journey with heaven as your final destiny, but you feel you know so little, what are you to do? Do you "see" the glory (light) of Jesus, of Him as the only Savior and appointed Lord (King) of mankind? Perhaps you do not see Him brightly or clearly, nevertheless, follow that "Light." Begin to order your life according to that bit of light you have. As you come closer to Him His glory will appear brighter and more certain to you. IN this way He will direct you to your soul's salvation as you place your faith in Him.

John Calvin (1509-1564) gave some comments on several of these statements of our Lord.

Walk while you have the light lest darkness overtake you. This statement, that *the light* does not continue to shine on them but for *a little while*, applies equally to all unbelievers; for Scripture promises that to the children of God *the Sun of righteousness* (Malachi 4:2) will rise, and will never go down.

The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor the moon by night, but the Lord shall be your everlasting light (Isaiah 60:19). But all ought to *walk* cautiously, because contempt of *the light* is followed by darkness. This, too, is the reason why night so thick and dark sat down on the world for many centuries. It was because there were few who deigned to walk in the brightness of heavenly wisdom; for Christ enlightens us by His Gospel, in order that we may follow the way of salvation, which He points out to us. For this reason, they who do not avail themselves of the grace of God extinguish, as far as lies in their power, the light which is offered to them.

And he who walketh in darkness knoweth not where he goeth. To strike them with still deeper alarm, He reminds them how wretched is the condition of those who, being destitute of light, do nothing but wander throughout the whole course of, their life. For they cannot move a step without the risk of

⁸ Christian fleeing "towards the middle of the plain" is an allusion to Lot fleeing out of Sodom because it was a city soon to be destroyed due to God's judgment.

falling or even of destruction. But now Christ declares that we are *in darkness*, unless He shine upon us. Hence infer what is the value of the sagacity (wisdom) of the human mind, when it is the sole guide and instructor, apart from Christ.⁹

Let us consider *the consequences of failure to walk in the light of Jesus Christ*. The Lord Jesus told His listeners, “Walk while you have the light, *lest darkness overtake you*; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.” The Word of God describes all non-converted people, that is, all who are not true Christians, as ones who are in darkness. Paul wrote to the Christians at Ephesus saying to them, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8). Before we were Christians, we were at that time *darkness*. The puritan **David Clarkson**, (1622-1686), who was the successor to John Owen, once gave a message entitled, “Unconverted Sinners are Darkness.”¹⁰ He wrote,

But what is it to be in darkness? What is the unconverted state that the Holy Ghost so often calls darkness? Take it in these particulars.

To be in darkness is (1) to be in sin, the work of darkness; (2) to be under satan, the prince of darkness; (3) under wrath, the fruit of darkness; (4) near to hell, the place of darkness. The Scripture by darkness ordinarily expresses some or all of these. When an unconverted state is called darkness, we are to understand by it a most sinful and miserable state.

Then Clarkson goes into particulars: To be in darkness is to be...

(1) In sin, the work of darkness. Sin is called in this chapter a ‘work of darkness,’ (ver. 11. And he that lives in sin acts in the works; he is said ‘to walk in darkness,’ 1 John 1:6. He that is not converted, he is wholly in sin, under the power, the pollution, the guilt of sin.

All the qualities and motions of his soul, all the acts of his life, are sinful, John 3:5, 6. He that is but once born, not born again of the Spirit, owes his being to no other birth but that of the flesh; he is flesh, he is wholly, only. By flesh is meant the corruption of sin: ‘is flesh,’ i.e. wholly corrupted by sin; his whole soul is full of sin, mind, conscience, will, affections; all are tainted with it, possessed by it, overspread with the pollution of it, Titus 1:15. There is nothing in his soul but what may be called flesh, i.e. sinful and corrupt; no principle of holiness.

Such a soul is sunk in sin; he is encompassed and quite covered over with sin. Hence that of the apostle, Romans 8, ‘in the flesh.’ Nothing they have, nothing they can do, can possibly please God, because all they have or can do is sinful, and so abominable to God.

Because of time and space we will not rehearse his words on the second and third aspects of the unconverted soul in darkness, but here are a few of Clarkson’s words on his fourth assertion, that *to be in darkness is (4) near to hell, the place of darkness*. To be in darkness is to be...

(4) Near to hell, the place of darkness. That is ‘a land of darkness, as darkness itself.’ It is called ‘utter darkness,’ Matt. 8:12, 22; 12:25, 30. So near is an unconverted state to hell, as it joins it as an outer room; there is but a small, weak partition betwixt them. If conversion does not bring the sinner out of this state, the partition will be broken, death will overthrow it, and then no passage, but to the outer room, into outer darkness. Hell is called the ‘mist of darkness,’ 2 Peter 2:17... Until thou be converted, thou art a child of darkness; this is thy portion, it is reserved for thee, thou art every moment in danger to fall into the woeful possession of it. Thou canst lay claim to no other portion, canst hope for no other

⁹ John Calvin, **Calvin’s Commentaries**, Vol. XVII (Baker Book House, 1993), p. 426. He was speaking of the folly of those who direct their lives according to their own “wisdom” apart from Christ, which is great folly and error.

¹⁰ David Clarkson, “*Unconverted Sinners are Darkness*” in **The Works of David Clarkson** in vol. 2 of 3 (The Banner of Truth Trust), pp. 355-384. On line at <http://digitalpuritan.net/david-clarkson/>

inheritance until conversion. To be in darkness is to be in danger of hell; it is a state bordering on hell, it is the confines, in the suburbs of it.¹¹

But those who have come to Christ as the Light, as the one in through whom God is revealed and through whom God is befriended, they become “children of light.” They shall forever dwell in the light of God’s presence, enjoying the joy, the warmth of comfort, the delight of understanding Him and knowing that they are in His eternal favor.

Our Lord Jesus concluded this section by declaring to the crowds before Him by giving a word of instruction and of hope. Jesus said, “***While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light***” (12:36). By looking to Jesus Christ who is the light, you may become a child of light, a true Christian. “Those that have God for their Father are children of light, for God is light; they are born from above, and heirs of heaven, and children of light, for heaven is light” (Matthew Henry).

The Gospel writer then records this description of Jesus leaving them. **Verse 36b** reads, “***These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them.***” The manner that the Gospel writer stated this was itself to be a warning to his readers of the importance to decide now, for as our Lord had warned that He as the light would soon depart from them, He does so. Here are the words of **Donald Carson** (b. 1947):

That Jesus then *left and hid Himself from them* recalls 8:59, but in this context it signifies much more. Not only is the public ministry of Jesus now drawing to a close (apart from 12:44-50, His next public act of self-disclosure is the death/exaltation itself), but by His withdrawal, His self-conscious hiding from the people, He is acting out the judicial warning He has just pronounced. This acted parable of judgment the Evangelist finds to be not only a suitable climax to the warnings and entreaties of the previous verses, but a telling introduction to His own theological reflections on the unbelief of so many amongst His own people (vs. 37ff.).¹²

May the Lord in His mercy and grace enable each of us to see clearly and fully the glory of Jesus Christ and may He transform us to conform to His likeness through that sight. May we in faith see the light of His transcendent nature and authority (glory) in the immanence of His humanity (face). And may He transform us into His image for having done so (Cf. 2 Cor. 3:18).

It is the duty of every one of us *to believe in the gospel light*, to receive it as a divine light, to subscribe to the truths it discovers, for it is a light to our eyes, and to follow its guidance, for it is a light to our feet. Christ is the light, and we must believe in Him as He is revealed to us; as a true light that will not deceive us, a sure light that will not misguide us. We are concerned to do this while we have the light, to lay hold on Christ while we have the gospel to show us the way to Him and direct us in that way. Those that believe in the light *shall be the children of light*; they shall be owned as *Christians*, who are called *children of light* (Luke 16:8; Eph. 5:8) and of the day (1 Thess. 5:5). (Matthew Henry).

“O LORD, you are our God;
we will exalt you; we will praise your name,
for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.
(Isaiah. 25:1)

¹¹ Ibid, p. 859.

¹² Carson, p. 446.