

Sermon, January 3, 2021
Isaiah 60:1-6 & John 1:1-9
“The Darkness Never Lasts”
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We live, in case you didn't know it, in an incredibly beautiful world set in an incredibly beautiful and complex universe. It's easy to see why some theologians say it's difficult to look at the world and our universe and deny the existence, at least of a creator, given both the orderly and beautiful world and universe in which we live.

Just in the past few weeks, we witnessed the star convergence, really planet convergence some liked to the star of Bethlehem. Just breath-taking. If you lived further North than we do, you would have been able to witness the Northern Lights. My Screensaver on my computer in my office constantly reminds me of the wondrous beauty of the earth, whenever I turn it on, showing me landscapes across the globe.

I think it's easy if you've never traveled much to miss much of the beauty of the world until you've experienced it. As we said on Christmas Eve, there are some things that simply must be experienced in order to truly grasp them.

In the mid-eighties, I had the experience of being truly North in Russia. Not Siberia north, but as North as I wanted to be. The first thing that told me I was out of my element was getting off a plane in what is now St. Petersburg in June and seeing snow fly through the air. The second was the sun never completely going down. Such is the beauty and the wonder of our earth that at that time of year given the position and tilt of the earth, the sun never completely dipped over the horizon. It was such a strange phenomenon. How'd you sleep? It's just an incredible experience.

But as we talked with our hosts, they said well, that's really nothing. The summer you can deal with, the light you can deal with. What they said they struggled with was the virtually six months of darkness when you got to winter time. That, they said, was the struggle. Living in what seemed to be perpetual darkness. Oh not that it's completely dark every second. It's just the opposite of summer with the sun never quite making it over the horizon. And when it does appear on the horizon, it visits for a very short time. I did a check on the sunrise and sunset there as I was writing this sermon. The day checked sunrise was at 10:01 AM. Sunset was at 4:02 PM.

As you can imagine, living in darkness can be maddening. Getting up when it's dark, going to work it's dark. It's dusky all day at work, and when you leave, it's been dark for almost two hours. How in the world does one survive when you have that much darkness? How do you survive?

Maybe you've been asking yourself that question as we go into 2021. You might feel as if you have lived a year in darkness. We seem to have forgotten that at the end of 2019, we were so happy to see it go and so glad to see 2020 arrive. How did that work out for you? None of us could have foreseen this much darkness. It's been a dark year. And just like living in the North, every now and then we might be getting a little bit of sunlight and then it dips below the horizon far too soon.

Some of you have your own individual darkness to struggle with. You may have issues and problems that have arisen because of the pandemic or as a side effect of the pandemic. But some of us have darkness in our lives that have nothing to do with the pandemic. Believe it or not, some of us have issues and things we are dealing with that go beyond a virus. That might be with us long after the virus is gone.

So how do we deal with that much darkness in our lives? How do we survive it as we look at going into a New Year? Today we begin a new series we've titled 5 Principles to a Better Year. It's our hope that you will take these problems, write them down, and try to apply them as we move into this New year. Now, before we go on, I want to take just a moment and call your attention to the title. Most specifically the word *better*. The title is *a Better Year*. Not perfect or trouble-free. But better. And we think as you look at these Biblical principles they will help you move toward a better year.

So what principle helps us deal with the darkness that envelops our situations, our lives, and truth be told, even our souls sometimes. In some ways, it's the same principle that guided our hosts in Russia as they dealt with the seemingly perpetual darkness of winter. If asked *how to do you deal with it*, they simply shrugged and said *well, we know it will end sometime. The darkness never lasts. It won't be forever. Darkness never lasts.*

This is John's message as we begin the Gospel of John. I love how it begins because John doesn't simply concern himself with the miracle of the virgin birth. Oh no, he says, there is a cosmology to Jesus we have to understand. Before he was born as a baby, Jesus is eternal and He is light. And John drives this home again and again, Jesus is eternal, and Jesus is the light of the world.

Now, why is that important for us to understand as we begin this year? Because it means that the light of Jesus is eternal. Light was at the beginning of all things, not darkness. Darkness is not greater, more eternal or more powerful than light. And when light comes, darkness must pass away.

When Jesus comes, He brings His light. And darkness cannot exist in the face of light. It must concede. There is no darkness in your life that can defeat the light of Christ. Why, because the darkness you have or are dealing with is real, but it is not eternal. It is short-lived. It isn't eternal.

But do you know what is eternal? Jesus. He will outlast any darkness you are struggling with or are facing. Pandemic, loss of job, personal loss, problems in your life. Jesus will outlast them all. So have hope. Do you know what else is eternal? You are. You have been made in the image of this light-giving eternal God. Which means you have been specifically built not to be defeated. As an eternal creature, you have been created to outlast any darkness you are going through. In 1 John, John reminds us greater is He (who is the light) is in you than he (darkness) who is in the world.

As we go into this new year, there is darkness. I know we have acted as if as soon as 2021 gets here, it will all be fine. And it's not. But it will be. As you look at this year and you see any darkness, you must hold onto this. Darkness will not last forever. Whatever darkness you are struggling with, it will not last forever. It might seem as if it will. But it will not. Truth be told, darkness, even when it seems never ending, will not last.

So how do we deal with this darkness going into the year? As always, admit there is darkness, we don't have to hide from it. It's Ok to say we are going through dark times. But also see it for what it is. Yes, it's dark, but we will not give up hope because whatever we're facing is not the end of who we are. It will someday be gone.

Darkness has a difficult time dwelling with light. So make a concerted effort this year to spend more time in Jesus presence. The closer and more concentrated on the light of Christ, the more darkness will disappear from your life. What's your plan to draw closer to Jesus this year?

Darkness is easier to deal with when you have others walk with you. Every child knows this. Who are the people who will walk with you this year through the darkness? Do you have those people? Let me suggest you need two types of Christians in your life to help affect darkness; you need caregivers and you need truth tellers. You need people who will tend to your soul and those who are willing to help you pull the weeds. If you only have caregivers, they won't hold you accountable. And if all you have are truth tellers, you can get your soul bruised up. Do you have both in your life?

The light has come, this year will be better, darkness will be defeated. Amen