

1 Sermon, May 5, 2013

Texts: John 6:32-38, John 6:47-51, John 9:1-7

Title: The Bible in Song: "You Are the Light of the World"

1. The song is three questions.
2. We need light – Christ is the light
3. We need bread – Christ is the bread
4. Then we need to trust and act – and overcome

Intro:

Sing Song – "The Light of the World" by Michael Card

1. The song is three questions.

Michael Cards' song asks three questions:

If Christ is the light of the world, how could there be any darkness in me?

If Christ is the bread of life, how could there be any hunger in me?

If Christ has overcome the world, why should I be afraid?

Implied in these questions is that there is darkness in me, there is hunger in me, and I am afraid. There is sin in me, there is yearning and longing for more in me. I am afraid: of embarrassing myself, of making big mistakes, of things that threaten my way of life.

The song beautifully takes three statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John, and says, if this is true, why am I so imperfect? Why is the world so imperfect?

It gets to the heart of Christian belief.

There is a gap. On the one hand we believe that Christ has overcome darkness, hunger and fear. On the other hand, we deal with the reality that life has challenges we don't know how to meet.

The question is, then, how do we bridge the gap?

How do we get to the place where the light of Christ eliminates the sin in us?

How do we get to the point where our spiritual hunger is satisfied?

How do we get to the point where our fear is overcome by the grace of God in Christ?

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2. We need light – Christ is the light

Well, I'd say that, first, we need to expose ourselves to the light of Christ.

Just like plants need light to grow, we need to expose ourselves to Christ's message of love. Bible reading is one way. Listening to Christian music is another. Doing a daily devotional like the Upper Room is another way we expose ourselves to the light of Christ. Coming to church is still another. Talking over our problems with a Christian friend or counselor is yet one more.

In 2008, Neuroscientists at the University of Pennsylvania performed a study where they kept rats in the dark for six weeks. The animals not only exhibited depressive behavior but also suffered damage in brain regions known to be underactive in humans during depression. The researchers observed neurons in the brain actually dying.

We need light. It is no wonder that Jesus used the metaphor of light for his power to banish sin from our lives.

3. We need bread – Christ is the bread

Then, how do we satisfy the spiritual hunger in us?

We need to eat bread.

And here the metaphor is about action. Eating is an action.

I don't think we can satisfy our spiritual hunger *completely*, or we will become spiritually dead. I think that we need some spiritual longing our whole lives.

To be more satisfied, however, we need to act on our hunger.

God has given us a hunger for wholeness, so we are to treat our bodies well.

God has given us a hunger for compassion and community, so we need to care about people, and care for people.

God has given us a hunger and thirst for righteousness. So we need to do things that are good for our nation and our world, that promote justice and peace.

We can't satisfy these hungers just by watching better TV or by being a better consumer. We satisfy these desires by being involved in causes that give hope to the hopeless, home to the homeless, voice to the voiceless. We satisfy these hungers by listening well to those who are hurting, and doing things that help people to know they are loved.

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I'm sure you have experienced it: you have assisted at a food pantry or a soup kitchen, and have found yourself blessed. A few weeks ago, RJ Johnson spoke about the World Orphan Fund, and how helping these children did so much for him.

When we give ourselves away, we are strangely satisfied.

Jesus used the metaphor of bread, that he was the bread of life – the answer to our hunger. But hunger is still a problem in the world.

A US government report from September 2012* says that an estimated 85.1 percent of American households were food secure throughout the entire year in 2011, meaning that they had access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members. The remaining households (14.9 percent) were food insecure at least some time during the year, including 5.7 percent whose eating patterns were disrupted because the household lacked money and other resources for food.

15% of the US Population is no small number – it's over 46 million people. And according to the Economist Group, based out of England, the US has the greatest food security in the world. The US scores better on the affordability, availability and access to food than does any other nation in the world.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization says that almost 870 million people chronically undernourished in 2010–12.

We have a hungry world.

What satisfies our spiritual hunger and the world's hunger for food is the same thing: it is action that includes loving our neighbor and seeking the best for everyone.

4. Christ has overcome fear – love banishes fear

But we haven't really gotten to the third verse of the song. "You've overcome the world, O Lord, and given us victory. So why should I fear when trouble is near?"

The scriptures themselves tell us how to overcome fear. 1 John 4:18 says: "Perfect love casts out all fear."

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The only thing that can cast out fear is love. If your love is big enough, you are not afraid of people, although you may fear *for* them.

I think of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who became unafraid of those who taunted him. He knew he was in danger, but he chose to love the ones who saw him as an enemy. And he kept on challenging the system. He became fearless because his love and his desire for a better world was so great.

Some 600 years earlier, John Hus, leader of a religious movement that preceded the reformation, was tried by the Catholic Church and convicted and burnt at the stake. When he was convicted, he said, "Christ, son of the Living God, have mercy on us!"

When given an opportunity to recant, Hus said,
"God is my witness that the things charged against me I never preached. In the same truth of the Gospel which I have written, taught, and preached, drawing upon the sayings and positions of the holy doctors, I am ready to die today."

Perfect love casts out all fear.

So, Christ has already given us the resources. We are to expose ourselves to Christ's light. We are to satisfy the hunger with good deeds. We are to overcome fear with love.

Thanks be to God.

*Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson - Economic Research Report No. (ERR-141) 37 pp, September 2012