

This was my first Summer XP experience since being on staff. My kids used to participate in Summer XP, and then my daughters eventually became volunteers and leaders at Summer XP when we were planting a church in San Mateo. So I've gotten to experience, through them, all that this entails. They would come home all excited, talking about the things they learned and the friends they made. And then as they got older, they were so excited to serve and create that experience for so many others.

It is such a valuable thing that we do here, not only for our church, but for the community as well. That's some of you here today. Maybe you have never been a part of CPC before, but you heard about what we were doing, and you live nearby. This is an exciting thing for your kids to be a part of, and you've gotten to experience, through them, what this week is really all about. We are excited you're here with us today.

Today we're not just going to teach. We're going to hone in a little bit. So it's going to be different than normal. We are going to bring the heart of what we were dealing with throughout this week at Summer XP into this room and into our minds and hearts.

Let me just ask you a question. Have you ever tried to navigate your way from one place to another in total darkness? It's pretty rough. A few weeks ago, I was visiting family in St. Louis, and we went on a rafting camping trip. Originally, my wife was going to be able to join us on that trip, which meant there was no tent camping. We were renting a cabin, and it's going to be the best cabin they have.

Unfortunately, some health stuff went on with my daughter, so there were only a few of us who were able to attend, and my son and I were the only ones staying in that cabin. We got about five minutes in to look around before we spent the day outside. While we were out, this huge storm hit. It was a complete down-pour. We were trying to hide underneath the rafts, and the wind started changing and blowing the rafts up. But we were having an absolute blast. It only lasted for about 30 minutes. Then we were able to finish the day, jump off some cliffs, and go about our business.

The problem was that the storm was so big that it knocked out all the power, and so we had this cabin that we went to at night. The clouds are still covering the sky, so there's no moon, no stars that are helping, and it is pitch black in a space that I had seen for no more than five minutes. It's got all the rustic, fun things you

want to stumble around at night, like a wood-burning stove on a stone hearth, right in the middle of the floor.

I'll tell you, if you have to use the bathroom in a completely unfamiliar space in the middle of the night when it is pitch black, and you have about a gallon and a half of water that day, it is a nightmare that I wouldn't wish on my worst enemies. That was quite the struggle that night.

What often happens when we try to navigate in total darkness like that? We try to make our way. Has anybody ever gotten hurt? Yeah? Maybe you've got a toe still to this day that's crooked. Sometimes we can get a little bit lost. We get turned around. We don't know where we're at. A little bit confused at those times. Getting injured. Coffee table bruises, right? I think we've all had some of those before.

For some of us, it can feel a little bit scary. Maybe there are some people in the room who are afraid of the dark. That's something that really brings a lot of fear into your life. Maybe it's because you're young and growing or maybe it's because of some things you've experienced in your life. There's some trauma that's attached to that. The darkness really scares you. It freaks you out.

When that happens, when we're overcome by the fear of darkness, what really helps us in those times? It's pretty simple. We need a little light, don't we? We have to turn on a light. This is what helps us in those times when we are in darkness, because once the light is on, then we see that there really isn't a monster in the room. We see that it wasn't real. That was just a fear. We don't have to worry about that anymore. I see that things are as they were in the light, the same as they were in the dark. So once it's on, we see that it wasn't true. I don't know if monsters are your fear. It could be anything. It could be a part of the Dodgers organization showing up. You turn on the light, and you're like, "Woo. All right. We're still good. They're not here."

Light wipes away the darkness and exposes what's true. That's why the theme and what we dove into all last week was the Illumination Station. At the heart of all that we learned, and everything we experienced throughout the week, were the words from John 8:12. *"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"*

That's right, we've taken a break from the series with John to go into John in a different place. So this morning, I want to take the

next 20 minutes or so to share some key thoughts from those powerful words, to help us better understand the person of Jesus. He's trying to help us understand what he's offering us in himself. What it can look like for us to receive that and experience this great gift that he is to us.

The big idea that we're homing in on this morning is that we can either suffer in the dark or we can thrive in the light. That's a big part of what's going on here in these words. When Jesus makes this statement in verse 12, the nation of Israel is in the middle of this incredible celebration called the Feast of Booths, or the Feast of Tabernacles, which is this seven-day-long party. All right? It's a seven-day-long party celebrating the Israelites' 40-year journey from slavery in Egypt to the possession of the Promised Land.

This was considered to be the most joyous of the seven annual feasts, because day and night, for an entire week, there's this music playing, there was singing, dancing, eating, and there was drinking. The Israelites knew how to party. I mean, they just did. The Israelites knew how to party. Some of you think Jesus acted like a religiously stoic monk. It's some of the images if you're not a part of the church. Sometimes, we look at the church, we look at Christianity, and we're just like, "Man, I don't know about all that."

I grew up looking at Jesus as a joy stealer because I went to church sometimes, and what I understood about Jesus is that he has a whole list of rules that take away all the things I enjoy in life. This is how I understood him. I'm so glad that I got to know him and got to know who he really is, that he brings out the fullness of joy into our lives when we are in his presence. I'm so glad to know that was wrong.

But we see even in this story, even though it's not the point of the story, we get to see in here that God loves to celebrate. He loves to have mornings like this. He's celebrating with us this morning as we're dancing and singing praises to him.

So this incredible celebration is going on, and the sun has gone down, and Jesus is there in a part of the temple called the Court of Women. *"He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his hour had not yet come"* (John 8:20). So he was in a place called the Court of Women, where the offerings were put. That's important to know because in the Court of Women, there were these massive oil-fed lamps, each one standing about 75 feet tall, which is roughly three times the height of the auditorium if you're standing in the middle.

Here's the kicker: if you're a priest in training at the time, then it was your responsibility to fill these lamps and light them using old priestly garments as wicks. They would do this by climbing a giant ladder that reached about 75 feet in the air. No, thank you! Quite honestly, this feels a little like a Levitical hazing! It's not that, but it felt like that a little.

So each night of the feast, except on the Sabbath, as the sun went down, these lamps were ceremonially lit. They were so big and tall that their light would illuminate not only all of the temple grounds, but the entire city.

Everything was covered in light, and so nothing was hidden. Nothing was hidden in darkness. The purpose of the ceremony was to give the people two powerful images to set their minds on. It was to remind them of their wilderness journey from Egyptian slavery to the Promised Land. A journey that would have taken their lives if it weren't for God being present, showing up to them, walking with them.

He did that in the form of a pillar of fire by night, cutting through the darkness. And in this pillar of fire, God guided the people from Egypt, where they were enslaved, into a life of freedom. He illuminated the darkness all around them. He gave guidance in a time of wandering. These are things that we need in our lives, by the way.

He protected them, he guarded them, watched over them, and ultimately led them to the land and to the life of abundance that he had promised them. The Israelites were either going to suffer in the dark or thrive in the light of God.

So the illumination of the temple ceremony that took place each night of this Feast of Booths was a celebration in remembrance of that. It was meant to remind God's people of their need for his presence in their lives, and to stir in them a desperation to be near to him, something each one of us need to have stirred in us.

Because if we need the light to cut through the darkness in our lives, we need God to stir in us a desperation for that light, a desire to run to that light. Because the darkness wants to keep us from that, this ceremony put their hearts and minds on God and reminded them of their past.

The second thing is that, along with serving as a reminder of the past, it also served as a beacon of hope for the future. When they lit those massive 75-foot-tall lamps, and I believe they each had about four gallons of oil in them, so that's a lot of fire. When they lit them, and they watched the cover of darkness throughout the land become instantaneously overcome with light, they watched the darkness just wipe away; it symbolized for them God's promise of the true light of life, the Messiah, who would one day come and overcome the darkness both in them and all around them.

It would breathe new life into God's people and bring us all into his presence for all of eternity. That's the moment in which these people were in John 8:12. This is the moment their minds and hearts were fixed on. It was remembrance and hope. It was a celebration and desperation. They're looking at what was and desperately wanting what is to come because they're living their lives in that darkness and looking to God to bring them out of that.

It's in this great moment of longing that Jesus stands up and cries out, *"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'"* (v. 12). So, in other words, he's saying the wait is over. The presence of God that they had longed for was now with them. "I'm the one that you've been longing for. You don't have to stumble and suffer in the darkness anymore."

He says, "Follow me, and you will have the light of God's presence," the light that overcomes the darkness and leads to life. He wasn't saying that the sun's never going to go down again, obviously. He wasn't talking about physical darkness. That was all symbolic of the real darkness that Jesus came to overcome. He's talking about a different darkness, a darkness that fell on the world when sin entered back in Genesis 3. It's a darkness that each one of us experiences daily.

Whether we know Jesus and follow him or not, we experience this darkness. It's a darkness that blinds us from the truth of God, a darkness that clouds our thoughts, hearts, and every part of our lives. It's a darkness that leads us astray. It's a darkness that causes deep confusion and shame and makes us stumble into all sorts of harm and brokenness. It's this darkness that has us asking questions like, "Why is this happening? Why am I going through this? Why am I experiencing this? Am I enough?"

It's that darkness that has us asking those questions. That's the darkness that Jesus came to cut through and wipe away, and it's a darkness that not a single one of us has the power or ability to overcome on our own. We need Jesus. We need the light of the world to overcome it in and for us.

We can't overcome it on our own, but I'll tell you this, I certainly try. Does anybody else try? When you're dealing with any of those things, maybe a pattern in your life is that you're going to put your head down and bull through this. That's me, and I don't like that, so I end up seeking and finding and resting in and being rescued by the light.

But why do I have to go through this whole process of suffering in the dark first? My natural inclination when I experience a great deal of stress, fear, shame, confusion, and pain, all those sorts of things, is to isolate and try to fight my way through it.

The crazy thing is, after a crazy week this past week, which was super fun, but I'm also introverted so it also wipes me out. I'm an extroverted introvert, it's a weird place to be because I'm like, "I want to be around all these people," and then I'm like, "Ah, I can't think, I can't breathe. I don't know what to do now." So that's me.

So, going through this week and looking ahead to this Sunday, and trying to think of how I can write this sermon. What's this going to look like? I struggled through it. So yesterday I experienced this when I was attempting to write this out a bit. It's a sermon about how I have the light of life in Jesus, and I can

trust him and can and must run to him when the darkness overwhelms. That's what the sermon is about.

But after this week, what I did was that while I was feeling exhausted and stressed and going, "I can't really think. I'm trying to put this together," is I isolated. I put my head down and tried to muscle through it. I tried to do it all on my own, and it ended up later that evening, which I haven't felt in a while, was panic and fear, which led to anger. This led, on a positive note, to getting about a good one-hour workout on the heavy bag, a little bit later in the night. I apologized to the family if it was shaking the house a bit. But then I ended up getting just under four hours of sleep. I could have gotten more if I remembered that the light of the world has come into my life to cut through that darkness, to offer me truth and insight, to guide my way, to give me peace when I'm feeling that anxiety.

What I could have done was to run to the light when I was in that darkness instead of going deeper into the dark and saying, "I got this." I could have turned to God in prayer, telling him what I was feeling, what I needed, asking for his help, and then trusting him to show up and shine the way that he does.

I could have turned to his word for reminders of what's true instead of foolishly believing all these lies that were going on in my head. And I could have told Sarah, my wife, how I was feeling and what I was thinking yesterday, and asked her to pray for me, and she probably would have offered some encouragement and truth in that as well.

I could have run to the light instead of letting the darkness tear me down. I could have thrived in the light instead of suffering in the dark. Because that's what darkness does: it makes us suffer. It hides our sinfulness when we're sinning so that we don't recognize it for what it is, but instead we justify it.

Darkness does that in us, and so we don't run to Jesus for forgiveness and for salvation. Darkness keeps the truth hidden from us so that we continue to be in bondage to the destructive lies that are going on in our minds. Darkness makes us believe that we're not enough, that we're failures, that we can't, that we won't.

Darkness aims to keep us eternally separated from God, the God who loves us and wants us to experience life to the full. The only light that could ever cut through this darkness, that can expose the truth, that can lift the shame, that can break all of our chains, lead us to repentance, forgiveness, and new life, is Jesus Christ himself.

That's why that moment was so huge in John 8:12, and it's why every moment today after that moment is huge for us. Because when we are experiencing darkness in our lives, we have the light of life that we get to run to and follow, that light into the life of freedom and victory and satisfaction and impact that he has in store for all those who follow him.

So my question for you today as we wrap this up, is are you experiencing darkness in some form, or have you been? Do you need understanding? Do you need wisdom, protection? Do you need guidance in some troubling circumstance that you're in right now? Have you been trying to find it everywhere within yourself or other people? You've been on Claude or ChatGPT, going, "Fix me. Fix the situation."

Has the darkness of sin been cast over some area of your life, and you're just e- entangled in it, and you're ensnared in it? Does it have your life and you're going, "I can't figure this out, I can't get out of this"? Do you need comfort, maybe in a season of sorrow right now? No matter what darkness you've been clinging to or stumbling through, or like I did, maybe hiding out in, Jesus can and actually desires to light that darkness up. He wants to bring you out of the darkness and cover you with his life-giving light. Jesus says simply,

Follow me. Follow me. I am light. Follow me, and you can have light. Come to me. Run to me. Trust me. Wrap your mind around who I am. Let my truth set in. Let my peace give you rest. And let my light guide your steps so you know where you're going and can experience the life that I have in store for you.

So wherever we are, we get to turn to Jesus because he is the light of the world, and he can overcome the darkness in our lives.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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