

# See the Light! Be the Light!

A sermon based on 1 Peter 2:9-12

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I can't imagine it's always been this extravagant. Today, they don't even bat an eyelash at the millions and millions of dollars spent, the thousands of hours spent planning, organizing, rehearsing, the over-the-top display of showmanship and entertainment, and for what? To simply light a cauldron, nothing more than a starting gun to open the games.

Now, I don't mean to downplay the sheer awesomeness of the Olympics. I'm a huge fan, but have you noticed how much of a production these opening ceremonies have become? All of it, the walk through the host nation's history, the captivating music, the graceful dancing, the proud and rowdy athletes parading in, and that's not even the star of the show. No, people from all over the world watch, wait for the belle of the ball, the Olympic flame, when will it finally make its appearance to signify the opening of the games? They want to see that fire blaze, the sign that the games are here!

There's another light we long to see. And during this season of Epiphany, we've seen him, and it's been spectacular. But the torch has been passed. Not that our true Light has been extinguished, but he's not the only light shining. Because you, believer, you are a light. So, be the light!

Now, if you can remember back to just a couple of weeks ago, we started talking about the light, about us being children of the light. The question we asked of ourselves was, "Am I walking as a child of the light?" Because a believer in Jesus delights in obeying God and his commands, longs to follow in Jesus' footsteps.

This week, Peter takes us one step further. We're not just children of the light, followers of Jesus, the true Light of the World. No, we are the light. Ok, so those aren't Peter's exact words. But let's look at what he does call us, how he does characterize you and me. "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God."

Do those words bring comfort to you? They certainly did to Peter's original audience. He was writing to Christians who stuck out, who felt misplaced as believers in a world controlled by sin. Peter was writing to people of God who knew what it was like to face intense suffering and persecution from opponents of Jesus. They were spiritual soldiers who were battered and bruised by Satan and his forces of evil. Not too far off base from where we are in this world, from our spiritual battlefield, right?

This was a delicate and dangerous situation because suffering Christians can easily become doubting Christians; suffering sometimes makes Christians doubt God's wisdom. They wonder if God knows what he is doing and complain about when he is not doing. They doubt God's love, fearing that he is as fickle as they are and that he might be tired of struggling with his disobedient children.

They needed a pick-me-up. They needed encouragement. They needed these words from Peter. So Peter reminded them of who they were. He reminds us of who we are. "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

At one time, they, we, every one of us were no different from the rest of the world. Had a failed relationship with God, separated from him by sin, without his mercy and compassion and love, living in Satan's camp, deserving of wrath not mercy, on the path to hell.

Then came Jesus, the Light of the World. He woke us up by shining his grace and his mercy on us, living that perfect life that we weren't able to, dying on the cross, defeating the darkness of sin, rising from the dead. And then he shined his grace in us, enlightening us, bringing every one of us to the light, to faith in him by the work of the Holy Spirit, making us the people of God. Pure, sweet gospel are these words from Peter.

So, then, to every struggling believer, in the midst of this struggle, this suffering, this persecution, Peter says, "Remember who you are." You are a chosen people. From eternity, ever before the creation of the world, God elected you to be his. He wanted you, just look at how he went out of his way to seek you out.

You are a royal priesthood. From being a nothing now to this! You're royalty because you have a crown of everlasting life awaiting you in God's heavenly kingdom. But you're also a priest. Once separated from God, but now you have full and free access to him. And as God's priest, you've been commissioned to a lifelong spiritual ministry of love and service.

You are a holy nation. Though once shackled to Satan, you are now attached to Christ. Jesus' holiness, his perfection, his righteousness is yours. And you are a people belonging to God. There is an enormous satisfaction in realizing you have a place, a spiritual home. We are God's possession not as slaves, as things that are owned, but as children for whom he accepts a huge and unending obligation. He's put his mark on you at your baptism, and every Sunday, you're reminded of that. Whenever I make the sign of the cross, it's to remind you of who you are. You're his!

So again, do those words bring comfort to you? Does this gospel comfort you? You've seen the Light! He's chosen you, made you holy, made you his own, made you his priest for a life of service to him.

Now, as you look over our verses, can you see the neat progression Peter makes? He starts out with the incredible reminder of who we are...chosen, royal priests, holy, God's people...people who have been called out of the darkness of sin into the wonderful light.

But he doesn't stop there, and I'm glad he doesn't. Yeah, the gospel, the sweet, sweet, message that Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus rose is for every one of us, but it's like Peter's telling us, "Don't just be content to just sit in the light of God's grace and to just bask in his mercy and love. Let's get practical. You see the light. Now get out there. Be the light!"

Ok, Peter doesn't exactly call us the light...but Jesus does. Right, in Matthew, Jesus says, "You are the light of the world...Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Doesn't that line right up with what Peter writes today? "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God..." In a world covered by the pitch darkness of sin, there are little gospel lights placed all over. That's you.

The pagans see you. As a child of Christ, you stick out. Unbelievers, they are watching you. Your every word, they hear it. Your every movement, they see it. They are continually observing our lives. What they think of God is based on what they see in us. So, are our lives ones that are giving glory to God?

Are you willing to stand out and be different? Are you wearing your faith on the shoulder, or like the song, are you quick to hide your light under the bushel? Dear friends, we are aliens and strangers in the world. Because of Jesus, because of the lights he's made us to be, we're different.

But we don't always want to be. "I know what God says about honoring and respecting those in authority as his representatives, but when I'm with my friends, who don't go to church, and we get onto the topic of politics, it's no-holds bar. If I don't like what our leaders are doing, I'll tear them a new one." People see you.

"I know what God says about being slow to anger and quick to forgive and full of patience, but when that guy at work screws up on such a small task, I don't care if co-workers are present or not, I'll lay into him. I don't care if we're in public or not, if my child is misbehaving, I'll let my frustrations get the best of me and just scream at her until I'm red in the face." People see you.

"I know what God says about giving up our cares and our worries and giving them to him, but when bills pile up, I complain. When money seems to always be in short supply, I complain. When I have to work a few extra hours as a result, I complain. When I get my measly paycheck, I complain." People see you.

It's unfortunate how often we can sit here and be filled with Jesus and his love here in worship and be all about Jesus here, but as soon as we walk out those doors, the light switch goes off and we ease back into the shadows of the world rather than burst out of these doors radiating Christ in each and every situation. It's sad how sometimes we act as though we're ashamed to be who we are, to stand out as believers but rather allow our actions and our value systems to be influenced and distorted by the sinful world around us.

We are in a war; the evil desires of our sinful nature seek to take over and destroy the Christian in us. But they cannot win. We have the X-factor on our side. We have the true Light. We have Jesus, whose life, death, and resurrection, whose loving forgiveness covers over our disrespect, our anger, our worrying, our complaining. We have Jesus, who never stops shining, even when we might be covering our light up.

We have Jesus, who rekindles our flame day after day, who gives us the fuel and the drive to be the light. And we have Jesus, who works in us to live lives of thanks to him for all the love he's shown us, to live lives that are different from the world around us – as different as light is to darkness.

So, how can we do that? How can you and I be the light? How can we show Jesus? First, it starts with our praise. Peter writes about who Jesus has made us to be so "that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

That praise doesn't just happen in here. It doesn't just happen in the privacy of your home. No, how you talk to others, you can show Jesus. The child who belts out "Jesus loves me" in the grocery store, that's declaring his praises. The athlete who wins the big game, and first thing to come out of his mouth is "I want to thank God for what he's done for me," that's declaring his praises. Telling your story, how

much Jesus has been a part of your life, and not forgetting the best part, how he's saved you from your every sin, that's declaring his praises.

Don't be afraid to make Jesus a part of your social interactions and conversations..."I hope this will happen, if it's God's will." "Yeah, thanks but God's really the one who deserves credit because he's given me the gifts and abilities to do that."

Just your whole demeanor, how you carry yourself throughout life, are you willing to stand out? We're different, we stick out amongst the rest of the world because we're foreigners. It's ok to be the one doing the right thing when everyone else isn't.

Instead of complaining about something, like, "Ugh, this weather is so disgustingly cold, I hate living in Alaska," maybe, "I rejoice that God saw fit to cause the sun to rise again...it reminds me his mercies are new every morning. I'm forgiven today." Or... Instead of posting every derogatory, critical article I can about our president and how screwed up our government is, how about "I'm so blessed by God to live in a country that even though we aren't perfect, our leaders aren't perfect, my freedoms are still intact and God continues to provide for my physical needs through them."

Being a light means approaching every situation with the mindset, "It really doesn't matter whether there's an unbeliever here or not because Jesus is here? What can I say, what can I do that will show the true Light of the World, that will give glory to God, even if it makes me look different." That's ok. We're strangers here. Heaven is our home.

Now, in looking at the opening ceremonies for the Olympic games, there's no denying the intense level of commitment to give the greatest introduction to the star, the Olympic torch. We have an even greater Light that people need to see. He's found you. He's made you to be a light. The entire world might not be watching you, but people are. Are you going to go out?

No! He's made you to stand out, above the rest. You are the light of the world. And God will bless you as you go out and be a light. He will bless you as you shine to the world, all for his glory. Amen.