

***Ephesians 5:8-14** For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), ¹⁰ finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. ¹¹ And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. ¹³ But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. ¹⁴ Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light."*

The season of Lent can sometimes feel like Lent is about God driving one nail after another into our coffins. For in Lent, we examine our lives for sin and time and time again find evidence of sin. God says, "Thou shalt not" and we find that we have. God says, "Thou shalt" and we find that we have not. Yes at times, it can seem that the heavy weight of God's law pressing on us this season has sealed our death. We realize that our own faults have placed us into the grave and the air inside the coffin seems to be running out quickly with each new stroke of God's Law. If we truly allow all of the law that seems to be lurking around in Lent to penetrate us, it can certainly seem that we might not make it through the season of Lent alive.

And that is why it is important today that we take a bit of a reprieve from all of the Law floating around in Lent to make certain that we never forget one central truth. For this truth is the central truth of our faith. That truth is this: no matter how oppressive the Law of God seems, for those of us who are in Christ, there is always freedom from its crushing power. It is this comforting truth that comes through so clear in our Epistle lesson for the day.

Yes, our text says that God stands over our graves, those graves dug deep by our sins, and says, "Awake you that sleep and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." No, not even in the penitential season of Lent will God allow His children to remain dead in their sin. God proclaims that His children cannot die. For, His Son has already died in their place. Our death would be useless for our death has already been died. Or even more poignantly, if we choose to die eternally for our sin, Jesus' death becomes useless for us. Only one person need die for our sins, and that one death has already happened at Calvary.

By revealing this truth to us in His word, God pierces today through the darkness of the coffin, the darkness of Lent, the darkness of death with His light. But what exactly does this light do when it hits our bodies? Put simply, Christ's light destroys the darkness of sin. First, it removes the guilt of sin. But the text

before us today is mostly about the other thing that that light does for us. That light also illuminates the way for us to walk. Yes, Jesus' light makes it possible that we can walk faithfully with our God.

The favorite hymn *Rock of Ages* makes a similar statement about the two effects of the cross on sin. When we sing this song, we ask Jesus to let the forgiveness that flowed from His riven side on Calvary be of sin the double cure, to cleanse us from sin's guilt and power. Paul, in writing to the Ephesians in our text, speaks primarily of the latter. He speaks of the power of Jesus' death to cure us of the power of sin in our lives.

God does not raise us from the death of our sin in order that we might just fall forward into the next grave we see. He forgives us in order that we might walk in newness of life before Him. Yes, God has promised that if we fall again, He will once again lift us up. But constant falling is certainly not what he intends each time He forgives. He intends for us to walk in the light as He is in the light.

And Paul leaves no doubt what this looks like in this chapter of Ephesians that surrounds our text. He spells out us what the power of Jesus' forgiveness looks like in our lives. He says that the people of God walk in love and that sexual immorality and covetousness are not even mentioned among them. He tells us that the people of God replace words of crude joking in their vocabulary with words of thanksgiving instead. He proclaims that the light that Christ shines on them and then reflects off them to other people. Most simply, he says that God's people are now light and not darkness. And finally he adds that they are not filled with wine to the point of drunkenness but are rather filled with the Spirit to the point of singing spiritual songs and making the melody of Jesus' love in their hearts.

And all of this is not spoken as Law but Gospel. Paul is telling those Ephesians then and us today that this new way of living is what is possible when one walks in the light of Christ. Without Jesus, we would simple suffocate in our own sins, but with Him we can walk above ground in righteousness before our God.

The Law has but one work to do with us today. For, it calls us to examine this day where we find ourselves. We must examine if we have been morbidly enjoying the grave or walking in the light. We must be honest as to where we find ourselves today. But the great news today is that even if we have settled into an eerie comfort with the darkness of the grave, if we repent, God will tell us again to rise out of our graves and walk before Him in His light.

Only a very twisted and morbid person wishes to lie in the grave. And thanks be to Jesus, we do not have to do so. Rather we can walk in the light that Jesus places onto us and before us this day. And this is much better than living in the darkness of drunkenness, covetousness, crude talk, and sexual immorality.

Do you want to live your whole life in the constraints of the coffin? Do you want to try to walk throughout your life staggering around in darkness of death?

You do not have to any longer for the sake of Jesus. The constraints of the coffin were destroyed by the constraints placed on His hands and feet on the cross. And the darkness of death we ought to suffer has already by suffered by him in your place. Now for us is left only to receive His forgiveness and to walk in the light. And this is a wonderful lot to have in life indeed.

God's forgiveness spoken to us in Absolution and His Word pries open the coffins of our wretchedness this day. The body and blood of Jesus served to us from this altar raise of limp bodies back from death to life. And the gift of the Holy Spirit we have received at the font, places those bodies back in motion for the glory of God. And that, right here in the middle of the darkness of Lent, is great news indeed.

Great news that God forgives us not only of the guilt of our comfort with sin, but that he also gives to us through His Holy Spirit the power to overcome those sins. He gives to us the not only the forgiveness won at the cross, and also the victory sealed at the empty tomb. He gives us the power both to rise and to walk.

Lent is not about death, but rather recognizing sin that places us in danger of death in order that we instead rise and walk in the life and light that Jesus won for us at the cross. Paul says today...no rather God says today, "Rise up children of God! Rise up!" Amen.