



SIMPLE CHRISTMAS  
**YOU'RE NOT THE LIGHT**  
John 1:6-8  
December 5, 2010  
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There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

## Introduction

The bestselling hardback book in American history begins with a rather blunt statement: "It's not about you." I'm referring, of course, to Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life*, and its opening sentence.

Frankly, I find it ironic that a book that's been so widely embraced in our culture should begin with such a countercultural statement. Because we do, after all, live in a culture that sure makes it seem like it's all about you. Perhaps people are actually stuffed with themselves, like those who've had too much Turkey and gravy, ready to diet from being at the center of things.

Now, I don't know if this will be the bestselling sermon in American history, but I'd like to begin in a similar way by saying to you: *You're not the light.*

In our first Advent-Christmas message, we reflected on the profound statement in John 1:5: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Today, we continue in John's Gospel by asking the question: what's my relationship to this light that shines in the darkness?

And the first part of an answer to that question is this: you're not the light. That's one of the simple truths of Christmas. In fact, this is one of the keys to a *Simple Christmas*: to realize that you're simply not the light. Jesus is the light.

## You're Not the Light – Even Though You Want To Be

Of course, we all want to be the light. Who doesn't? "'Tis inexpressible, and almost inconceivable," says that great theologian of the heart, Jonathan Edwards, "how strong a self-righteous, self-exalting disposition is naturally in man; and what he will not do and suffer, to feed and gratify it." That seems to me to hit the nail on the head, doesn't it?

Let's face it: There's something pretty satisfying about being that charming personality that brightens a room when entering; that gifted individual who lights up the stage or the court with talent; that widely-travelled or widely-read person who can enlighten any conversation with insight; that attractive individual whose beauty so shines it easily wins the attention of everyone in the restaurant or store; that wealthy person whose load always seems light because of financial resources; that intelligent individual who sheds light on any subject, solves

any problem, settles any debate; that unusually mature man or woman whose character radiates purity and grace and godliness. There's something about these experiences that has the potential to feed the fallen ego in us all.

You can gauge the extent to which you crave being the light by asking yourself how painful it feels when others get the attention you think you deserve. Perhaps you're in sales and your colleague, who's no better at his job than you are at yours, continues to get pats on the back from the boss; or you're a mother and yet all the other moms you hang with are always talking about 'what an amazing mom' your neighbor is but not you; or you're an athlete and it sounds like the coach cheers louder when your teammate makes the same tackle or shoots the same basket you do; or you're a pastor and you realize that even your own congregants would rather listen to Mark Driscoll or James McDonald or John Piper sermons than your own.

This temptation to want to be the light may actually be *even more subtle* than we at first would have thought. Why? Because some of you have good reason to think you're the light. You've been given gifts: certain natural or moral excellencies that cause you to shine in the midst of those around you. And so you stand out, like light. You're charming, or you're talented, or you're beautiful, or you're smart, or you're energetic, or you've had remarkable life-experiences, or you're unusually godly and Christ-like. These aren't excellencies you only wish you had. No, you have them—and they cause you to shine. Wherever you go, sooner or later you get noticed. People turn to look at you as though, well, as though you were the light.

John the Baptist no doubt faced a similar temptation. He too had good reason to think he was the light. Israel had gone many, many years without any light, any revelation or any prophets—400 years, in fact. But then John showed up on the scene. He was talked about in the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi. There, it was prophesied that an Elijah-like figure would eventually come. John was that figure, dressed in camel-hair and eating locusts and wild honey like Elijah.

It would have been very easy, then, for John to see himself as the dawning of the light after a very dark and long night. No wonder, as we read in the first chapter of John's gospel, the Jews were interested in finding out who this John was. So they sent people to him to ask him: "Who are you?" Surely, they thought, this guy must be the light, the Christ, the Prophet (1:20-21).

Yet here in the opening verses of John's gospel, we're told in a rather blunt way: "He was not the light" (1:8a). And he knew it. He didn't try to pretend as though he were something he wasn't. In fact, he *unhesitatingly denied* that he was the light:

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." (1:19-21).

He also *humbly affirmed* that he was only a voice:

So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said" (1:22-23).

But, third, he *gladly rejoiced* in the fact that Jesus Christ is the light, even if this meant he found himself standing in Jesus' shadow.

Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete (3:25-29).

In sum, this was John's insight: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (3:30). And that's the key for you and me. That's what we must say as well. Have you said that? Can you say that? Will you say that?

### **A Witness That Others Might See The Light**

Not the light, but a witness to the light. That's who you are. But what's the point of being a witness to the light?

The answer is *so that others might see the light*. You're called, not to pose as the light, but to draw attention to the light. "He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, *that all might believe through him*" (1:7). That's John's approach. And here's how he did it: *Whenever he saw Jesus, he simply said so*. John's strategy wasn't any more complicated than that.

After the Jews had done a thorough interrogation of John to determine whether or not he himself was the light—the Christ, that very next day, John "saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (1:29). You see, he spotted Jesus on the move, in his life and the life of other people, and he simply spoke up.

Witnessing to the light doesn't need to be more complicated than that. If we will simply speak up when we spot Jesus on the move, we will find that we're bearing witness to the light, and others will be drawn to it.

All too often, we remain silent when we see Jesus on the move, when we should say something. When are good opportunities to speak up?

Whenever you see Jesus doing something, say so.

Whenever he helps you, say so.

Whenever he heals you, say so.

Whenever he gives you something, say so.

Whenever he forgives you of something, say so.

These are the occasions when Jesus is on the move in our lives, and these are therefore wonderful occasions to speak up and say “Behold, the Lamb of God!”

You see, there was a man who was sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to the light, to bear witness about the light, that others might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.

*But there's also you.* If you've have embraced this light, this Word of life, the Lord Jesus Christ, then you too are sent from God, whatever your name is. And God has sent you into the world as a witness to the light, to bear witness about the light, that others might believe through him. You're not the light, but you have come to bear witness to the light.

## Conclusion

Think of it this way. You're not the light. But, in Christ Jesus, you are the light; you're the light-not-light like the moon is the light-not-light. Not the source of the light, but a reflection of the light.

I'd like to conclude with a story, a children's story, about the moon. It's called, *Fool Moon Rising*. This was a *fool* moon—instead of a wise one—because this moon forgot that he is not the light; he's only a witness to the light. Yet the moon was stealing glory from you know who. For this is what fool moon would do:

He bragged each night that his great might  
Could make the darkness flee.  
And like a kite he scaled the heights  
And said, “Hey look at me!”

The pompous moon would only croon  
The songs that praised his name.  
He hoped that soon the cosmic tunes  
Would bring him greater fame.

It's really strange but he could change  
His shape through the year.  
His face would change, then rearrange  
And sometimes . . .  
. . . disappear.

He loved the thought that astronauts  
Had danced across his face.  
And cosmonauts and monkeynauts  
Would visit him in space.

He bragged that he could cause the sea  
To rise and swell each day.  
Then all could see how mightily  
He'd pull the waves away.

He'd boast away and loved to say,  
"I am the greatest light!"  
Until one day a piercing ray  
Showed him a shocking sight.

He saw his pride and then he cried  
For all that he had done.  
For he had lied when he denied  
His light came from the Sun.

So now each night a new delight  
Is what he loves the most.  
Reflecting light with all his might,  
The Sun is now his boast!

So God I pray for grace each day  
To find the joy that's true,  
In all my days and all my ways  
In making much of YOU!

The key to a *Simple Christmas* is to not try to be the light, but to rejoice in bearing witness to the light with your life. You are not the light. But you are called to reflect light with all your might. To find a new delight, something besides yourself you love the most, to make the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, your one and only boast!

Amen.