

“INTO THE DARK”

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Speaker: Danny Clinton



“Darkness doesn’t represent evil in this description, instead it’s the natural slow, still, and difficult rhythms of life.”

- As the days grow shorter and darker, we decorate the darkness in our physical surroundings with lights and candles, but we must also do this with our internal darkness...
- Alexander Shaia, a Christian writer and theologian, talks about decorating our darkness in order to make way for joy in difficult circumstances.
- Shaia says... *“We want to decorate the darkness. We want to make the darkness luminous... It brings up wonder... We come back to this dark time to sit in the hallowed darkness knowing that it’s always the face of a new beginning.”*

Consider the beginning of Jesus Ministry!

- The world is in a very dark place!
- And...“Jesus is the face of a new beginning.”
- He starts the whole thing off with an invitation – “Follow Me.”
- He’s inviting them to Go Somewhere with Him! Perhaps a Brighter Place?

I love all these offers of Christ...

- They are fun situations to try and put yourself in...

(Vs) Matthew 9:9 ESV – “As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.”

(Vs) Matt 4:18-20 ESV – “While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him.”

- And there were many others...

These followers all had great intentions... as we all do!

- ... but it soon becomes clear that they clearly missed where Jesus was asking them to follow him to, especially when the places He was leading them to became more and more difficult...
- We know this because of how the entire scene changed when Jesus started to clarify where He was taking them.
- Later in Matthew, Jesus begins to state clearly what it means to follow Him.

He said... (Vs) Matthew 10:34-39 - *"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."*

This is a very Dark and Difficult verse!

- But Jesus never softened the truth, and the truth is that...

"Following Jesus often leads to difficult places."

- Your decision to follow Christ has to be yours and yours alone, no matter the surrounding pressures.

Sometimes turning back will seem very appealing...

- When Jesus' teaching went from the Beatitudes or "Blessed" teachings, to the Coming Cross or "Suffering" teachings...
- ... People who had followed Him turned away in mass numbers...

(Vs) John 6:66 - *"After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him."*

- They no longer wanted to go where He was going!
- Jesus doesn't relent... (Vs) Luke 9:23 - *"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."*
- He's pointing out this is the only way... there's no such thing as a "halfway disciple."
- ... Even though that's exactly what He got...

For eventually, even His own disciples decided that following Jesus was too difficult...

- The night He was arrested, each and every one of them deserted Him.
- Peter not only deserted Him but denied that he even knew Jesus three times... Brutal!

Sadly, from a Human perspective much of this makes sense...

- ... because we can only follow one thing at a time...

(Vs) Matt 6:24 – “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.”

This verse is also teaching that... “Everyone’s following something somewhere.”

- ... Friends, popular culture, family, politics, selfish desires, or God.
- Jesus refuses to share those who follow Him.
- Like the old song says... He wants to be our “All in ALL”
- This is why we must consider and choose wisely!

In thinking about all this, could it be that this is the very reason Jesus described Himself as “The Light of the World?”

- I mean, He asks a bunch of people to follow Him and then leads them straight into one difficult situation after another!

“Could it be that He claimed to be this light because of the darkness He knew was coming?”

- A darkness He was inviting us into with Him?
- A darkness He knew we would need a light to get through?
- Maybe even a darkness we would be called to decorate?

Today’s message is an invitation to walk out into the dark with Christ...It’s the same invitation the Disciples were offered...

- “Will you follow Him?”
- You must decide...Because... “You cannot decorate a darkness you are unwilling to walk out into!”