

February 15, 2026

Paul Purdue preaching

In long term relationships we discover all kinds of unexpected things about our partners, just as they learn all sorts of things about us. Not long after Connie and I got married 37 years ago, I learned that I leave the lights whenever I leave a room. Apparently, this is wrong. Connie then noticed that my mother “*keeps every light in the house on.*” Growing up, we heard “*close that door, we do not live in a barn*” but nothing about lights. In fact, the first person home turned on all the lights.

Spending six days without electricity allowed time to reflect on electricity. In 1936 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the Rural Electrification Act that brought electric power to my grandparents farm a few years later. Mom was about ten when the Salt River Coop strung lights to the barn, hog shed, brooder house and the homeplace. Mom recalled walking home from school and seeing these tall poles in the middle of a hayfield and her older brother, Clellon, joking about the huge fence they were building, maybe to raise giraffes. In 1882, the Brush Electric Company brought Nashville’s first electric lights to the state capital.

Before electricity, my grandparents lit one of these coal-oil lamps after supper and put it on a high shelf in the living room, as Jesus said “*so it could give light to everyone in the house.*” Every night, grandma Clackie sat closest to the wood stove, reading aloud from the Family Bible, the Courier Journal and any personal mail they received. My grandfather, Ark, a bright man who could write his name and do some math, gently corrected my grandmother’s mispronounced words like Hezekiah, Abimelech, or Dunkirk. She did not appreciate it. Aunt Margrette, Mom, Uncle Clellon, my great grandmother, and often one of Aunt Lellie’s children talked over the farm life, school, Bible stories, news articles and family letters with their parents each evening around the stove or in the summer on the screen porch.

As Connie and I carefully managed our phones’ battery life, I wondered how much TV, “smart” phones, central heat, and larger homes have pulled our social bonds apart? How did huddling together for heat, information, and light shape our ancestors’ souls? How beautiful was light to the ancient imagination? How welcomed was the dawn, a glowing fire or an olive oil lamp placed on the mantle giving light to everyone in the house?

The night has a deep beauty. Abraham and Sarah first heard God’s promises under a beautiful black sky, with a million stars glowing in glory. (Genesis 12) God dwelled in the

night long before saying “let there be light” and after Creation, God named both the night and the day, “very good”.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus declares *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”* John’s prologue declares that Christ is *“the light of all people”, and that the light cannot be extinguished*. (John 8 & 1)

When Moses received the law on Mount Sinai, Moses’ face glowed in the reflective glory of God, shining perhaps like a glorious halo. The people weired out a bit, asked Moses to put a veil over his face, to hide the shining light. (Exodus 34) When Jesus went up on a high mountain and was transfigured, Matthew 17,tells us a bright cloud surrounded the disciples engulfing them with God’s glorious presence and that Jesus’ *“face shone like the sun, and his clothes became bright as light.”* Peter wanted to build a cathedral there and never leave God’s presence.

Maybe you have had some moments where you caught a little glimpse of God’s grandeur, the reflective glory, breath-taking mystery, or shining transcendence? Maybe you saw God in icicle prisms dancing in the sunlight, or you felt it as a friend’s hand steadied you, or you sniffed it in a field of fresh cut hay, or saw it looking over the rim of the Grand Canyon, or you held the universe in a baby sleeping in your arms? Maybe you experienced it in a still small spark of hope, or singing with the choir, or hearing a gentle prayer, maybe you saw the face of God in Esua’s forgiveness or Mary’s magnificent?

Jesus the light of the world says to each of us...

“You are the light of the world.”

You are city high on a hill,

Your light cannot be extinguished or hidden.

Do not hide your light

Let your light shine

put it on the lampstand,

*Let it be a streetlight showing folks the way home**

Others need your light

let your light shine,

Let others can see your good works

and give glory to our heavenly father, mother- perfect parent

You are the light of the world

The Apostle Paul puts it like this: *“For it is the God who said, “Light will shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars...”* . 2 Cor. 4

This week, I wondered, what does it mean to be the light of the world? Is Jesus just giving us some feel-good spiritual spray tan? What are the good things that I can do that will help other people find their way home to God?

I have an answer, but it is not short, simple or syrupy sweet. It's long, complex, challenging and maybe we need it. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus launches the Good News movement with a sermon quoting Isaiah 58 and 61. (Luke 4) In Chapters 55-62, Isaiah, as prophet and poet, takes ill-fitting swaths: gloom, untruths, political corruption, powerless prayers, stumbling, dawn, light, justice, renewal, rebuilding and weaves them into a tapestry that speaks to our times. Like a master quilter Isaiah crafted these beautiful individual scriptural squares, but the message really appears when we gaze at Isaiah's whole quilt. I have paraphrased, redacted, and edited down Isaiah's seven chapters, but tried to stay true to the images. I think if you really listen, you will hear a word from God that you can put on your lampstand and allow it to light your path.

Our leaders are blind,
 Silent watchdogs
 Who never get enough
 Shepherds without empathy
 Looking out for themselves
 Greedy for gain
 Enraging God with illegal profit-taking
 Even when the righteous perish, they do not notice. (Isaiah 56 & 57:17)
 Gloom

Shout out like a trumpet, do not hold back
 Announce to your nation its sin.
 You act like a nation that believes it is righteous, but
 You fast, while oppressing workers
 You sing hymns only to quarrel
 You pray and then hit each other with wicked fists. (Isaiah 57)

God is not unable to save,
 But our misdeeds separate us from God.
 Our fingers drip with guilt
 Our lips speak lies

Our tongues mutter malice
 Dishonest lawsuits haunt us
 No one pleads for truth.
 Truth stumbles in the public square
 We do not know the way of peace
 We can not find justice's path
 Our streets are littered with malice and violence
 Justice is far from us
 And Righteousness feels out of reach (Isaiah 59)

We grope along
 unable to see
 Feeling our way along walls
 Expecting a glimmer of light
 But walking around in gloom (Isaiah 59)

We pray bending over like wet grass
 We put on sack cloth and receive ashes
 But God does not delight in such a fast (Isaiah 58)

God thunders "act justly"
 "do what is right and avoid evil!"
 Don't let the immigrant say, "I am excluded!"
 Don't let the eunuch say, "I have no legacy here!"
 The lord who gathers the outcasts says,
 "My house will be a house of prayer for all people!" (Isaiah 56)

What is it that God longs to hear from us?
 How do we let our light shine?
 What good works will help our neighborhoods find their way back home to God?
 Loose the bonds of injustice,
 undo systemic evils,
 let the oppressed people go free,
 And break down unfair barriers.

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
 and your healing shall spring up quickly;
 your vindication shall go before you;
 the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. (Isaiah 59)

Shine, put your light up on the mantle
Guide people with your good works (Matt 5)
Share your bread with the hungry
Bring the homeless poor into your house;
See the naked and cover them
Welcome your misfit kin,
Stop pointing fingers,
Stop speaking evil,
Feed the hungry
Satisfy the needs of those who are ill.
Stop using the Sabbath to pursue your own interests
Stop looking after only your own affairs,
Instead, Delight in God: in holiness, in truth, in honor. (Isaiah 59)

And then God will answer your prayers,
Your light will shall rise in the darkness
Your gloom will become like noonday.
The Lord will guide you continually
 and satisfy your needs in parched places
 and make your bones strong,
and you shall be like a well watered garden,
 like a spring of water whose waters never fail.
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
 And the restorer of streets fit to live in. (Isaiah 58)

Lift up your eyes and look around
see and be radiant;
Open wide your hearts,
Open your city gates,
And God will make peace your governor
And Righteousness will be your boss
Violence will no longer resound in your land
Nor destruction within your borders.
The sun will no longer be your light during the day
Nor the moon your guide at night
Because the Lord will be an everlasting light around you.
And God will be your glory

And the least of these shall be a thousand strong
 And the smallest shall be full of power
 For I am the Lord, and I will hurry this along (Isaiah 60)
 Oh, the spirit of the Lord God is upon us
 because the Lord has anointed us;
 God has sent us to bring good news to the oppressed,
 to bind up the brokenhearted,
 to proclaim liberty to the captives
 and release to the prisoners,
 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
 to comfort all who mourn,
 to provide for those who are hurting—
 to give them a garland instead of ashes,
 the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
 the mantle of peace instead of a faint spirit.
 To rebuild and renew ruined cities
 To make a room for strangers and foreigners in our lands;
 bringing honor instead of shame,
 Justice instead of robbery,
 and fairness instead of distrust.
 To pay everyone their wages
 To grow a nation rooted in righteousness. (61)

Arise, shine, for the light has come,
 and the glory of the Lord has risen upon us.
 For darkness shall cover the earth
 and thick darkness the peoples,
 but the Lord will arise upon us all,
 and God's glory will appear over you.
 And Nations shall come to the light
 and kings to the brightness of your dawn. (Isaiah 60) Amen.

*Crowded Table-Hemby, Carlile and McKenna