The Gospel of John: *Lest Darkness Overtake You*
John 12:35-36a

*(Brief comments following Bootstraps video re: Marvin Motley. Promote Feb.11 prayer and repentance service at SKC, Commitment Cards turned in asap).*

Happy Superbowl Sunday! You won’t find too many people in our great city not wearing RED today as we prepare to cheer the Chiefs on to a second consecutive Superbowl victory! I know it’s just a football game, but in a time when unity and joy has been hard to come by, it is a bit of grace to pull together as a city, amen? So, go Chiefs! That said, we all know that Superbowls come and go, but 1 Peter 1:25 states, “The Word of the Lord endures forever!”…amen? So, let us turn our attention to the Word of the Lord FIRST, and then later we’ll eat too many nachos and yell at the TV!

Now, you may recall that last Sunday I delivered a message on one lonely verse, John 12:34; and I promised then that this week we would at least cover more than one verse. I am happy to report that I was faithful to my promise; for, in fact, we shall cover one and a half verses! So, on this Superbowl Sunday, let us focus our minds and hearts on the words of Jesus in John 12:35-36a.

35 So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

My message this morning is entitled *Lest Darkness Overtake You,* and it will fall under three subheadings: 1) A Final Warning; 2) Walking and Believing; 3) Becoming Sons of Light.

**I. A Final Warning**

If you recall where we were last week, some of those in the crowd standing close to Jesus have challenged His teachings. Last week they said in vs. 34, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?”

We can assume these skeptical Jews did not ask these questions seeking knowledge and understanding; clearly the questions were rhetorical as far as they were concerned. Jesus did not align with their nationalistic expectations of the Warrior Messiah. They had no place for a Son of Man/Messiah who would be lifted up on a Roman cross…and so they dismissively ask, “Who is this Son of Man?” It was equivalent to saying, “Who in the world do you think you are? Whatever ‘son of man’ you may think yourself to be, we want nothing of it.” The crowd in Jerusalem that day rejected the teachings of Jesus; and as such, they summarily rejected Jesus Himself.

Jesus understands the futility of correcting the crowd’s errant assumptions about the Messiah. Instead, Jesus provides a final warning for those who are inclined to reject Him. The warning is loving, direct, and even includes an invitation to those who will soon shout “crucify him.”

Jesus begins by saying, “The light is among you for a little while longer.” Now, before we go any further, can we agree that Jesus is obviously referring to Himself as the Light? Throughout
John’s gospel Jesus has been referred to as the Light and Jesus has even referred to Himself as the Light. In John 1:4-5 we read, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” In John 1:8 the apostle says of John the Baptist, “[John the Baptist] was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light,”…the Baptist came to bear witness about Jesus.

In John 1:9-10 the apostle writes, “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.”

The powerful imagery of light and darkness is common throughout John’s gospel, and it draws upon powerful imagery in the Old Testament as well. Who could forget Isaiah 9, a famous messianic prophecy that states: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of darkness, on them has light shone…for to us a child has been born, to us a Son is given…”

Jesus has come as the Light for those who walk in darkness; that has been a constant theme in John’s gospel. However, something has changed, did you pick up on it? Time is running out for the Jews in Jerusalem. Jesus warns them, “The light is among you for a little while longer.” Soon the opportunity to align themselves with Jesus will be over. The crucifixion will solidify their unbelief, and without Jesus, the coming darkness will be swift, horrible, and despairing. Jesus urges the unbelievers in vs. 35, Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.

Now, as modern-day readers, it is our inclination to immediately hear Jesus talking to us. However, when we read the Gospel, we must first consider the doom that awaited the citizens of Jerusalem in the first century…a dark destiny that Jesus foresaw and spoke of in passages such as Matthew 24 when Jesus predicts that “there will not be here [Jerusalem] one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” In just a few decades following the crucifixion of Jesus, Jerusalem will be destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. Hundreds of thousands of Jews will perish. The temple, along with much of the city, will be burned to the ground; and the practice of temple worship will be over for good. Jesus has foreseen the doom of Jerusalem, and even now in John 12 He is warning them about what is to come.

Now…would believing in Jesus save people from the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70? Yes! Why? Because prior to AD 70, the Christians will be run out of Jerusalem and scattered all over the middle east, Africa and Asia Minor! You might remember the great dispersion of the church as recorded by Luke in Acts 8:1. So, ironically, those who followed Jesus were spared from the destruction of Jerusalem, though they faced great hardships and persecution wherever they went.

So…here in John 12 Jesus is at first speaking a warning that has immediate consequences for the first century unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem and their families. He urges them, “Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you.” Darkness was coming for the unbelieving crowd…not just in the spiritual realm, but in the social, political, and physical realms as well.

Now, in addition to addressing the first century unbelievers in Jerusalem, we also know that Jesus was speaking eternal truth that extends to all ages, and His warning is as true and relevant today as it was in the first century. All of us have been invited to walk in the Light of Jesus
Christ as we find Him in the gospels. Through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, the Light of Christ continues to shine forth for those who will walk in it. But just like the citizens of Jerusalem, our time to walk in the Light is limited.

To be clear, our opportunity to walk in the Light is limited to the span of our earthly lives. We don’t get to walk in the light of Christ on the other side of death if we failed to walk in His light when on earth. As the story of the rich man and Lazarus so starkly reveals, once we breathe our last, our judgment is set, and there is nothing in scripture that suggests we have the opportunity to realign our allegiances after this life is over. In other words, it’s too late to bet on the Chiefs to win the Superbowl when the game is over! We must walk in the light while we have the light…but that opportunity is time sensitive for us all.

In some sense, the picture Jesus paints here is that of a man on a journey who has yet some distance to go, and the day is fading quickly. If he waits, if he dawdles, if he turns aside and gets distracted, the day will pass, and his journey will be overtaken by the darkness. His opportunity to walk in the light will have passed. In a world with no streetlights and no flashlights, walking in the dark was both dangerous and foolish in the ancient world. Why? Jesus states it clearly, “The one who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.”

Church, I know this verse may seem simple and obvious; but it is, in fact, profound. Let me appeal to the right side of your brain for a minute as we think deeply and philosophically about what Jesus just said and the system we all work on called a worldview.

Part of holding to a biblical worldview is living in the certainty that the heavens and the earth and human beings (most of all) were created by God for a purpose. The Bible helps us to understand that history has a beginning and an end…and all along the way, human history is going somewhere. This concept of “an end” is what we call teleology. The word comes from the Greek word telos which means “end.” Teleology asks begs the question, “To what end?” So, for a simple example, the telos or end of a professional football team is to win the Superbowl, right? That is the purpose of forming a team and playing the regular season. It is not the telos to simply play games or make money. The end of any professional football team is to win the Superbowl.

Now, in the world of philosophy, teleology is a pretty big deal. Teleology is the means of explaining phenomena in terms of purpose rather than cause. For example, we might ask, “What is the purpose of the human eye? What is the purpose of white blood cells? What is the purpose of the uterus? What is the purpose of the earth’s rotation? What is the purpose of the seed?”

It doesn’t take a philosopher to observe that if something has a purpose, then it was designed to have a purpose by One who both designs and has an end in mind. For example, a watch has a purpose…to tell time, right? But the watch does not just occur through random chance or natural causes…a watch has to be designed by an intelligent designer who has, in advance, designated the purpose of the watch even before it was made. This idea of telos is the starting place for the work of an engineer. The engineer is confronted with a problem or opportunity, and his challenge is to design some product that will serve the purpose—the product will solve the
problem or maximize the opportunity. Teleology means we begin something with the end in mind. We start walking because we are going somewhere...there is a destination.

So, think now about what Jesus just said. He said, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. Do you hear the teleology in that statement? The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. He does not know his destination. He does not know his telos.

Don’t miss the profound implications of this warning spoken by the Son of Man some 2000 years ago. To walk in the light is to know who we are, why we are, where we are, whose we are, and where we are going. This is what Christ brings us; and according to Him, there is no other LIGHT that allows us to see telos. We either walk in His light, or darkness overtakes us, and we do not know where we are going.

You know...in many ways, the Coronavirus has revealed much about our culture, our families, and even us as individuals. How? Well, think about it. Those who walk in the light of Christ know who they are, why they are, where they are, whose they are, and where they are going...they know their telos. So, when the threat of Covid comes around, those walk with Christ—though certainly concerned and thoughtful—are also those who ultimately say, “This pandemic may end my earthly life, but I know where I am going...” so I shall not despair. I’ve heard those words spoken by hundreds of Christ-followers in the past 9 months.

However, those who walk in darkness, apart from the Light, do not know their telos in this life or the life to come. So, when the darkness of a pandemic approaches, it overtakes the faithless travelers because they do not know who they are, why they are, where they are, whose they are, or where they are ultimately going. Thus, we often see a deep, almost paralyzing kind of fear from many who walk in darkness. Now, I know that sounds a bit harsh, but this is exactly what Jesus is saying: Without Me, says Jesus, there is inevitable darkness...and those who walk in darkness are lost. In John 8 Jesus literally and emphatically states: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Friends, take a moment and think about your life. Do you know who you are, why you are, what you were designed for, your purpose is? Do you know Who made you and Who has claimed you as His own? Do you know where you are going in this life and the life to come? Do you know your telos?

Or, have you adopted the worldview of humanism, agnosticism or atheism? These worldviews provide NO answers for why you are, who you are, what you are designed for, your purpose in this world, or the telos for this life and the life to come? Indeed, many have succumbed to the notion that it is brave, courageous, honest and humble to walk boldly in the darkness, as though walking in the darkness is the only intellectually honest response to a world that is ultimately an impersonal, immoral, unknowable accident of time and chance.

Church: I don’t buy it...and you shouldn’t either. Walking in the dark is both painful and foolish...particularly when the Light of God’s Word...the Logos...is both accessible and powerful to light our way. A biblical worldview aligns and explains reality as we find it.
Begin with what you can observe. An eye is brilliantly designed to see...that is it’s purpose. White blood cells are designed to fight disease...that’s why I’m still standing before you after having endured Covid. The woman’s uterus is designed to host conception and new life; none of us would be here if that were not true. The purpose of the earth’s rotation gives us day and night and the various seasons necessary to grow all the food that we depend upon for life on planet earth...food that miraculously comes from a seed—the package of God’s brilliant design and provision. Everywhere we look we see telos...we see design, purpose and an end to that which is brilliantly made. However, without the LIGHT, without Jesus...we won’t have the capacity to see what is TRUE. If we do not walk in the LIGHT, then inevitably the darkness will overtake us; and we will be those who walk in darkness, not knowing where we are going.

Heed the warning of He who is the Light of the World. The light is with us a little while longer. Walk while you have the light...lest darkness overtake you.

That leads me now to my second subheading:

II. Walking and Believing

Jesus beckons the unbelieving crowd to engage in two specific behaviors: walking and believing.

First, says Jesus, “Walk while you have the light.” Again, this teaching at first seems simple and obvious, but that is rarely the case when Jesus speaks.

To begin with, we must acknowledge that Jesus provides light for even the unbelievers to walk in...don’t miss that. Jesus is the Light for all men, even when they don’t believe in Jesus. This is exactly what John writes in the prologue, “The true light, which gives light to EVERYONE, was coming into the world.”

If there is any light at all in us, around us, and for us...that light is attributable to Jesus as the earthly representative of the whole Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Paul comments son this “general light” provided for all people Romans 1: “For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

Some light has been given to all people; such is why we find beauty, grace, giftedness, intelligence, and value in all people; we see the light of God’s majesty and divine nature in the brilliance of His creation. But it is not enough that we live in and enjoy the general light that is common for us all on planet earth. It is imperative, as Jesus states, for us to WALK in the light; lest darkness overtake us. Why? Because as we walk in the light, we come to know the light not as a natural phenomenon, or a philosophical concept, or a mathematical equation...we come to know the Light as a person whose name is Jesus! Think about it: we only really get to know another person when we walk with them through life. The longer we walk with another person, the more we come to love that person for who they are rather then what they can do for us, right? This is, at least, part of the invitation that Jesus is making to the unbelievers. It is as though He
is saying, “OK, so you do not believe in me…you do not believe my teaching…you have questions and hang ups…even so, walk with me. Walk while you have the light.” The invitation is loving and urgent for the crowd there in Jerusalem, even as it is for us all today. The Light is with us for just a little while, so we must walk while we have the light. Sadly, many people will turn away from the light. Although they were once drawn by the warmth and brilliance of Jesus, they will turn away, seeking to remove themselves from the Light. Why? Jesus gives us at least one reason in John 3:19-21: “19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

Many of us have come to believe that life is easier when we avoid the Light that reveals our darkness. In fact, many people have come to hate the Light because they know that the Light of Christ will expose that which they would refer to keep hidden. I get that. The closer we draw to Christ; the longer we walk in His Light; the more regularly we see our sin…and that can be somewhat painful and uncomfortable at times. However, what the lovers of darkness fail to realize is this: the Darkness does not love us back. The darkness leads only to despair, death, and an eternity without Light in the life to come. However, the LIGHT…who is Jesus…though He will expose our sin…is also the One who atones for that sin and offers us forgiveness through His blood on the cross. And here’s what that means: no more hiding. To walk in the Light is actually the most humble, honest, and liberating way a person can live. Jesus says that those who walk in the Light will learn to do what is true, and the world will come to see that any good thing in that person comes from God– and God will receive the glory He is due. Church: what is the chief end of man according to our creed? What is our telos? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever! This is what it means to walk in the light! We’ll return to this theme next week, but remember the telos for Jesus followers: we come to know the Light; we are transformed by the Light; and we bring glory to the Light…amen?

Now, Jesus not only invites the unbelievers to walk in the light; He also calls them to a second behavior: believing. Jesus says, “While you have the light, believe in the light.” There is a difference between walking and believing. Initially, we walk when we see the light and benefit from its presence, right? Even unbelievers can walk in the light when its is present and among them. In other words, we need not believe in the light when we can simply open the shades. The light that floods our room immediately does its work, and we can walk without stumbling.

However, as Jesus just said, the light is only going to be available for a time. Darkness is coming. Storms are coming. A season of testing is just around the corner when the light will not be so obvious, and it is then that we will need to believe, even when we cannot see. This is the essence of faith. To believe in the Light is to put our trust and confidence in the Light’s constancy, the Light’s efficacy, and the Light’s character.

Think about our relationship with the sun. We go long hours of the day and night, particularly during winter in the Midwest, without ever seeing the sun. Be it nighttime or one of the many short, gray days of February, we function for long periods of time without seeing the Sun and experiencing the pleasure of its warmth and light. Nevertheless, we believe the sun is constant. Though we cannot see it this evening, we have confidence that the sun will surely rise in the morning. We also put our trust in the efficacy of the sun; such that even though it is dark and
cold, we trust the sun is competent to warm up the earth, to bring about springtime, and to resurrect life in a world that otherwise appears to be dead. Finally, we trust that the sun is not out to get us. It is there for our benefit, though in our stupidity we can make the sun our enemy, right? But enmity is not the nature and character of the sun...thus we trust the nature and character of that which brings life and light to our world.

This is, in fact, what Jesus calls us all to do: to believe in His constancy; His efficacy; and His character...even in those difficult times when we do not have the pleasure of seeing Him as the crowd in Jerusalem has had the privilege of seeing Him in John 12. If we are going to walk in the light during the dark times, we must cultivate our belief in the Light while we have the opportunity to be in the Light...for a time will soon come for us all when we are called to walk by faith, not by sight, amen?

Let me conclude now with my third and final subheading:

### III. Becoming Sons of Light

For John’s Gospel, the last words of Jesus to the public are these found in vs. 36a: “While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

Walk...believe...become. Allow me to invoke the Geek with the Greek here for just a minute.

The Greek verbs for both walk and believe are written in the present imperative, and thus the effect is something akin to, “Keep on walking” and “Keep on believing”. It is a command to engage in ongoing, regularly repeating action. However, when Jesus says “become,” the verb is written in the aorist tense, which means it is a once and for all action. In other words, when those who are walking and believing then BECOME sons of light, that action is permanent and irreversible. It need only happen once. This is the language of transformation. It is the language of adoption. It is the telos for those who will walk in the light and believe in the light: we shall be changed...we shall be transformed...we shall be adopted. We will no longer be sons of darkness...we will become sons of light.

Now, I touched on this last week, but it bears repeating. If you recall, the ancients often used the phrase “son of...” idiomatically to emphasize the classification of something. In other words, if a person was particularly truthful, he might be referred to as a son of the truth. If a person was a particularly angry person, they might be referred to as a son of wrath. If you had some guys on your team who were prone to being a bit loud, you might call them “sons of thunder!”...which was in fact what Jesus named James and John, the sons of Zebedee!

So...we should keep this notion in mind when we hear Jesus promise that those who walk in the light and believe in the light are those who will once and for all become “sons of light.” In other words, our nature...our classification...our most telling attribute will be our transformation into the likeness of the One in whom we walk and believe! Our new classification will be that we have been transformed into the nature of the LIGHT!
This is no doubt the very point Jesus was communicating to His disciples after they had walked together for many miles when He says to them in Matthew 5:14-16, “Now you are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

Church, your telos is to be transformed into a son of light! Your telos is to serve as the light of the world, to give light to all who are in the house! To what end? So that the world will see the Light of Jesus in you, they will see the Light of Jesus in who you are and what you do, and our Father in Heaven will receive all the glory!

Colonial, I hope you can appreciate that it is precisely because of what Jesus says here in John 12:35-36 that our mission is “To be the light of Christ in a hurting culture so that the lost are found, the broken are made whole, the fatherless find hope, and our city is blessed.” Sons of Light are needed in this dark hour, for the hope of the world, and for the glory of our Father in heaven, amen? That is our telos. I know a lot of us are not there yet. We have too long walked in darkness, not knowing where we are going. So what shall we do? Heed our Lord’s warning and His loving invitation: Walk in the light…believe in the light…become sons of light…while the light is among us…lest darkness overtake you. It begins with a submission of our will…it begins with prayer. And then we start walking!

Let us pray together.