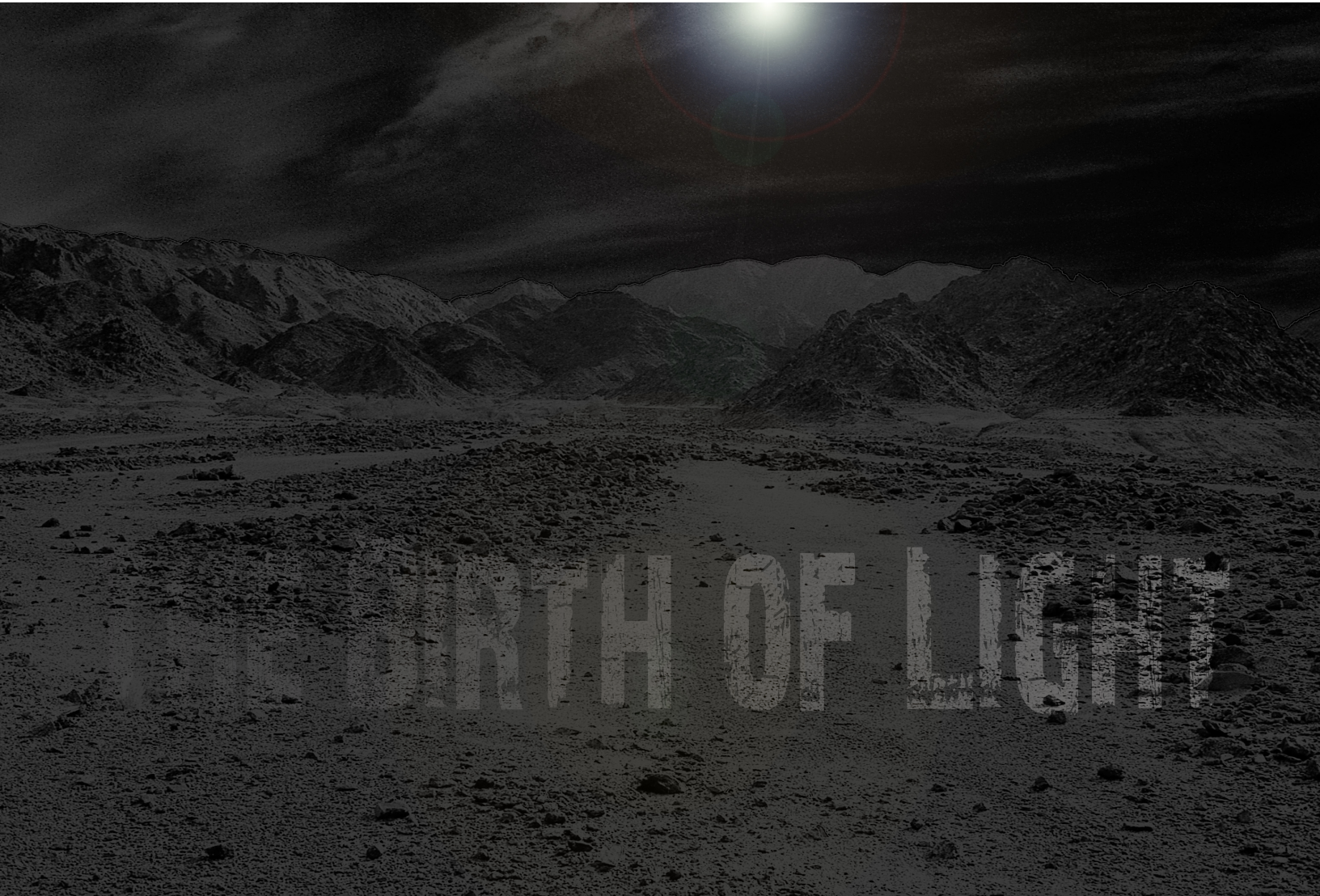


Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL



Therefore justice is far from us,
And righteousness does not overtake us;
We hope for light, but behold, darkness,
For brightness, but we walk in gloom.
We grope along the wall like blind men,
We grope like those who have no eyes;
We stumble at midday as in the twilight,
Among those who are vigorous we are
like dead men.

Isaiah 59:9-10

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AND THERE WAS LIGHT

HAVE STOOD IN THE MIDDLE OF A BARREN, lifeless desert on a night of not just darkness, but of utter blackness. An impenetrable blackness. A night with a few distant stars visible in the heavens, but no moon and no other light. Not the tiniest suggestion of light. A blackness so deep that one literally cannot see one's hand in front of one's face. As if sight itself has been rendered void, useless.

The cloying black of that desert night was tangible; one could *feel* it pressing in. The utter silence was deafening, creating an inescapable roaring in the ears. Here was a void that was *something*, a thing—an oppressive, cloying presence that made one's flesh crawl.

This is how creation began. Not as a soupy, quivering amorphous mass of shapeless gelatin, but as a black, featureless expanse devoid of life. The prophet Jeremiah borrowed from the language of Genesis to describe the devastation that would overwhelm the land of Judah if Israel did not repent of her sins.

I looked on the earth, and behold, it was
formless and void;
And to the heavens, and they had no light.
I looked on the mountains, and behold, they
were quaking,
And all the hills moved to and fro.
I looked, and behold, there was no man,
And all the birds of the heavens had fled.
I looked, and behold, the fruitful land was a
wilderness,
And all its cities were pulled down
Before the Lord, before His fierce anger.

Jeremiah 4:23-26

In the beginning God spoke into existence the heavens and the earth. He spoke into existence, from nothing, the essential universe of planets and stars. But all was dark. And it was not yet “good.” He had not yet spoken into existence that which would be the starting point of life.

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven. Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground.

Genesis 2:4-5

But God spoke creation into existence for *man*, and man would require light. So the second thing created on that first day—the first thing that He declared “good”—was light.

Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

Genesis 1:3-5

Now the sun and the moon had light: one the source, one merely reflecting. And now the earth could begin to become a suitable home for its intended occupants. But here, back in the formative, infantile moments of creation, was the pattern established: Darkness would represent waste, void, emptiness, barrenness, chaos; light would represent good—God's good. Thus the darkness of night would have no place in the sublime and future eternity of the new earth.

There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in [the new earth], and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

Revelation 22:3-5

“I HAVE COME AS LIGHT”

THERE WAS AN ORDER TO THINGS, back in the very beginning, all the way back when God in the Son was crafting what we know to be creation. The ancient (if anything set outside of time and place can indeed be termed “ancient”) second member of the Trinity systematically set in place the various parts of the universe. Each in their turn the earth, the waters and dry land, vegetation, the stars and planets, the beasts, and finally man were imagined, spoken, and made substantial by Him. But before everything else, the first thing He created by His first recorded words was light: “Let there be light.”

It must have been important, this thing called light. And it was. If it is dark when I go out to the barn to work on one of the tractors, the first thing I do is turn on a light. It is the beginning of the project. Since God possesses His own illumination, the light must have been for the benefit of creation itself—the growing things, the beasts of the field, and the odd, two-legged ones to follow.

The Lord God offered to the first two humans His glorious light, His unsullied, pristine, innocent light. He offered free of charge to man the opportunity to walk in this light. But, of course, he didn't. Man chose an alternate path. Instead of light and life, he chose darkness and death.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins...

Ephesians 2:1



So God let man run with that a while. And, over time, what God called “death” became what man called “living.” Over time man forgot that life without God is not life at all, but the darkness of death—estrangement from His light. But man grew content with such a “life,” for he had been blinded by the lie.

Satan does not scream at us; he doesn't beat us about the head and shoulders, forcing us through sheer might to his will. Instead, he whispers sweetly into our ears those things most pleasing, those things that will draw us pleasantly away from righteousness and toward evil. He paints himself in light to draw us away from the *true* Light, and toward the true darkness in which he lives.

And man listened, and was beguiled by his beauty. Thus man lived until the Son came down to His creation, to be born in flesh in a rude shed, cradled not by golden threads, but by a stone depression smeared with cow slobber.



And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

History invariably repeats itself. Even the cosmic, mystical process of universe-creation repeated the night the Son of God returned to His creation. Since man had followed his own path since he had been ejected from the Garden, the world was again in chaos, spiritually barren, confused, empty of soul. Into that desert God the Father sent His Son. And now once more, as before in the Garden, the true Light was in the world. And what man had been calling “life” would forever be counterfeit, for now the Source was once again in the world. He



would now offer the authentic thing to all who would believe: real life, real light.

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

John 8:12

Man still had a choice. Christ's life, and the light it would bring to those dwelling in darkness and death, was an offer—not a birthright. Death and darkness were still an option that many would choose. But now, for the first time since that fateful day in the Garden, man could live in hope; not only would there be the promise of eternal paradise with God—a return to that sublime communion once shared in the beginning—but even the believer's earthly sojourn would be illumined by His light and life. No more was man on his own. He now had not only a way out, but a way *through*.



The holy radiance of God was either invisible or lethal to mankind—until Christ. Finally we had a visible, touchable part of God—God without death.

The light of Jesus not only is a light that saves, it is a light that *reveals*. He reveals God to man through His personality and through his integrity. Jesus manifests the personality of God in flesh.

If darkness represents mystery, bleak foreboding, and evil, then the light of Christ represents revelation, hope, and righteousness. Jesus came into the world not to emphasize the mysteries of God, but to *explain* them.

[Jesus said,] "I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness."

John 12:46



Just as our eyesight eventually adjusts to the dark surroundings in which we find ourselves, so man has gradually become accustomed to the darkness in which he lives. Step from the brilliance of noonday sun into a small darkened room, and the new enclosure seems utterly black. But remain a few moments and, as the eyes adjust, the details of the room emerge.

Soon the black has been replaced by a dim light previously unnoticed.

Step from the illuminated interior of a house into the exterior black of night. At first glance there are few stars salting the night sky. But remain a while, standing in the darkness while the eyes adjust to the dim surroundings, and soon the arch overhead is populated by myriad bright lights.

Man has lived so long in the tepid gloom of his habitation that he imagines it to be normal. He imagines the dim, gray light to which he is accustomed to be the pinnacle of brilliance, the best it can be. And so he is satisfied. He is as satisfied as the complacent frog swimming in a beaker of gradually warming water, who doesn't notice when his bath becomes sufficiently hot to cook, rather than cleanse. He is as satisfied as the blind fish swimming so deep that eyes are no longer necessary to penetrate the gloom. So man has become blinded by his own mediocrity.

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 NKJV

Jesus came to replace the false brilliance of man's mediocrity with the true brilliance of His saving light. He came to show the people of His own creation that they needn't settle for the dim tawdriness of their self-imposed destiny, but could, instead, rise into the light of His salvation. He came to be a shining light to those trapped in darkness.

The darkness of man's surroundings represents the full brilliance of his own light. Jesus came as a blinding white light to a people more accustomed to the dim glow of their own faint illumination. His arrival hurt their eyes. And when man is suddenly confronted with painful brilliance, he covers his eyes and turns away.



Heaven is (and the new heaven and new earth will be) illumined by the unfading light of God's resplendent glory. Heaven has no external source of light: There is no sun or moon. There are no light bulbs. God Himself illumines His dwelling place with a brilliance we cannot yet imagine.

Without benefit of the believer's bodily resurrection—in which we will be utterly changed—we would certainly be blinded for all eternity by the contrast between earth's dim light and the white clarity of heaven.

When Jesus came to earth as the Savior of man, He not only brought light with Him, He *was* the Light.

In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

John 1:4-9

But just as our bodies will be adapted to heaven in the resurrection, so the Son's "body" was adapted to earth in His incarnation. Among other supernatural changes, the overpowering, blinding light of His presence was temporarily dimmed so that He might dwell with man. Though remaining fully God, the human flesh in which He dwelt could not possibly contain

or display the fullness of His glory. Then, too, Christ did not come to shine with His unfettered glory, but to serve,

who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:6-8

Even so, though dimmed, His light was still brighter than anything else, and sufficient to both relieve and reveal the hearts of men.

From the moment He entered this fallen world the holy light of heaven shone from Jesus. And with Him He brought a brighter path.

In Him we have the essential truth of God.



The light of Jesus reveals the truth of God to man, but it also reveals the purpose God intends for men and women who call upon His name. And that purpose is to worship and serve Him. To adore Him.

To *live* in the Light.

When He said, "Be perfect," He meant it. He meant that we must go in for the full treatment. It is hard; but the sort of compromise we are all hankering after is harder—in fact, it is impossible. It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird; it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad... If we let Him—for we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less.

C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

LIVING IN THE LIGHT

THE TITLE AND FIRST LINE of an old hymn by William Cowper woke me one morning.

*Sometimes a light surprises
the Christian while he sings;
it is the Lord who rises
with healing in His wings;
when comforts are declining,
He grants the soul again
a season of clear shining,
to cheer it after rain.*

I think I understand what the venerable author is saying; the Lord certainly can and does bring comfort and cheer, and often when we least expect it, but need it the most.

But it is also true that many Christians are “surprised” by the Lord far too often. God’s idea of salvation/sanctification is for the believer to *live* in the Light, to *dwell* in the light of Christ—the light He reveals, the light He supplies, the Light He is.



Because of the culture in which we physically dwell, it is easy for the Christian to confuse the biblical concept of “walking” with the temporal concept of “pursuing.” The regenerated child of God is already what he needs to be; he need not pursue Light as if it is something not yet apprehended. *Be what you are*, is Paul’s counsel to the church in Ephesus.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:6-10

Certainly we are to pursue goodness, purity; we are to daily pursue an increasingly mature level of sanctification, of growth in the ways of the Lord. This is our “walk.” But we need not pursue something that has already changed to the very core of our being who and what we are.

Instead of pursuing Light, we are to *claim* it. We are to acknowledge it as present reality in our life, and so live in it. Just as the Son’s incarnation revealed the Father to man, the light He brought into this world reveals its corruption and sin. More to the point, His light reveals *our* sin. When one lives in darkness, one cannot see the shadows; when one lives in Light, the shadows are exposed.

Daily walking in communion with our Lord, listening to His voice, learning from His example, committing ourselves to His lordship we will, by default, be walking in His light. And then one by one the shadows of rebellion will be revealed, confessed, and removed. Oh, new shadows will show themselves from time to time, but they will be quickly identified and dispatched.



On that night so very long ago when the Son of God came to live for a while in human flesh, He brought not just the offer of eternal life with Him in His glory, but the offer of a new way of life here on this earth.

In His Light.

