

JJ<sup>1</sup>

If you have ever gone and toured a cave, somewhere along the line they probably turned off the lights. If you've done that before, then you know real, physical darkness. I've done it a couple times. It can be even be a bit disturbing. It's so dark you can put your hand in front of your face and never even get a glimpse. Imagine now trying to find your way out of that cave in the dark! Even if there were paved paths and guardrails, it would be dangerous. You'd be lucky to make it out with just a few bumps and bruises. But chances are good you'd really hurt yourself. You could even die.

I bring this up because that darkness and trying to find your way through it is what we all are by nature when we come into this world. Our hearts are completely consumed with spiritual darkness. While you and I have been set free, in part, from this darkness, there is a whole world surrounding us that is still lost in it. And as one year ends and another begins, the world continues to invite us to join them in that darkness.

The world lures us saying that they have light and understanding. They say that they know what the future holds and they can protect us from it, but they don't. Sure, they can make some good

guesses, but the things that matter most are hidden from them. It's like walking through a cave without a light. You can feel around and make some guesses as where to turn next, but without a light you can't tell that the next step drops into a 100 foot pit!

There is only one thing that **LIGHTS THE WAY** through life. There is only one thing that can make any real sense of what we do see and what we cannot see. That thing is God's Word. That is why the psalmist writes: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

Looking at our sermon text, you see this is the 105<sup>th</sup> verse of this psalm. At a total of 176 verses, not only is Psalm 119 the longest psalm, but it is also the longest chapter of the Bible. This psalm is all about God's Word and its impact on our lives. How fitting as we look back at one year—in part illuminated by God's Word and his plan—and look into the next year—darkened with mystery, uncertainty and all the consequences of being sinful people living in a sinful world.

Because we are sinners living in a sinful world, it's much easier for us to see the darkness. By nature, that's all we see. But even as believers, it can be hard for us to

---

<sup>1</sup> JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

not become overwhelmed with the darkness of this world and our sinful hearts.

As we look into another year, we hear of and see all kinds of darkness. In the realm of politics, one side says a bright new day is dawning, while the other side says we should be terrified of the blackest darkness about to befall us. We look at the economy both here and abroad and see some succeeding and comfortable and others struggling and striving. There are wars being waged around the world both physically and digitally that ruin and destroy lives. The darkness of new diseases works its way into our vocabulary, like Zika.

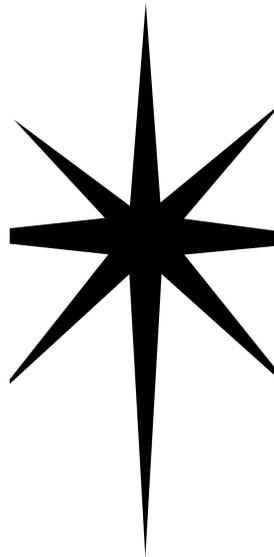
Yet the deepest uncertainty and darkness we face as a consequence of sin, is death. Whether it's expect or not, this darkness will strike us once again this year one way or another. The closer that darkness strikes us, the darker it is and the longer it lingers.

Darkness is everywhere. Without the Light of God, there can be only darkness, or the fake light of those who lie to themselves about the true nature of this world and their own hearts.

Ah, but friends, you and I know that even though darkness is all around us and even in our own hearts, there is one Lamp that **LIGHTS THE WAY** and shows us a bright and beautiful future. Yes, even when the present seems only to be dark-

ness and pointless. The psalmist knew and believed this. This is why he wrote: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

In essence, God says to us: "Just take hold of my Lamp. It will show you the way. It will break through the deepest darkness you can imagine, and illumine even the most desperate circumstance. Because with my Lamp I show you that I am always there and will never leave you. But, my child, you must hold on to the Lamp I give you. If you let it go, then you won't be able to see. If you let it go, you'll be lost in darkness all over again! But don't be afraid that you need to muster up your own strength to hold on. I'll give you the strength you need!"



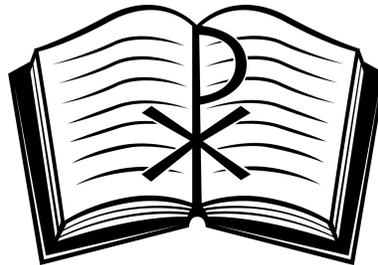
And friends, as we peer into the Lamp of the God's Word, we're given every reason to never let go of that Lamp. Consider what God's Word has shown you! God brought his light on the darkest day in history when Adam and Eve fell into sin by promising them and all mankind a Savior! That Light came into this world in Jesus Christ. God's light shines forth on the 2<sup>nd</sup> darkest day when the dark forces of man and fallen angel put God to death on a cross. Yet God used it to forgive sinful mankind for both his natural darkness and his daily proof of that darkness he gives through his sin!

God didn't stop their either. He came and illumined your heart at your baptism, giving you the gift of faith and marking you as his child forever! He continues to brighten your hears with the Lord's Supper every time you receive it with repentant and believing hearts! God's Lamp has lightened the burden on your heart in times of sorrow, grief and loss because when God says, "It'll be okay. Don't be afraid," his Word actually carries the power to do it! God's words aren't just empty sentimentalities of sinful people who don't know what else to say. They're real and powerful!

Friends, this and so much more is why we don't cast aside the Lamp of God's Word and follow the world's plan or ways. That's just darkness leading to more darkness. The world trying to show us the way is like a lost first-time visitor to a cave trying to tell the expert park ranger they can find a better way out of a cave with no light! No, friends, the Lord's "word is a lamp to [your] feet and a light for [your] path." Sure, what God says may not always make sense to the soggy noodle. Then again, God never said it would. His ways are greater than our own. That's why he simply says, "Trust me."

Martin Luther speaks to this point in his comments on this verse: "[God's Word] is a lamp, because it guides the feet and the heart, and faith does not require understanding. Not understanding, but willing,

not knowing but doing, what is *heard* is the right thing. And you will not go astray if you believe and go, even though you do not see. Only walk securely in what you have heard, because His Word will be a lamp to your feet and a light for your paths. Nothing is required except that you do what you do not know, perform what you do not understand, go where you do not know [the way], following the leading of the Word, and become foolish, dismissing your own thought." (*Luther's Works, AE, Vol. 11, p. 485*)



Friends, as we move into a new year, hold on to God's Lamp. His Word will **LIGHT THE WAY**. As we look for the right path to follow, God's Word will illumine that path. When darkness clouds our vision, especially through loss or sin committed

against us, often God's path simply says, "Just trust me. I'll light the way. I've already got the path prepared for each one of you. Just follow my light and you won't have to be afraid of where it will lead. It will lead you into your heavenly home where there will be no spiritual or physical darkness!"

The Lord bless us as we follow him into another year filled with his mercy and grace so that we also might bring that Light to others still lost in the darkness. Amen.

SDG<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for “To God Alone Be The Glory”. This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn’t about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

Artwork by Ian M. Welch—Copyright 2013 Ian M. Welch. All Rights Reserved. [paramentics.com](http://paramentics.com)