

INTRODUCTION

Since this is my final message in the country music series, here are my final nominations for the "Funniest Country Song Titles:" I'm Just a Bug on the Windshield Of Life; If You Don't Leave Me Alone, I'll Go and Find Someone Else Who Will; You're the Reason Our Kids are so Ugly; You're the Hangnail in My Life, And I Can't Bite You Off. And finally: Tennis Must be Your Racket 'Cause Love Means Nothin' to You. Hank Williams wrote 66 songs, and most of them were heart-rending tunes like "Cold, Cold Heart" and "I'm so Lonesome I Could Cry." However, he did write and record some happy songs including: "Good bye, Joe, me gotta' go, me oh, my oh. Me gotta' go pole the pirogue down the bayou; my Yvonne, the sweetest one, me oh, my oh; son of a gun we'll have big fun on the bayou; Jambalaya and a crawfish pie and a fil'e gumbo; 'cause tonight I'm a gonna see myma chazemio. Pick guitar; fill fruit jar, and be gay-o. Son of a gun we'll have big fun on the bayou."

Spiritual themes run through many of his songs, his most enduring gospel song is "I Saw the Light." There's an interesting story behind the song. One night when Hank was only nineteen, he was driving home to Montgomery from a concert when he got lost. He got frustrated because he didn't recognize any of the landmarks around him. Then he looked in the distance and he saw the light at the top of the broadcast tower for the Montgomery radio station WSFA, and the light steered him safely home. After that experience he wrote these words: I wandered so aimless, life filled with sin. / I wouldn't let my dear Savior in. / Then Jesus came like a stranger in the night. / Praise the Lord, I saw the light." The chorus went: "I saw the light, I saw the light! / No more darkness, no more night. / Now I'm so happy, no sorrow in sight. / Praise the Lord, I saw the light!"

The Bible is full of references about "seeing the light." For instance, the words in Hank Williams' song are almost identical to the conversion experience of the Apostle Paul. He also had an experience of "seeing the light." It's found in Acts 26. Paul told this story to King Agrippa when he was being held prisoner. In his experience, it's possible to identify four stages that he went through as He was seeking God. I believe these are four spiritual stages people experience today as well. The first stage of seeking God is

STAGE ONE: WANDERING IN DARKNESS

We'll pick up in the middle of Paul's testimony in Acts 26:9-11: "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them."

Like the lyrics in Hank's song, Paul spend the first part of his life wandering in spiritual darkness.

There are millions of people who are wandering in spiritual darkness. The problem is when you're living in darkness you don't ever realize it until you see the light. Paul thought he was

really in touch with God, and it wasn't until he saw the light of Jesus that he realized just how deep his darkness had become. There are two warnings found in Paul's story.

(1) You can be religious and lost!

Saul was more religious than any of us will ever be. Back in verse five he told Agrippa, "According the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee." He had been circumcised on the eighth day of his life, and could even trace his lineage back to the tribe of Benjamin. He called himself "a Hebrew of Hebrews." He was the perfect Jew. (See Philippians 3:4-6). He'd never touched a pork chop or a catfish. He'd never worked on the Sabbath, committed adultery or told a lie. He was a good guy—but he was in darkness.

Like Saul, you can be a good, religious person, and still be spiritually blind. You can have your name on a church roll, and even attend church and still be lost. You may think because you believe in God you're going to heaven. But the Bible says in James 2:19, "You believe that there is one God—good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder." Religion doesn't deny God; instead it reduces everything about God down to a set of rules and rituals. As I'm writing this, rock singer Madonna has made news again because she has made a pilgrimage to Israel because of her religion (Kabbalah is the latest new-age pseudo-religion). God isn't satisfied with your religion. He is seeking to have a relationship with you.

(2) You can be zealous and wrong!

In Acts 26:7 Saul told Agrippa he "earnestly served God day and night." His service involved wiping out the heretics who were following Jesus. He was sincere and zealous in this task. He was like a holy warrior involved in a holy war to destroy the infidels. Sound familiar? We're currently involved in an international war with religious fanatics who are so sincere and zealous that they're willing to die for what they believe. Worse than, they're willing to kill in the name of what they believe. They have labeled everyone who doesn't embrace their beliefs as an infidel who should be killed.

There's a popular saying that goes: "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you're sincere." If zeal or sincerity is the basis of truth, then Islam is true and Jesus is mistaken because most people who claim to believe the Bible aren't zealous enough to get out of bed on Sunday morning! But the validity of truth is not based upon the sincerity of those who embrace it. Truth is objective, not relative. You can be sincere and sincerely wrong. Before a person sees the light of God's truth, they are wandering in darkness. Next is:

STAGE TWO: SEEING GOD'S LIGHT

Paul described what happened next in "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground."

Like Hank, Paul could have sung, "I saw the light! I saw the light!" There are two Biblical reasons why seeking and finding God can be compared to seeing the light.

1. God's character is expressed as light

The Bible says, "God is light," but that doesn't mean "light is God." In the beginning of creation, there was no light, only chaos and darkness. The first recorded words of God in the Bible are "let there be light." (Genesis 1:3) And when God said it, it happened. There are dozens of scriptures that compare God's mystery and majesty to light: "You are resplendent with light...He wraps himself in light as with a garment...Who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light..." (Psalm 76:4; 104:2; I Timothy 6:16)

Light is such a common part of our lives we take it for granted. As smart as man is, we still don't even know exactly what light is. We've broken it down into its spectrum, and even harnessed it for x-rays and lasers, but we still don't really know what light is. One of the ongoing discussions in quantum physics is the mystery of light. Peter Russell, a quantum physicist has written: "We never see light itself. The light that strikes the eye is known only through the energy it releases. This energy is translated into a visual image in the mind. Although the image appears to be composed of light, the light we see is a quality appearing in consciousness. What light actually is, we never know."

Albert Einstein was the first to suggest the speed of light is the only constant in the universe. He proposed his theory of relativity in 1905, but he still didn't understand light. He wrote: "For the rest of my life I want to reflect on what light is."

In the same way that light is everywhere, yet we cannot understand it, so it is true with God. He is everywhere, but He is like "unapproachable light." How, then can we see the light? That leads to the next truth:

2. God's spotlight is Jesus

You can't look directly at the sun without something to protect your eyes. You can't approach the brightness of God without having a "filter." Something or Someone who can allow you see. That is who Jesus is. God put His spotlight on Jesus. He was saying, "If you want to see me, just look at my Son." When Jesus began His earthly ministry the Bible announced, "The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." (Matthew 4:16) Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

It's popular to try to explain Jesus away as just another religious teacher; a good man. Many religious leaders claimed they could see the light, but only Jesus claimed to *be* the light. Many religious leaders taught they knew could find the way—Jesus claimed to be the way. Others said they knew the truth—Jesus said, "I AM the truth." Other religious promise to improve life—Jesus said, "I am life. Have you seen this light yet? Have you come understand just who Jesus really is? The next stage is:

STAGE THREE: OBEYING GOD'S VOICE

Let's go back to Paul's account to find out what happened after he was blinded by the light. Acts 26:14-16: "And I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' 'I am Jesus,

whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 'Now get up and stand on your feet.'"

God tried to communicate with Saul before this, but he wasn't listening. God sent a bright light that knocked him to the ground to get his attention. It was a scary experience that blinded Paul for three days. Maybe God is trying to talk to you, too, but you're not listening.

Jesus said, "Saul, Saul, why are hurting me? The more you keep kicking a sharp stick, the more you're going to get hurt." Paul's first question was: "Lord, who are you?" When your mind is opened to the truth about God, the first question you must ask is: God, who are you? God's answer is always Jesus. As God gets your attention there are a couple of very important lessons to learn:

(1) Seeing the light is not the same as following the light

You can believe in God, and even have some kind of religious experience in which you "see the light." But unless you obey the voice of God, all the light will do is confuse you more.

I've always been a seeker of truth. My dad used to say, "You learn something new everyday." I've tried to do that. But some people aren't even looking for the truth. Their attitude is "my mind is already made up; don't confuse me with the facts." Or they say, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." Well you're not a dog, and truth isn't a trick.

A fact can be true without being the truth. $2 + 2 = 4$ is a fact, but it won't change your life. Jesus died on the cross for your sins is a fact, but it is also life changing truth. You can see the light and believe the facts about Jesus without embracing the truth and making it your own.

For instance, consider Hank's lyrics again: I wandered in darkness; life filled with sin. / I wouldn't let my dear Savior in. / Then Jesus came like a stranger in the night; / Praise the Lord, I saw the light! It's obvious Hank knew Jesus was the light, but he still called him a stranger. When you learn about the self-abusive lifestyle of Hank, one must wonder if he ever followed the light at all. The second lesson is:

(2) Knowing about Jesus is not the same as knowing Jesus

You can acknowledge Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on the cross for your sins, and was raised from the dead the third day and still go to hell. Eternal life is knowing Jesus, not knowing *about* Him.

Jesus said, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (John 17:3) Paul knew all the stories about Jesus, but he didn't really know Him until God knocked him off his feet and blinded him. Later Paul would write in Philippians 3 that he was a good, zealous, obedient Jew who kept the law, but compared with the priceless joy of knowing Jesus, all those religious attainments were like sewage.

STAGE FOUR: SHARING GOD'S LIGHT

You never graduate from the Christian life until you come to face to face with Jesus through your death or His return. But sharing His light (truth) with others is the final stage you should

seek in your relationship with Him. Meanwhile back to the Damascus road: Jesus told Paul *what* he was to do with the light. "I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from you own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." So, then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven." (Acts 26:16-18)

God told Paul He had a job for him. Now it was his job to do what had just happened to him. He was to take God's light and use it to open the eyes of others who were wandering in darkness. God wants you to do the same, too.

When Hank Williams wrote his song, he referred to being happy. The chorus said: "I saw the light, I saw the light! No more darkness, no more night!" And all of that is absolutely true, but then he said, "Now, I'm so happy, no sorrow in sight. Praise the Lord! I saw the light." As a nineteen-year-old rising star, I'm sure Hank was happy, and there wasn't much sorrow in his life. But during the next ten years he would face the pain of alcoholism, the death of his mother, divorce, and more sorrow than he could imagine. Then when he died drunk in the back seat of his baby blue Cadillac, there didn't seem to be much light in his life.

But seeing the light is not about a good feeling. When you meet God, it is not for your enjoyment, it is for your employment. God isn't after you to give you a warm feeling, but to give you a purpose for living. Are you truly walking in God's light? There are at least two irrefutable proofs to demonstrate that you are walking in the light of God's goodness:

(1) A changed life

The Bible says: "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth." (I John 1:5-6) On the road to Damascus, Paul was changed from a persecutor to a preacher; from a hater to a helper; from someone who wanted to kill Christians to someone who wanted to make Christians. What happened? He had a Son stroke. The Son of God flashed into his life, and He was changed.

Maybe you've heard of the television show "Extreme Makeover." In it, a rather ugly person is chosen, and then a team of specialists transforms the ugly person in a beautiful person. After the process, you get to compare the "before" picture of the patient with the "after" picture. There have been some pretty amazing results. But what would be your reaction if the "after" picture looked exactly like the "before" picture? You would assume this person really hadn't had a makeover, or if they had, it was a failure!

The same is true spiritually. The Bible says, "If any person is in Christ, they are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (II Corinthians 13:5) When you become a Christian, you don't look any different, but you think and act in a new way. It's a spiritual extreme makeover. But if your "after" picture looks exactly like your "before" picture, you might have seen the light, but you're not walking IN the light. The second way to know for sure if you're in God's light:

(2) A concern for others in darkness

God told Paul to take his light and shine it so others could know Him. Are you concerned for others who are walking in darkness like you once were? If you're in the light, you will have a burden to share God's love with others. The Bible says, "Whoever loves his brother lives in the light...but whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness." (I John 2:10-11)

The Passion of Paul's life can be described in these words: "I want to know Jesus and I want to make Him known!" (Philippians 3:10; Ephesians 6:19) God's love and grace illuminated his life and he committed himself to giving God's light to others. Jesus gave us this command: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

Hank Williams was a pioneer in country music, yet he lived a sad life and died a tragic death at age 29. I like all kinds of music, including country music, but I must admit my favorite kind of music is contemporary Christian music.

A few weeks ago, one of our members, Shirley Smith, told me a spiritual giant recently died. She was referring to a friend of hers named Bob Oldenburg. Bob Oldenburg was a Christian music pioneer who went to be with Jesus last May. In my opinion, Bob Oldenburg was the Father of Contemporary Christian music. In 1967, Bob Oldenburg wrote a radical, revolutionary musical called "Good News." It was the first "youth musical," and it employed drums and guitars. It was the first Christian music with a beat. In the years before he died, Bob Oldenburg, who spent most of his ministry in Texas, visited some churches that offered "contemporary worship." He once mentioned to his wife, Martha, that the volume and beat was a little "too much" for him. She replied, "Well, if you don't like it, look in the mirror, because you started it!"

When I was a teenager, my youth choir presented "Good News." The music was so controversial we weren't allowed to sing it in the sanctuary. It was long before the days of churches having gyms, so we were finally allowed to present it in the Floral High School gymnasium.

The final song Bob included in "Good News" was entitled "Do You Really Care?" (while Bob compiled "Good News" and wrote most of the songs, this song was written by Bill Cates) Through the years, I've never been able to hear the words to that song because it was the first time I understood millions of people were searching in darkness. The words said: "People grope in darkness; Searching for the way. / Do you know of someone / You can help today? / Do you really care? Do you know how to share/ With people everywhere. / Do you really care?" If you have seen the light, and obeyed God's voice, you WILL care enough to share God's light to those people who are groping in darkness.

CONCLUSION

Every person reading these words is on a journey in relation to God. Either you are on a journey *to* God, or you are on a journey *with* God. In which stage do you find yourself at this moment? Are you wandering in spiritual darkness? Have you seen the light? That is, you have made the discovery that only Jesus can help you. Seeing the light is not enough. Have you obeyed God's

voice? Have you repented of your sins? Have you publicly professed your faith through baptism? Are you sharing God's light with those who are now where you once were—in darkness?

It's interesting to notice the different ways animals respond to light. When a cockroach is exposed to the light, it goes scampering toward the nearest darkness. When a deer is spotlighted, it often freezes, without moving. On the other hand, a moth always turns and flies right toward the light.

People respond in different ways, too. You may be running from Jesus. Or you may be frozen by fear or doubt. But God wants you to turn from your darkness and run into the God's light. Then you can not only sing, "I saw the Light" but you can also sing, "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine!"

OUTLINE

STAGE ONE: WANDERING IN DARKNESS (v. 9-11)

- (1) You can be religious and lost!
- (2) You can be zealous and wrong!

STAGE TWO: SEEING GOD'S LIGHT (v. 12-14)

1. God's character is expressed as light

"You are resplendent with light...He wraps himself in light as with a garment...Who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light..." *Psalm 76:4; 104:2; I Timothy 6:16*

2. God's spotlight is Jesus

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." *John 8:12*

STAGE THREE: OBEYING GOD'S VOICE (v. 14-16)

- (1) Seeing the light is not the same as following the light
- (2) Knowing about Jesus is not the same as knowing Jesus

STAGE FOUR: SHARING GOD'S LIGHT (v. 16-18)

Two infallible proofs that you're in the light:

- (1) A changed life (I John 1:5-7)
- (2) A concern for others in darkness (I John 2:10-11)

"Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." *Matthew 5:16*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes