

Out of Darkness Into Light

“They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.”
Isaiah 9:2 (KJV)

I had spent a cold afternoon in the woods precariously perched on a climbing tree stand. The wintery wind felt like it was rushing unimpeded down from the North Pole, singing a dirge through the stubborn red oak leaves over my head that would not fall until replaced by new growth in the spring. As the weak sun dipped near the horizon rain clouds moved in and obscured the last feeble rays of warmth causing my ears to turn to ice inside the flaps on my cap. Then as a misting rain mixed with sleet began to fall icicles formed in my mustache encouraged by the stinging tears streaming down my checks. A chill penetrated the layers of clothing in which I had bundled myself causing me to shiver in spite of my attempts to remain motionless.

I steadfastly remained as darkness settled hoping a trophy buck would materialize ghost-like out of the mist as they have the ability to do. Mentally I questioned the sanity of a man my age leaving the comfort of a recliner in a warm house to spend the afternoon in such weather. But I had not been successful yet and the hunting season was almost over. As darkness settled I delayed returning to the house until suddenly I realized the freezing rain had increased in intensity and all hope of spotting any game had passed.

I unbuckled my safety harness and removed the shells from my gun preparing to lower my stand to the ground. I reached in my coat pocket for the bright flash light I always carried to the woods in the afternoon, only to discover it was not there. Just about that time a pack of hungry coyotes came together between me and the house and sang a blood curdling chorus as they gathered for their nightly hunt. It is said that coyotes are shy predators that attack only small prey while resolutely avoiding contact with humans. My mind may have accepted that premise, but the hair on my neck did not as it bristled at the sound.

Once on the ground I was alone in the dark woods. The wind drove icy pellets in my face like BBs from an air rifle as I pushed through vicious briars and brambles with only a dim miner's light from the visor of my cap to find the trail and navigate my way out of the darkness while sloughing through water and mud trying to avoid low hanging limbs, unseen vines and protruding roots that might cause me to fall face down in the freezing mud. I found little comfort in the fact that the coyotes had grown silent.

It must have been about fifteen minutes later, although it seemed much longer, when I stumbled out of the tangle of brush growing where large oak and hickory trees had been selectively cut a few years prior. I breathed a sigh of relief because I could now see a glimmer of light from the patio shimmering in the rain through the young pines and oaks

which had recently been set out where there had once been an open pasture. My pace quickened and I walked confidently from this point onward toward the ever increasing light knowing a trail was clear and would soon lead me to the warmth and safety of home. I would now confidently walk in the light that shone brighter with each step I took.

Effie met me at the door with an indulgent smile and a warm hug. Through the years she had come to accept the foibles of my deer hunting without judgment. As I entered the door she wordlessly helped me out of my wet coat and coveralls and laid them on top of the washing machine. The warmth of the house began to penetrate through my wool shirt and insulated underwear as I made my way to the bathroom where I hastily replaced them with sweat pants and a baggy shirt. Then we sat down at the kitchen table with bowls of chili she had lovingly prepared and I rested in the warmth and safety of the light and the comforting presence of love.

Soon I reflected, as I am prone to do, upon the difference between walking in spiritual darkness, with its hidden dangers and perils, and living by the light of faith. The word of the prophet Isaiah came to mind as he prophesied to a nation that had shunned the light of God and walked in spiritual darkness for generations. The miracles of the past had been discounted and forgotten. God had delivered them from bondage in Egypt and set them on a journey into a land of promise. He had been present in a cloud by day which shielded them from unseen dangers and a pillar of fire by night to guide them on their journey. That journey had been long and fraught with dangers before the Jordan River was crossed and the land possessed.

In the centuries that followed a sense of God's presence had been lost. The miracles of the journey had been forgotten. The light of God's presence had gone out for all except a few prophets who saw God's people walking in great spiritual darkness. Isaiah prophesied of a coming messiah through whom the light of God would once again shine into the hearts of His people and guide them out of their darkness. His light would shine anew. Wise men would follow the guiding star unto him and never again walk in spiritual darkness.

Isaiah foresaw a day when the illuminating light of Immanuel would enter into the world as a baby in a manger. Wise men would follow the leading star until they came into His presence and presented precious gifts and knelt before him in adoration and worship. They found the light of the world and would never again walk in darkness.

Just as the light from the patio led me home that cold and rainy night, light shining through Immanuel unto the One who was revealed as the true light continues to guide wise men who seek to find their way through a dark and dreary world

"I am the light of the world: he that followeth after me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." John 8:12

