

## **“A Light with a Special Purpose”**

**Romans 1: 1—7**

**You are a light with a special purpose. Yes, you. Did you know that? Like a beautiful Christmas display, you are a light with a special purpose. Do you believe that? Or do you want to debate that?**

**Well, let me tell you about someone who became a light with a special purpose. His name was Paul. I say, he “became a light,” because his life wasn’t always that way. He would be the first to tell you that for a long time, he was filled with darkness.**

**As a young man, he went by the name of Saul, and he lived a life of strict obedience to the religious laws and ceremonies of his people. Along the way, he dedicated himself to persecuting and arresting anyone who proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah. And if such people ended up dying for the Christian cause, so be it.**

**This is the same man who, years later, was moved to write that he was “a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.” But it wasn’t always that way, and that is so important to remember when you don’t feel like you could possibly be a light with a special purpose; when you feel like you’re not good enough, or you don’t live up to it, we need to remember how this works; how you become a light.**

**You see, Saul-who-becomes-Paul did not choose to become a servant of Jesus. If he had chosen anything, it was to be a shining success on his own terms. And he had many reasons to be proud of his own resume: in his letter to the Philippians he says: “I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.” He was trying to self-achieve goodness. And so, he was digging a deeper hole into darkness, until that unforgettable day when he was on the road to Damascus and the “light from heaven shone around him” (Acts 9:3). From that moment on, Saul’s life was no longer his own. From that moment on, Saul would begin learning what it meant to be “set apart for the gospel of**

**God.” In that moment, he met Jesus in light and word, and began to learn that the only goodness that counts is the goodness of Jesus. The only resume that counts is Jesus’ record of perfection. In a flash, Jesus chose Saul, and Jesus began giving His perfection to Saul as a holy gift of grace. And Saul accepted his new status as a servant/slave of Jesus; he answered the call to be someone sent out with this good news; he was set apart for the gospel of God. Set apart to be a light with a special purpose.**

**Do you see? That setting apart is God’s work. It is all God’s work. He does the setting apart. He does the choosing. He does the cleansing. He put the light of grace inside of Saul and sent him out to shine. That’s how it works. That’s how he became a light. And guess what? That’s how you have become a light.**

**You are a light with a special purpose. I can say that because God set apart his own Son for a special purpose—for the most special purpose. Jesus was set apart to be born of a humble mother. Born in a no-frills stable. Born as a direct descendant of King David. Born to fulfill God’s promise to Adam and Eve—to send someone to crush the head of the serpent. Born to live a perfect life, and to die a death that would cancel our imperfection. Born to greet the early light of Easter morning in a resurrected body. As Paul himself writes, “Jesus was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.” The special purpose of Jesus was to do all the things that you and I could never do, and not only do them well, but do them without a single mistake. Jesus creates the perfect record of loving God and loving neighbor and then he lets you have the benefits of that perfection; he lets his goodness count for you. You don’t have to try to achieve anything to get God’s blessing. In the good news of Jesus, born for you, God is putting the light of grace in you. And when God puts the light of his grace in you, he always sends you out to shine.**

**It is almost time for Christmas. When you plug in that string of lights, when you light that special candle, let it tell you that you are a light with a special purpose. You are someone who carries around the goodness of Jesus. You are a gift to the world.**