

The Light of the World

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[0 : 00] I'd invite you now to look for a little while at John chapter 8 and verse number 12. John chapter 8 and verse number 12, where we find the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. Jesus said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

I think in winter time when days are often dull, although this morning was a lovely bright morning, but we're very conscious of the long nights, the darkness, and we long for the brightness and the warmth of summertime. People all over the world and in every generation I think have been fascinated by light and darkness, by the sun, the moon, and the stars, and indeed philosophers in ages past conceived of a never-ending struggle, never-ending struggle between the forces of good and evil, which they characterized by light and darkness.

And the Bible itself draws quite a distinction between the light and the darkness. These two great elemental features of the world in which we live. Where you have light, the darkness is banished. Where you have darkness, there is no light. And these two don't live together. We have a very beautiful illustration of this in the ninth chapter of John, in the verses that we read together, where Jesus met a man who had been blind from birth. This man for all his life had walked in darkness. And Jesus, after applying mud to his eyes and telling him to go and bathe his eyes in the pool of Siloam, this man in the beautiful little phrase that finishes the story, that part of the story anyway, he came home seeing.

For the first time in his life he was walking in the light. And here in John chapter 8 and verse 12, Jesus makes this tremendous claim, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. The immediate context of this verse was the great festival of tabernacles in Jerusalem. The city at that time would have been crowded with people. And as the festival drew to its close, two significant ceremonies took place, or two aspects of all the ceremonies that were held during that week took place.

And they prompted Jesus to call people's attention to himself, who becomes the fulfilment of what is depicted by so much of these Old Testament ceremonies. We read in chapter 7 that on the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus said, if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. And what prompted that saying of Jesus was that during the week, water was taken from the pool of Siloam and poured into a basin that was placed beside the altar at the temple there. But on the last great day of the feast, that part of the ceremony stopped.

[5 : 59] There was no longer water poured out, but Jesus said, I am the water of life. If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. And he says, when we do that, the water that he gives will never run out. We will never be thirsty. Fresh water is at where all the time depicting as John says, life given by the Holy Spirit in the Christian's heart.

And then finally, there were four great lights illuminating the great court at the temple.

And as the festival drew to its close, these lights were extinguished and darkness would have descended on the scene. And it was then that Jesus declared, I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

And it's thinking of that statement that I want us to spend a little while together this morning. And to highlight what Jesus means by claiming to be the light of the world, I want us to think first of all about what the Bible has to say about darkness, because that's instructive I think, leading us to think of Jesus' statement. For in the Bible, darkness invariably has a negative connotation. This is first drawn to our attention at the very opening page of the Bible in Genesis chapter 1 and in verses 1 to 3, we read that the earth was formless and empty and darkness was over the face of the deep. There was no light and there was no life. And later on in the Old Testament, when the children of Israel wanted to be released from their bondage in Egypt and the Pharaoh of the time refused to let them go, God sent plagues upon Egypt and one of these plagues was a plague of darkness.

[9 : 12] It was a felt darkness that caused horror among the people and it epitomized the stubborn unbelief and rebellion of Pharaoh against the word of God and the demands of God. And when you go through the Old Testament, you find that darkness is so often illustrative of that kind of unbelief and of rebellion. In the book of Job, in chapter 37, Job brings together ignorance and darkness, the darkness of ignorance. And in Psalm 107, verse 10, we read of the darkness of rebellion against God. Proverbs speaks about the darkness of wickedness and you find in the Gospel by John which makes a lot of the interplay of light and darkness. In chapter 3 and in verse 19, we read that men love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. Matthew mentions in chapter 22, the dreadful doom of those who do not believe in God and they are cast out into outer darkness, the darkness of damnation and judgment forever. It reminds me of the saying of Samuel Rutherford, the Old Scottish Divine, who for a time was put in prison in Blackness Castle further up the fourth. And in writing to a friend, he said that he was glad that the darkness of Blackness was not the blackness of darkness forever, making a play of the words, but their very solemn words, if we persist in our unbelief. Darkness then is a biblical synonym for unfaith and God's judgment upon it. And the tragedy is that that is where we are all placed unless we come to know Christ as the light of the world in our lives. Indeed in chapter 5 of Ephesians and in verse 8 there Paul says that we are all darkness itself. It's the state of a person who is ignorant of the grace and the mercy of God in his life or her life.

And surely we must think that that is a scary thing. And the tragedy is that left to ourselves, there's nothing that we can do about it. The lights are out. At best we can only stumble in the darkness and we become more and more and more lost. But, and it's a glorious but, that is not how God leaves us. So if we've been looking at darkness, let us now look at the light. What does the Bible say about the light? Well let's go back to Genesis chapter 1 again. We read that darkness covered the face of the deep and God said, let there be light and there was light. And following that, life was created. God brought life.

And in Psalm 104 the psalmist tells us that God himself is light. And in a very homely phrase, it says that God wraps himself round with light as with a garment. As if he's putting a warm blanket around himself. It is a blanket of light. And in him is no darkness at all.

[14 : 51] In other words, God is perfect, perfectly holy, perfectly good and above and beyond all contamination with sin. He is the holy other dwelling in light. A light so intense that we sinful creatures cannot come near. And yet God from the beginning shared his light with people in mercy and in grace. Remember, I was saying one of the plagues in Egypt was a plague of darkness. But we read that among the children of Israel and the land of Goshen where they were living, there was light. Light because God was among them.

And when the people of Israel eventually came out of Egypt, God travelled with them, protecting them in a very visible way with a pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire by night. Not so many weeks ago we were celebrating the coming into the world of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. And in one of the most quoted chapters of the Old Testament in connection with the coming of Christ, I say a chapter 9, chapter prophesying about the Saviour's coming. We read concerning this that the people walking in darkness saw a great light on those living in the land of the shadow of death. A light has dawned. And John in the beginning of his letter of his gospel tells us that when Jesus came into the world, in him was life. And that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Jesus has come to take us out of the darkness, the darkness of our sin and of our helplessness and the eventual blackness of darkness forever. This is one of the great themes of John's gospel, explaining to us how Jesus is the light of the world and how he saves sinners like us. Of course the other writers of the New Testament find this fascinating as well. Remember how Paul was converted on the road to Damascus when a great light shone round about him? Suddenly the Bible says, and he was changed. Later in Damascus itself we read that scales fell from his eyes like scales of darkness as it were. And Paul, like the man in the story in chapter 9 of this gospel, he went away seeing. And what a difference it made to him. Don't we often use the expression ourselves,

I've seen the light when we come to grasp something that we didn't understand before. And here today is Jesus standing before us and saying to us, I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. So I ask you, have you seen the light? Now in order to make plain what this means then, let me look finally at how Jesus dispels the darkness and brings to us the light of life. When Jesus says I am the light of the world, he's referring to the fact of our moral and our spiritual darkness, our sin. And he is claiming to be the only one who can deal effectively with that dire condition. In spite of the facts of our sophistication, our discoveries, our brilliance in so many fields of science and philosophy and arts and so on, it remains true of our moral and spiritual condition. Just as the prophet Isaiah spoke about the people in his day, darkness he says covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples.

We have a near neighbor who is Chinese and when Elizabeth was speaking to her recently about Christian things, she said, no, we don't believe these things because now we are educated.

[21 : 32] These things are for old people. Old people, young people, we are all in spiritual darkness.

It covers us. We need a saviour, whether we are clever, educated or otherwise. And the fact is that to get us out of the darkness takes a miracle. A miracle perhaps even mightier than the one that we read of in John chapter 9 and verses 5 to 7. And when this miracle takes place, like the man in the story, you go home seeing. But what is the miracle? The miracle is quite simply the saving work of Jesus Christ and that miracle takes place in this way. In the first place, we become aware of our situation that we are lost in the blackness of sin. We are not going to get anywhere until we realise that. And in the second place, we become convinced that by ourselves we cannot get rid of that blackness of sin. It has us in its grip. And in the third place, we become convinced that Jesus and Jesus alone is the one saviour whom we can trust to take us out of the darkness, deal with our sin and take us into the light of gospel blessings, of forgiveness, of cleansing, freedom from guilt before God and gives us a great new foundation for life. All that and so much more has been achieved by Christ for us through His death on the cross. And then, and this is where the miracle in John chapter 9 is so very important, think what these verses said. Jesus spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva and put it on the man's eyes. And then he said to him, go, wash in the pool of Siloans. That's what the man did. So the man went and washed and came home seeing. Do you see the application friends? Jesus says in John 8 and 12, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. He said to the man, go, wash. And he came seeing. What then

does it mean to follow Jesus? I think the clearest and best illustration of this that I can give anyway is found in the Gospel by Matthew in chapter 9 and verse 9. When Jesus one day came to Matthew and he said to Matthew, follow me. And we read that Matthew got up and followed Jesus. He rose up. That's an interesting, very interesting word. It's a word that is associated with the resurrection, a word that's associated with new beginnings, the word from which we get the name Anastasia. It means you turn your back on your old way of life and it's unbelief. And you become, so to speak, an apprentice of Jesus Christ to live for him, to follow him, to love him, to love his word and his ways and to love his people. That is what the miracle results in. So what action are we going to take today?

Are you going to go home seeing? I trust so for Jesus' sake. Amen. Let us pray together.

Our dear Lord, we thank you for the grace of Jesus Christ. We thank you for the power of Jesus Christ and the saving work of Christ. And we ask Lord that if there is still someone who is not yet seeing, we pray that you would help them this day to follow you, that you would take away the scales of unbelief from their eyes, the darkness that they may walk in the light for Jesus' sake. Amen.