

I Am the Light of the World

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[0 : 00] Xboxes and iPods and all those other gadgets that kids seem to have today. We had to invent our own entertainment, which I think was far more exciting.

My friends had organised a sleepover, so we'd all headed over to his house, and the plan was that when the parents were sleeping, we would sneak out of the house and go for a night walk. That was our entertainment. So about one or two in the morning, when the parents were fast asleep, we snuck out of the house, we left the lights of the neighbourhood behind, and we headed out.

It was all a bit of fun, and everything was going really well until we found ourselves in this field. And very soon we discovered that we weren't actually alone in this field.

There were also animals in this field. And to this day, I still don't know what they were. Were they horses or cows? I haven't a clue. But although we couldn't see them, we could hear them.

[1 : 08] And they started to run towards us. So in absolute terror, with kind of a hill like this, we took off down the hill, running as fast as possible. And one by one, we all ran headfirst into this huge hedge full of briars and nettles and every other stinging plant and prickly bush.

Because of the dark, we simply couldn't see where we were going. It all started out as a bit of fun and games, but then it got quite scary and dangerous.

If only we had a little bit of light, a little torch or something, and we would have been okay. You see, being in the light is much safer than being in the darkness.

Did you see what Jesus said in John chapter 8 verse 12? He says, Now, I don't think Jesus was kind of giving a little hint for naughty boys who wanted to sneak out the house and run around at night time.

Now, I don't think it's literal that Jesus is some kind of massive big torch in times of difficulty. It's using concepts like light and darkness to explain a deeper meaning and truth.

[2 : 41] So what does it mean when Jesus says, I am the light? And what's it talking about when it says, walking in darkness? Well, to help us understand this, we're going to ask ourselves three questions.

And the first question is this. What is the light? You see, when Jesus talks about light, it's full of significance.

And we can find the reason for why he uses light by going back to chapter 7. This is all one big long story and we follow the context. Look at verse 14 of chapter 7.

It says there that not until halfway through the feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and began to teach. So Jesus is in Jerusalem at the time of a great feast, a particular celebration, which we know is called the Feast of Tabernacles.

So when we get to chapter 8, verse 12, and it says Jesus spoke again to the people, he's speaking during the time of this great feast.

[3 : 52] Every year towards the end of harvest, when all the crops had been gathered in, all the Jewish people would head up to Jerusalem for a weeks-long celebration, a great big party.

We're going to read about what that celebration was like. We can go back to Leviticus, which is right at the front of your Bible, Leviticus chapter 23.

So keep a finger in John chapter 8 and go to Leviticus. I haven't got a page number. Has somebody got a page number?

1, 2, 6. It's on page 1, 2, 6. Leviticus is a strange book. It's got all kinds of different laws and things. And one of them it tells us about the different feasts that the Jewish people celebrated. And that feast that Jesus was at is explained here. So Leviticus chapter 23, verse 33.

[5 : 02] The Lord said to Moses, say to the Israelites, on the 15th day of the seven months, the Lord's Feast of Tabernacles begins. And it's to last for seven days.

Verse 39. So beginning with the 15th day of the seventh month, after you've gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the Lord for seven days.

But it was more than just a harvest festival. It was primarily a celebration of God rescuing his people from slavery in Egypt.

Look at verse 42. During this celebration, he says, verse 42, to live in booths or tabernacles. That's like little shelters. We might call them tents.

So live in shelters for seven days. All the native-born Israelites are to live in shelters so that your descendants will know that I made the Israelites live in shelters when I brought them out of Egypt, when I rescued them out of Egypt.

[6 : 11] I am the Lord your God. So, while it was all about harvest, it was also a festival celebrating and remembering God's great rescue, his salvation of bringing them out of slavery to a new land to have a fresh start, a new beginning.

So we can imagine, as Jesus has gone up to Jerusalem with everybody else for this festival, we can imagine all the families traveling up, building their little makeshift huts and tents.

Even the people who lived there would have built little huts and tents on top of their roofs. Others would have been doing it out on the street. And all the families, all the kids getting ever so excited for this week-long celebration of camping out.

Because everybody likes to camp out. And whenever the children would ask mum or dad, why are we camping out? What's all this about? They would be able to tell them, long, long ago, that God had rescued their people.

And during that rescue, on their way out, they would live in little shelters as God was bringing them to a new place to live. So it was a huge, big party, a great, big celebration.

[7 : 24] But there was something more significant about this feast. On the first day of this particular feast, huge metal bowls, all the way around the temple, would be filled with olive oil, and then they would put cloth inside it, which would act like a wick.

Basically, they were giant-sized candles, or nightlights, if you like. All the way around the temple. And at night, these candles would be lit, and they would be so bright, that the light would shine up, and illuminate the whole city.

Now, for us, in a day where we've got electricity, and just a simple switch, light bulbs, and street lights, it doesn't seem much. But back then, when there were no lights, when it got dark, it got dark. You couldn't see anything. So here you could imagine this great big city, that didn't have lights, all these bowls being lit. It was something spectacular, something wonderful.

Light, all around the city would shine. Now, we can begin to see the significance, of what Jesus said, can't we?

[8 : 40] When Jesus said, at the end of the feast, when the lights were extinguished, Jesus announces to everybody, I am the light of the world.

He was making an extraordinary claim, that I am the true means of rescue, and salvation, and deliverance. I bring a new beginning, releasing you, and freeing you.

But it's not just for the Jewish people, it wasn't just for that culture. Look at what it says in verse 12. He says, I am the light of the world. Jesus is salvation for everybody, whatever race, or culture, or religious background you may come from, whether you go to church, and read your Bible, or whether you don't.

Jesus is saying, that I have come, to give life, in all its fullness. Look at what it says, at the end of verse 12, whoever follows me, will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

You see, when the Israelites, were coming out of Egypt, and making their way, to the promised land, it would be a life, of prosperity, and peace, and fullness, and completeness.

[10 : 00] Now Jesus comes, announcing to everybody, that he offers, the light of life, eternal life. The promise, of a new beginning today, not of wealth, and money, and materialism, but a new beginning, of sins forgiven, not of success, and health, but of guilt, being removed, and the guaranteed, hope, of the ultimate, promised land, paradise, heaven, itself.

So Jesus, came announcing, to the world, that I, am the true light, the means of salvation, the way of rescue, the way of deliverance, the way of a new beginning.

So that's the first question, what is the light? Well it is life, for the world. The second question, we need to ask is, well, why do we need, this light?

That's fair enough, Jesus is the light, but why do, I need the light? Well if you can remember, back to the story, I said at the beginning, being in the dark, and running around, in fields at night time, can be pretty dangerous.

You don't know, where you're going to end up. Well look back, at the beginning, of this gospel, Joe read it to us, earlier on. John, chapter 1, verse 3.

[11 : 33] Light is a big theme, in John's gospel, and right at the very beginning, he starts talking about it, wanting us to know, what it's all about. John, chapter 1, verse 3.

Through him, that's through Jesus, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made, that has been made. In Jesus, was life, and that life, was the light of people.

The light shines, in the darkness, but the darkness, has not understood it. So it's telling us, very clearly, that Jesus, who is the light, has come into the world, and the world there, is described as darkness.

But what is this darkness? Why is the world, described as darkness? Well, as we read through the book, we get all kinds of hints, and it's explained for us. Let me show you one, in chapter 3.

Flick over the page, chapter 3, verse 19. This is the verdict.

[12 : 42] Light has come into the world, it's talking about Jesus, but people love darkness, instead of light, because their deeds were evil.

Everyone who does evil, hates the light, doesn't like Jesus, darkness, and will not come into the light, for fear, that their deeds will be shown up.

You see, darkness, in John's gospel, is not just physical, it's not just talking about night time. It's primarily a picture, of our spiritual rebellion, against God.

Now, you don't have to be religious, to think about the word, dark. We often use the word, dark, to describe, the world we live in, that it's a very dark place, at times.

Think of all the wars going on, the murders, the rape, the child trafficking, the ruthless regimes, the greedy dictators. It's very dark.

[13 : 43] But even our own lives, have dark times. We get annoyed. We tell lies. We start shouting, even parents, I'm a parent, we start shouting, and we shouldn't.

We get greedy. We all have dark times. You see, the world, and its people, people like you and me, is saying, it's full of darkness.

We all do, evil things. We all do wrong things. Whoever we are, it doesn't matter who we are, we want to live our own life. We don't want anybody telling us what to do.

And that's what it's saying in verse 20. We don't want to kind of come out towards Jesus, because then he'll show us up for what we're really like. We like to stay in the dark, and live our own lives the way we want to.

So whether our name is Johnny Grant, or Gaddafi, we all want to be in charge of our own lives. We all want to live our own way. And that's incredibly dangerous, to be in the dark.

[14 : 50] Look at chapter 3, verse 36. It says there, whoever believes in the Son, in Jesus, has eternal life.

So that's to go the way of the light. But whoever rejects the Son, whoever rejects Jesus, will not see life.

For God's wrath, his judgment, remains on him. So throughout the Gospel, John is saying, being in the darkness is a dangerous place to be.

And while it reflects our own rebellion against God, it also pictures the consequences of that rebellion. Now when we read our verse in chapter 8, verse 12, it helps us to better understand now, what it means when Jesus talks about, walking in darkness.

But let's see the great promise of this verse. Jesus says, I'm the light of the world, whoever follows me, will never walk in darkness.

[15 : 57] Jesus is promising to come to lead us out of the darkness, to show us a new way, to live a different way. Do you remember the account of creation?

Let me read it to you, from Genesis chapter 1. There's no need to look it up. I'll just read it to you.

Genesis chapter 1. It says, In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Now the earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the surface of the deep. And God said, Let there be light.

And there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And he separated the light from the darkness. So Jesus has come to do exactly the same.

Not just physically, like in creation, but spiritually, as in salvation. The light shines in the darkness. Jesus has come to be the light of life in the darkness of this world.

[17:09] And he's come to dispel the darkness, to separate the light from the darkness. And that ultimately happened when Jesus died on the cross.

We know that when Jesus died on the cross, from 12 noon till 3 o'clock in the afternoon, it says it went completely dark. The whole land was covered in darkness.

A sign that God's judgment was falling on Jesus instead of us. He died for our rebellion. And now through Jesus, the darkness has been dispelled.

Death and despair are gone. Now there is light and life. And so it is time to celebrate this wonderful feast.

So that's the second question. First, what is the light? The second question, why we need the light? And the third question is, well, okay, that sounds all great.

[18:14] But how can I have this light? Well, if we had had some light when we were running about in the field, we would have been fine. A little torch or something, and it would have saved so much trouble.

Well, we've seen that Jesus is the light, and we're in the darkness. So what are we to do? Well, look at the verse, chapter 8, verse 12, it tells us. It says, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness. The invitation is to follow the light, to walk with the light. Whenever we picked ourselves out of the hedge, and all those thorns and everything else, we came to the conclusion that we just needed to get back home.

And getting back home was easy, because we just followed the light in the distance. And the closer we got, the brighter it became. At last, we were back home again in the safety and the security of a house, falling into a nice, warm, soft, not a prickly bed.

I don't think we ever went on a night walk again after that. But you see how we're called to follow the light of Christ? To follow His way, His path?

[19:39] But that following is a life of commitment and a life of trust. Have a look at John's Gospel, chapter 12.

This is what Amy read for us. John's Gospel, chapter 12, verse 35. This explains what it means to follow the light. John 12, verse 35.

Jesus told them, He's speaking about Himself, you are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light before darkness overtakes you.

The person who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it so that you may become children of light.

So Jesus is saying, we are to entrust ourselves into the care of His light. That means we are to accept that Jesus took the darkness of our lives on Himself.

[20:50] But not only that, it says if we trust in Him, we become children of light. Jesus takes our darkness, our sin, our rebellion, and in its place He gives us His light, His purity, and His goodness.

It's a complete exchange. So we're no longer treated as people in the darkness, as enemies, but we are now loved and treasured and accepted and welcomed as His own children.

That means we're brothers and sisters with the Lord Jesus. We have the same Father God. It's a wonderful invitation to follow the light.

But this also confronts us with a choice. There's no dusk here. There's no mention of dawn, kind of like an in-between darkness and light.

He just talks in simple terms. Light or darkness. And so we need to ask ourselves, am I in the darkness or am I in the light?

[22:05] You know the feast that we talked about at the very beginning that Jesus went to was a week-long celebration. People came to party and enjoy themselves. They really knew how to party in those days.

We're going to have a party in a little while. It'll only last for a couple of hours. This went on for a whole week, seven days. People would walk around the city with torches at night, big flaming torches, singing and dancing.

There'd be huge, big orchestras and there'd be beating drums and playing harps and lyres and clashing cymbals, celebrating the salvation that God had done in the past.

Well, Jesus comes then to center stage and he says, I am the light of the world. And he's inviting us all to enjoy his salvation, to join in the greatest celebration.

He's inviting us to an eternal feast. The feast of heaven where there will be no more darkness, where there's no more death, no more despair.

[23 : 08] It's completely dispelled. It's gone. And so he's inviting us to trust Jesus, the light, and to walk with him, to celebrate in that eternal feast.

Let me read to you in closing something that John said in another book. It comes at the very end of the Bible in Revelation and he pictures what that's going to be like.

And this is what he says No longer will there be any curse. There will be no more night.

We will not need the light of a lamp or the light of a sun for the Lord God will give them light and they will reign forever and forever.

If we follow the light of Jesus Christ, we will celebrate with him forever in the greatest feast eternal life with God.

[24 : 15] Let's pray together. our Father God, we thank you so much that you are so clearly the light to this world, shining a path for us to follow, showing us that Jesus is the way.

Help us to trust him with our lives. Help him to enjoy the salvation that he has come to give, to celebrate with him and to look forward to that eternal feast, heaven itself.

So we thank you for Jesus. Amen.