

Jesus' Light at Dedication

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 December 2010

Preacher: Alex Cowie

[0 : 00] Well now let's turn back then to John's Gospel and chapter 10 and we're considering the passage from verse 22 through to verse 33 and we're thinking about Jesus light at Hanukkah Jesus light at Hanukkah or as it's here dedication Now it was the feast of dedication in Jerusalem and it was winter First thing we want to do here is just to remind ourselves that the festival of Hanukkah isn't one of the prescribed festivals of Israel and yet it figured in the life of Israel at the time when Jesus was in this world

By prescribed festivals I mean of course the set festivals of Passover and Shavuot the festival that we call Pentecost and so called Tabernacles these were the three key festivals and the people were to go up to Jerusalem at those specific times but there were other festivals like Purim the feast of Hesda and Hanukkah as well called here dedication Hanukkah just means dedication that's where we get the word dedication the English word and it's interesting you see that when we see in the Gospel record here at a strategic time in Jesus' ministry that he's at the temple at the feast of dedication at the festival of Hanukkah and that raises a question should we ignore Hanukkah and the answer surely has to be no we shouldn't we should know about it we should understand it we should know why our Saviour chose a strategic time to be at the temple walking in Solomon's colonnade at Hanukkah

I want us to see how Jesus harnessed Hanukkah for his own purpose to demonstrate something about himself that is important he's at the temple the temple is lit up because it's a festival of lights you remember that Hanukkah dedication can be called the festival of lights as well and he's there at that time and it was a strategic time as we shall see I want to look at three things but first of all I want just to look at the historical perspectives on Hanukkah how it came about what's it about and then to look just briefly at rabbinical traditions not that we're putting any great store upon them but we're just wanting to see how they got certain things woven into their thinking about Hanukkah and bear in mind Jesus also used what they were thinking to focus on himself that's the sort of way I want to take it the first thing then on historical perspectives is we want to look at its origin, its roots and Hanukkah dedication, the festival or the feast of dedication as it is here verse 22 is rooted in history it's not fanciful it's not a fairy story the festival of dedication

Hanukkah happened and we go back to 167 years before Christ came into the world 167 BC more or less the Syrians were the dominant force in that part of the Middle East they were pretty ruthless and brutal the Syrians in history we think about the Seleucid kingdom and the kings called Antiochus there were several of them the most infamous, the most wicked Antiochus Epiphanes who likened himself to a god appearance he was anything but that he was a brute he was if you were to take a modern equal Hitler might square with him he was absolutely and I choose the words hell bent on ridding himself and that area of the Jews that was him he wanted a final solution he wanted to get rid of them and he turned his attention upon them and he worked out a strategy to humiliate them and to destroy them to break their spirit and of course the story is told the historians tell us that he went swept right into

Judah Judea with his armies into Jerusalem took over Jerusalem and proceeded to pollute the temple and to offer swine to offer pigs on the sacred altar where the God appointed sacrifices were offered and you know the Jewish view of swine flesh and so on so it was the ultimate in degradation and humiliation and he he he rendered the people not only humiliate into a state of humiliation but of discouragement and distress and then when all seemed at its darkest the the the the Maccabees there was a big family of them best known as Judas they came to the rescue quite a lot is known about Judas

[6 : 32] Maccabeus and one of the things that's most important in this connection is that he was a military genius and he turned a motley crew of Jewish fighters into a very excellent guerrilla

machine military machine and within a relatively short space of time they were able to to weaken the Syrians and eventually within a year or two to see them off and to recover Judea and Jerusalem and so they turned their attention to renovating the city and purifying the temple and the temple courts and of course the altar and so on and the the book of Maccabees the first book of Maccabees actually is a very accurate historical document we don't put it at all on the power of scripture but first

Maccabees is a really accurate historical document and in first Maccabees in chapter four of it we get we get details on how they embarked on this effort now that our enemies are crushed let us go up to purify the sanctuary and re dedicate it that's a quotation from first Maccabees four it's a really interesting insight as to what happened they achieved victory God enabled them to overcome and they set about purifying the temple and rededicating it to the Lord and in the second book which is perhaps less accurate they tell us that they completed the purification exactly three years to the day when it had first been polluted so you get a picture there of what they were enabled to do under the good hand of

God and they saw it that way it's fairly safe I think to say that the evidence is really quite good for suggesting that Judas Maccabeus and his family were godly people they had a love for the Lord more than that I wouldn't be prepared to say but that at least is they were God fearers and they entrusted themselves in their wee army comparatively to God and they were able to see off a vastly greater numerically greater army and eventually recover the country Judea Jerusalem and the temple and when they saw this happen they decided to appoint an eight day feast that's why there are eight candle holders on that candlestick that's there leaving aside the other one for the moment there are eight in a line and they had an eight day feast and they saw this occasion as a festival of rejoicing now if you know your bible festivals you will remember that the great festival of rejoicing is tabernacles tabernacles the feast of ingathering symbolical of the end of the age when the lord shall come and reap his harvest and dispose of those who believe not the gospel and it's a time of joy and thanksgiving and they took that model the tabernacles model and they applied it to Hanukkah they lit up the temple as we said already to show that God was their light and salvation that God had not let the enemy rejoice over them and that the nations around them would see and know what God had done God had protected them and to this very day there's a song the Jews sing at Hanukkah called Maaz Sur which means rock of ages they saw God as a rock of ages as their help and so that's very briefly the kind of historical background historical perspectives on this God snatched them as it were out of their darkness and God gave them light and deliverance from their enemies now I want just for a moment or two to think about the rabbinical tradition because there is a tradition among the

Jews they would say going back to early times to really to Hanukkah itself the first Hanukkah the rededication that God provided for them light in the temple the story goes that the big menorah the big candlestick the seven branch candlestick needed special oil it needed the high priest's oil that was sealed with his seal and they only had one jar of it sufficient for one day and it lasted eight days until they were able excuse me to have some more oil made and they saw that again as a miracle from God as deliverance as a pledge of his goodness and his mercy to them and whatever else we can say about it there at the temple prior just months prior to

[13 : 01] Jesus' death Jesus was at the feast of dedication in Jerusalem and that brings us then naturally to Jesus' use of Hanukkah focusing on his divine messiahship focusing on the fact that he is our light and he is our salvation focusing on the fact that he is the light sent from God to give them light and to give the nations light and to be the deliverer of the people you remember how at the beginning of Jesus' ministry when he was calling his disciples you remember how Nathaniel when he was under the tree he saw

Jesus as the son of God he saw Jesus as the son of God Rabbi thou art the son of God thou art the king of Israel he was given an insight into this truth that Jesus was heaven sent the son of God the king of Israel and that he came that the blind could see the spiritually blind could see and those who thought they see would be left in darkness I am the light he said of the world whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life excuse me and in this passage you see Jesus is confronted by the Jewish authorities verse 24 if you are the Messiah tell us plainly how long do you keep us in doubt and there is a suggestion there that Jesus was being unfair to them that he wasn't speaking plainly to them verse 25 I told you and you do not believe and it's interesting you see they were to deduce from the works he did that he was the Messiah they were

to deduce from the miracles he performed Messiah has come if you go back into chapter 9 you see that there was a man born blind who was given his sight now that was a sovereign operation of God of Jesus to demonstrate

Messiah has come the works I do in my father's name declare plainly they bear witness verse 25 of me so he's saying to them in effect the evidence you were given and given and given you chose not to believe it they didn't think they needed light they didn't think they needed spiritual deliverance they refused to recognize him they simply turned away he didn't fit the criteria they had set out for Messiah and yet he had repeatedly declared himself Israel's shepherd Israel's miracle working shepherd the one who had come to give light to those who are in darkness and the one who can say of himself in relation to his father verse 30

I and my father are one notice that because some people think when Jesus said that that he was saying that we are one in will we are in agreement about what I do if you look beyond that verse they knew what Jesus was saying verse 33 the Jews answered Jesus saying for a good work we do not stone you but for blasphemy because you being a man make yourself God and their great problem was that they weren't prepared to recognize him as the divine Messiah one of the curious almost conundrums in the in the Jewish writings is that they were expecting

[18 : 31] Messiah to be the glorious divine Messiah and yet when it came to pass in Jesus they wrote him off they wouldn't have him he wasn't august enough he came meek and lowly didn't Zechariah say that yes did they believe it no did they believe it of him no he humbled himself in becoming man he didn't come with all the pomp and circumstance of the king of heaven that he might easily have done he came to preach the gospel to the poor to heal the broken hearted to set at liberty the prisoners and you remember old Simeon could say of him when he was just a babe in arms he took him in his arms from Mary his mother you find it there in Luke at the beginning of Luke

Lord now you're letting your servant depart in peace according to your words for my eyes have seen your salvation your deliverance a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel he had come to give them light in the father's name and they were not prepared to receive that light or the help they needed Jesus chose that Hanukkah strategically in order to confront them with reality which they would pay for by rejecting that he was indeed the Messiah of Israel the shepherd of Israel the eternal son who gives eternal life to those who believe in him verse 28 verse 27 when my sheep hear my voice

I know them and they follow me and I give them eternal life and they shall never perish neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand and I say again there is something here important for us to understand that Jesus chose this opportunity at the festival of lights to set himself forth to the people as the lord of the literal temple that stood there in Jerusalem and the fulfillment of the meaning of that temple as well there is a very interesting passage perhaps we will come back to in Malachi 3 from verse 1 to 3 in the prophet's eye in Malachi's eye there is a messenger coming before the lord to prepare his way we know that was

John the Baptist but the lord is the speaker in Malachi 3 and he says he shall go before me that is the herald and the lord whom you seek will come into his temple but who may stand when he appears he had come to purify he had come to bring salvation and purification through himself and these rulers that he's dealing with here weren't prepared to take him on in that way they weren't prepared to see that all the transactions and all the spiritual duties of man in relation to the true God are conducted only through him did he not say himself no man comes to the father except through me that wasn't John's wistful thought it was the divine spirit speaking in the son of God no man comes to the father except through me and my dear friends as we think about him at the temple at the feast of dedication

Hanukkah on that occasion let us see by faith in him the fulfillment of the temple he is the temple and we are being built into him if by faith we receive him we're being built into a glorious spiritual temple for a dwelling place for God himself in the spirit you go to Ephesians 2 and verses 22 following to the end of the passage that's exactly what Paul says we are being built into him a dwelling place for God and you see our ground for acceptance with God our direct access to God our guaranteed direct access to God our worship and service as acceptable is all in him and that's wonderful in him who is the fulfillment of the temple even as he is of the sacrifices thereof and the high priestly ministry too and it ought to encourage us here today that we are here to listen to him listen to him listen to what he says in verse 11 of this passage listen to what he says

[24 : 46] I am the good shepherd the shepherd of Israel the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep I am the good shepherd verse 14 and I know my sheep and more wonderful still and they know me this is something wonderfully encouraging friends he gives his life for us he knows us and we know him by faith and he says in this passage we've been looking at these months later verse 27 my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me these authorities were refusing to follow him they were refusing to listen to him they were refusing to see him as the fulfillment of the very temple they stood in and battled against him let us use our reflections here on

Jesus light at an to affirm for ourselves the Lord is my light and my salvation the Lord is the strength of my life we are to make these affirmations our very own and it is as we do that by faith we can truly say surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the temple of the Lord forever Amen