

Light and darkness

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[0 : 00] All right, good morning. It's Christmas is fast approaching, isn't it?

Yeah, it is. So Christmas is fast approaching. It doesn't matter what you think it is. It's scary how fast it is approaching. Oh, my goodness. Okay.

And if Christmas is fast approaching, then things like the trees go up, maybe not in your house, but the trees go up, decorations go up, and presents start getting bought and wrapped and placed under trees.

I'm a gift giver. It's one of my love languages. If you've read that book, *The Five Love Languages*, I'm a gift giver. And it's a good thing to know, you'd think, yeah?

Except no, it's not. It's kind of a curse. You see, because I'm a gift giver, I really put a lot of value on gifts. I will judge you on the basis of the gifts you give me.

[1 : 08] I would judge you on the basis of, well, how much do you love me? How much have you actually thought about this gift? How much have you really put me at the center of what's going on here? And if you haven't, if you haven't done well, if you haven't put that thought in, well, you're going to see it in my face, because I don't, I'm not very good at poker.

Now, you think about this and how my family actually functions and what Christmas morning looks like for them, and I want to tell you that, don't worry, okay, because I bought my present from Joe about a month ago, and she nailed it.

Of course she did. But what do you get for someone who has everything? What do you get for someone who has everything, or at least thinks they do? As we go into John chapter 8, or resume John chapter 8, David's been preaching us through it so far, what we find is that we have a bunch of people who are responding to Jesus in a particular way for a particular reason.

It's a positive response. They're believing in him. And yet Jesus takes a funny turn, an extraordinary turn, and actually challenges those who believe in him. It's a really unexpected response from Jesus.

So what did he see in their response? Surely they were giving him what he was asking for, but what did he see in their response that he wasn't happy with? What did he see that we can't? Why did he respond in this way?

[2 : 37] Well, the issue is that what Jesus sees goes right to the very heart. It's all about what we want. And what we want isn't necessarily what we need.

In verse 31, let me take it up and read the first couple of verses. So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, straight away, Jesus digs at the foundation for their belief.

These believers were looking to the right person, but for the wrong thing. So they were attracted by Jesus' signs on the one hand, but repelled by Jesus' words every time he opened his mouth.

Even though, as you can see through this passage, he keeps saying, I'm telling you the truth here. So let's look at this. They were attracted by Jesus' signs. Now in John 3, verse 2, Jesus has an encounter with a man called Nicodemus.

And Nicodemus says these words by means of introduction. John 3, 2, second part of it. He says, Rabbi, addressing Jesus, we know that you're a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.

[3 : 55] Now John, as we go through the Gospel of John, you might have noticed, he's a little bit more sparing in the number of miracles he describes. The kids listed a bunch of them that actually aren't in John's Gospel at all. But here's the thing.

The other writers give us a fuller picture, and Nicodemus here just gives us a glimpse into that picture. You see, the other Gospels tell us that it's actually unusual when Jesus doesn't perform miracles.

Everywhere Jesus went, he pushed back the darkness and suffering of life. He fed the hungry. He healed the sick. He restored sight, speech, hearing. He straightened deformity, strengthened weakened limbs, brought comfort to the broken in spirit.

And on at least three occasions that we know of, he brought back the dead to life. People came everywhere for relief. Just to touch him was enough.

Just for him to speak the words. The normal life of Jesus' ministry was that he pushed back darkness. Nicodemus knew this. Everyone at the time knew this.

[4 : 59] But even as he pushed back the darkness, he opened his mouth to speak. And people were repelled by his words.

As much as they were attracted by his signs, they were repelled by his words. Why? Because Jesus told the truth, and that truth was that he demanded that they centre their hopes on him. It wasn't enough to enjoy the relief he offered. These things were just signs. Signs that he could do what they needed.

So why did the people who are expecting Jesus the most reject Jesus the strongest? Surely they should have been in sync here at least. Well, the answer lies in how you define the problem. And Jesus said, If you abide in me, the truth will set you free.

And they picked up on that word free straight away. In verse 33, they answered him, We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say you will become free?

[6 : 08] And they understood the implications straight away. And they reacted strongly to it. Only slaves needed to be freed. But, they're thinking, We're not slaves.

We're offspring of Abraham. What do they mean? Well, on face value, you could say they were a kind of slaves. They were actually under Roman occupation at the time. And they had a long history of being slaves before that.

So Egypt, Babylon, Persia, and so on. But in their minds, they were privileged beyond anyone else on planet Earth. They were Abraham's offspring.

They were the rightful heirs of the promised blessing. They were the golden race. Everyone else was a distant second place. Worse, they were dirty.

I think I've told you before what my granddad used to say to me. He was a Yorkshireman. He used to say there are two kinds of people in the world. There were Yorkshiremen, and there are people that wished they were.

[7 : 08] This was a kind of feeling they had about themselves. They thought they were it.

Everybody else was dirty. Now, the Jews were so convinced of this that they would shake off the travelling dust from other countries before they stepped back into Israel.

Can you imagine that? It reminds me of the foot washing that used to happen in the airports during the mad cow crisis. I don't know if you were aware of this, but Joe and I used to travel to England a lot. We still can't give blood because we were actually in England during the mad cow crisis, and they don't trust us to not have mad cow disease and pass it on.

But during that time, if you came from England to Australia, you would have to go in a special queue, and you'd have to have your feet washed because they didn't want you to bring anything of the dust of England into Australia.

The Jews did this, not out of a necessity to avoid infection, but out of an arrogance, a belief of who they were, and a confidence that they were the chosen people.

To be the people of Abraham, the offspring of Abraham, well, in their minds, you were truly blessed. Freedom? What about slavery?

[8 : 28] What could this slavery possibly be? Well, Jesus answers them in verse 34. He says, Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. Truly, truly, or amen, amen, is a direct translation.

Before emoticons, this was how you would emphasize a statement. You would say something like truly, or amen. If you say it twice, that's like super emphasized. But it means something more than just, this is important.

It means what comes next is true. And it means that what comes next actually applies directly to the hearers. It has a consequence. In what Jesus says, there is truth on the one hand, and there is a consequence for all the hearers on the other.

In other words, Jesus is saying, you are people who sin, so you are slaves to sin. Now, the concept of sin is no big revelation in one sense.

I mean, nobody in their right mind claims to be perfect. But these Jews, who were Abraham's descendants, never thought that their sin was threatening their relationship with God.

[9 : 40] Never entered their minds that that would be the case. They just didn't see their sin as a problem. They had the law to guide them, and it did. They were, perhaps, better than everyone else around them.

But they'd missed the point of the law. The law didn't provide the security they assumed. On the surface, maybe they were better than them out there. But the law also showed them that there were so much worse than the holy God they worshipped.

And it showed them the means of bridging that gap. Sacrifice. I think we have the same problem when it comes to law, when it comes to this issue of sin and applying it to ourselves.

But perhaps for a different reason. When we hear the words, you are a sinner, we hear that and we think, yeah, but I'm a good person too. Yeah, I sin, but I'm a good person. Jesus says, no, you're not.

You're a slave to sin and your place in God's future is not certain. The problem of sin is this. Every sin has a penalty. The same penalty, and that penalty is high. And every sinner is a slave to sin.

[10 : 48] Sin is the master we serve. And as a slave to that master, we're not in a good position to buy ourselves out. Jesus goes on to say in verse 35, as a means of illustrating this point.

The slave does not remain in the house forever. The son remains forever. So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed. The only way to be free from sin is through the son.

The only way to remain in God's presence is abiding in this son. This is a huge claim. It represents a massive shift in their identity too.

You think about how they've been defining themselves up to this point as Israel's offspring, as Abraham's offspring, as Israel, Abraham's firstborn son. Think about this.

By Sarah, that is, sorry. Just for accuracy. Think about this. The way that they define themselves has changed significantly. I've been trying to think about how I can actually illustrate this to you. And it's like saying, you can't be Australian unless, I don't know, unless you're friends with David Calderwood on Facebook or something like that.

[12 : 02] You know, it's just like such a massive shift. How do we consider, how do we actually work out our identity and who we are? How do we work that out? Whatever way you use to define yourself, Jesus is saying, it's totally wrong.

Abraham has always been their father genetically. The DNA test would prove it, but there's still a problem. Yes, they're offspring of Abraham, but is he really their father?

Jesus says in verse 38. I speak of what I have seen with my father and you do what you have heard from your father. Here we get the sense that there's two fathers in play here. And they hear the challenge, but they can't let go of their view of themselves.

Still. But Abraham is our father. They're thinking and saying. So Jesus raises the question, so where's the resemblance?

You know, this sense of resemblance with father and children. Ladies, I'm sorry if you actually resemble your father too much.

[13 : 11] It's something that as fathers we don't want our children to do, our daughters to do at least. We don't want our daughters to look like us. I remember when I was a teenager, I was pretty good at this. I don't look anything like my father.

When I was a teenager, my sister used to tell our youth group that I was adopted. And I looked totally different to my parents. I don't look anything like my dad. In fact, some of you thought he was Joe's dad when he came and visited a couple weeks ago, a few weeks ago.

Now one day, my sister kept throwing this line out, oh, he's adopted. She did it in front of me and the other kids in the group were horrified that she would do that. Actually, you know, comment on me being adopted in front of her, in front of all the other kids.

And they'd call her out on it. How can you be so cruel? And she was only joking the whole time. We don't look alike at all. But you know that sense where you expect the parental resemblance, you expect it to come through.

I can tell you now, my dad and I don't look alike. We have different eye colour, hair colour, everything. I don't look alike to my dad. But you ask Joe about my mannerisms and my habits.

[14 : 20] She'll start with the annoying ones, but there are a whole bunch of them. I'm just so like my dad, it's not funny. Ask Ben, he'll tell you too. He's got a list of them. You know, we expect to see a resemblance from father to son, from parent to child.

But they have this false confidence because they've actually forgotten what their father is truly like. So Jesus explains it to them using their category of father.

But he makes two if statements. If you are Abraham's child or children, which is wanting to move them from that sense of physical descent through to an understanding of a spiritual relationship with their father.

If you are Abraham's children on the one hand. And the second one is if God were your father on the other. In verse 39, Jesus addresses the first one as they say, Abraham is our father.

Jesus said to them, if you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did.

But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God.

[15 : 36] This is not what Abraham did. Jesus is the true son. Have you noticed how the Bible often uses genderous language at different points?

This is one of those places where you get this sort of father-son type language. And in the interest of offending, you know, we try and sort of streamline that out. So certain passages where it says brothers, it actually means brothers and sisters.

So we go, you know, some versions, Bible versions will actually say brothers and sisters. You know, we try and do all that, try and smooth things out to not offend. But here, where Jesus raises a matter of sonship, it's really important that we don't actually smooth it out.

It's got something really important at stake here. You see, in the ancient Near East, the son had a specific role in the households. He would serve the will of his father.

A son would uphold the family honour. A son would keep the family business together. The son would actually nurture the family as a whole. He would take part in that keeping the family together as well. The son would eventually inherit.

[16 : 40] The son would take on the work of the father in every sense. Jesus is the son, the true son of his father. But they are not true sons.

If they were, they'd be like Abraham. And let's be clear at this point. Jesus is not declaring Abraham as the shining example for everyone to follow in morality before God.

He's declaring Abraham as the shining example of dependence on God. Abraham's work.

Abraham's work was trust. He believed God.

He believed God and he placed his life in God's hands. When Abraham heard the voice of his heavenly father, he believed his word. He left his home, his family, his friends, everything that was familiar.

He placed his life in the father's hands, literally. Because in the ancient Near East, to do these things, to move away from these areas, these points of security, was literally taking your life into your hands.

[17 : 46] But he did these things without knowing where he was going or what was ahead of him. Man, when we come to Jesus, it's easy to have an idea of what should be ahead of us. An expectation that's so strong in our minds that we are crushed when we don't get it.

Angry with God. Disillusioned in our belief. Spiritually content when we get what we want. And then wanting to kill Jesus when he demands too much of us.

Jesus said in verse 40 to 41, this is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did. To paraphrase, this is not what Abraham did, but I do see another father you resemble.

To the Jews, Jesus is saying that physical descent isn't enough. It's not enough to be ethnic Israel. It's not enough to be born of the right parents. It's not enough to be legally blameless.

We need to be clear here. Jesus is not saying that we need to be doing more to be saved. Jesus is saying that we need to come to him to be saved. We understand, as Catherine spoke earlier, we understand the sense of consequence in terms of punishment, don't we?

[18 : 57] The consequence in terms of doing something good and we get something back. doing something bad and we get something wrong. What Jesus is saying here is doing something bad, yeah, does get you punishment.

But trying to do something good doesn't get you out of that punishment. You can't balance the scales like that. We can't do more to be saved.

We need to come to him to be saved. In our hearts, there's a desire to be self-sufficient, to be worthy rather than dependent.

And it can be hard to spot when it creeps into our lives. Recognising this works-based approach to God is really difficult. Let me give you this one way at least of trying to spot it as it does creep in. How do you feel when someone criticises you? See, if you're a religious person, someone who actually is basing your relationship with God on what you do and someone points out a sin in your life, you will be crushed by it, embarrassed, ashamed by the exposure of that sin.

[20 : 16] It represents a chink in the armour of righteousness that you're trying to create for yourself or I'm trying to create for myself. But perhaps we're not quite along those lines.

Perhaps we're thinking, oh man, God is a God of love. How can he possibly reject me? You have the God of justice and you understand this issue and you try and produce a life of righteousness. Or you have this concept of God as a God of love who will never turn you away. And you're offended personally by the suggestion that you're a sinner in any way. Don't put me in that category. Yeah, I sin but I'm not a sinner.

No, I'm not perfect but I'm far from unworthy. Anyway, God is love. If that's the kind of pathway you're going down, then that pathway fails to take sin seriously.

Both paths fail to take sin seriously. But God does take sin seriously. And all of history has been leading to this one point. Jesus as its fulfillment.

[21 : 20] And Jesus is saying listen to me. Come to me and be saved. It's a call for an all-in Abraham-like trust in Jesus.

If Abraham were your father you would be living like Abraham toward God. The Jews are stung by the implications of Jesus' words.

Jesus is not suggesting but saying that they are illegitimate children of another father. And they respond to this in verse 41.

They say to him we were not born of sexual immorality. We have one father even God. Now it's possible at this point that the Jews might even be having a dig look at the legitimacy of Jesus' own birth.

It's possible that they're actually saying you're the bastard son not us. But one thing is definite and that is that they recognize the spiritual nature of what Jesus is saying.

[22 : 28] They argue if we're talking spiritually then God is our father. And they have reason to do this because in Exodus 4.22 for example God calls Israel his firstborn son.

But again Jesus questions their argument. In verse 42 he says to them if God were your father you would love me for I came from God and I am here.

I came not of my own accord but he sent me. If God were their father well Jesus would expect to see two things. He'd expect to see love and understanding.

Love Jesus said if God were your father you'd love me. In other words when Jesus calls us sinners and tells us he's here to save us we should be overwhelmed with relief with gratitude with love.

He's the only one telling the truth to us in all of creation. He's trying to bring life. He's here to save us. We should overflow with love for this Jesus who comes from the father not a desire to kill him.

[23 : 35] love and understanding in verse 43 Jesus says these words. Why do you not understand what I say?

It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. In a sense they do understand and we do too and it's a hard truth to live with.

I am far worse than you could know. I am far worse than I could know. I need the salvation he is offering.

I need the Lamb of God to take away my sin. But more than that in the extension of what Jesus was teaching in chapter 6 I need God to open my eyes to hear this truth.

Without God's intervention we will remain the children of the devil. We will accept the lie that he speaks. More than that we will live that lie actively.

[24 : 46] In verse 47 Jesus says these words whoever is of God hears the words of God the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.

This ability to understand is based on whether God has called us. Now man you may be asking yourself this and it's a fair question if you do and it's good if you do as well because I'm going to answer it and that is how do we know if he has called us how do we know if we're in that category how do we know if we are of God well let's just turn this passage around and look at how we

respond to Jesus how we respond to the Son and how we respond to the Father that's how we know you see do we respond to Jesus with recognition of who he is in our eyes and love in our hearts or with offence in our eyes and murder in our hearts do we accept him as the one come to save and just receive him with gratitude or do we want to kill every thought of him in our lives how do we respond to the Son how do we respond to the Father do we respond to our Father with love and gratitude or do we measure his goodness as a

Father by our own desires and how well he does at meeting them is God the Father that we run to with arms wide open because this is the Father who longs to welcome you because of Jesus' death on the cross his arms are open wide he is that loving Father who longs to draw you into his embrace we're going to sing the truth of this in a song now it's called come to the altar so I invite the music team to come up just to recognize and to meditate on the relationship between what the Father and the Son are doing and what they long to do in sharing that relationship with us it's called come to the altar and I can tell you now as Christians if you are a Christian then coming to the altar is something that we continue to do not in the need to be converted again to become a Christian again but in recognition that we will continue to struggle with sin and that we have a safe place to come to because we are not relying on that sin for our salvation we are trusting in Jesus he is our righteousness and if you're not a Christian then as we sing these words ponder them and think through what the foundation of our faith is it is not how we live that is not the foundation of our faith our foundation of our relationship with God

Jesus is and I hope you see it through these words let's stand and sing 1, 2, 3 are you having a broken wind overwhelmed by the weight of your sin Jesus is calling have you come to the end of yourself Do you thirst for a drink from the well Jesus is calling Come to the altar The Father's alms are open My forgiveness was bought with the precious blood of Jesus

Christ Leave behind your regrets and mistakes Come today there's no reason to wait Jesus is calling Bring your sorrows and trade them for joy From the ashes A new life is born Jesus is calling O come to the altar The Father's alms are open Life forgiveness Our open life forgiveness was bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ O come to the altar The Father's alms are open Life forgiveness was bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ

[29 : 50] Jesus Christ Oh what a Savior Isn't he wonderful sing hallelujah Christ is risen Oh what a Savior Isn't he wonderful sing hallelujah Christ is risen Oh what a Savior Isn't he wonderful sing hallelujah Christ is risen

Christ is risen For he is Lord For he is Lord for he is Lord of all sing hallelujah sing hallelujah Christ is risen For he is Lord Christ is risen in the Lord of all sing hallelujah sing hallelujah Amen Oh come to the altar The Father's alms are open Life forgiveness was bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ Oh come to the altar The Father's alms are open hope and wide For forgiveness was bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ May you cross as you wait for the crown Tell the world Tell the world of the treasure you've found