

Light of the world

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[0 : 00] love him or hate him, it's almost impossible to ignore him. Mr. Trump is so out there in the things he says and the things he does that he just polarizes people.

It seems like, I don't know whether he means to do it or not, but he certainly manages to do it. This week, for instance, he disagreed completely with the predictions of the American Reserve Bank. And he said this, they're making a mistake because I have a gut. He means a gut feeling. I have a gut and my gut tells me more sometimes than anybody else's brain can ever tell me.

That was a pretty big statement. Put in different words, it goes like this. What Mr. Trump feels and believes will determine his actions.

Even if that means ignoring the statistics presented by a panel of experts like the Reserve Bank, he'll bag himself.

[1 : 10] Now, most people would express horror at such self-confidence. They'd see it as reckless, arrogant. But the uncomfortable truth is that we're actually quite like Mr. Trump at so many points in our lives.

For example, in relational conflict, we're so quick to back ourselves. We're right, others are wrong, even in spite of the evidence at times.

Why is it like that? Well, because, I think it's because we're driven by an incredibly powerful, but hidden desire to be right, to be in control of any given situation.

Dare I say even, to be God-like in any situation, to have the final say. In the words of John Paul Sartre, French existential philosopher, he says, man is the being whose project is to be God.

So, it's a proper statement, isn't it? You might not agree with anything else, he says, but you could agree with that one. And we feel the impact of that every single day. Again, for example, we often lament in society people who reject authority.

[2 : 34] Well, I actually think that's not quite right. It's not that people reject authority, it's that people actually want to be the authority speaking into the lives of others rather than recognize and live under an external authority.

We want to control our own lives. We want to set our own destiny. We want to run our own agenda. We want to answer to no one but ourselves. And surprise, surprise, when we answer to ourselves, we try and convince ourselves that we're right.

And even as the evidence of our internal brokenness tells us we can't really achieve the personal sovereignty we long for, we redouble our efforts to convince ourselves and convince others that we can.

It's a matter of sovereignty. Whose sovereignty will be sovereign? In the same way, when we look into these passages in John, we've seen week after week an increase in pressure.

Jesus is polarizing people. People loved him or they hated him, but they couldn't ignore him because of his radical words, his radical actions.

[3 : 52] And again, it was a battle for sovereignty, pitting personal feelings, a desire to be right, a desire to keep control on the part of the Jewish religious leaders against the challenge of coming under the sovereignty of Jesus.

And the clash, as we move into verse 12 here, is a very familiar pattern. Jesus declares his sovereignty in the words, I am light and life. Now, we've got to remember the context.

Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths. That was an important seven days of thanksgiving for God's blessing, especially God's blessing in the wilderness time after the Exodus.

And that two key pictures dominated that week-long celebration. A picture of water, and Bo took us through that a couple of weeks ago, celebrating the fact that God provided for his people in the wilderness life-saving water.

And we saw that Jesus had already claimed that, chapter 7, verse 31. He said, that which you're celebrating now in this feast, that's about me. I am the thirst-quenching water that will fill the wells of your soul.

[5 : 11] And equally, through the Feast of the Booths, there was another ritual, each evening, after the sun had set, four huge lampstands were lit in the outer courts of the temple, a place called the Treasury, which is where Jesus is teaching in this particular section.

It was called the Treasury because there was 13 trumpet-shaped money boxes in that area where people, as they were part of the celebration, would actually put money in as a gift to God in thankfulness for what he has done.

And the light, these huge lampstands symbolized the pillar of cloud and fire that was a picture of God's glory, of God's presence with them in the period of the wilderness wanderings.

And therefore, it became to them a picture of the guarantee that in their lostness, the Lord would lead them through into the life and the land that he had promised to give them.

It was presence and deliverance. And people then, each evening of this week of feasting and celebrating, they would come along, each also holding burning torches, and they would dance into the evening.

[6 : 23] They would sing praises. They'd give money in thankfulness to the Lord. And it's said by those who lived in the time and recorded it that such was the light around the temple that illuminated the whole city of Jerusalem.

And we can understand that because there was no street light. So once you moved away from that, you were in pitch darkness, essentially. So with that background, and remember, Jesus is there. Those big lampstands would have been in the background even as Jesus was teaching. We can sense something of the impact of Jesus' words when he says, I am the light celebrated in the festival.

I am God's presence with you. I have come into your world which is darkened by sin to illuminate it, to dispel darkness, to dispel sin, and transform you into the bright, beautiful thing you were created to be in relationship with God.

And so, as we move into this story, the festival is over for another year. The lights have gone out.

[7 : 36] Once again, darkness settles heavily on Jerusalem. Jesus says, I am the light.

currently you're stumbling around in the dark, totally lost, unable to find your way home. I am the light to light your way.

I am the light that will be with you and surround you as you walk that way. I will show you the way home. I will take you home. But notice what Jesus actually says.

He says, you can have the light. You can have me, says Jesus. It's not just something you use out there like a torch on the end of your arm.

You have me. You have the light. I am the light for life. Only I can give light for life. So, I think Jesus is saying, come to me and my divine light will stream into your heart, into your soul, dispelling the darkness of sin and misery and transform you from the inside out.

[8 : 49] Enlighten you from the inside out. And so, we see, I hope you can see, it's a matter of sovereignty. Jesus is saying, either back your own sovereignty, verse 12, looking for light and life as you've been doing in a renewed national Israel, a return to the great days of Moses or in a lifetime of sincere religious actions.

He said, you can maintain and follow your own sovereignty and says Jesus, it will end badly. You'll experience darkness and death. Or, come under my sovereignty, says Jesus, believing it's me who connects God's people into God's presence, into relationship with God, into blessing and heaven. If you do that, says Jesus, then you will actually have, not just experience, you will have light and life forever. So, the response isn't surprising.

Verses 13 to 20. Essentially, these guys are just saying, why should we listen or believe in you, Jesus? Now, I believe the response is full of anger.

They actually hate the challenge to their sovereignty. So, verse 13, how are they going to get out from under this direct challenge as Jesus ramps it up and leaves them less and less wriggle room?

[10 : 26] Well, they do what they're so good at doing and they've done it before in earlier chapters. They plead a technical, a legal technicality. Jesus, we don't have to listen to what you're saying because, technically, your testimony isn't valid.

You're testifying about yourself. You see what they're doing? We'll dismiss everything on the basis of a technicality. What you're saying, Jesus, doesn't meet the legally accepted truth standards of our society, so we reject it.

When Jesus pushes back hard again, verse 14, he said, you know, if you guys even had the slightest idea who I am, truth would not even be an issue.

We wouldn't be having this conversation. verse 15, if you only talk about what's legally accepted, it's your words which have no legal worth, says Jesus, because your words are coming out of prejudice.

Your judgments are being formed on the basis of untruth and your own feelings. And he goes on in verse 15, 16, 17, 18, and I'm just going to touch very, very briefly on it, and he's really saying, look, in actual fact, if you only argue legal technicalities, I'm telling you now that all legal requirements for truth have been met.

[11 : 45] And it goes something like this. I've just said that I'm light. By virtue of that statement, light doesn't need to be proved. It just shines.

You just see it. it proves itself by dispelling darkness. You understand the argument? You don't have to say, well, possibly there's light in this room.

Well, we know there's light in this room because there's not darkness. And more than that, says Jesus, I've told you before that it's the Father of himself who corroborates me as a witness.

So they counterattack again. Tempting to discredit Jesus as not being of suitable character to claim any authority by reminding Jesus that in their eyes he was illegitimate.

Verse 18, oh, verse 19, they said to him, therefore, where is your father? You see what they're doing? They're finding a way to get out from under the burden that Jesus is loading on them.

[12 : 56] So they're suggesting in there, oh, yes, let's just talk about your father for a minute or two, Jesus. Actually, hmm, you don't even know who your father is, really, do you? Jesus pushed back again.

Listen, you guys, it's you who are not of suitable character to make judgments rejecting me. Why? because you guys don't know me or the father.

And so in verse 20, we feel something of how Jesus has them boxed in. They're absolutely rotable with Jesus.

They can feel that Jesus is snatching away their sovereignty. And what's their only option? Either to give up their sovereignty or to do what they've done.

To go back to the other option for protecting personal sovereignty, and that is getting rid of the person who challenges it. And so in their hearts, at least, they're thinking, jeepers, we really do need to get in and kill this bloke.

[14 : 18] That's the only way we're going to silence them and take the pressure off, remove his challenge. But then verse 21, Jesus continues to push them, and he pushes them really hard.

He says to them effectively, reject me and you will die in your sin. There's consequences, says Jesus, for continued unbelief.

I am God's king. I am God's savior. The one you have been seeking all along, the one you search the scriptures for daily. Let me tell you, says Jesus, soon I will return to heaven having completed my salvation mission.

And if you reject me, continuing to seek and search for a Messiah who sits comfortably with your expectations and your understanding of what Messiah would look like and what Messiah would do, then I'm telling you now, says Jesus, you will die in your sin.

You'll be excluded from heaven. You won't be able to go where I'm going to in spite of a lifetime of sincere religious actions. Verse 22, what do they do in response again?

[15 : 42] they mock Jesus. Will he kill himself? They defend their sovereignty again by mocking Jesus.

See, these are guys who were the professors of Old Testament Scripture. They would have known the dozens and dozens of verses that described Messiah as the suffering servant who would die for the sins of God's people.

What do they do? They choose to take Jesus' words as a suggestion of suicide. Now, in their eyes, in the eyes of the law, anybody that committed suicide would go to hell because they were guilty of the sin of self-murder.

So, what they're doing to Jesus is saying, listen, Jesus, you're talking about us going to hell. Let me tell you in response, you're the one that's going to go to hell. It's amazing stuff, I reckon, if I'm writing the way I'm reading the text.

And Jesus pushes back again, verses 23 and 24. He really is pushing deep into them now, saying, look, he's exposing their lack of self-awareness. Verse 23 and 24.

[17:01] He said to them, you are from below, I am from above. You are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he, that I am Messiah, you will die in your sins.

What's Jesus saying? Well, Jesus saying, look at the divide that's opening up between us. I am from the realm of God himself. And so says Jesus in effect, he says, I deal in truth.

I deal in concern for God's glory and honor. I am on a mission given me by the Father, the mission of salvation. But you guys, you're ignorant of your own nature, a nature that means you're hardwired to move away from truth, to reject God.

You're committed to your own sovereignty. You're on a mission too, but it's a self-salvation mission, to make yourself God, to be your own life and light through your own resources.

Jesus, we're poles apart, says Jesus. And if you're going to hear me, you'll need to be polarized, because my message is a polarizing message.

[18:23] But let me tell you, says Jesus, interpreting his words here, it's going to end really badly if you continue to act unaware of your earthbound nature.

It's going to end really badly, because you will one day face the full force of God's justice for your sins, every one of them. You can check through the reference of verse 21.

Sin is singular, which means the sin of unbelief, but this time sin is plural. It's reflecting the idea of God's justice falling on people who are so culpable, guilty before him.

A dreadful picture. Their response again?

Verse 25. Who are you? Now, I don't think that was a genuine question of we need more information. It's more of a sneering.

[19:33] You are a nobody, and we do reject you. It's a good question. Who are you? It's a right question. It's the question that every single person needs to ask of Jesus.

But these guys ask it with a sarcastic, unbelieving attitude, effectively saying, who are you to instruct us, the professors of religion, in things of salvation and heaven and hell?

Who are you to suggest that we are blinded by prejudice and hardwired to reject God and anything offered to us by God? You can hear them saying, we're God's people.

We're steeped in the traditions of the Old Testament scripture. We've spent our lives doing religious things to honor God and protect his name. And nothing you have said thus far, Jesus, will make us change our view, make us change our position.

You are nobody in our eyes. And we reject you and your stated pathway to forgiveness and heaven. And Jesus comes back again.

[20:37] Very generously comes back. I will die for sin as I am lifted up, verses 26 through 29. And again, it's as if Jesus is saying to these guys, what more can I say?

I have consistently, verse 26, I have consistently and repeatedly told you the truth my father sent me to tell you. But you have deliberately chosen not to understand, not even to try and understand. Why not? Because you've not liked what you've heard. And you're backing your own sovereignty. Jesus then goes on to give them the final warning, but it's also laced with hope and generosity. Verses 28 and 29. Jesus said to them, they will eventually be forced to see what they choose now not to see.

I will die, says Jesus, but not because I commit suicide from a sense of defeat and failure.

[21:51] Rather, I will die because I will be lifted up onto the cross and die as a means of securing your forgiveness and new life with God. And again, Jesus polarizes.

your glory, the end point of your determination to keep your sovereignty, to be God, to set your own agenda for acceptance with God, your glory will be the shame of crucifying the Lord of glory.

glory. Jesus' glory, by contrast, would be the pathway of suffering, rejection, death, resurrection, ascension, to be with his father forever.

And his shame and death would be the means of removing shame, darkness, and death from his people. His death would be the light dispelling darkness.

It would be the light of his life shining deeply into our souls through his Holy Spirit. It's quite amazing that in spite of repeated unbelief, repeated attempts by these guys to squirm away from what they genuinely see to be the challenge against their sovereignty by Jesus, Jesus keeps on being generous to them.

[23 : 23] He keeps on offering them hope in spite of their unbelief. And it's as if he's saying here, look, you can come to me for light and life now, or you can pursue your own sovereignty and self-salvation and then you'll find out the truth about me down the track of it, but it will be too late to benefit from the truth.

And the final word in this offensive message from Jesus, John tells us, it's almost understated in the verse 30 here, many believed, many believed.

In spite of persistent unbelief on the part of high-profile individuals, many find Jesus so compelling, so freeing, that they believed, they gave up their personal sovereignty to experience the life-changing light he offers freely to anyone who will come under his sovereignty.

So it says in the front of the bulletin, let's not hang back, let's not hold back from the light of Jesus, because his light shows up our dirtiness and brokenness.

Let's not stay in the dark, just sort of nursing that brokenness and dirtiness, sort of comfortable with ourselves and yet miserable in ourselves.

[25 : 05] Let's not do that, let's come to the light and have all that misery dispelled. Because apart from believing in Jesus, there is only darkness.

What is darkness? Well, darkness by definition is the absence of light. No matter how real, how sincere your religious actions might be, unless you have light and Jesus' light is total, then you're in darkness.

Through chapter 6 and 7 and now to chapter 8, Jesus has been saying this over and over and over again. He said, I am the bread of life. I am the thirst quenching water you long for.

I am the light of life you in your lost state so desperately need. I am everything you need. Give up your sovereignty and come under my sovereignty to experience all of that.

Final sentence, for those of us who are already committed to living under the sovereignty of Jesus, then each one of us needs to be looking into our own hearts and exposing those areas where they will be there, where we are still determined to maintain our own sovereignty against the sovereignty of Jesus.

[26 : 36] Those areas where we keep them to ourselves and we don't want the gospel to shine in them, those areas of darkness and sin because we still like them, we still want to dabble in them rather than living in the light and life of Jesus.

let me pray. Lord, burn these strong, offensive words deeply into our hearts.

We don't like the notion of giving up sovereignty. We are hardwired to make ourselves sovereign.

So help us, Lord, to give up our sovereignty, give up that which has failed us ultimately, for a sovereignty that will never fail us but will feed us and quench our thirst and give us light to find our way home to heaven.

Amen.