

(3) The scandal of human nature

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Date: 04 November 2007

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[0 : 00] The reading this morning is from John chapter 8 verse 12 to 30 on page 1078 of the Church Bible, starting at verse 12.

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. So the Pharisees said to him, you are bearing witness about yourself. Your testimony is not true.

Jesus answered, even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you do not know where I come from or where I am going.

You judge according to the flesh. I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me.

In your law it is written that the testimony of two men is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.

[1 : 03] They said to him, therefore, where is your Father? Jesus answered, you know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also. These words he spoke in the treasury as he taught in the temple. But no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

So he said to them again, I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come. So the Jews said, will he kill himself, since he says, where I am going, you cannot come?

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, you will die in your sins.

So they said to him, who are you? Jesus said to them, just what I have been telling you from the beginning. I have much to say about you, and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world that I have heard from him.

They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said to them, when you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.

[2 : 22] And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him. As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

Thank you very much, Jonathan, for reading the passage to us. Please keep your Bibles open on page 1078 as we look at John chapter 8 together. Let me pray for us before we start.

Father God, we do thank and praise you for your word. We praise you that it is a light to our path, a lamp to our feet. And so we ask, Father God, that you would shine the light of your word into the darkness of our hearts now this morning.

In Jesus' name. Amen. The other day, a door-to-door salesman visited our house. I'm sure they visit yours. There seems to be a lot of them around.

And I knew this particular salesman must be quite canny because our house is now situated in one of these no-call zones where you're not meant to be doing this cold contact. But that obviously didn't bother him, so he knocks on the door.

[3 : 29] I open and he's straight in there. Mate, got some great things for you to buy today. Got the greatest scissors in the world. Now, I'm not sure about you or how you feel when these people come to your door.

I was feeling quite sceptical. Greatest scissors in the world? Yeah, right. And obviously he knew I'd be thinking this because at this very moment he took out of his pocket a penny.

It must have been a pre-prepared penny because it was sliced in half. See these scissors? They cut right through this penny. Greatest scissors in the world. Now, as I said, I'm quite a sceptical guy.

I'm still thinking, yeah, right. But just for a moment I thought, well, what if they are? What if these really are the greatest scissors in the world? Do I actually need them?

I've got some perfectly adequate scissors in the kitchen and I've never needed to cut a penny in half. So, you see, whenever someone says such an outrageously bold claim like that, I think there are always two things in our minds.

[4 : 33] One, is it true? Where's the proof? Can I trust this claim? Second thing, even if it is, so what? What's this claim got to do with me? Do I need it?

Is there proof? Is there a need? Well, just to say, my scepticism got the better of me, so I pulled out my own one-pee piece from my wallet and said, if your scissors cut through this penny in front of my eyes, I'll buy all the scissors you've got.

At which point, he moved on to the next door. But I start with that story because in the passage before us, we ourselves are confronted by a bold, outrageous claim.

It comes from the lips of Jesus and we heard it right at the start of the reading. I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Now, claiming to have the greatest scissors in the world is one thing to which you'd want to see proof and your need. But claiming to be the light of the world, which we'll see at the moment, is a claim to be the greatest light.

[5 : 38] The only light, the one and only true light that everyone in the world needs. Well, that's quite another claim altogether. And we're wanting to see, we'll want to see Jesus' proof.

We want to see our need. And you'll be pleased to know that unlike the door-to-door salesman, Jesus Christ is going to back up this claim that he's the light of the world. You want proof?

I've got it. You want to see your need? I'll show you. So let's take a look. If you just turn to the back of your service sheet, you'll see where we'll be going over the next 20 minutes or so.

We'll look first at Jesus' claim, then his proof, and then our need. First then, the claim made by Jesus in verse 12.

I am the light of the world. This is not the first time that light has been mentioned in John's Gospel. We first saw it mentioned all the way back in chapter 1, the light shining in the darkness, the light that reveals God.

[6 : 43] We also saw it in chapter 3, the light that exposes sin, that exposes evil in the world. Now in chapter 8, we see Jesus explicitly state that this light refers to him.

I am the light of the world. But to fully appreciate what Jesus is claiming for himself here, we need to remember the context of the situation in which Jesus is speaking.

Verse 20 tells us that Jesus is teaching in the treasury, in the temple. And we know from chapter 7, that all this is happening during the Feast of Booths.

It might be helpful if I say that verse 12 carries straight on from verse 52 of chapter 7. 7.53 to 8.11 is not in the earliest manuscripts. So we're still at the Feast of Booths in verse 12.

And if you don't remember what the Feast of Booths was, it was one of the major festivals of the year. Remember when the people of God gathered together and lived in huts or booths made of branches.

[7 : 47] To remember God's rescue of them when they had lived in booths during the time of the Exodus. Now we've been looking at the Exodus, haven't we, in our home groups at the moment. So you'll know that one of the most significant parts, or one of the significant parts of the Exodus, was when God had guided his people in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

God's light to guide them, God's light to protect them from Pharaoh's army, God's light to lead them out of slavery into freedom and salvation. So light was a major theme of the Feast of Booths.

And it's said that for the whole eight days of the Feast of Booths, four huge lamps of oil were lit in the temple court of women near the treasury where Jesus is speaking. So that light was constantly shining forth day and night.

as they remembered back to God's presence with them in the pillar of light. But this ceremony of light didn't just look back, it looked forward as well, to a time the prophets had spoken of.

The light of God himself would appear again. This time rescuing his people from the darkness of sin. This time a light for all the nations. When the light of God, the light of salvation would reach to the ends of the earth.

[9 : 05] And I put some references again like last week on your sheet if you want to go and look at those later on. So it's into this context that Jesus speaks.

And you can only imagine that the effect it would have had. As Jesus declared, I am the light of the world.

With the four lamps burning around, Jesus saying, I am the light that the prophets spoke of. I am the true light which these lamps around me signify. I am God's presence with you.

I am your guide, your rescuer from sin's darkness. I am God himself come to lead you into salvation. This is the claim Jesus is making for himself with this phrase, I am the light of the world.

God himself bringing in the light of life just as the prophets had predicted. And it is this very claim that Jesus directs at us this morning, the readers.

[10 : 08] Because whoever follows him, says Jesus, will not walk in darkness, a darkness of sin and death. If you follow me, you will have the light of life, eternal life.

Well, that's the claim that Jesus makes. Secondly, let's look at the proof. Because in verse 13, the Pharisees are immediately questioned Jesus' authority for making such a claim.

Have a look at verse 13. You are bearing witness about yourself. Your testimony is not true. Now, if you're joining our series in John for the first time today, you could probably sympathise with the Pharisees' objection.

That's a massive claim you're making, Jesus. Who's there to back it up? How can we know it's true? Where's the proof? What makes you any different? To the other crackpots who claim to be messiahs or saviours of the world?

Problem is, Jesus has already dealt with this particular complaint at length earlier on in the Gospel. And by this stage in John 8, it seems the Pharisees, well, they're just arguing for the sake of arguing.

[11 : 27] So in the dark are they to the truth about Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesus repeats the answers he's given them before, as well as giving them a defining moment when they can know the truth about Jesus.

So, in verses 14 to 16, Jesus repeats what he's already said in chapter 7. Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going.

I'm from the Father, I'm going back to the Father, I'm on a divine mission, the Father's taught me everything, he's taught me the truth, so when I speak, I speak the truth, I'm speaking his words, I am the light of the world.

And in verses 17 to 18, Jesus repeats what he's already said in chapter 5. In your law, it is written, verse 17, that the testimony of two men is true.

I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me. Jesus is saying, look, were you not listening when I was teaching you in chapter 5?

[12 : 36] God, the Father is my other witness. And if you remember, we saw John the Baptist sent by the Father to witness to Jesus. Jesus pointed to his miraculous works given by the Father.

Jesus went to the Scriptures written by the Father, testifying to Jesus. Moses, the law, the prophets, this feast of booths here, it's all speaking about me, says Jesus.

I'm not speaking on my own authority. I have the Father too bearing witness about me. And that's all a bit of a recap but the Pharisees, they remained just as ignorant as they were when Jesus first taught them about the Father and his witness.

So in verse 19, where is your Father? They're clueless. Verse 25, who are you? Just don't get it.

Verse 27, they did not understand that Jesus had been speaking to them about the Father. totally in the dark, they're blind.

[13 : 42] So in verses 28 to 30, Jesus speaks to them again, saying a definitive moment is coming. A definitive moment when people, when you will know the truth about him.

A definitive moment when his claim will be shown to be valid that he really is the light of the world. So let me read verse 28. Jesus said to them, when you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak just as the Father taught me.

When you've lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that the Father who sent me is with me, but he's not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.

We saw back in chapter 3 that this phrase lifted up the Son of Man refers to Jesus' death. So Jesus is saying that his death is the defining moment. The defining moment when they back then and us today can know the truth about him.

That Jesus is who he says he is, that he really is the light of the world, sent from the Father, doing just what the Father had said. This is the moment when you'll know I'm doing nothing on my own authority.

[15 : 04] I'm doing just what is pleasing to the Father. Bringing in the light of salvation, dying for the sins of the world, just as God had predicted. And you might like to take a look at the account of Jesus' death in chapter 19 later on today.

You will see John go out of his way to show how Jesus' death fulfilled the Scriptures, fulfilling what God had said. Four times, I put the references on the sheet, four times John inserts his little comments.

Not one of his bones were broken to fulfill the Scripture. They cast lots to fulfill the Scripture. Jesus said, I thirst, to fulfill the Scripture. And again, another Scripture says they will look on him whom they pierced.

Jesus has been teaching throughout John that his entire life is in perfect accord with his Father's will. not one second of his life is contrary to what God had said in the Scriptures.

Jesus has the full authority and divine witness of the Father behind him as revealed in the Scriptures. And it's at his death that we see this most clearly as God's purpose of salvation revealed in Scripture is fulfilled.

[16 : 20] As Jesus deals with the problem of sin and cries out, it is finished. So Jesus, he's not speaking on his own authority here in chapter 8.

Jesus didn't just appear on the scene out of nowhere like a door-to-door salesman on the light of the world. Jesus is no maverick killed for having delusions of grandeur. No, his whole life from start to finish, from birth to death, was working out exactly as God the Father had said it would.

And it's at his death that we see this most clearly. When you've lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he.

Now, I'm not sure about you, but this comes as something of a surprise to me. And an exciting surprise it is too, because normally when I think of a defining moment of proof for who Jesus is, I think of his resurrection.

The resurrection of proof that Jesus has conquered death, the resurrection as proof that Jesus' death has paid the penalty for sin, the resurrection as proof that Jesus has risen and ruling as king over the universe, who will one day come back to judge the whole earth.

[17 : 32] And certainly for the other gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, that is true. But for John, he says that Jesus' death is proof too. Here is more proof, more evidence, that Jesus is who he says he is.

Which I hope is a real encouragement to us this morning. More evidence to show your friends. More evidence to bolster our faith. In those times of doubt, is Jesus for real?

What if it is just all made up? Well, by all means, remember the resurrection. But also, look at his death. No tragic accident, no mistake, just as the Father said it would, fulfilling scripture perfectly, just as God said it would happen.

It's marvelously reassuring. When you've lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the light of the world. So the claim, the proof, thirdly, our need.

Because like my attitude to the greatest scissors in the world, and do I need them, many people wonder just the same about Jesus. Isn't he just one of many lights in this world?

[18 : 46] Do I really need to follow him? And if so, how much? A little bit from time to time? Just when I'm struggling, generally I'm getting on well with life, trying my best. How much do we need Jesus?

Well, it's to this issue that Jesus focuses in verses 21 to 24. Let me read them out to you. 21.

So he said to them again, I am going away and you will seek me and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come. So the Jews said, will he kill himself since he says, where I am going, you cannot come?

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, you will die in your sins.

Why do we need Jesus? Well, you couldn't have missed it as I read those words out. Three times, chiming like warning bells, you will die in your sin, you will die in your sins.

[19 : 54] Unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins. Now, it goes without saying that to die in your sin is a horrific, horrific thing.

The Bible teaches that to die in your sin is to have the shame and guilt of sin hanging over you like a guillotine as you stand before the judgment seat of God.

To die in your sins is to face the full force of God's righteous fury at sin for rejecting his son Jesus. To die in your sin is to remain unforgiven, lost, alone, miserable, unquenchably thirsty, hursting, wasting away for eternity in hell.

It is a horrific, horrific thing to die in your sin. And what Jesus says here is that unless you believe in him, that will be your destiny. Now, I hope these hard-hitting words you see are, these are Jesus' words, they are not my words.

Some people think Jesus doesn't talk about sin and dying in your sin, but here it is three times straight from the lips of Jesus himself. And Jesus is just so black and white about it.

[21 : 08] If you don't believe in me, you will die in your sin. If you don't believe in me, you will not go to heaven. Where I'm going, you cannot come. Hell is a reality to Jesus.

The hundreds of people that die every minute across the world, if they didn't believe in Jesus, they will have died in their sin. Do you need Jesus? Of course you do.

We all do. And he is the light of the world. He is the true light who saves from sin. Not Buddha, not Mohammed, not any Hindu God.

Unless you believe in me, says Jesus, me, you will die in your sins. Now we need to remember that Jesus has made some wonderful invitations to us over the past couple of weeks.

Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. If anyone thirsts, come to me and drink. Whoever follows me today will have the light of life.

[22 : 12] Jesus has come to bring life. He loves to save people. But what we're seeing here in this part of John is what happens if you reject Jesus' offer of life?

What the consequences are of unbelief? And Jesus says very clearly, unless you believe, you will die in your sin.

Now for some of us this morning, well this is a warning isn't it? Please let Jesus' verdict on the Pharisees be a warning to you. Don't be like them.

and reject Jesus in spite of the evidence. Jesus is offering life. Why choose to die when you can have life?

Why choose to die in your sins when you can have the light of life? Jesus is saying stop walking in darkness, stop resisting, come to me, accept my rescue, be forgiven, have the light of life.

[23 : 12] So please, please consider very carefully Jesus' words here this morning. Unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins. For many of us here, these verses are a reminder of the world we live in.

The friendly neighbour next door, a chatty commuter on the way to work, the caring mother on the way to school. without Jesus, they will die in their sin.

It's not a pleasant thought, actually it's a horrific thought, but it is a true thought. And we mustn't forget it. People need Jesus. It doesn't matter how good they are, how lovely they seem, how rich they are, successful, maybe delightful people.

Unless they believe in Jesus, they will die in their sins. People need to believe in him. Now, if you're anything like me, you'll need to ask God to help you to believe this, this morning.

You'll need to ask God to help you to see people's destinies as they really are. You'll need God's help to really believe this truth about the people around you, about the world we live in.

[24 : 25] But these verses also serve as a wonderful reminder to us of what Jesus has saved us from. Can we ever stop giving thanks to God for it when we consider what it means to die in your sins, the horror of hell, and yet God has rescued us from it, rescued us from God's fury at our sin.

We're forgiven now because of Jesus. We are friends with God. He is our light leading us to be with him in heaven. We all know this is the heart of the Christian message, yet we so easily take it for granted.

In your personal prayers, when was the last time you thanked God for your salvation? If it's been a while, why not give thanks to God right now under your breath? Give thanks. He has rescued you from sin if you follow Jesus.

You are forgiven if you believe in him. Your destiny is heaven now, not hell. Just think where we would be right now without him.

And if you are having trouble thinking about that, well, let these verses, I mean, see them again. Jesus' words are so strong here of this world from below, of the flesh, ignorant of God, ignorant of Jesus, dying in our sin.

[25 : 42] This is what we are all like by nature. This is what we were like without Jesus. lost in darkness, living for ourselves, deserving God's judgment in hell.

We couldn't get ourselves out of this mess. We didn't want to get ourselves out of this mess and we certainly didn't deserve God's favour to rescue us from the mess. And yet, God did. And perhaps it was his very words that God spoke to you to call you out of the darkness.

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life. We needed to hear those words back then whenever it was when you first started to follow Jesus and we need to hear those words again today as we continue to follow him.

Nothing has changed. So let's keep giving thanks. We'll do it in a moment as we eat the Lord's Supper. Continue to give thanks this week.

Jesus is the light of the world. Follow him and you have the light of life. Let's pray together. Father God, these are sobering words from Jesus' lips that unless people believe in him, they will die in their sin.

[26 : 58] We do thank and praise you Father for the Lord Jesus that he is the light of the world. He holds out this marvellous invitation that whoever follows him will not walk in darkness but have the light of life.

We praise you for opening our eyes to the truth of that, for bringing us out of darkness and into your light. And we pray, Father God, that you would help us never to forget it but continue to remember it and realise this is the state of all those who don't know you.

Help us to hold out Jesus' offer of life in his name. Amen. Amen.