

The Light of the World

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Preacher: Phil Meulman

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 23rd of January 2000. The preacher is Phil Muleman.

His sermon is entitled, The Light of the World, and is from John chapter 8, verses 12 to 30. Well, let's pray.

Father, help us to understand your word. Lord, help us to know what it means for us today as your people, and help us to believe it, and to know that you are Lord.

Amen. Imagine you're learning to play cricket, and you're down at the MCG cricket nets, practicing your batting skills, Joshua, when a little Indian fellow walks up to you and he says, I am the world's number one batsman.

I am the world's number one batsman. What do you do? Do you go home because you're embarrassed, you don't want him to see your shocking batting skills?

[1 : 09] I'm not picking on you, Josh. Or do you continue on batting and ignore this person who has come down and said, I'm the world's number one batsman? Or do you ask this man, do you believe him, and ask him for some hints?

Or imagine you're learning to play tennis, and you just happen to be practicing your tennis down at the Melbourne Tennis Centre in this day and age, when a bald-headed American comes up to you and he says, I am the world's number one tennis player.

What do you do? With a better accent. Tony, do you go home because you're too embarrassed?

Do you go home because you're too embarrassed, you don't want to stand next to this guy? Or do you ignore him and go on practicing your tennis?

Or do you ask this person for some handy hints? Well, in a sense, that's what's happening here in John chapter 8, when Jesus says, I am the light of the world.

[2 : 24] He is using the current situation that the people are involved in, and that is the festival of tabernacles, which I'll talk about in a minute, and he's using the imagery from that particular festival to tell the people just who he is.

And that is, he is the light of the world. Now this festival of tabernacles was among the most popular of the annual festivals of the Jewish people, which is who's involved in this situation.

And as a result, it drew vast crowds to the city of Jerusalem, much like New Year's Eve that has just gone by. How many people were in Melbourne?

Half a million people, they think. How many people were up in Sydney? A million people, they think, were drawn into the cities and so on. The festival of tabernacles drew vast amounts of people from the surrounding areas of Jerusalem into the city to celebrate it.

And this festival had a strong element of what we would call eschatological expectation, and that's a big word, but that is, it has a strong element of what things would be like at the end of time.

- [3 : 39] And it was a festival, if you like, which gave a foretaste of the age to come. And it was a great celebration amongst the people.
- And this festival had two central elements or symbols. The first one was water. And in the Old Testament, on the day of salvation in the Old Testament, it talks about living waters flowing out from Jerusalem.
- And this was a symbol that the people looked forward to. And in this festival, they used to draw water and carry it around and all sorts of things with it. So that was the first symbol that was going on in the festival of tabernacles.
- The second symbol that was on, there was light. At night time, the temple courts were brilliantly lit up. You see, the reason was because in the Old Testament, again, it talks about on this day of salvation, with its promise of unending daylight.
- A symbol of joy, a symbol of light. It would never end. It's something that the people will look forward to. And the Old Testament is steeped with allusions to light.
- [4 : 54] This is why they had this festival of tabernacles. And it's in this context that Jesus says, He is the light of the world.
- Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Now, I suspect if Jesus was alive today in bodily form and was attending one of our millennium celebrations that went on around the world, if you didn't watch it on New Year's Eve, then he would probably say, I am the fireworks of the world.
- Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have fireworks that will never end. They will go on forever. Because I think we would understand what that sort of means, that the fireworks are a great symbol of the celebration of the new millennium and so on for us.
- Now, this Jesus that we read about here in the gospel has already made an impression on the Jewish leaders. And he hasn't proved particularly popular amongst them.
- And in verse 13 of chapter 8 here, we see how the Pharisees, that is, the sect of, the Pharisees were a sect of Judaism, and they were the strict observers of the law. We see how these Pharisees who hear Jesus' words respond to him.
- [6 : 19] And their response is an honourable one, really. But it also highlights the fact that they don't understand Jesus. It says in verse 13, Again, Old Testament law requires that for any testimony to be valid, when Jesus says, I'm the light of the world, someone else has to testify to that.
- Old Testament law requires that for any testimony to be valid, it needs at least two witnesses. So from a human point of view, which sees Jesus as just a human being, their response, in a sense, is right.
- And in a sense, the fact that two witnesses are needed to verify a testimony, I think, highlights the true character of this fallen world. And that is, we live in a world which is not ruled by truth.
- We live in a world where people cannot trust one another. And that's why Jesus, that is why Jesus, God in the flesh, was sent into the world to point people back to the truth, to point people back to God.
- And the way to get back to God was through Jesus, the light of the world. And that's why he says, I am the light of the world.
- [7 : 50] Jesus was fully human. And in our services, perhaps not so much in the evening services, we say that in the creeds every week.
- But we also say in the creeds that he was fully God as well. Jesus was fully human and was fully God. And the beginning of John's Gospel talks about Jesus being God made flesh.

And it's this point that the Pharisees and many others back then and still do today just do not understand. That is, we see the purely human Jesus but ignore his truly divine nature which can illuminate our understanding of this world's darkness and sorrow if we look to the divine nature of him.

So the Pharisees criticised Jesus' testimony. But Jesus goes on and in this passage he defends his method and authority in four ways.

And I've got them highlighted and Stella will reveal each one as we go along. First of all, he defends his method and his authority in four ways. First of all, he appeals to his mission in verse 14.

[9 : 02] Jesus says he knows where he has come from and he knows where he is going. He is the one sent into the world by the Father and engaged in a mission which will culminate in his exaltation which I'll look at in a little while.

So that's the first point. He appeals to his mission. Secondly, he appeals directly to his Father's presence with him in verse 16. He says, It is not I alone who judge but I and the Father who sent me.

The words I and the Father express the relationship which is the heartbeat of Jesus' life. And John's Gospel constantly, throughout the Gospel, constantly repeats this theme of the unity between the Father and the Son.

And his unity with the Father, with God, means that his teaching and judgment are those of his Father. He comes to do his Father's will, comes to do God's will and so on.

So this sort of claim demands a decision. Either we accept this and believe it or reject it and disbelieve it.

[10 : 15] I don't think there's middle ground. Thirdly, he appeals, Jesus defends his methods and authority in the third way by appealing to his divine origin.

At the end of verse 23, he says, I am not of this world. He's alluding to his divinity. And Jesus does not, like those around him, originate from this world.

Again, way back in chapter 1 of John's Gospel, it says that he was in the world before the world began. He speaks, Jesus speaks from the standpoint of one who has come from the heavenly world.

The fourth thing that he appeals to is seen in verse 28 where he talks about his future lifting up. What happens to Jesus in the future, that is, his death and resurrection, will testify to his teaching now that he's talking about here in this passage, that he is the light, that he is the life, that he is the salvation of the world.

And at that time, at the future lifting up, in verse 28, he says, you will realise that I am he, that is the one I claim to be, and that I do nothing on my own.

[11 : 39] But I speak these things as the Father instructed me. Well, we today live in an age where Jesus has died and is risen.

And we now await for Jesus' second coming, for his return. And along with it, the judgement of all people that Jesus has authority over. And that is everyone.

That's you and me included. To know God is to be in a personal relationship with him through this man, Jesus, that is talking here in this passage.

And we have already entered into paradise with him now in the knowledge that our sin is forgiven. And that future glory, which is free of suffering and hardship, of pain and sickness and all those sorts of things is in the future is still to come.

But we enter into it now when we put our trust into Jesus. But if we don't believe in Jesus in the sense of placing all our trust in him and serving him in all the areas of our lives, we have no relationship with God even though we may claim to believe in him.

[12 : 57] The way to God is through the Son. And that's essentially what Jesus is saying in verse 19. What he's doing and going on and doing is making a slamming indictment of these Pharisees, the law abiders, by saying they don't know the Father.

That is, they don't know God because they don't know him. They don't know God because they don't know him. And those sorts of words that he would be speaking to these law abiding Pharisees, these Jews and so on, would infuriate the people.

even to the point of wanting to arrest him because of the bold statements that Jesus is making. But we see in this passage that no one arrests him in verse 20.

Why does no one arrest him? Why does John bother to put that in there? Well, at the end of verse 20 it says, because his hour has not yet come.

That's why. Because Jesus' hour hasn't yet come. As the gospel of John unfolds, the plot against Jesus thickens.

[14 : 09] The people are looking at ways to arrest him, to corner him and get rid of him and so on. And throughout the gospel there are many opportunities to arrest him. But the time for that to happen is not in the hands of humans.

That's in God's hands. things. And I think that that has some real pastoral significance for all of us to take note of.

No matter what we do, we cannot ever thwart God's plans. We may make huge bungles.

This morning I got back from holidays and I was dreaming when we did communion and I made a few bungles. we may make major stuff-ups at work and at home.

We may make mistakes when we go on holidays. We may make mistakes in relationships. We might have totally failed relationships or whatever.

[15 : 14] We may even have major tragedies in our lives. But friends, nothing we do will ever thwart God's ultimate plan.

As Christians, therefore, we ought to take comfort from these words, knowing that whatever happens in our own environment and in the world at large cannot thwart God's ultimate plan.

He is the one who is in control. God's time is the right time. And we should trust, even though we may cry out, how long, oh Lord, because of the circumstances that are before us, we should trust that God knows what he is doing.

Well, Jesus is the teacher who addressed the Pharisees and the crowds at this feast of tabernacles. And he is the one who confronts us today with the uncompromising claim, I am the light of the world, as verse 12 says.

And that's a pretty startling claim and teaching in the context of that situation. Now, by contrast, there is the other kind of teaching in this passage represented by the Pharisees.

[16 : 33] And Jesus characterizes them in five ways. Again, it's on the overhead. First of all, again, in verse 14, we see they are ignorant of Jesus' mission.

You do not know where I come from or where I am going. For these people, for these Pharisees, these gathered people, Jesus is not understood.

They see only his outward appearance and judge it as unimpressive, a verdict which would have ample apparent justification as he took their leave from them on the cross.

They would be able to sort of verify their claim, I guess. Secondly, they judge merely by human standards as they judge him. Verse 15, because they don't experience the intimate oneness with the Father that Jesus knows, remember Jesus is divine as well as human, they are left at the mercy of their purely human judgments.

The third thing is that we see they are ignorant of the person of Jesus. And therefore also of the person of the Father. Verse 19.

[17 : 52] And let's look at the second part of verse 19. The order of this is important. He says, if you knew me, if you knew me, you would know my Father also.

As the teachers of Israel claiming to know God and the guardians of his truth, they were in fact, and the irony can hardly be greater here, strangers to this living God.

The upholders of the law are strangers to this living God. But the possibility of knowing God stands before their very eyes in verse 24, if they will believe in him, in Jesus.

There is no other way to the Father except through him. Don't believe what the false teachers of this world say when they say there are many ways to God.

Don't believe that. It's absolute rubbish. Those people who say those sorts of things, they're deceitful and they are liars and there is no place for them in God's heavenly kingdom.

[19 : 01] Jesus is the only way. The fourth thing, since these authorities do not know God, they cannot go to where Jesus will go after he dies in verse 21.

The heavenly order from which Jesus has come and where he will return is barred to them. They cannot get there. Verse 21 suggests that they will die in their sin if they don't acknowledge Jesus.

The fifth thing is, Jesus says of these Pharisees Pharisees and the people that are gathered, they are of this world. In verse 23, unlike Jesus who is not of this world.

These people's horizons are limited by their nature. Their merely human judgments reflect the reality that they are merely worldly people.

They have never been reborn from above. As John 3 says, John 3 says that we must be born again, not physically but spiritually.

[20 : 13] They must be reborn. Well, there's those sorts of things. I've said quite a few things in a very short time. And what can we do with these words and thoughts?

Let me say a few things. Jesus is unique. He's the Son of God and the means by which salvation is brought about for all the world as this passage tells us.

And the danger that many people fall into and that we as Christians must avoid is seeing Jesus as only a mere human. There are plenty of people today who still believe in the human Jesus because he was a good and a moral person.

There are plenty of people who believe that. In fact, there are religions which add Jesus to their religion because he provided this good ethical instruction and teaching.

But that is all they see. People like that and religions like that are no closer to God than these Pharisees that we read about here in this passage.

[21 : 23] The religions of Buddhism, of Islam, of Hinduism, of the Mormons, of the Jehovah's Witnesses are like this. They add Jesus to it or they do something to Jesus within that.

But they do not acknowledge the divinity of Jesus, that he is God. And while there are things to command in religions which uphold Jesus' moral and ethical teaching, it is not teaching the whole truth about his nature.

And there is a point at which the Christian cannot go with them. And by this I mean we cannot add other elements to the Christian gospel. It's heresy.

We cannot do it. Jesus stands alone because of who he is. And in him alone God has come to us and made himself known to us.

And as we will discover throughout this gospel and the whole of scripture, it is Jesus alone, not Allah, not Krishna, not Buddha or any other thing, who has paid the price of our sin by his unique sacrifice.

[22 : 34] on the cross. Whatever insights other religions may have to offer, they cannot bring us to God.

They cannot. Even Judaism on its own, the religion which reveals to us the Old Testament scriptures as we know them, cannot bring us into a relationship with God without Jesus' kingship being acknowledged.

The Pharisees did not know Jesus, therefore they did not know God. This is what verse 19 alludes to. To put our trust in Jesus is to enter into an eternal relationship with God the Father.

To ignore him is to die in our sin, as verse 21 points out. there is, however, an invitation in Jesus' claim.

All may come to him. Why? Because Jesus is the light of the world. And to do that, we must first admit our darkness.

[23 : 46] darkness. For as Calvin, the great reformer in the 16th century says, none will ever present themselves to Christ to be enlightened save those who have known both that this world is in darkness and that they themselves are altogether blind.

But if we are ready to admit that need, that is that we are blind and that we live in a world of darkness, Jesus stands there ready to give the light of salvation to all who believe in him as saviour and lord.

Well, at the beginning I asked what you would do if you were playing cricket and this world's number one batsman came up to you, Sashin Tendulkar obviously, and said I'm the world's number one batsman.

And I also asked if an American with a geeky accent came up and said I'm the world's number one tennis player. What would you do? What would you do? I think you'd be crazy to reject their advice and their hints if you're wanting to further your batting skills or your tennis skills, wouldn't you?

These people, Sashin Tendulkar could give you some great insights on cricket and Andre Agassi could give you some great insights on how to play tennis and I could do with a few of those tips.

[25 : 16] They give you great insights on the sport that you may have never ever thought of and your game may just improve. Well, Jesus said that he is the light of the world and that whoever follows him will never ever walk in darkness.

And he demonstrated that supremely by his work on the cross, by his dying for our sin on the cross and showing that he is the light of the world by raising again to life, raising again to life.

It would therefore be crazy to ignore or at the very least investigate the claims that he makes about himself in the Bible. Are you walking in the light or are you walking in darkness?

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.