

Jesus, Giver of Light

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[0 : 01] You may like to have open again the Bibles from the pews at page 870 and this is the second of four weeks in anticipation of Christmas of sermons from John's Gospel on the theme of light and life to all he brings.

So let's pray. God our Father, shine the light of your truth in our hearts we pray that it may lead us to your Son the Lord Jesus Christ and to the life that lights up the world.

Amen. The great feast is just over. Probably the greatest Jewish feast of Jesus' day was the Feast of Tabernacles held in our calendar in September, October during the year.

One of the three main pilgrimage feasts where all the men at least were obliged under Old Testament law to go to the central place in Jesus' day that was Jerusalem to celebrate the feast.

The Feast of Tabernacles or booths recalls tents and people would actually live in Jerusalem in little tabernacles or tents to remember and give thanks for the time when they spent 40 years in the wilderness, about 1400 BC and there lived in tents in the wilderness from leaving Egypt and its slavery towards and into the promised land.

[1 : 26] A 40 year period during which in the desert God miraculously guided and provided for them. So the Feast of Tabernacles was a joyful celebration.

It coincided also with the summer harvest so there was plenty of fruit of figs and dates and grapes and all that sort of thing as part of the festivities of the Feast of Tabernacle.

In the temple courts where the people would come there were fountains and running water. It was a symbol of part of the provision and miraculous provision of God in that 40 year period.

Remember how God's miracle turned the brackish salty water into drinkable fresh water. Remember how when they were complaining of the lack of water God miraculously provided water from a rock under the leadership of Moses.

So on the last day, the great day of this Feast of Tabernacles, where the fountains of water were in the temple courts reminding the people of those miracles of the past provision of God.

[2 : 39] Jesus said, Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.

Those words of Jesus are recorded for us at the end or near the end of chapter 7 preceding today's passage. The last great day of the Feast.

As they remembered and saw that symbol of water reminding of the past, Jesus says, Look future. It's fulfilled in me. I invite you who are thirsty to come and find the water of eternal life.

In the temple court, in one of the outer courts, the court of women, there were 13 great big collection trumpet looking things apparently into which people would put their offerings.

It's probably there that in another occasion, that widow put her mite, her little coin, when she made her offering to God. In this outer court, the court of women, or sometimes called the treasury court, because of these collection boxes, during the Feast of Tabernacles, and especially on the last day, the great day of the Feast, there were four huge candelabra.

[4 : 06] Reputation is that they were 50 cubits high, that's 75 feet. That's astonishing height. And apparently young men would climb ladders to light them, probably breaking every OH&S; rule there is these days, I'm sure.

Rather than perhaps candles of wax and wicks, although they might have been a bit like that, more likely they're probably big bowls of oil with wicks of cloth in them that would burn and the flames would come over the top in effect and give light to this outer court of the treasury, the court of women.

And when they were lit, there would be music and dancing and feasting and festivities. This was a particularly exuberant and joyful day, the last great day of the Feast, the water fountains running and the light.

Now, if you lived in Jerusalem in these days, at night it would be very dark. You see, we're used to, at night, car lights, traffic lights, street lights, house lights, shop front lights, city office block lights.

Our city is still a beacon, even at night. But in those days, the only light were, were oil lamps in effect, little lights.

[5 : 23] And if you walk the streets of the city of Jerusalem at night, it would be very dark indeed. But the reputation was that in the Feast of Tabernacles, these tall and monstrous candelabras would shed so much light from the outer court of the temple that the whole of Jerusalem dazzled in bright light through the night.

It would have been an extraordinary sight. Remember, too, the symbol of this fiery light and the time of tabernacles in the wilderness. How that whole period began with God appearing in a burning, dazzling bush and revealed his presence to Moses and his instructions to save the people from the slavery of Egypt.

Remember how they came out of Egypt to Mount Sinai, God's own mountain, and the mountain was ablaze with fiery light to symbolise the presence of God as he gave his laws and made his people his covenant people and directed them towards the promised land.

And remember how we're told that through the night, through those 40 years, God led them in the wilderness by a pillar of fire at night to guide them to the salvation of the promised land.

On the next day, after the great day of the feast, they go home, we're told, at the beginning of chapter 8. But probably the next day, Jesus is back.

[6 : 54] No doubt the crowds have dispersed. There may not be a huge crowd here. But the candelabra would be burnt out, extinguished. The court would be in normal light, no longer dazzling light.

And to the people who were there assembled, Jesus said, I am the light of the world.

I am the light of the world. Not just a light for the temple, not just a light for Jerusalem, not even a light for Israel, as God is called in the Old Testament.

I am the light of the world. With the backdrop of the court of women, the treasury court, we're told in verse 20, the same place where these lights had been blazing the last few days but are now gone, I am the light of the world.

I wonder if you've ever played a word association game. You know, you say a word and somebody is to respond immediately with a first word that comes into their head. If you did that to a Jew of Jesus' day, not least at the Feast of Tabernacles, but probably generally, and you said to them, light, I guess they would respond with one of two words.

[8 : 22] Most likely they would simply say, God is light. The other word they may well say is salvation. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Psalms 27 begins. You see, through the Old Testament, light is a standard symbol of God. God is light. God is light for his people. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

The light is a symbol of God's presence in the midst of his people, but not just his presence holy, yes, but his presence to save. The burning bush, Mount Sinai ablaze with light.

The pillar of fire by night leading them through the wilderness to salvation in the promised land. Light God, light salvation would be the word association that's there.

The context in John, the context of the Feast of Tabernacles, reeks of Old Testament symbolism. And so when Jesus says, I am the light of the world, the interpretation, the framework of understanding what he means is what the Old Testament teaches us.

[9 : 28] The light is the dazzling presence of God to save his people all through the Old Testament. So when Jesus says, I am the light of the world, he's making a very bold claim.

He actually uses distinctive language to do it. He doesn't simply say, I'm the light of the world, but he says, I am the light of the world.

It's emphatic. And the way that it's emphatic reminds us of something else in the Old Testament. Because the very name of God, Yahweh or Jehovah, as it's sometimes translated, in our Bibles, usually it's the word Lord in capital letters, but literally it's the word Yahweh or Jehovah, means, as God told Moses at the burning bush, I am who I am.

So when Jesus says, I am the light of the world, he's making a not so subtle claim to divinity. He's claiming, in effect, to be divine.

He's claiming to be God in the flesh, as he was and is. It's not simply saying, I'm just a prophet. It's something bolder and stronger than that.

[10 : 47] Which is why, of course, there's so much hostility that's thrown back at Jesus in response. But there's more to it than that as well. The Old Testament anticipated in particular in the prophet Isaiah that one would come who would be the light to the nations.

Twice, in fact, that prophecy is made in Isaiah 42 and 49. And the person about whom it is made is called a servant of the Lord. When Jesus stands up and says, I am the light of the world, it's in effect what was prophesied, the light for the nations, the world.

And Jesus is saying, I'm that servant. Now, whenever you get this, an Old Testament illusion like that, it usually carries with it the context.

For example, if I say to you, the Lord's my shepherd, many of you will instantly think, therefore I shall lack nothing. He leads me beside green pastures and still waters, and so on. That is, the Lord is my shepherd introduces into our mind all the connotations of Psalm 23.

So when Jesus says, I am the light of the world, it brings in all the connotations of the servant, predicted and prophesied by Isaiah.

[12 : 08] So what happens to that servant? What is he on about? The servant comes to die. The servant comes to die an atoning death, carrying the sins and iniquities and burdens of the people.

He dies a death mocked and despised and rejected. But he also dies and is vindicated by God and lifted up.

He's the one who makes many righteous. Jesus is saying, I'm that servant. I am the light of the world. I am God's saving presence.

I am the one, the servant, who is predicted to save the people. And that's what Jesus is saying about himself. I'm the saviour. I am God incarnate.

I am the light of the world. I'm the one who's come to atone for the sins of the world. I'm the one who's come to bring people back to God. I'm the one who is the saviour of the world.

[13 : 20] I am the light of the world. And those who follow me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

It's an invitation to follow him. Just like Jesus says, those who are thirsty come to me and drink. The end of chapter 7. The day before. Now another invitation.

Follow me. Is what Jesus is saying. I'm the light of the world. Follow me and you'll never walk in darkness but you will have the light of life. Life in all its fullness.

Life with richness and meaning here on earth. But even more than that. Resurrection life. As Jesus will demonstrate in just a couple of chapters time when he raises Lazarus from the dead and a few chapters after that himself rise from the dead.

He's the one who brings eternal life. Knowing God the Father. As he'll say in chapter 17 for example. Follow Jesus leads to life as it's meant to be.

[14 : 22] Life with God. Life for eternity. Life in its fullness. Life with God. The resurrection life. And we follow him by trusting him. We trust in his death that it takes away our sins.

We trust in him that he's brought us to God and made us righteous in God's eyes as the prediction of the servant was made in Isaiah 53. But we also follow not merely by trusting but it's a moral invitation as well.

In the Old Testament frequently you would be exhorted to walk in God's ways. Here we're being exhorted to not walk in darkness. Rather to walk in the light.

Following Jesus. It's a moral implication. That is our lives are to be shaped in character and activity in speech and behaviour by Jesus himself.

The light of the world. He reveals to us and in a sense shines for us how we are meant to live our lives. In the reflection of the character of Jesus himself.

[15 : 34] Light is the saving presence of God directing us to how to live in trust and obedience following Jesus. The Feast of Tabernacles this symbol of light look backwards.

Back to the light of God's presence providing and guiding in the wilderness. darkness. But Jesus is saying that event itself is looking forward to me Jesus the light of the world.

I fulfil it in a bigger way where that light led to the promised land I am the light that leads to the eternal heavenly land. To the ultimate and long lasting and eternal salvation.

Not merely the land on earth. As John's gospel begins more or less in him was life and the life was the light of men.

Or as Charles Wesley put it in perhaps I think the greatest Christmas carol light and life to all he brings. Well understandably the Jewish leaders did not particularly like this claim of Jesus.

[16 : 40] they recognise that it's actually a serious and bold claim and so they begin to reject him with some hostility. This hostile reaction to Jesus has already begun.

We saw that last week in chapter 5 and it bubbles and brews and expands until in the end he's put to death on a cross. The Pharisees are Jewish leaders who are particularly devout.

We often think of the word Pharisee in a slightly derogatory way. that the Pharisees were bad people but actually in Jewish society they were very religious very devout they knew their Old Testament and they knew their own laws in addition to that.

They wanted to dot every I and cross every T in their behaviour they were highly legalistic and very devout. And they say to Jesus as we're told in John 8 verse 13 you are testifying on your own behalf your testimony is not valid.

That is they're trying to pick him up on a legal technicality and that is simply that Jesus is speaking about himself by himself and in their law that's an invalid testimony.

[17 : 51] In the Old Testament you need two witnesses to prove a case in court and similar to that in the Jewish tradition if you simply made a claim about yourself by yourself then that was regarded as invalid.

and so they're saying Jesus we dismiss what you're saying about yourself because it's just you who's saying it and therefore it's wrong it's invalid testimony.

Jesus dismisses their objection but he does it in an enigmatic sort of elusive way. He says back to them in verse 14 even if I testify on my own behalf my testimony is valid.

Why? Because I know where I've come from and where I'm going and you don't know where I've come from or where I'm going. That's a puzzling thing in a way for Jesus to say.

Where he's come from where he's going is clearly heaven but why does that make his testimony valid? Well the point is and it gets clearer in the words that Jesus says in the following verses the point is that Jesus is alluding to his heavenly origin he comes from the heavenly father from God the father sent by him as he'll say in a minute.

[19 : 08] So when Jesus speaks God speaks. When the son speaks the father speaks. I and the father are one.

So his testimony is actually not alone. His testimony is the father's testimony. It's two at the same time. Jesus is saying what I say has the stamp of God's authority about it.

Not just my own made up words. He is God's very word remember. In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.

Jesus. God's word. And they're ignorant of where he's come from and where he's going. They don't understand Jesus' divine origins. They don't recognise him as the son of God who speaks with the father's authority.

They're ignorant. And therefore Jesus goes on to repudiate their judgement of him. They've judged him by worldly standards in effect is what he's saying in verse 15.

[20 : 11] I judge no one. What he means is I don't judge people by worldly standards. Why? Because I've come from heaven. If I judge he says in verse 16 my judgement is valid for it's not I alone who judge but I am the father who sent me.

Jesus is saying you're judging me simply by worldly standards and that's ignorant. You don't know where I've come from or where I'm going. But I judge by heavenly standards by God's standards by an informed knowledgeable standard not out of ignorance.

Jesus does judge but he judges rightly and he judges again with the father's authority. We saw that in detail last week from chapter 5. Well now Jesus gets a little bit clearer again in verse 17.

In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. It's there in the Old Testament reading we had today from Deuteronomy. Yes, Jesus says I testify on my own behalf.

That's one witness. And the father who sent me testifies on my behalf. Now for Jesus when he speaks the father speaks. You get two testimonies in one.

[21 : 26] It's a Christmas bargain. Well they don't understand this the Pharisees. Where's your father they say. It's hard to know quite the intonation of what they mean.

It could mean simply naively well where's your father here we can't see him let's hear his testimony. Or maybe it's even a little bit more dismissive. Oh come on as if your father's testimony is going to be really out.

Where's your father really. He's not here. Dismissive. Disdainful. And Jesus replies you know neither me nor my father.

Again they're ignorant. If you knew me you'd know my father also. For when I speak the father speaks. and you don't recognize my testimony and you don't know the father's either.

What a tragedy to be ignorant of Jesus Christ as these Pharisees were. As so much of our world is. Not to know him as the light of the world.

[22 : 37] Not to embrace him as the saviour of the world. not to recognize in him the path of life. Because the alternative to following Jesus is walking in darkness.

If following Jesus means that we have the light of life not just follow it but we have it then by implication the opposite is if you walk in darkness you have death.

eternal death cut off from God forever. It's a stark choice actually. The trouble is most of our world lives as though it's in the light.

It's sort of enraptured by the glitzy lights of neon and gold and plasma. It doesn't recognize its need for the light of the world.

world. And so too for the Pharisees presumably satisfied with candelabra for one week a year and they fail to recognize their need for the light of the world.

[23 : 53] There are many who like the Pharisees show contempt and dismiss the claims of Jesus Christ. There are many who say well I like Jesus moral teaching but I reject his claims to be divine.

But as we saw last week so again you cannot separate the two. Jesus here is claiming some moral teaching. If you follow me you will walk and have rather the light of life.

And following Jesus has got moral dimensions as I've explained. It's about following him in character and godliness and behaviour and action and speech and so on. But the moral claims of Jesus are bound up, are inseparable from, are tied together with his claim to be the light of the world.

His claim to be divine. His claim to speak with the Father's authority. If that's not true then his moral teaching is rubbish, unvalidated to be rejected.

The moral teaching is to follow Jesus. But the moral teaching also is bound with the promise of salvation. I am the light of the world.

[25 : 19] I show you how to live righteously, in a godly way, but I am the light of the world. salvation, forgiveness, atonement, I die for you to make you righteous in God's sight.

Jesus is claiming here to be uniquely the one who saves. He's claiming here to be uniquely the light of the world.

He's claiming here uniquely to speak with the Father's authority. He's claiming here uniquely to be the one who will take people back to God.

It's a bold claim. No wonder the Pharisees rejected it. But what about you? There is only one light of the world, Jesus.

There is only one who brings us to God. Jesus. There is only one who leads us to follow the path of life.

[26 : 34] Jesus. There is only one who's come from heaven and went back there. Jesus. There is only one path to life.

Jesus. Jesus. I am the light of the world. Those who follow me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Follow him. God bless you. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. He is to His name is entre ■■■
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