

The Light and Life

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[0 : 00] I'd like to thank Dan Gifford very warmly for his very warm welcome and as I see some familiar faces it's very good to be back with what Anita and I regard in a sense as our second home.

So it's lovely to be here with you. I'd like to say something about the Gospel of John in the next couple of Sundays and this morning I draw your attention to the reading from John chapters 7 and 8 that we've just received.

As we do that I wonder if we would just bow our heads in prayer as we ask God to speak to us. Almighty God our Heavenly Father we thank you that you have caused the Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning.

We pray that your Holy Spirit may now speak to each of us as we listen to your word. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Friends if we were Jewish people living in the time of Jesus, living in Palestine, at this very time of the year we would be among the tens of thousands of people who were attending one of the great festivals known as the Festival of Tabernacles.

And the Feast of Tabernacles had two great ceremonies as part of it. One involved water and the other involved light.

[1 : 24] Now we can't live without water and we can't live without light. In Sydney, Australia, the home of Anita and me, we are in the throes of a terrible drought.

And our dams are only about 40% filled and if we don't have some rain fairly soon a city of 5 million people faces very severe difficulties. We need water.

Likewise, when we have a power failure and all the lights go out we realise how dependent we are on light as we struggle to find that torch or those candles to illuminate our way.

So water and light are among the staples of life. But in the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus takes these two great symbols which are part of that ceremony of the Feast of Tabernacles and gives them a very profound meaning at a, shall we say, at a deepest level.

A deep level, as it were, that will sustain us through the struggles of life. The Feast of Tabernacles lasted for about a week and it was to commemorate the privations and difficulties that the escaping Hebrews felt as they travelled through the wilderness to the land of promise.

[2 : 45] And to commemorate this, once a year they would meet together in Jerusalem, tens of thousands of them, and they would build rough temporary dwellings. It would be like camping out for a week to remember that for 40 years they did just that.

The climax of the Feast of Tabernacles involved some priests going to the Pool of Siloam with large golden flagons and taking water from the Pool of Siloam, coming up the steep ridge to the Temple Mount, entering the temple precincts to the blast of trumpets, and then coming into the temple area and pouring water from the Pool of Siloam on the altar in the temple.

This was in relationship to a promise that was made in the book of the prophet Jeremiah, I beg your pardon, Ezekiel chapter 47, where Ezekiel spoke of a great temple at the end of history, God's temple from which water would flow north, south, east and west, knee deep, chest high, that would flood the land, that would bring growth where there was desert, which would bring freshness to the Dead Sea so that fish would swim there and so on.

This was a kind of end time picture that Jerusalem's temple would be the centre of the world and it would be a blessing to the whole world. It is extraordinarily pointed, therefore, that at this very moment Jesus should arise and say, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me, let him drink, he who believes in me.

And then John said, This was to fulfil the scripture that said, Out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.

[4 : 45] Jesus is therefore claiming to be the source of spiritual sustenance and renewal that will provide the wherewithal for people to travel through this life into the land of promise in the kingdom of God.

It is a promise of the water of forgiveness that will flow from the death of Jesus on the cross. It is the water of inner peace, of a right relationship with God which is now established.

It is the water of a confident relationship with God which is now established. It is the water of connectedness, which means that men and women need no longer to be thirsty for the knowledge of the living God, but know both who he is and enjoy a relationship with him.

This is water that will sustain and refresh today and tomorrow and tomorrow and beyond that through the struggles and difficulties of life.

The Lord Jesus is invisible but he is near and he says to us, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me, let him drink, he who believes in me.

[5 : 59] We may remember the woman of Samaria that Jesus spoke to in an earlier passage in the Gospel of John. A lonely woman, an outcast as she was in that society and he said, If you knew the gift of God and who it is who is speaking to you, you would ask and he would give you living water.

Some years ago in a parish where I was at that time working, in the course of Sunday morning service as one looked out from pulpit and prayer desk, I saw a couple that I hadn't seen before. I'd seen folks like this not uncommonly in the past and there was something about them that told me I had an idea what they would ask me for when there was an opportunity to do so.

I was wrong. They didn't ask for money. I said, How can I help you? And the man said, I want to find God.

I have to tell you that's not something that happens as often as we might hope it would. But that was his question. And it was an indication, I suppose, of the thirst, the thirst that this man and his, I won't say wife or he was not, his companion, asked for.

[7 : 22] Thirst for the living God. So, Jesus is taking this great symbol of water which was so prominent at this festival and in the midst of the festival he is making this huge claim, if anyone thirsts, I am that great temple as it were, that will come at the end of the age.

I am the source of renewal and refreshment that will be there for all people in all places and in all times. And so, he offers that water to you and me today if we will come to him and believe in him. The second great ceremony at the Feast of Tabernacles occurred at night and it involved filling four huge bowls, full of oil, elevating them and setting them alight.

It involved thousands of Jewish men with lighted torches dancing in the presence of this brilliant light in the night sky.

This too was to fulfil an Old Testament idea for in the Old Testament the people were led by a pillar of cloud by day as they escaped from Egypt and a pillar of fire by night.

[8 : 44] The idea of light is deep rooted within the thinking of the Old Testament. The first act of creation is let there be light for God himself is light and in him is no darkness at all.

When the Messiah came it was believed he would be the bringer of light and so Jesus says I am the light of the world he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

Now if you read your Bibles in John chapter 8 you'll find verses 1 to 11 in brackets that is the passage in relationship to that woman taken in the act of adultery.

Almost certainly that passage is an authentic gospel passage but equally almost certainly it is wrongly located. It has been dislodged from somewhere else and it has found a resting place there. If we remove it as we are fully justified to do in terms of manuscript evidence we will therefore find that the passage in which Jesus says if anyone thirst for them come to me and drink is back to back was his statement I am the light of the world.

[10 : 04] So Jesus is making these two massive claims that caught up the symbolism of that great festival of tabernacles and then he is saying I am the fulfilment of this symbolism.

I am the ultimate water and I am the ultimate life that will sustain on the one hand and guide on the other people through their lives.

One of the disciples of Jesus was a man named Matthew. As Matthew heard Jesus teach and as Matthew saw Jesus perform his miracles of kindness to those in need he quoted an Old Testament text in his Gospel of Matthew the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light and those who sat in the region of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

In the passage beyond the one in chapter 8 moving into chapter 9 we have an account of a man born blind a beggar a man who never saw and Jesus speaks to him and Jesus gives that man sight and Jesus follows him.

He is a kind of living example of someone for whom Jesus is the light of the world and who began to follow him so that he did not walk in darkness but have the light of light.

[11:37] As water provides sustenance and renewal and refreshment on a day by day basis so light gives hope. Light speaks of goodness.

Light speaks of moral purpose. Light speaks of the kingdom of God. That couple that spoke to me in church who as it were thirsty for the living God I have to say that they also needed light.

One could easily misrepresent the story by suggesting that it was a simple and easy road for them to walk. In fact it was not. It turned out that this lady who was not married to her companion she had had five children by I think four different men.

The man himself was a criminal on the run. one. I sat down with him in my youthful naivety when I heard about his crimes and I said you will have to make restitution.

He said what is that? I said you will have to pay back what you have stolen. Ah he said that will be difficult. Why I said well he said I estimate that I have committed one criminal act every day for the past 15 years where do you suggest I start?

[12:59] I well I talked him into giving himself up and the detective who was on his case nearly fell off his chair when he walked into the police station and the magistrate before whom he had appeared on several occasions beforehand nearly fell off his bench when he appeared.

He did pay back the money. I have to say though there were many false starts. things were not easy there were slippages backwards and then being raised up again and I have to say that pastorally this man and his wife that she ultimately became because we ultimately did get them legally married I have to say they took up as much pastoral time and energy as the rest of the congregation put together.

So it was something of a relief when we finally left that parish and went consoling ourselves with the thought of leaving our friends to move into another part of Australia my wife said well at least we won't have I'll say the names they're not their real names Reg and June well several days after you arrived the front doorbell went and my wife reported to me later the tone of voice when I said oh Reg how nice to see you we lost touch with that couple but years later I heard that he was doing mission work on the streets helping people who had come from the sort of background that he had come from but he and his wife are good examples of those who sought for water and found it and found light to guide their paths

C.S. Lewis one of the great literary and intellectual figures of the 20th century once reflected on these passages that I'm reflecting with us about today and he reflected that the sorts of people who make claims like I am the light of the world are either evil knowing they're not the light of the world but claiming to be or are deranged thinking they are the light of the world but are not or in the case of Christ who is neither deranged by his behaviour nor evil in what he does makes a huge challenge to us that in fact he is God for he who claims to be the light of the world is at the same time humble I am meek and lowly of heart and is at the same time good he goes around doing good so this is a huge challenge to us it points to the deity of

Christ it points to the fact that he fulfills all the of the Old Testament but more profoundly it tells us that just as we need the staples of bread and water and light for our daily life so at a more profound level to deal with the struggles and realities of life and the fact of the need to know God and come into the kingdom of God we need Jesus Christ who is the water the living water and who is the light of the world so will you do a reality check and ask yourself this morning have you heard his words which say to you if anyone thirst let him come to me let him drink he who believes in me have you done that have you come to him have you taken the cup of water of salvation from his hand will you ask yourself the question when he says

[17:20] I am the light of the world he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life will you ask yourself am I indeed following him today Lord may it be so Amen to meet