

# Light of the World Exposing

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 31 May 2015

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[ 0 : 00 ] Oh, good morning, everybody. I just want to add my welcome to James and Dan, especially to those folks who are visitors with us today for the wonderful—it was a great baptism, right?

It was just a lovely kind of vibe. I can't—terrible word to use in church, but it was just wonderful. It was wonderful. So anyway, my name is Aaron. If you don't know me, I'm one of the ministers on staff here.

And you've joined us in the middle of a series on John. And this week, we're up to John 8, and we're looking at verses 12 to 30.

Like last week, when you heard the passage read, now like last week, it's focused around a confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders of the day. And they have a really big problem with Christ.

In this case, it's his outrageous claim that he makes in verse 12. Let me remind you of it. But 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.

[ 1 : 02 ] And I'm going to spend most of my time here this morning just on that one verse. Now, so you know where we're headed. Four sections. The darkness of the world, section one.

Section two, Jesus is the light. Three, the condition you have to fulfill to be in the light. And four, the promise of light in your life. So darkness, light, condition, promise. Let's go.

Section one, the darkness. Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness. So what does that assume?

It assumes if you're not following Jesus, you're in the darkness. And I think it's fair to say that, you know, at every point in history, that that Christian truth has been very distasteful to people.

I mean, especially today. So what does it mean to walk in darkness? What is it talking about here?

Well, the first layer of meaning, I think, has to do with confusion and ignorance. And Isaiah 59 paints this wonderful picture of this.

[ 2 : 01 ] Very vivid picture of it. Listen to these words from Isaiah 59. We hope for light and behold darkness. And for brightness, but we walk in gloom. We grope for the wall like the blind.

We grope like those who have no eyes. We stumble at noon as in the twilight. Among those in full vigor, we're like dead men. Now, I think this is the experience of the Pharisees in our passage today.

I mean, the Messiah they are hoping for is he's right there. And they miss him. They're hoping for light. They're hoping for light. They're actually in darkness.

They're groping around completely oblivious to the fact that there is treasure right there. And you can see it in how they respond to Jesus. Let me read a few verses here. Verse 13, the Pharisees said, You're bearing witness about yourself, so your testimony is not true.

So they wanted two witnesses. It was kind of like a court thing. You needed two witnesses for something to be true. So they're just rejecting his claims on a technicality, a judicial technicality.

Verse 19, they say to him, So where's your father then?

[ 3 : 07 ] Because Jesus has just talked about being his connection with his heavenly father. And he's just said that his heavenly father is his second witness, sort of implicitly there. And they're like, So where is this father of yours then?

Verse 20, they say, Is he going to kill himself? Who knows where they got that idea from. And 25, the climax of their confusion, Who are you? They're in the dark.

They're confused. And they're ignorant. I mean, there's great confusion about Jesus today, of course. Even in the last century, there were people who didn't even think Jesus ever existed.

The great Soviet encyclopedia published in 1952 has two lines under the heading Jesus. Here's one. The name of the mythical founder of Christianity.

The other people think Jesus is just a prophet. I mean, it's the position of Islam. The BBC aired a show earlier this year asking the question, Was Jesus an alien? So some stellar scholarly work there, obviously.

[ 4 : 12 ] But I think the most damaging kind of confusion around Jesus is the lie that Jesus was a good man, and he did some good teaching, and he taught us how to be kind, and he was eventually crushed by the wheel of history there.

Now back to the text. So we've heard confusing questions, confusing statements from the Pharisees. Now listen to how Jesus describes these religious leaders, and he's not messing around.

Verse 14. You don't know where I come from or where I'm going. 15. You judge according to the flesh. 19. You know neither me nor the Father. 21. You will die in your sin.

23. You are from below. You are of this world. 24. You will die in your sin. At the end of the same verse, you will die in your sin. 27. The climax. They don't understand.

So the Pharisees are in the darkness of ignorance and confusion, and Jesus calls them out. He just names it. And these are the most respected men in their day.

[ 5 : 14 ] And he names it. The temple officers from last week's passage were absolutely right. No one ever talked like this man. So you can see why these guys wanted to kill Jesus.

So if the first layer of darkness, I think, is sort of around the idea of confusion and ignorance, I think the second layer's got something to do with sin and death.

And we heard just then, three times, Jesus says you'll die in your sins. What's that about? When the Bible talks about death, it's sometimes talking about physical death, sometimes talking about spiritual death.

In this case, I think we can take it both ways. The passage is saying this, that every aspect of our life is marked by sin and death. You know, in the confession that we did earlier, it said there is no health in us.

I wonder if you ever kind of get to that point and say, if there's no health in us, actually, I'm pretty good. I'm not too bad. In this one area. No, you know what the Bible teaches? It says this, that when you walk in darkness, that every aspect of your life, it's not as bad as it could be, but every aspect of your life is touched by death, by sin.

[ 6 : 21 ] Our concepts of, to use a sort of a classical framework, our concepts of beauty and truth and goodness have all been corrupted to some degree. Now, let me give you an example of this. It is a very heavy example, but I think it's a good one.

So, I have a child with Down syndrome, and in my family's journey, caring for a child with a disability, at some point, we read what was a statistic that we found just incredibly shocking, and that's this.

When a couple discovers during pregnancy, and this can be as a result of a prenatal test, or a scan, you know, your 20-week scan, when a couple finds out that they have a child with Down syndrome, when a discovery has been made, between 70 and 85% of those children will be aborted.

Now, these are not situations where the mother is in danger, or where the embryo is not viable. It's just that, well, they don't want this child.

And I know this is an emotionally charged example, but it is a great example of the darkness of the world, okay? A world that has a damaged view of beauty and goodness, of beauty and success, a world that idolizes health, and achievement, and the right of the individual, and because of these distortions, given the choice, people will do something which I think is morally indefensible, and mostly do it in secret.

[ 7 : 40 ] Why? Oh, because this child will demand too much of me. I have dreams I want to fulfill. It doesn't fit my picture of the perfect family. It will hurt my lifestyle.

It will be very inconvenient in any way. It's my body. It's my choice. What's behind all that? We've said it. It's darkness. It's darkness corrupting every area of our life.

This, you know, the individually focused life, is naturally going to seek its own glory, and not God's. And this is the result. Now let me say, if abortion has been part of your journey for whatever reason, I hope you know God's amazing grace and forgiveness.

If you don't, please, would you talk to somebody about that? Because that's the kind of thing that can really get its claws into your heart. Now, let me talk more generally again about the darkness before finishing up this section.

So remember, John is teaching us that without Jesus, you're walking in darkness. It's an offensive claim to make. Two more very quick things about the darkness. First, you know, one of the really awful things about this darkness is that it's actually where humanity wants to be.

[ 8 : 52 ] It's actually where we want to be. John 3, 19 talks about this. Let me read it to you. And this is the judgment, that light has come into the world, and people love the darkness rather than the light, because their works were evil.

We love our sin. We don't want it taken away from us. We don't want other people to know about it either. So, we kind of, you know, keep it on the down low. We stay in the darkness, and it's an awful thing. And we can't escape it.

We can't get out of it ourselves. It takes a revelation from God, and a work of God to get us out of it. Because given, given 10 choices, 100 choices, a million choices, we will always choose the darkness.

Unless God intervenes. It doesn't matter how clever you are. It doesn't matter how many letters you've got after your name. Without God's enlightenment, you're in the dark, forever. You can't step out of it yourself, without God, bringing you out of it.

The other thing about the darkness, I'll say, before moving on, is as Christians, we can actually still have areas of our life that are in the shadows. And, I don't need to quote a scripture to, I will, but, I can say that, and I know you can think of examples in your life.

[ 10 : 03 ] But let me read Ephesians 5, 7 to 11. Therefore, do not become partners with them. For at one time, you were, you were in the darkness, but now you are light in the, light in the Lord.

Walk as children of light. For the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true. And try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but expose them.

Whatever is in the darkness, folks, bring it to the light. Talk to people you trust, and ask them to pray for you. And not just this, not just the kind of acute presenting sin kind of stuff, just even your struggles, just your life struggles, your dramas, your anxieties.

Bring that stuff into the light. Because, you know, our city, it is not an easy city to fail in. Because we love achievements, and we love success. And it's very tempting to keep your problems to yourself. Folks, that is not mentally healthy for you, and it's certainly not the way a Christian community should work. Again, if you want to talk more about this, you know, talk to somebody. Talk to somebody about it.

[ 11 : 12 ] Okay, right. That is the darkness, that is life without Jesus. An outrageous claim. Now, point two, and we'll move quicker through these next ones here. Point two, Jesus, the light of the world.

Another outrageous claim. You know how you could change this? It would be so simple to change that little bit there, and make it really unoffensive. In fact, actually make it really cool. Actually make it pretty Vancouver, actually.

Let me tell you what you could do. You could just remove the definite articles. So it becomes, Jesus, a light in my world. I think most people would be cool with that.

But it's not what it says, isn't it? In the Greek, you know these two definite articles? It's, it's Jesus, the light of the world. This means, Jesus is not one of many possible lights.

A light for those people who need it. Who it works for. Who have a kind of a bent that way. Who like organized religion. Who, who, you know, the poor people in those other countries.

[ 12 : 09 ] Or people on death row, for example. People in the midst of tragedy. Good for them. No, good for everybody. You might have heard people say this, uh, in a kind of a weird compliment.

Oh, it's good that you found a spirituality that works for you. Folks, that, this passage makes a nonsense of that, doesn't it? Jesus is the light of the world.

Right, let's dig in a little bit more on this. Uh, it's, it's helpful to have some context here. So Jesus said these words in the middle of the Jewish feast of tabernacles. In that, in that feast, there was two major symbols.

You heard about one last week. The symbol of water. You know, the priest would pour out these things of water on the altar, right? So that's the symbol of, that's, that's water. You, you heard that

sermon last week. There's another symbol.

Another thing that happens. Uh, it's a big deal at this feast. And it's, it's due with light. So the priest would light these massive cauldrons, um, filled with oil and the, the wicks would be made out of old pressed clothes.

[13:13] I understand. And then, you know, they'd light them and they'd lift them high up in the air. And at night it would light up the temple and all the surrounding areas. And it would have been spectacular, but it wasn't just, wasn't just like, let's kind of, you know, fancy this whole thing up a little bit with some fancy lights.

Light, uh, in the old Testament is a symbol of God's holy presence. And the thing that's probably mostly pointing to is a pillar of cloud and fire. Uh, when God's people were in the wilderness. And I think that this festival is specifically referencing that. So by saying, I am a light of the world. What is Jesus saying? Cause I'm the presence of God. And me, you see what God looks like. He's saying, I'm what perfect goodness looks like. And I've to come, I've come to bring truth and holiness, the truth and holiness of God to you. And that means when the darkness has corrupted our sense of truth, beauty, goodness, that Jesus can replace our ignorance with truth, our hatred with love, our hypocrisy with integrity, our animosity with reconciliation. Jesus can take us from death to life. And isn't that wonderful? But how, how does that happen? Well, verse 12 gives us the condition.

[14:30] Remember, we've talked about darkness. We've talked about light. Now the condition, how do we be people that experience that light? This is section three. Now the condition, you'll hear it when I read it to you again, as Jesus spoke to them saying, I'm the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness. That's a condition. Whoever follows me. I googled light of the world and went to images.

And you can imagine what came up. A lot of really poorly designed Christian posters. So it had light of the world and then a picture, right?

Now, to tell you what that, what that was a picture of, let me read to you what is apparently an actual transcript from a conversation between a US naval ship and the Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland in October 1995.

Apparently this is real. Americans, this is the Americans talking right now. Americans, please divert your course 15 degrees to the north to avoid a collision. Canadians, recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision.

[15:37] Americans, this is the captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert your course. Canadians, no, I say again, you divert your course. Americans, this is the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, the second largest ship in the United States Atlantic Fleet.

We are accompanied by three destroyers, three cruisers, and numerous support vessels. I demand that you change your course 15 degrees north, that's one five degrees north, or countermeasures will be undertaken to ensure the safety of the ship.

Canadians, this is a lighthouse. Your call. So, so, so, so, you can imagine, now, now I've given away, those posters, all a picture, every single one of them, a picture of a lighthouse, with the words, I'm the light of the world.

Here's the thing, the lighthouse, as a picture of this, is incredibly unhelpful, because a lighthouse is a stationary thing. And, whereas the Christian life is fluid, it moves, we follow Jesus.

Remember what this light image is talking about, it's referencing back the, the God's people in the wilderness, right? And, let me remind you of what happened, I'll read Numbers 9 to you, okay? Just a couple of verses.

[16:59] On the day that the tabernacle was set out, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent, of the testimony, and at evening it was over the tabernacle, like the appearance of fire, until morning.

So it was always, the cloud covered it by day, and their parents of fire by night. And whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, after that, the people of Israel set up, and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the people of Israel camped.

This is a, these are people on the move. They are following the light. Folks, it's easy to get into a rhythm of, or a way of thinking that, it's like Christianity, right? It's a one-off decision, and after that I kind of do my own thing, because I'm in.

Got my ticket, I'm in. No. It's a journey. It's an adventure with Christ. It's a life of dynamic spiritual movement, as Eugene Peterson calls it.

It's a long obedience in the same direction. Let me give you some examples here. It's Jesus calling you to the mission field, at the point that you're about to retire, and live the leisurely West Coast life. [18:04] It's being given the gift of speaking in tongues, after being a Christian for 40 years. It's refusing to participate, in a slightly dodgy business deal, even though you've never said no before, but you've just all of a sudden, got this strange Holy Spirit nag.

It's the Holy Spirit awakening your heart, to your wedding vows, that you took 20 years ago, and recommitting yourself to your spouse. These are examples of what it looks like, to follow Jesus, when it's a dynamic relationship, to have your life exposed, and changed by the Spirit continually. And that's what our fourth section is about. The promise of Jesus is this, that if we follow him, we will have the light of life. So at the start I said four sections. Darkness of the world, Jesus is the light, the condition, follow him, and the promise of light in your life.

We've talked about it a bit already, haven't we? But like we've said, Christianity is not a one-off decision. It's not keeping the status quo. It's a present, ongoing commitment to discipleship. And it's not an easy thing, because one of the qualities of light is what?

It exposes. That's what light does the best. It exposes. So following Jesus, folks, is the decision to be constantly, and relentlessly confronted, by the reality of our sinfulness, bringing it daily to Jesus, and receiving his grace, and being open to the call he has for us.

[19:30] Let me finish up here. 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.

There are two possible centers for your life. There is God, or there is self. The way of light, the way of darkness. And Jesus, in this passage, promises if we follow him, if our life is built around him, we will have the light of life.

This is not the promise of the sin-free life. This is not the easy option, and it's not a tidy sort of life. It's probably quite a difficult and messy kind of life, actually.

Leo Tolstoy, in describing his Christian journey, said this, if I know the way home, and I'm walking along it drunkenly, is it any less the right way because I'm staggering from side to side?

That's how I think about my Christian journey. Kind of generally going in the right direction, but it's a bit, it's a bit drunk. I might not look pretty, but it is a life that enjoys forgiveness, and comfort, and guidance of God.

[20:40] So, a couple of questions here. That you can take away with you. Here's the big one. Are you walking in the light of life? Is Jesus the starting point of your thinking?

Is it the axiom from which you sort of deduce everything else? Do you do all your thinking and living in the darkness of the world's values or in the light of Christ?

Folks, these are probably good questions to take home with you and pray about. Amen. Amen.

Amen.

Amen.