

Christ's Final Public Appeal

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[0:00] Well, let's turn now to John chapter 12. John 12, we can read at verse 35.!

It's an amazing gospel, the gospel of John. He takes what are very simple things, particularly as Jesus himself spoke them as on this occasion, light, darkness, things that we can understand, things we know by experience, things which are themselves an everyday part of human life. But in the gospel of John, these are taken and made into profound teachings, because John's use of these concepts, such as light and darkness, really brings profound theological meaning and theological teaching before us as his gospel unfolds. You can see especially light and darkness used in the very beginning of the gospel, chapter 1, verses 4 to 9, chapter 3, verses 19 to 21, as Jesus speaks to Nicodemus. Chapter 8, verse 12, Jesus explaining that he is the light of the world. Whoever walks in following him will not be in darkness. Chapter 9, where you find one of his miracles set out by way of light and darkness, a man receiving sight, coming to have light pouring into his mind, into his heart, into his body, which previously he had been unable to see. And in all of these concepts, you find wonderful theological teaching, truth about Jesus himself, truth about the salvation that Jesus came to provide for us.

And here in chapter 12, we find that light and darkness is used in respect to the difference that faith makes, the difference that believing makes to any individual. Because believing is something that ushers us out of the darkness into the light that you find in Jesus himself and in our salvation. And it's interesting that, in fact, it's significant that this point in John's gospel is the point at which the public ministry of Jesus comes to an end. Because from chapter 13 onwards, Jesus is dealing especially with the disciples and with their teaching, with their preparation for his leaving of this world and for the cross, especially followed by his resurrection. So the public ministry of Jesus, Jesus speaking to the wider public, is brought to an end here in chapter 12. And we'll see that that's significant in the context in which he's here calling upon people to walk while you have the light, because while you have the light, believe in the light. In other words, Jesus is saying, as I am the light, I'm not with you for very much longer. So believe in the light while you have the light.

[3:34] While you have the privilege of my presence, of my teaching, believe. Trust in me. Accept God's word. In other words, really for the people in general, in John's gospel at this point, this is a final appeal to them.

You can take this as Jesus' final appeal to the wider public in John's gospel. And of course, because the gospel itself offers to us this Jesus as our Savior, because we are today recipients of the gospel, and because this gospel is the word of God, accurate and dependable, it is for you and for me today, just as if you are standing there listening to Jesus at that point in history, where he's saying to us through his word, while you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be or become the sons of the children of light. Here's the great opportunity. It's the final opportunity in Jesus' public ministry. But what a great opportunity it is. And what an opportunity you and I have today to meet with God, to hear God's voice, to respond to this appeal of Jesus himself through the gospel, to believe in the light while we have the privilege of that light being with us.

Why did the light come into the world? Let's look at this opportunity, first of all. Why did Jesus, why does light come into the world? Well, in verse 46 of this chapter, I have come into the world as light, or as a light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. We are in darkness as we are born into this world. We're born into the darkness of a sinful life.

We're born into the darkness of our lostness. And you know, that lostness is so profound. Our minds, as darkened minds by sin and by our fallenness, are so dark that we don't realize we're in the darkness. Here's one of the solemn things about the darkness in which we exist and are born into naturally. We don't realize, we don't accept the fact that we actually are in darkness.

We think we're in the light. The world out there today thinks that it's actually walking in the light. It's following human mandates. It's following human wisdom. It's following human understanding in itself.

[6:16] And it's following the kind of ideas that appeal to human beings, that make human beings like ourselves things that we're actually making progress when we're just descending more into the light, into the darkness rather than the light. That's how profound that darkness is. And that's why Jesus is appealing through the gospel to us today, while we have the light, believe in the night. In other words, we're born into darkness, but we're born again into the light. Which is why when you go to chapter 3, you'll find in his interview with Nicodemus and the following verses after that, that Jesus drives home the points that he's making to Nicodemus. This is the judgment he says in verse 19, that light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God. Out there in the world today, people think they're walking in the light. They're actually stumbling in the darkness. And you and I have the privilege of the gospel, of Christ speaking to us through the gospel, saying, I am the light of the world. I came into this world so that you would no longer walk in darkness, so that you would have the light of life instead of the darkness that applies to you naturally as a human being.

I remember back, I'm old enough nowadays to remember when there were no streetlights, especially in the village areas of the island. And you had to make your way very tentatively at times along the narrow streets in the country because there were no streetlights. And because there were no streetlights, it was just completely dark unless you got some light from some of the houses that you were passing. But there were long stretches with no houses at all. And you had to be very careful.

In fact, I remember going back home in town at one time, even from the houses nearest to us, there was still a fair gap. And walking along, just trying to feel where the ditch was so I wouldn't fall into it because it was totally dark. And Jesus is using that as an illustration of our natural darkness. And here we are today with the advantage we have of the gospel telling us that Christ himself in the gospel offers himself to us as the light of the world so that we no longer walk in darkness, so that we are actually redeemed from our own stupidity, from our own foolishness, from our lostness, from our darkened minds. And you see he's saying, for a little while, the light is with you.

Verse 33, so Jesus said the light is with you for a little while. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you.

saying to us through the gospel, the light is with you for a little time longer. These people were not going to hear Jesus again speaking publicly. Are you banking on it today that you'll hear the gospel again and you'll maybe think of trusting in Christ then? Well, don't bank on it.

[10:16] It may never happen. This is your opportunity. This is where you're hearing Jesus saying to you, the light is with you for a little while.

Walk while you have the light. Believe in the light so that you may become the children of light.

Because for me, my time is running out. For you, your time is running out. We're like the description in Psalm 103.

Frail man. His days are like the grass, which grows in the field for a short time. And then what? The wind blows over it and it is gone.

In my garden at Tongue, I've been growing gladioli this year for the first time. And they're beautiful. But the wind breaks them and smashes them. They're only there for a short time. A symbol of your life and of mine.

[11:22] And that's why he's saying, today is your opportunity. Don't let it be your final opportunity. While you have the light, believe in the light.

That you may be the children, the sons of light. And the appeal is to walk while you have the light. There's the opportunity. What's the appeal?

Jesus says, walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. Now, when the Bible speaks about walking in this way, it really is talking, as you well know, I'm sure, of a course of life.

It's not just literal walking. We do that daily. But it's walking spiritually, walking morally. In other words, what Jesus was saying to them was effectively saying, set the course of your life by the light. Set the course of your life by what I am offering to you, by what you find in me. The course of your life has already been set in one way or another.

[12 : 26] And if it is set by the light, then you're in a way that is safe. A way that leads directly to eternity, to heaven when you die. If that's not the case, well, there's only one other direction.

If you've set the course of your life by something else, and just because you and I are in church, whether it's occupying a pulpit or a pew, that in itself does not guarantee that we're saved.

Set your life, your life's course, by the light that is Jesus himself. Because as he says himself later on in the gospel, he is the way, the truth, and the life.

That's why he's come into the world. So that you and I would set the course of our life by him, by the light. I mentioned chapter 8, verse 12 already.

But that's what Jesus there very tellingly says, that he is the light of the world. In chapter 8 and verse 12, I am the light of the world.

[13 : 36] Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Following Jesus is equivalent to accepting Jesus.

You can't follow Jesus until you've accepted him and received him and trusted him. All of these descriptions amount to the same thing. Having him as your personal savior.

That's why he's come. As the light of the world into the world. In other words, he's saying, while you have the light, believe in the light. You set the course of your life by believing in Christ, by trusting in Christ.

By giving over your life to him to be your savior, your ruler, your king. By willingly depositing yourself into the hands of the light.

Into the wonderful custody of the light. So that darkness will not ever get a hold of you again.

Believe in the light.

[14 : 38] Some people think that believing in Jesus amounts to believing certain things about him to be true. Believing what the gospels say about him to be true.

That he definitely lived in this world. That he did the things the Bible speaks about. And you believe these things. And that's fine. That's what they're for. But remember, believing in Jesus is a lot more than just believing things about him.

Believing in him means trusting your life to him. Trusting your eternity to him. Believing in him means that you actually take him as he's offered in the gospel.

You lay and lean all your weight upon him. All the weight of your life and its burdens. Your death, your eternity, everything else. Has to be laid upon him to take the weight of it.

To take you safely through to heaven. While you have the light. While you have the light. Believe in the light. And you have the light today.

[15 : 44] You have it here. Have you come to believe in him in this way? Have you come to give your life over to him? Are you willing that he rules your life?

Are you willing that every detail of your life comes under the mastery of the king? Are you willing that he, especially, not anyone else, but he alone, directs your life?

Gives you encouragement. As the light of your life. That's how it is throughout the Bible, isn't it?

That you walk while you have the light. You set the course of your life. By what you find and have in Jesus himself. Through trusting in him. Believe in the light.

Don't just believe things about him to be true. The devil believes that. The devil believes in Jesus in the sense that he believes and knows that Jesus is real.

[16 : 49] That Jesus is the Son of God. That Jesus has a mastery over him. As James says in his epistle, You believe certain things.

You do well. The devils believe, yet they tremble. They know what's coming. They believe the truth of God. We're required to believe in a much deeper sense than that.

To believe in the sense of conveying your life over to him. For example, if you find, let's say, something like the Clifton Suspension Bridge over the gorge of the River Avon.

Down south in England. A bridge designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. One of the famous engineers in history. A lot of people go to the Clifton Suspension Bridge just to take photos of it.

And they can say when they've got home, That's a magnificent piece of engineering. He must have been a real genius of an engineer to have designed that. To have given all the directions by which that bridge came to be built.

[17 : 58] And that's true. You can admire that bridge. You can take photos of that bridge. You can go home and say, I have seen the Clifton Suspension Bridge. It's a marvel of engineering. You can say the same with the Forth Road Bridge, whatever.

But what are they for? Therefore, conducting people safely from one side of the river or the gorge to another. Their purpose is to be used for traveling.

And so with the Lord himself. He is the way, the truth, and the life. By all means, admire him.

By all means, adore him. In the way in which you see him as a significant figure in history. But he's not just there so that you can admire him.

And say to people, I believe the things in the Bible about the Lord. I think they're true. They are true. But they are there practically for you to travel on.

[19:04] Walk while you have the light. Believe in the light. That you may become the children of light. Lest darkness overtake you.

Walk while you have the light. Lest darkness overtake you. Well, Jesus got straight to the point always, didn't he? He never left in his teaching.

He never left anything out that we require to know for our salvation. He made the important things very plain. And it's the responsibility of us to try to preach the word.

To actually maintain that plainness in conveying the teachings of the Bible. And we hope we do that. And of that seems sometimes that we appear to be very blunt.

And very tactless which we never want to be. That's because we want to be faithful to the truth. And conveying it in all its own native clarity. And here is Jesus saying, Believe lest darkness overtake you.

[20:08] Look at all the regimes in the world throughout history that developed in such a way, away from the light of truth, from the light of the gospel, from the light that God gives us in his word.

What happened to them? What happened to the likes of what happened in the French Revolution, for example? Was that for the good? Did that bring in more light? No, it brought in darkness.

Oppression. Persecution. The Soviet Union. North Korea. Same development. Darkness overtaking them.

And sadly, it seems to be the case in our own country, that darkness is steadily creeping over the visible church in our land. Something which ought to concern us hugely.

Walk while you have the light is Jesus' word to the church. Not just to individuals, but to the church in every age. Walk while you have the light. Lest darkness overtake you.

[21:09] Believe in the light. Don't believe in your own wisdom, he's saying to his church. Lest darkness overtake you. Because one thing is sure.

When you put the light aside to one side or behind you, there's only one result. Darkness overtakes you. And the more you are concerned to put the light aside, to turn away from the light, to turn your back to the light, the darker you become in your life, in your thoughts, in your behavior.

While you have it, believe in it, that you may become children of light.

It says sons of light, it means sons and daughters. That you may become children of light. You know, in verse 36, it's a pity actually you have this break in the text here in this Gospel of John.

This break in the text between verse 36 here. Between verses 36 and 37.

[22:27] While you have the light, believe in the light that you may become the sons of light. Then there's this unfortunate break because the next thing really should be intimately tied with what's there. When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.

See what it's saying? While you have the light, believe in the light. And then they're seeing Jesus and he disappears. And they're left with this appeal by Jesus himself who's now gone out of their sight.

This appeal, believe in the light while you have the light. And off he goes. And they don't see him again until the crucifixion. And then tellingly, it says, though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him.

They refused the light while they had it. Darkness overtook them. What a sad spectacle that is. That people who have access to the light of the gospel, the light of truth, the light that Jesus is, still go on in darkness.

Let that not be you. Let that not be me. While we have the light, believe in it. Trust in it. Give yourself to him that you may become the children of light.

[23:46] That's the third point. There's the opportunity. There's the appeal. And there's the objective. That you may become sons of light or children of light. That's an ethical term.

It really essentially means that you may become disciples of the light. It was as the rabbis used to refer to becoming sons of so and so if they followed a certain rabbi.

They were known as the sons of the rabbi. They were disciples. They were under his teaching. Well, Jesus is saying, here's the light. Here's the light that you find in me. Whoever follows me shall not abide in darkness.

Walk while you have the light. Set the course of your life by the light you have in me. But though he had done so many things, they still did not believe in him.

They refused the light. And the Bible speaks about God's people. In Ephesians chapter 5, verse 8, for example, you were once darkness.

[24 : 54] Notice, it doesn't say you were once in darkness. That is certainly true. But they were darkness in themselves. These pagan people, former pagan people of Ephesus, you were once darkness.

Look in the past, he's saying, what were you? Morally and spiritually and ethically, you were darkness. But now, you are light in the Lord.

See the difference. The stark difference. The contrast. You were darkness. darkness. And how many people today would not be offended by saying, you're actually in darkness.

You are actually in yourself darkness. Because you're not in, you're not looking to God. You're not believing in God. You're rejecting God. You are darkness.

It's not an easy thing to accept, is it? This sophisticated world, this world so full of wonderful technology, this world so crammed with human invention and human achievement, to go to some people like that, in a world like that, and say, you are darkness, it sounds ridiculous.

[26 : 05] But ethically, and morally, and spiritually, that's what we all are. It's not just where we all are in the darkness. We are darkness. But now, here's the contrast, in the Lord, you are light.

Walk while you have the light. That you may become the children of light. That you may be lights instead of darkness. As he put it to the Philippians, when he wrote to the Philippian church, in Philippians chapter 2, You do all things without grumbling or questioning.

That you may be blameless and innocent children of God, without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

You know, friends, that this world needs light. This dark, evil, godless, immoral world needs light.

Where's it going to receive the light? How's it going to get the light? Through you. Through all of you who are in Christ, in the Lord, as children of light, you are light.

[27 : 25] You project light to this dark world. And the world needs more light. It doesn't just mean that you and I need Christ. That's fundamentally true.

But this world needs you in Christ. They need the light that Christians are by the blessing of God.

Let your light so shine before men, as Jesus put it, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

I remember speaking to someone who had served in the forces in the Royal Navy during the Second World War. And he was telling me something about an incident in his own experience that happened in London during the blackout.

No lights, of course, were allowed. And I know that he was telling me the truth because he was my father. And he said he was walking back to the ship in the docks in London.

Total darkness. And they were walking along and then all of a sudden he stepped over the edge of the pier. Straight down into the water.

[28 : 41] Darkness. Life. Life. Almost gone. He walked into the darkness of the waters in the quay.

And he told me that it was really the touch of the other man who was with him who was a good swimmer, fortunately. As he touched him under the water he came back to himself and they were rescued.

He said of the light. But how many millions today throughout our lost world will walk over the precipice of time into the darkness of hell?

don't be amongst them. While you have the light believe in the light that you may become the children of light.

Let's pray. O Lord, we thank you for your word of truth. We pray you've forgiven us for every way in which we sometimes indeed often misshandle and don't bear up the truth in its clarity that your own word sets before us.

[30 : 00] We thank you, Lord, for this portion of your word today that reminds us so solemnly and yet so encouragingly of the need to believe in the light. You are the light of the world.

We thank you that you shine into our lives through the gospel. We pray, O Lord, that you might shine in our hearts as well by your spirit to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Continue then, we pray, to bless us and to bless us in our age with the gospel and to bless us in a way that would further enlarge our people's understanding and our own understanding of the light of the world that Jesus himself is.

Continue with us now, we pray, in his name and for his sake. Amen. We're going to sing now in conclusion in Psalm 36, Psalm number 36 in St. Psalms and verses 5 to 9.

Sing to a tune Kilmarnock as on page 44. Your steadfast love is great, O Lord, it reaches heaven high. Your faithfulness is wonderful, extending to the sky.

[31:17] Your righteousness is very great like mountains high and steep. Your justice is like ocean depths, both man and beast you keep. And I've read down to verse 9, a feast within your house and drink from streams of your delight.

For with you is the source of life. In your light we see light. Verses 5 to 9. your steadfast love is great, O Lord, it reaches heaven high.

Your faithfulness is wonderful, is wonderful, is wonderful, extending to the sky.

is very great, like mountains mountains high and steep.

Your justice is like ocean depths, both man and beast you keep.

[32:57] how precious is your steadfast love, what confidence it brings.

O Zion O Zion O Zion find shelter in the shadow of your wings.

They feast within your house and drink from streams of your delight.

For with you is the source of life in your light in your light we see light.

let me get to the door after the benediction to the main door, I'll see you there. Now, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

[34:23] Amen. may may may