

Darkness and Light

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. Darkness and light. Darkness and light is the theme of John chapter 12, verses 20 to 50.

! Concepts that we take for granted, we understand. But in the spiritual sense, seldom do we appreciate the depths of our darkness and the deception of the human being.

And seldom do we really appreciate fully the wonderful light that Jesus brings into our lives to expose our darkness.

Very often we're afraid of our darkness when we see it. We want to run away from it or hide it away so that nobody else sees it. But the Holy Spirit, in His wisdom, will shine light into our darkness in order to bring about repentance.

Wasn't it lovely to hear when Sandy was praying for the children to go out, a little voice say, hooray! And it kind of made me stop and think, how do I feel when I hear about Jesus?

[1 : 14] Hooray or ooh, it's a bit scary. And I think in the many, many years now that I've been in ministry, there probably has never felt like there has been a more fruitful time for the gospel than now.

And people are noticing that across the country. All kinds of suggestions about the church growing, particularly among younger men and so on.

You hear all of that and then some dispute about the figures and all of that. But we're all aware, I think ministers, when they speak together, are aware of things changing and people seeking.

And that's a good thing. But all people have always sought Jesus and sometimes not for the right reasons. Sometimes they seek Jesus in order to get out of trouble, which is fine.

But the danger is, once you're out of trouble, then you forget the one who got you out of trouble. God and the doctor, we both adore in times of crisis and then no more.

[2 : 20] The crisis over, the illness righted, God is forgotten and the doctor slighted. And we can be a bit like that when it comes to Jesus.

Get me out of trouble, Lord, and I'll follow you. And then we're out of trouble and we stop following. It happened in Jesus' own day in John chapter 6 when he taught on the bread of life. And people said, it's a hard teaching.

Who can accept it? And then they turned away from him. And he said to his disciples, will you go also? And they said, well, Lord, to whom else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

See, the darkness of the human condition is one in which very often we're in it for self-interest, even when it comes to Jesus. And God knows our hearts and none of us are exempt from that.

But I want our following, I want my following, I want your following to be deeper than that. To be a real commitment in which you agree to lose your life so that you might find it.

[3 : 24] And that's what Jesus is going to speak to us about today. Losing your life that you might find it. The passage is John chapter 12, verse 20 to 15. And with this in mind, let us read the passage together.

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to the worship at the feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. Sir, they said, we would like to see Jesus. Would you? Would you like to see Jesus? Philip went to tell Andrew. Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, notice Jesus did not go in and meet them.

He simply replied, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed.

But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

[4 : 33] Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say?

Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name. Then a voice came from heaven.

I have glorified it and will glorify it again. The crowd that was there and heard it said, It had thundered. Others said, An angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world. Now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.

He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. The crowd spoke up. We have heard from the Lord that the Christ will remain forever. So how can you say the Son of Man must be lifted up?

[5 : 37] Who is this Son of Man? Then Jesus told them, You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light before darkness overtakes you.

The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light. When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

Even after Jesus had done all of these miraculous signs, in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet. Lord, who has believed our message?

And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For this reason, they could not believe, because as Isaiah says elsewhere, He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn, and I would heal them. Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him. Just stop there for a moment. You'll know Isaiah chapter 6, many of you.

[6 : 46] In Isaiah chapter 6, Isaiah saw in a vision the temple of God, and in that vision he saw myriads, thousands of seraphim and cherubim angels who were worshiping and serving God, and he said that he had seen the Lord high and lifted up.

And Jesus says, when he saw him, he saw me. He saw me. That's an incredible statement. When Isaiah saw the glory of God, verse 41, Jesus said, he spoke, or John says, he spoke about him, about Jesus.

Verse 42, Yet at the same time, many even among the leaders believed in him, but because of the Pharisees, they would not confess their faith, for fear they would be put out of the synagogue.

For they loved praise from men more than praise from God. I resist the need to speak here. I'll say something about that later.

Verse 44, Then Jesus cried out, When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me.

[8 : 04] I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. As for the person who hears my word, but does not keep them, I do not judge him, for I did not come to judge the world, but to save it.

There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words. That very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.

I know that his command leads to eternal life, so whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say. And I usually say at this point, Amen, and the Lord will bless to us the reading of his word, but I'm tempted to say wow here.

It is a very heavy and a very dense passage of Scripture, and the implications and weight of it are profound. There is darkness and there is light.

There's no middle way for Jesus. There's no kind of, let's sit on the fence and see where we go. Let's be indifferent to the truth that I teach. He says, you either believe it and accept it and you will be saved, or you reject it and you will be condemned.

[9 : 25] And there is no middle ground. Now that sounds awfully unsophisticated, doesn't it? I'm happy to be unsophisticated when it comes to the eternal, never-dying souls of people who are before me today.

Truth matters. In a world that has forgotten, the truth exists. Truth matters. And the acceptance or rejection of Jesus will decide where your never-dying soul resides for all eternity. That's the truth, as Jesus declared it. Charles Simeon knew this. Charles Simeon was a preacher at Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge.

He started to preach there in 1783, so a long time ago. He was a great scholar. He'd been converted in his teens and then he was ordained into the Church of England ministry.

And he wasn't very popular when he first arrived at his church. He had some pews put in because in those days people used to stand a lot. So there was lots of space in church, not a lot of pews.

[10:37] So he had pews put in so that people could sit and hear the preaching. The people didn't like his preaching. They thought him too enthusiastic, too unsophisticated as an evangelical.

And so they threw his pews out into the village square, into the university square, onto the grass. And the church wardens didn't like him.

They locked those pews to prevent people getting into them if they couldn't remove them. He was routinely insulted in the streets because of his preaching.

So it didn't start well, but he didn't move. He carried on preaching. He carried on caring for the congregation. He looked after their interests.

And eventually, he won them round as more and more people were converted to Christ. He served the church for 54 years. Good for one who wasn't very popular.

[11:35] And eventually, when he was buried at King's College Chapel, Cambridge, Cambridge came to a standstill. The students had their lectures cancelled, the shops closed, and the city came out in mourning for the loss of their great preacher.

Simeon began with others, the Church Missionary Society, in 1799, which took the gospel all over the known world, particularly in India through the East India Company, where ordinands and chaplains and missionaries were prepared for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And I'm telling you this story because Charles Simeon was a little bit of a vandal. He etched into his pulpit the word, Sirs, we would see Jesus.

Sirs, we would see Jesus. And he did that to remind himself whenever he preached that the most important thing he had to give people as a preacher was Jesus.

Everything else had to be subsidiary to that great aim of showing people the Lord Jesus Christ through his preaching.

[12:53] And he did this because he was converted on Easter Day 1779 when he realized at the communion table, I can transfer all my guilt to another.

I will not bear them on my soul a moment longer. Accordingly, I sought to lay my sins upon the sacred head of Jesus. And on the Wednesday, began to have a hope of mercy.

On the Thursday, that hope increased. On the Friday and Saturday, it became more strong. And on the Sunday morning, Easter Day, April 4th, I awoke early with those words upon my heart and lips, Jesus Christ is risen today.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. And from that hour, peace flowed in rich abundance into my soul. And at the Lord's table in our chapel, I had the sweetest access to God through my blessed Savior.

And I say amen to that. that is when he encountered Jesus. Not through preaching alone. Not through worship services alone.

[14:05] Not through the partaking in the sacrament of communion alone. But in encountering Jesus in his heart by the power of the Holy Spirit.

When his dark heart was enlightened by the Holy Spirit. And he was born again of the Spirit of God. Sir, I would see Jesus.

Not just learn about Jesus from the Bible. Not just do a theology course. Not just get baptized or take communion. I would see Jesus.

I would enter into relationship with Jesus. And my question to you today is, do you know Jesus? Not about him. Not a mild interest in him.

But do you want to and do you long to and do you live in constant fellowship and communion with him? Sirs, I would see Jesus.

[15:05] So this question, this question was asked of the disciples as a catalyst. It was a desire to see Jesus. Next slide.

And it was Greeks that came to Jesus and asked him this question. Sirs, we would see Jesus. Well, they came not to Jesus but to Philip. And some people say, why did they particularly choose Philip?

Well, he had a Greek name.

So they might have thought that he was sympathetic. Philip was a Jew but a Jew with a Greek name. And so these Greeks, whoever they were, they saw Jesus out.

Now, it wasn't an easy thing to do in the hustle and bustle of this great crowd that was around Jesus all of the time. It wasn't easy to get to him. And so if they wanted to get to him, they would have to get to him by invitation.

Now, again, the fact that they're called Greeks and not Gentiles, John might be hinting on the fact that these were very well-educated people, influential people.

[16:09] And there's a beautiful symmetry about this when it comes to the gospel story. You remember that the wise men from the east came to visit Jesus in Bethlehem when he was born.

And then wise men from the west come and visit Jesus just before his crucifixion, before he dies.

That may be significant. We're guessing a little bit, but it might be significant.

But also, Jesus sees the significance of this because when he learns that these Greeks want to see Jesus, he says, now my hour has come.

Now, those of you who've been following this series will know, I've mentioned this a couple of times, others have mentioned it too, that John is very specific with the use of that word and that phrase, now my hour has come.

The word hour refers to a specific point in human history. It has a technical and theological significance in the Gospel of John. It refers to the key moment for which Jesus came to this earth.

[17:15] The hour that would involve his crucifixion, his resurrection, and the ascension into the presence of God once again.

Now, John tells us in John chapter 1 that the disciples of Jesus are going to see the angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

Theologians call this the ascend, descent, scheme of John's Gospel. A very technical phrase which means Jesus has come from heaven or he's come down to us but he's going to ascend back to heaven and the purpose for which he came was to make a road between earth and heaven so that all who believed in him could follow in his footsteps.

and he draws upon the Old Testament example of Jacob. When Jacob was in Bethel when he saw the angels of God he saw the stairway and he saw angels of God ascending and descending to heaven.

There is a way made open and John's Gospel is showing us that a way has been made open through Jesus. The way, the truth, and the life.

[18:27] The one who takes us to the Father. And Jesus says now these Greeks have asked this question. Sir, we want to see Jesus. He says now the hour has come.

Greeks, because they represent the best of the Gentiles and they demonstrate to us that the Gospel is not merely for the Jews but for the whole world.

And the whole world has been represented in these spokesmen who are saying we want Jesus. We are seeking Jesus. We need Jesus just as much as you Jews. And yet there is an irony too to fit the theme of darkness and light.

The irony is the Jews who should be in the light are in the darkness. They're rejecting him. The Gentiles who should be in the darkness are in their light. They're asking for him.

It will reverse one day in the future when the Jews shall be grafted in again. But at the moment that is the reality. He came to that which was his own but his own people did not receive him.

[19:35] It fits the theme of John. This is a turning point then. The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. And the hour has come Leon Morris points out.

The verb is come is in the perfect tense. The hour has come and stays with us. It never ends. At the cross the world entered into a new hour a new era a new realm of possibility.

It is the hinge of history because there a way was open to God that will never be closed until Jesus returns and brings about final judgment.

there is always hope for the world because Jesus is ever present to offer salvation to those who will have it.

So if we come to him and say sir we would see Jesus the hour is here the way is open and if you want to see Jesus Jesus you will see if you will open your eyes to see him.

[20:46] The turning point of history the catalyst that caused it. The next thing is the cost. This is a rather dense bit of the passage chapter 12 verses 22 to 33.

Jesus says the hour has come for the son of man to be glorified. I tell you the truth unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains only a single seed but if it dies it produces many seeds.

Now Jesus is using an illustration from agriculture one that farmers and gardeners will be aware of that in order for a seed to produce any kind of fruit it must be dropped into the soil.

Yeah. Yeah. If you leave it in a packet on the windowsill yeah it won't bear fruit. The mice will get it as Ken says at least the mice might get it out of your shed let's hope not in your house.

It will dry up otherwise and it will be of no value. A seed has to be dropped into the soil and then it mixes with the element of the soil and the elements of the soil mix with the seed and eventually make the seed swell and then the seed ruptures and breaks and then it produces fruit.

[22 : 08] And Jesus uses that analogy to say that's what's going to happen to me on the cross. I'm going to be broken. My side is going to be ruptured.

My heart is going to pour out its lifeblood but it will bring salvation to the whole world. And it's got to happen for if you don't plant the seed you will not bear the fruit.

It's a great analogy to show the absolute necessity of the death of Jesus but it's a principle that he wants us to learn as well because he says you know the secret of life the secret of really discovering who you are of finding yourself is to give your life away to lose your life in order to save it to die in order that you might bear fruit to eternal life.

It's an analogy for us. As F.F. Bruce says the principle stated in verse 24 is of wide application in particular if it is true of Jesus it must be true of his followers.

If we are going to find our life we must lose it and surrender it to Jesus. If we try to hold on to our life then we will lose it for eternity.

[23 : 35] Again there's no half measures there's no kind of easy believism is it really. Jesus didn't kind of sugar coat the message. To really truly follow Jesus is to give up your life to Jesus.

It is to acknowledge that he must be Lord and Savior. Which is why John's Gospel ends with that lovely little account of Thomas with all of his questions and all of his doubts about whether a man could rise from the dead.

Unless I see the nail prints in his hand unless I put my hand into his side I will not believe. And Jesus says okay touch me and see a spirit of not flesh and blood as you see that I have and Thomas puts his hand into those wounds and falls on his knees and what does he say my Lord and my God and that is what it means to truly believe in Jesus not simply my Savior but my Lord and my God one to whom I submit and one who I will follow and give the rest of my life to follow many many people can say they believe but Jesus says it's not enough you must give me your life you must love your life sorry if you love your life you must be willing to lose it and then you must serve and follow me Jesus said the one who loves me will follow me he will serve me he will take up the role of a table servant the diakonos he will serve me with willing service and then he will follow me now that sounds like a good idea doesn't it happy to follow

Jesus if everything is going well but where is he is going to the cross the disciples are going to have a week of teaching which says people are going to hate you because of me people are going to turn against you because of me and then come and follow me well thank you Jesus that sounds really really eventful and hopeful and I'm sure it's going to be a bundle of laughs where are we following you to but if you love your life you'll be willing to lose it this is not easy teaching but the one who loves me Jesus says will follow me follow him and receive and accept the shame and the embarrassment of being a God botherer and a Bible thumper yeah you ever been called that I remember one day going I was in the 1980s in order to reach out to people

I used to regularly knock people's doors you think of Jehovah's Witnesses now I used to do it and I remember one time coming up to a door and there were four or five teenagers who were obviously not working it was the difficult days of the 80s and lots of people were out of work and there was all the teenagers sitting on a high fence and I went through what are you doing they said I'm going to knock on that door and I'm going to tell them about Jesus they said a Bible thumper I said funny that I've never thumped a Bible yet they all laughed but then they stopped and listened don't know what happened you never know seed was dropped but yeah we get called things and we might have people turn against us our families might mock us they might not want to hear from us etc etc you might have to kind of stand up for Jesus and suffer but it will be worth it in the end because you give your life away and that means you give your reputation away and your pride and you're prepared to be sneered at because of

[27 : 32] Jesus and actually isn't it interesting that when they sneer at you you don't feel angry with them at all you feel sad because it's father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing they may reject you and your love and concern and compassion for them but Jesus says they're not really rejecting you they're rejecting me the one who was sent to save them darkness and light you see we can't change anybody's darkness only the Holy Spirit can because he sent light into our darkness didn't he and he can change theirs so we can still speak and still pray that the seed that we dropped into the soil God will bring to eternal life serving and following Jesus is our calling but being with Jesus is essential to that

Jesus says my servant will be with me where I am where I am wherever they are that's where I am because Jesus is ever with us he never leaves us he never forsakes us he's with us by the Holy Spirit of God he is always available to us listen to these words of Colossians chapter 3 since then you have been raised with Christ set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God set your minds on things above not on earthly things for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God when Christ who is your life appears then you will also appear with him in glory!

Now that's a bit of a conundrum in my head I don't kind of work that out Jesus is in heaven but he says you're in heaven he's at the right hand of God but he says your life is hidden with Christ in God Jesus said I am with you always even to the end of the world that means now that means here that means in this moment that means he's next to you that he's with you that he's have when things are difficult in our discipleship in following Jesus he feels our pain he receives the slight that is given to us he hurts when we hurt and he stands with us to strengthen us when it's tough being with Jesus always with him and Jesus says if you're serving me and you're following me then

God will honor you as God honors me don't you want to be honored by God don't you want to hear well done good and faithful servant isn't that the most important thing for us in the end not what other people think of us what does that matter people think all kinds of funny things about us let's stop worrying about what people think they will either reject us or accept us because of our following of Jesus we can do nothing about that but pray what matters is not whether people reject us but whether God accepts us that's what really counts you see these people who are Christians in North Korea where they may well lose their lives for following Jesus do you think they worry about what people think when they're willing to be killed and imprisoned for their faith in Jesus do they worry do they think oh I'm really concerned that I've not lived my life as I ought to that I've not quite made it that

I've not kind of realized all my ambitions that I've not you know found my true self is that their concern not at all they honor Jesus they serve Jesus they follow Jesus they're prepared God and not from others and then Jesus says my heart is troubled now we saw that in chapter 11 didn't we when he wept at Lazarus tomb my heart is troubled he says but this time it's something different shall I say to God save me from this hour shall I try to avoid the cross because I am terrified by the thought of it now what is Jesus terrified of here is he terrified of dying not at all Jesus knew what was beyond death you know I've only I know a man who's a Christian man and he was converted to

[32 : 23] Jesus through a vision of Jesus when he died in hospital and then he was resuscitated he had a near death experience and his account is recorded in a book which Terry Wade's brother wrote about wonderful Christian man now if you speak to him about death he's not afraid at all he knows what's afterwards he's seen it but he didn't stay dead so Jesus knows more than any man he knows what's beyond death he's not afraid of dying that's the good to be with his father what is he afraid of then the horrors of the cross where he would bear the weight of our sin upon himself and he would feel the heaviness of that weight in ways that you and I can't understand all I can say is this have you ever really felt a disgust in yourself that it led to a heaviness of heart where you thought I'm a horrible wretched person and if you felt that weight and you said to yourself

I really if people knew me perhaps strips off the skin of a potato and he would pour out blood they would bash a crown of thorns on his head and it would pour out across him they would subject him to ridicule and mockery and spit at him and then he would hang for hours while people around him mocked him and who knows what the devil was doing in all of this!

cry out in agony of soul my God my God why have you forsaken me the horrors of it all shall I say Lord save me from this hour no it was for this hour that I came and he did that for you and he did that for you and he did that for me when we speak about the precious blood of Jesus it's only precious when you realize that that he poured out his precious blood so that you would be saved for

all eternity so imagine rejecting him now the one who died for you how dark must be the heart that rejects such an offer of salvation and how dangerous for judgment is coming now the time of judgment is drawing near said

Jesus but I didn't come to judge the world not me I came to save it but there is a judge my father and he will judge us for all that we have done if we reject his offer of salvation salvation is offered judgment is coming the question is what will we do with this message so Jesus talks about light and darkness he talks about how we're in this moment when light is revealed the contrast he gives here next slide to enlightened darkness we're in this place light has been revealed but darkness responds in this way we're not sure crowd saying well really is he the messiah is he not the messiah well he's done miracles we've heard of them we've seen them but we're not quite sure he talks about being the son of man he talks about being lifted up who is this son of man they ask let's find another reason not to believe but then there are others in the crowd who said well maybe he's telling us the truth maybe he is the one he speaks of maybe this is the offer of salvation for us and so the crowd are divided as ever and darkness and light plays its way out again why is it that some believed and some did not

Jesus says because many loved the praises of men more than the praises of God in other words when they weighed up their life when they were subject to the teaching of Jesus when they were called upon to make a choice they chose human stuff over heavenly stuff they chose the things for life rather than the things of eternity do you know I know many people and I have heard of and met many people who chose wages rather than Jesus who chose a good job rather than Jesus who chose an easy life rather than Jesus who chose a man or a woman rather than Jesus who chose human social status rather than Jesus God have mercy on their souls because in the end what will you take with you when you die your wages your job your wife your stuff who gets them what shall it profit a man to gain the whole world but lose his soul what can a man give in exchange for his soul so test your heart here if you love

[38 : 50] Jesus and you want to live your life for him you give your life to him can you say now Jesus I give you my life Jesus I give you it again and I give you it again because I don't trust myself I get so easily taken in and deceived by the stuff of this world I get too comfortable I want to live my life as urgently as a person who's given a terminal diagnosis lives their life because once you know you have a limited time you begin to take life seriously God keep us from thinking we've got forever when we might be called to judgment today what we do with Jesus is essential so that's the choice this is where we end today like next slide belief brings eternal life choose Jesus John says and you discover

God because if you've seen me you've seen him when you looked at Isaiah's glory as Isaiah looked he saw me when you look into my face you see the face of God choose Jesus discover God choose Jesus or live in darkness choose Jesus and be saved Amen