

The Light Brings Life

John 8:12-20

We've arrived at the third part of our Christmas sermon series, looking at Jesus being the light in the darkness when he arrived in the world as a human baby two-thousand years ago.

Last Sunday night, Rick taught us that Jesus comes to illuminate and expose everything, and called us to stop living in the dark but to come into Jesus' light.

This morning, Rick showed us how Jesus' light brings direction. He is not a light to be admired, like a string of fairy lights, but a light to be followed in a dark world, like a beacon.

Now that we've looked at the nature of that light, and the direction it brings, I want to look at the destination it leads to.

Let's pray, and then we'll look at John 8 together.

Pray

Introduction - What's Your Ideal Life?

I want to ask you a question. What does your ideal life look like?

Living on the Sunshine Coast, we're often reminded that this a great place to enjoy "the good life". We see the TV adverts of blissful retirements, beautiful views, relaxed coastal lifestyle.

But what does your ideal life look like? Where would you be? Who would you be surrounded with? What would you be surrounded with? What would you be doing?

I'd like you to keep revisiting that question for yourself as we talk about this passage in John's gospel tonight.

Context

When we come to that section in the Bible that was read for us earlier, it's worth asking the obvious questions, like, "What's going on?", "Why is Jesus having a face-off with these guys?", "Why do people want to arrest Jesus?"

Well, since the beginning of chapter 7, Jesus has been at the temple in Jerusalem during a Jewish Festival called 'The Feast of Booths', or the 'Feast of Tabernacles'.

The words 'booths', and 'tabernacles' really mean 'tents'. This feast (which during what would be our October) was a commemoration of an important time in Israel's history. It remembered when they were wandering in the desert and living in tents on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. To remember the journey through the desert, everyone had a big camp-out in Jerusalem around the temple for the whole week.

During the festival, Jesus has been teaching at the temple. But his teaching has divided the crowd. There are some people who think he's a prophet, some who think he's the promised Messiah, some who think he's just a good man, some who think he's an upstart, some who think he's got a demon, some who want him arrested, and some who want him killed. Suffice to say, opinion is mixed about Jesus.

Light and Life To All He Brings

And so it's on either the last day of this festival, or the day immediately after the last day, that Jesus makes this statement in v12 to the people gathered at the temple.

"Again 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.""

(John 8:12 ESV)

This statement has quite an effect on those listening. Some wanted to attack Jesus' statement, or even arrest him.

To understand why Jesus gets this reaction to his words, we need to understand what it is he's actually saying in v12.

There are three parts to Jesus' statement.

1. "I am the light of the world"

This is the first thing Jesus says. What does he mean?

The theme of 'light' is very important in John's gospel, as we've already discovered.

Jesus' words connect with something John said right at the beginning of his gospel, in chapter 1, setting the scene for Jesus' arrival:

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world."

(John 1:9 ESV)

This idea works really well to describe what Jesus does. As we've said, Jesus comes into the world to illuminate everything. He exposes everything, and shows things up for what they really are. His words cut to the heart. His actions deal with real needs.

For example, Jesus comes into the world and exposes our problem with sin. It's something we easily ignore, or justify, or deny, the fact that we are hard-wired to behave in a way which rejects the authority of God over our lives, and separates us from a relationship with our creator.

But Jesus exposes this problem, and the depth of this problem in what he says as he teaches. He sets the bar really high, higher even than the religious leaders of his day.

He exposes this problem and its extent in his perfect life. Next to Jesus, every other human being is a just a poor second. No one can compare to Jesus. There's a difference between being really good, and being perfect.

He exposes this problem and its gravity in what he does. He dies for the sin of the world. If there was no problem with sin, then he didn't need to die, and didn't need to do it in such a serious and dramatic way.

And of course, only Jesus can fulfil the role of being the Light of the World, the True Light, because he is the Son of God.

2. "Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness..."

The second thing Jesus says is that, because he is the light of the world, whoever follows him will have a clear path ahead, they will not walk in darkness.

In the Bible, when the word 'walk' is used like this, it's got to do with more than just your gait. Walking means the way you live, the direction of your life and how you follow that direction.

Quite simply, Jesus is saying that if someone follows him, then they will no longer live in a fake world, dominated by false truths, false pleasures, and false satisfaction.

That is the darkness that Jesus came to expose.

What are we constantly told to believe?

That all people are basically good, and that to be a good person all we need to do is be seen to be doing the right things in the right places at the right times?

Or that what is right is what feels right for you, and that you should be true to yourself and pursue what you feel is right, and don't let anyone else tell you how you should live or who should be?

Or that all religions are basically the same, that they're all just different ways to get to the same God?

Or that God doesn't really exist anyway?

Or that the most important thing to pursue in life is personal happiness and contentment?

Friends, if Jesus is who he says he is, and if what he accomplished through his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension is true, then all of these things are nonsense!

How could God be a complete fantasy if he actually walked the earth two-thousand years ago? Jesus said in John 14:9 *"If you have seen me, you've seen the Father."*

Or how could all people be basically good if Jesus had to come to earth and die for the sins of the whole world? John the Baptist saw Jesus back in John 1:29, and said, *"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!"*

Or how could all religions be different ways to the same God, if Jesus said in John 14:6, *"No one comes to the Father except through me?"*

At Christmas time, we're very good at fantasy.

I won't comment on Father Christmas, but I was at a one of the local shopping malls a few days ago, and there's a booth where you can have Christmas photos taken of your kids playing in snow. They go inside a big clear plastic bubble, that has a lovely Dickensian backdrop, and a blower blowing soft white feathery stuff everywhere. Of course, every kid in there had on a summer dress or boardies and a t-shirt, because it's 30+ degrees outside, and humid!

Then there's the Christmas fantasies of what our budgets, or our stomachs, are capable of!

But the truth is that the arrival of Jesus at Christmas time is not about fantasy. It's about reality.

Let's look at Jesus' third point.

3. ...but will have the light of life

Now this gets a little more tricky. What is the Light of Life?

Well, again we can turn to the first chapter of John to find some answers.

"In him was life, and the life was the light of men."

(John 1:4 ESV)

Let's take this slowly and carefully. We'll start in John 1, and then work our way back to John 8.

When John says that *"in him was life"*, he's talking about how Jesus was and is involved in the whole process of Creation.

Do you remember how God created the world? He spoke it into being. He said, "Let there be...", and there was. Interesting how the first thing he creates in Genesis 1 is light, two days before he creates the sun, the moon, or the stars!

So God spoke, the world into being. It came unto being by his "word". What does John say right at the beginning of chapter 1?

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."

(John 1:1–3 ESV)

That's Jesus. He is the Word of God who goes into the world to accomplish what God has declared. And so the source of all life, God himself, a life that has always existed and will always exist, communicates life into the world at Creation in and through the Son, Jesus.

In Jesus, the life of God shines into the world. Jesus gives us a glimpse at the eternal existence of God.

So, if we return to chapter 8, we should have a better idea of what Jesus is saying.

When he says,

“Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

(John 8:12 ESV)

...what he means is that those who follow Jesus will have the life of God, the source of life, revealed to them. We will see real life, which is eternal life, in Jesus, with God, forever.

When Jesus came into the world, he lit a path to new life. He made a way for you to live forever, and be created new in him, the one through whom God creates.

That's why the Christmas carol says, “Light and life to all he brings.”

And this is what Paul can say in 2 Corinthians 5:7,

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

(2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV)

SLIDE 9

Words No-One Wants To Hear

So when the Pharisees get upset with Jesus, this is what they are getting upset about.

What Jesus is saying, basically, is that if anyone follows him, he will give them a light which leads to life.

To do otherwise, simply means to remain in a darkness which leads only to death.

Isn't it interesting that Jesus' opponents don't try to attack his argument?

Instead, they attack Jesus himself.

This is actually a well-known arguing technique called an *ad hominem* argument. It's frequently used in court rooms and newspapers all over the world. If you can't discredit a person's viewpoint or statement, you just discredit them!

We won't go through the whole exchange, but Jesus basically uses their own law to prove his point. If we jump down to v17, we see quite clearly what he is saying:

"In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me."

(John 8:17–18 ESV)

Of course, they still don't really get who Jesus is, but Jesus has made his point. He is the revelation of God, and the life of God, in the world.

Darkness to Death or Light to Life?

This statement by Jesus in 8:12 is as true today as it was two-thousand years ago. And it demands a response from each of us today, as it did two-thousand years ago.

Are you walking in a darkness that is leading you to death?

Or are you following the Light of the World to eternal life?

Now, it's easy to do what the Pharisees did and dismiss Jesus' declaration. It's easy to discredit Jesus himself, reduce him to something less than he actually is, something less threatening, less authoritative, less powerful.

A good teacher? A religious founder? A historical figure, but one's who biography has been embellished by his followers? How about a little tiny baby in a Bethlehem manger, surrounded by fluffy animals?

If that's the way you want to think about Jesus, so you don't have to deal with the hard things he said, then what Jesus said is true of you:

“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light...”

(John 3:19 ESV)

You're just living in the dark, and you're not seeing clearly.

But Jesus is inviting you into the light, so you might see him clearly, and enjoy a real life, the life that he offers - eternal life that begins now with the life of God within you, and which continues on into eternity in complete satisfaction and enjoyment of Jesus Christ.

There's no promise that it will be easy, or that you'll welcome his light shining in your life at first. That light brings exposure and illumination to our lives and truths about ourselves that we don't want to hear.

That's why we often prefer to reject Jesus and his words. Or to launch an attack against Jesus, the Bible, Christians, the church; because then we can take the focus of his beam off us, and remain in the dark.

But remember what will eventually happen. You can't hide in the dark forever:

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”

(2 Peter 3:10 ESV)

Before we finish off, I want to borrow a story from American pastor John Piper's book *Don't Waste Your Life*. You don't have to be a religious fundamentalist, or an active enemy of Jesus to be living in the dark. The reality is much more subtle and tragic. Piper writes:

“Consider a story from the February 1998 edition of Reader's Digest, which tells about a couple who “took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their 30 foot trawler, play softball and collect shells.” At first, when I read it I thought it might be a joke. A spoof on the American Dream. But it wasn't. Tragically, this was the dream: Come to the end of your life—your one and only precious, God-given life - and let the last great work of your life, before you give an account to your Creator, be this: playing softball and collecting shells. Picture them before Christ at the great

*day of judgment: "Look, Lord. See my shells." That is a tragedy. And people today are spending billions of dollars to persuade you to embrace that tragic dream."*¹

Friends, you can be living in utter darkness and heading for death even while you live in bright sunshine of the Sunny Coast.

That's because the light that leads to real life doesn't come from the sun. It comes from the one in whom light existed before the sun was even created.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that real life is about collecting shells and amusing yourself.

Jesus himself says, in John's gospel:

"And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

(John 17:3 ESV)

So, Jesus invites you tonight, "Come into the light." And if you want to talk to someone about that, if you want to ask some question, speak to the person who brought you, or come to chat to Rick or myself after the service.

Let's pray.

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¹ p.46, *Don't Waste Your Life*, by John Piper, ©2003 Desiring God Foundation
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