

The Light of the World

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[0:00] 1073. And the words are also up there on the screen. Reading from John chapter 8, we are looking at basically the whole chapter, but we're going to read some selected verses so I'll let you know those as we go through.

So first of all, reading John 8 from verse 12 to 25. 12 to 25. When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

The Pharisees challenged him. Here you are appearing as your own witness. Your testimony is not valid. Jesus answered, even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid for I know where I came from and where I am going.

But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards. I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are true because I am not alone. I stand with the Father who sent me.

In your own law, it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself. My other witness is the Father who sent me.

[1:29] Then they asked him, where is your Father? You do not know me or my Father, Jesus replied. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.

He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him because his hour had not yet come.

Once more, Jesus said to them, I am going away and you will look for me and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come.

This made the Jews ask, will he kill himself? Is that why he says, where I go, you cannot come? But he continued, you are from below. I am from above.

You are of this world. I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins if you do not believe that I am he.

[2:25] You will indeed die in your sins. Who are you? They asked. Just what I have been telling you from the beginning, Jesus replied.

And now we move to verse 31. To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. They answered him, we are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?

Jesus replied, very truly, I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.

So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know you are Abraham's descendants, yet you are looking for a way to kill me because you have no room for my word.

[3:32] I am telling you what I have seen in my father's presence and you are doing what you have heard from your father. Abraham is our father, they answered.

If you were Abraham's children, said Jesus, then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God.

Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the works of your own father. We are not illegitimate children, they protested.

The only father we have is God himself. And then finally, we're going to go to the end of the chapter and verse 58 and 59. Very truly I tell you, Jesus answered, before Abraham was born, I am.

At this they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. Amen. And may God bless to our hearts this reading from his word.

[4:39] Let me pray and ask for God's help as we look at these verses together. Father, our gracious and loving God, we thank you for your word. And we pray now that as we focus our minds and open our hearts to listen to your voice.

We pray that by your spirit you would speak. And as you speak, our lives would be changed. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, here's a question for you.

Can you trust the Bible? It's a question that I find I'm often asked as a minister, and I'm sure you also have been asked this question. Can you trust the Bible? And the question essentially implies that the Bible is unreliable.

And, of course, people will accept that the Bible has lots of good things in it, but some people aren't convinced about its historical reliability.

But, of course, it matters because the Bible is our primary source for Jesus. And so when we read the Gospels in the Bible, like the Gospel according to John, which we're looking at in church right now, we must be sure that when we read about Jesus in terms of his life, his claims, his death, his resurrection, his miracles, everything, we must be confident that what we are reading isn't myth, it isn't legend, but it's true.

[6:09] And that's why I'd like to start this afternoon by mentioning the fact that we're not mentioning a chunk of the Gospel of John. That is John chapter 7, verse 53 through to chapter 8, verse 11.

You will have noticed that we didn't read it. Well, I hope you noticed that we didn't read it. And you might be wondering, well, why did we not read that chunk of John's Gospel? Well, after all, it is there in our Bibles, and it's the story of a woman who is caught in adultery.

And then there's a statement in brackets that says, the earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not have John 7, 53 to 8, 11.

Okay, so the earliest Greek manuscripts don't include this story. And the few that do include it aren't quite sure where it fits or where to stick it.

And it's because this probably wasn't part of the original text of our Bibles. In other words, when John wrote his Gospel about Jesus, this bit wasn't there.

[7:24] Now, that doesn't mean that the story is fiction. It could be something that happened involving Jesus. And there's nothing in this story, of course, that contradicts what the Bible teaches in other places.

But we shouldn't regard this as Scripture, as part of our Bible, if we can't be sure. And scholars just aren't sure. And that's why I'm not going to preach on this passage today.

And you might think, well, surely then that just means the Bible is kind of unreliable. We can't really trust what is in there. This proves that theory that people often state that the Bible is unreliable.

But it doesn't prove it. It actually proves the opposite. Because it gives us confidence that we can trust in the Bible as a reliable document that gives us the truth about the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus.

Because when there's a question about something, and whether that something, that chunk, that part, that story, whether it should be included, and that's actually only here in John chapter 8, and then again at the end of Mark's Gospel in chapter 16, that's just a tiny fraction of verses. And if we can be sure that if there's a question about these few verses, then everything else we've got is historically accurate and reliable.

[8:58] Because where there's a question mark about something, it's flagged up for us. Saying that, well, we don't know, or we're not sure whether this is part of the original text.

And so we're telling you, we're putting it in there, and we're letting you see it, but we're not sure that it is to be regarded as Scripture like everything else.

And so let's focus then on what we can be sure about and what we can trust, and that is everything else that we see in the text of Scripture. So let's look at John chapter 8 from verse 12.

It follows on from where we left off last week at the end of chapter 7, where Jesus is teaching during a festival called the Festival of Tabernacles. And what we saw last week and what we see this week is how Israel, the Jews, fail to respond to Jesus as they should.

And the reason we discover here is it's because they are in spiritual darkness, they are in slavery to sin, and they have the sense of entitlement. And so Jesus teaches here that he is the light of the world who leads out of darkness, who brings us freedom from slavery to sin, and who gives us eternal life as God's children.

[10:19] So let's see three things from this passage up on the screen. The first is Jesus is the light in our darkness. Second, Jesus brings freedom from our slavery. And then third, Jesus exposes the true children of God.

So first of all, Jesus is the light in our darkness, from verse 12 to verse 20. Verse 12 says, When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Now this is the second I am statement of Jesus.

So what does Jesus mean when he says, I am the light of the world? Well, if you read any of the Old Testament, you'll see that light is significant throughout. But it's likely that Jesus says this here because of what happens at the Festival of Tabernacles.

Now this was a major festival for the Jews. We thought about this last week. And the Festival of Tabernacles, or Feast of Booths, basically celebrated the way that God looked after Israel after the Exodus as he led them through the wilderness.

[11:31] And so at the festival, the people camped in tents to remind them of their journey through the wilderness. As God's people of old. And of how God provided for them with food to eat and with water to drink.

And of how God guided them back in Exodus chapter 13 with this pillar of bright clouds during the day. And then this pillar of fire during the night.

And so last week, as well as the water ceremony that we mentioned, there was also a light ceremony at this festival. And the light ceremony would take place in the temple courts.

Which, if you look at verse 20, just happens to be the very place where Jesus spoke these words.

And so at night, in the temple courts, four huge lamps would have been lit in the courtyard of the woman.

Where the offerings were put. And there'd be great joy, and there'd be singing, and there would be dancing. And the light in the temple would illuminate all of Jerusalem in celebration of how God led his people through the wilderness by the pillar of fire.

[12:46] And of course, it would also point to God's promise to send his Messiah, who would be a light for the nations. And so this is a setting of Jesus' declaration.

I am the light of the world. And it's the perfect metaphor for him to use. Because Jesus is saying he is the fulfillment of God's guiding light and presence.

Not just for Israel, but for the world. Whoever follows me, he says, will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

So Jesus is saying to his listeners that they're walking in darkness. But he's the light to guide and lead, just as the pillar of fire led Israel in the wilderness.

And so Jesus is claiming here to be the one who can save us from spiritual darkness. Because like those listening to Jesus, we walk in darkness when we resist Jesus, who is the light.

[13:51] And so the Pharisees, that's the Jewish religious leaders, they refuse to accept what Jesus was saying. And so in verse 13, the Pharisees challenged him.

Here you are appearing as your own witness. Your testimony is not valid. Now they didn't understand what Jesus was saying because they were walking in darkness.

And so Jesus restates his divine origin. Jesus is God's son. And so he's got the right to bear witness about himself to them.

But he also says the father who sent him also bears witness to him. Now, as Jesus spoke to these people, he was talking about God, the father.

But these Pharisees, they've got no idea what Jesus is saying. They think Jesus is talking about his earthly father. And it simply proves their ignorance of the God they claimed to worship there in darkness, spiritual darkness, because they have no relationship with God.

[15:01] And so Jesus says there in verse 19, You do not know me or my father. If you knew me, you would know my father also. Now, so they thought they could see, but they're in spiritual darkness.

They're blind to who Jesus is. Now, I have to admit, I've been struggling to see recently. The text of the Bible just all of a sudden got really blurry and so small.

And when I read anything, I need a 100-watt light bulb behind my head to shine on whatever I'm reading. And so I decided I should get my eyes tested for the first time. And I didn't realize how bad my eyes were until I tried on glasses at the opticians.

And then it was a whole new world. I could see things I'd never seen before. What a difference. I didn't realize how much I couldn't see until I could see.

And it was amazing. And so see what Jesus is saying here. He's talking to people who think they can see, but they are in spiritual darkness.

[16:12] They're blind. They think they know and they think they understand, but they don't have a clue. And you know, that's a great metaphor because we can be the same.

Lost in spiritual darkness. Even though we think we can see. You see, by nature, we walk in darkness.

We are born into darkness. The darkness is within us until the light of the world, Jesus, enables us to see. And it's not until Jesus shines his light into our lives that we can see and we can understand. And we step out of the darkness and we discover how things really are. And so the festival, either as this light burned brightly in the temple or as the light was extinguished, Jesus says, I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. So Jesus is the light in our darkness. That's our first point. The second point is Jesus brings freedom from our slavery.

[17:28] Verse 21 to 36. What Jesus does to his listeners here is give a blunt, but actually a true assessment by highlighting their sin.

So first of all, verse 21 to 30, he says they're spiritually dead because of their sins. And then secondly, verse 31 to 36, he says they're in spiritual slavery to their sin.

And what he says is bleak, but it describes all of us, every single human being. Listen to Jesus, verse 21. Once more, Jesus said to them, I am going away and you will look for me and you will die in your sin.

Where I go, you cannot come. He's talking about going back to heaven and he's saying you'll die in your sin and you can't come to heaven with me.

Because if we look at verse 24, they don't believe in him. He says, I told you that you would die in your sins if you do not believe that I am he.

[18:36] You will indeed die in your sins. So Jesus is warning them of their spiritual death if they don't believe who he is.

But they don't know what he's talking about because they don't know who he is. So verse 25. Who are you? They asked. They don't know who Jesus is.

Why? Because they're in spiritual darkness and they are spiritually dead. Let me try to illustrate.

Our dog, Poppy, had puppies a few years ago.

She gave birth to 10 puppies. Eight of them survived. Sadly, two of them didn't survive. And one of those puppies was stillborn. And it came out when she gave birth.

And the puppy was completely lifeless. I mean, it looked like all the other puppies. Tiny, soft, cute. Could hold it in the palm of your hand.

[19:36] Beautiful features like all the other puppies. The one difference was it was dead. And Jesus is saying that is the reality of our spiritual condition without him.

Well, yeah, we might be walking around and it doesn't look as if we're dead. But spiritually, we are dead. Because continuing to resist Jesus like his opponents were here is an indication of our spiritual death.

And so Jesus is saying we will die in our sins. Because if we don't believe in him, we'll die in our sins and we will miss out on the eternal life that he gives.

John's gospel has been so clear in telling us that Jesus came to give us eternal life. And all this means that, well, we die. And if we die without our sins forgiven, then at that moment we will be separated from God forever in a state of eternal death.

And so Jesus is not only warning his listeners here, he's also not just giving bad news, he's giving the good news. That God sent him into the world to be the good news, the one who takes us out of our spiritual darkness by shining the light that is him into our lives, but also the one who can take us out of our spiritual death by giving us eternal life.

[21:06] And this mission that Jesus came on was to save us from sin and death and hell. And his mission is centered on his death on the cross.

And that's why Jesus says there in verse 28, When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own, but speak just what the Father has taught me.

When Jesus is speaking of the Son of Man, he's talking about himself. And when he speaks about being lifted up, he's referring to being lifted up on the cross to die.

So of course, Jesus was lifted up on the cross. He was nailed to the cross physically. And so he was killed on the cross, lifted up. But there's the other sense in which Jesus was lifted up.

And that's in the exalted sense, where Jesus on the cross was exalted as he completed his mission on earth, the mission that the Father had given him to do.

[22:14] And when the mission was complete, he would then return to his Father. So the cross was the lifting up of his suffering and death, but also his exaltation as he went back to his Father in glory.

And that's why Jesus says, it's when he's lifted up on the cross, then you will know that I am he. So his opponents will realize that he came on his Father's mission at his death.

And as he spoke, some people did believe. Look at verse 30. Many believed in him. But as we apply this to ourselves, we shouldn't miss what Jesus is saying here.

That if we don't realize God sent Jesus to die to forgive our sins and give us eternal life, if we don't realize that and do something about it, then we will continue in our spiritual death.

And the reason is, it's because we are a slave to sin. And Jesus alone can bring us freedom from our slavery.

[23:21] So look down to verse 31 and 32. To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, What's Jesus saying?

He's saying that if we don't have the truth, the truth about him, then we're not free. We're slaves. But that's not how his Jewish listeners saw it. Verse 33.

We're Abraham's descendants, they say. Now, they think Jesus is talking literally here. But even then, they still get it wrong because their descendants had been slaves to plenty people.

Remember, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, but they'd also been slaves to the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks. And even now, as Jesus is with them, they're under Roman rule.

But Jesus is not talking literally about that kind of slavery. Look at verse 34. Jesus replied, Very truly, I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

[24:36] So we're slaves to sin. So sin is not just something that I do or that you do. Our human nature is sinful.

So we cannot stop ourselves from sinning. Sin has a power over us that enslaves us. And we can't break free from its bondage by ourselves.

Let me try and illustrate. In 2020, a wild python in Australia had squeezed into a cage with five pet budgies. You can watch this on YouTube if you're really interested.

And the python, you know what the python did. It ate every single budgie in the cage, five of them, which meant it became far too big to get itself out of the cage again.

And so it was trapped until the next morning when the homeowner let it out of its cage and it went free. And that's what we are like as human beings. We think we are free to do whatever we want to do and to follow whatever our sinful appetites want us to do.

[25:48] But instead of enjoying our freedom, we soon discover that we're trapped. Like the python, our sinful appetites, our sinful desires enslave us.

Just think of the alcoholic. The alcoholic thinks that they are free to choose to drink alcohol. But they're actually enslaved to the drink.

They don't have the power over the alcohol. The alcohol has the power over them. And of course, nobody likes to think that they're enslaved to sin.

We like to think that we are in control, that we can choose to do something and we can then choose to stop doing that thing that we're doing.

But Jesus is saying we can't escape our slavery to sin. We need help. And that's why Jesus says there, verse 35 and 36, Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.

[26:52] So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed. Only Jesus can set us free. Only Jesus can give us salvation.

Now today, I think our culture would define freedom as having as few restrictions as possible. So you can do whatever you feel like doing, where nobody or nothing should be allowed to tie you down or to restrict your freedom.

And so Christianity, of course, is seen in our culture as something that takes your freedom away. But that's not what Jesus is saying here. Because true freedom isn't the ability to do whatever you want with no restrictions.

That's chaos and continual enslavement. No, true freedom is the ability to live within the right restrictions, the ones that God has designed for our own good and for our human flourishing. The restrictions that actually protect our freedom and protect us rather than enslave us. And that's why we can't escape our slavery by the things we do, no matter how good those things are.

[28:14] And that's why God sent his son Jesus to die for our sins, because that's the only way that we can be set free. Think about it. If we could save ourselves, why would God send Jesus to die if we could do it our way?

But Jesus came to die because he had to, to bring us freedom from our slavery to sin, so that when we believe in Jesus, we're no longer a slave, but we're a son.

In other words, God welcomes us into his family as one of his children, because our sin isn't stopping us from being with him.

So Jesus is the light in our darkness, first of all. Secondly, Jesus brings freedom from our slavery.

And then thirdly, Jesus exposes the true children of God, verse 37 to 59.

And this second half of chapter eight, basically, Jesus is teaching what it means to be a true child of God. Now, Jesus' opponents, Israel, the Jews, they assume they are the true children of God because they're Abraham's descendants.

[29:32] And yet it's not ethnic descent that makes somebody God's child. It's believing in Jesus. And so because Jesus' opponents reject him and want to kill him, they prove they aren't the true children of God.

They are, in fact, as Jesus says, children of the devil. And so from verse 37 onwards, Jesus makes it clear that they do not belong to God.

So verse 37 says, I know you're Abraham's descendants, yet you're looking for a way to kill me because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in my father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father.

So Jesus acknowledges that they're Abraham's descendants, they're Israel, they're Jews. And their instinctive response here, verse 39, is to say, yes, Abraham is our father, which is telling.

And we see their true colors shining through by what they say because they think being a true child of God comes down to ethnic descent.

[30:52] And so if they're Abraham's descendants, they assume that God is their father. And yet Jesus is saying being a true child of God is about having their own relationship with God.

They must know God for themselves. And that's why Jesus came. So if God really was their father, they would receive Jesus.

And so their rejection of Jesus proves they can't be true children of God. And so Jesus tells them that the true children of Abraham and therefore true children of God, well, they'd be like Abraham, wouldn't they?

Which Jesus' hearers weren't. And so he tells them, verse 39b, since they're plotting to kill him, they prove instead that they're doing the work of their own father, who's the devil.

Because the true children of God would love Jesus. Verse 42, Jesus said to them, if God were your father, you would love me. So Jesus is highlighting the simple sign of being God's child.

[32:06] It's loving him. It's loving Jesus. How can you tell if someone truly belongs to God? They will love the Lord Jesus Christ, won't they?

And you will be able to see it. And so the question is, do you love Jesus? If you don't love Jesus, then you cannot be God's child.

And that shook Jesus' listeners to the core because they believed it was all about their racial descent. But Jesus denies them any membership of God's family and in fact, calls them children of the devil.

Verse 44, you belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. They do not belong to God. And Jesus' words here are so strong that how do they respond?

Well, they respond to Jesus with personal abuse. Verse 49, verse 48, the Jews answered him, aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and are demon-possessed?

[33:16] They're saying to Jesus, you're not one of our people. In fact, you're demon-possessed. And then the argument escalates, escalates, and so Jesus leaves them in no doubt that God is his

father.

Verse 53, are you greater than our father Abraham? He died and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are? Jesus replied, if I glorify myself, my glory means nothing.

My father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. And so this argument ends and Jesus makes an astonishing claim there in verse 58.

Very truly, I tell you, Jesus answered, before Abraham was born, I am. Jesus claims he existed before Abraham was born and he is the great I am.

This is a clear declaration by Jesus that he is God. That is his true identity. He is the eternal son of God. And it's his most explicit claim to divinity yet.

[34:27] And you can tell by the reaction in verse 59, at this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

They saw this as a blasphemous claim. That's why they were ready to stone him. Now, for those today who are sceptical about the identity of Jesus as God and who think Jesus never actually claimed to be God, well, those who listen to Jesus would never agree.

They were under no illusions here. They knew Jesus was claiming to be God. That's why they wanted to kill him on the spot. God.

And so, as we close, all of this just comes down to one simple point. And it is, who do we think Jesus is?

That's what these people ask him, isn't it? Look at verse 25. Who are you? Then again, verse 53. Who do you think you are?

[35:38] That's what they say to Jesus. That's how they question him. And so, Jesus tells them straight, and by extension, he tells us too. And so, if Jesus is who he claims to be, the Son of God, meant to save us from our slavery to sin, then we've got to respond to him in the right way.

or else there is no hope for us, is there? We will remain in spiritual darkness, living in spiritual death, in slavery to our sin and children of the devil.

Which means being separated from God right now in this life, but being on a path that leads to us being cut off and away from God's presence forever.

But the good news, of course, says that for all who love Jesus, who love Jesus, who see that Jesus came from the Father for us, for all who love Jesus, Jesus gives us light and freedom and life in the family of God, a rightful place as one of God's children.

That's the best place to be in the world.